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"THE SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN ANNUAL"
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The School Friend

Every **2^d** Thursday



WILL THE DOOR HOLD?

(A dramatic moment from the new long complete story of the girls of Cliff House School, contained in this issue.)

Opening Chapters of a Grand New Serial: "THE LITTLE LADY OF THE LIONS!"

THIS WEEK'S FINE NEW LONG COMPLETE STORY OF THE GIRLS OF CLIFF HOUSE SCHOOL!



The Mystery of Polly Vane!

I SAY, Polly, are you coming down into the village with us?"

A pair of dancing eyes were looking into the wistful face of a girl who stood by a study window.

Dark, wavy brown hair and deep blue eyes, made Barbara Redfern, captain of the Fourth Form at Cliff House, look more than pretty as the sun found them and added to their beauty.

And the girl to whom she was speaking?

That pale face would have been very beautiful indeed had not sorrow and pain robbed it of its colour, and if sleepless nights had not conspired to etch dark lines and shadows beneath eyes that were like forget-me-nots.

Clustered about Study No. 4 were other girls of the Fourth Form at Cliff House.

Here was Clara Trevelyn, gay and fearless; Peggy Preston, one of the most popular girls in the whole school; Marjorie Haseldene, Freda Foote, and, last, but not least, Mabel Lynn, Barbara Redfern's special chum.

And the eyes of these girls were focused on that pale face that looked so wistfully into the eyes of Barbara Redfern, better known as "Babs."

There had been a deal of mystery abroad since this pale-faced girl had come to Cliff House.

Nor had the manner of her coming been without interest.

Only a few days since, rather shabbily clad, and perhaps by her nervous manner and reticence an object of sympathy, she had come as a day girl to the old school, and the school had learned that the newcomer's name was Polly Vane.

Since that first day many things had happened that had woven a fabric of mystery about this pretty and nervous-eyed girl with the fair hair and the soft voice.

In the first place, it had been quite by chance that Babs had discovered that, although she lived in a cottage, her sole attendant was a middle-aged woman who was obviously a servant.

Then there had been mysterious figures who had seemed to find a strange interest in Polly Vane, and, after that, an attempt to abduct Polly.

It had so happened that Marcia Loftus, one of the most scheming girls in Cliff House, had taken it upon herself to be unduly interested in Polly's affairs.

The outcome of this had been that Marcia, taken by mistake for Polly, had

The Truth About Polly Vane!

A magnificent new long complete story of your favourite characters, dealing particularly with the mystery surrounding POLLY VANE, the new Day Girl at Cliff House.

By HILDA RICHARDS.

found herself in the hands of Polly's enemies; but no one knew why it was that, released as quickly as she had been captured, Marcia had returned to Cliff House with an unforgettable smirk on her thin, spiteful face.

After that, matters had moved with a speed that had been surprising.

Clara Trevelyn had unearthed a description of a certain Beryl Wingate who was missing, and, in a badly printed photograph, she had seen a likeness to Polly.

But Clara had not had very many supporters in this belief, and it had been dismissed when, as an additional surprise, Polly had been discovered by Marcia posting a letter to the father of the missing girl.

Hot foot upon this had come Marcia's accusation that Polly was intent to make capital out of Mr. Wingate's loss.

And, as that accusation had not been disproved, perhaps there was every reason that Polly Vane should be a picture of sadness and fear at this moment, despite the fact that the autumn sun was shining upon her fair hair.

"Yes, Polly!" cried Clara. "Do come down to Friarade with us!"

"Yes, do, dear!" put in Mabs, Freda, and Marjorie.

Peggy Preston did not speak.

She was wondering why it was that Polly had drawn back against the window, as though in mortal fear of this pressing invitation to go on what, after all, was only a simple excursion.

The excitement of this affair was partly accentuated by the fact that, through a foolish caricature that Marcia Loftus had drawn of Polly, the Fourth Form had been galled for a short while.

To-day was the first day of freedom, and spirits were high in the Fourth Form; and none of the girls were more excited about the lifting of the ban than Babs Redfern and her special chums.

"Why," laughed Mabel Lynn, fair, and with bobbed flaxen hair and a beautiful rose complexion, "I do believe you're afraid of going out, Polly!"

Polly Vane winced, and a shadow passed across her eyes as she looked into the keen grey ones of Mabel Lynn.

Why was she trembling, why was she feeling such a prey to nervousness?

None of these girls could tell.

"No, Babs!" she whispered. "I can't come, really I can't!"

Her lips were trembling, and Babs could see that her hands were plucking at her dress, nervously, awkwardly.

"Do come and see Bessie eat cakes at Uncle Clegg's!" laughed Clara. "Bessie is the jolly limit when she gets going

on Uncle Clegg's pastries—or anybody else's!"

As Clara spoke the door opened, and slowly there came into the study a figure that, for plumpness, it would have been hard to rival.

It was Bessie Bunter, and Bessie's eyes glimmered behind her thick glasses as she overheard the reference to pastries.

"I say, you girls, I'm jolly hungry!" she said, blinking round. "I can never get enough to eat here. I shall have to get my people to write to the governors of the school about it."

Bessie's words provoked a general laugh, and, for the moment, interest was turned from the pale-faced girl who stood by the study window.

Polly Vane had hailed the arrival of Bessie Bunter with a sigh of relief, which did not reach to the ears of the other girls in the room.

A moment since she had been placed in a most awkward position.

There were fears in her heart which she dared not reveal to these girls who had been so kind and so loyal to her.

She wondered what their thoughts would be like if they had had to undergo the torments that she had been compelled to endure since her coming to this locality.

At the back of Polly's mind there was more than fear.

She had come to realise that she had foes within the school as well as without it, and even as now in the safety of this room she looked about her, she felt that the very shadows concealed potential enemies.

Under different conditions how she could have enjoyed in the friendship with these girls! She could have laughed, as they were laughing now, at Betty's halting conversation, the fat girl's denials that she was greedy, her statements that large quantities of food were necessary to her health.

But, amusing as all of it was, this morning there had come new doubts into Polly's heart.

She felt that she was compassed about by enemies, and the suggestion that she should accompany her friends into Friarade Villa had given her an alarm that only with difficulty was she allaying now.

"So you won't come, Polly?"

Babs, her eyes alight with smiles, had swung round from chaffing Bessie Bunter and was looking at Polly.

Polly shook her head.

"I would, sooner not, Babs, if you don't mind," she said.

Babs laughed.

"All right, then, Polly," she said

cheerily, and then: "Come along, girls, we shall lose all the sunlight."

The next moment that laughing and happy band of Fourth-Formers were flocking from the study and following Babs' lead into the grounds.

And when they had gone Polly Jones walked sadly towards the table, drew a chair forward, and seated herself.

For some moments she looked blankly before her.

There was something peculiarly wistful and pathetic about this little girl as she sat there.

There was a faintly discernible tremor of the refined mouth, and into those lovely eyes had come tears that began to veil her eyes.

She lowered her head to her hands, and now the tears could not be controlled.

"Daddy! Daddy!" she whispered. "If only you would take me away—take me back! I am so afraid—so afraid!"

But no answer came to that plea. There was not even an echo in Study No. 4, and no sound, unless it was the distant laughter that came from those happy Fourth-Formers as they went laughingly on their way to the village.

No laughter for Polly Vane, no sunshine of happiness, but only grave fears and carking doubts, and the enemies that were always in the background, haunting, threatening, insistent.

Once she stirred and looked nervously about her. She had fancied that she had heard a furtive sound. It had occurred to her that someone had opened the door, but a glance at the door showed it to be closed, and she turned away again. And then these fears were getting the better of her. They were robbing her of her nerve.

Once, and that seemed so long ago now, she had been so care-free.

There had not been one single thing in the world of which she was afraid. Not one thing.

But now—how different now!

Now all was crowding shadow, and that shadow she had to face, and she wondered how long it would be before she gave in before the weight of that shadow's threat.

As though unseen hands were turning the handle the door opened silently, and a pair of hard and glittering eyes looked into the room.

They were the eyes of a woman—a woman garbed as a servant—and how noiselessly she opened that door, and how strange that smile that crept across a pair of thin lips.

The next moment the door was closed, but no sound of her departing footsteps came, no sound at all.

As though she was something of the darkness, she had stolen away, and Polly had been conscious neither of her coming nor her going.

She just sat there in her tears with that bitter sorrow weighing her down.

Oh, what mystery was it that had brought such sadness to Polly Vane of Cliff House?

Fun at Uncle Clegg's!

"I SAY, Babs! She was frightened! I am sure that she was!"

Mabel Lynn looked anxiously at Barbara Redfern as she spoke, and she wondered if Babs' thoughts had been the same as her own, for there was worry in her chum's eyes.

"Yes," whispered Babs, "I think you're right, Mabs. It is all so unexplainable. If only Polly Vane would tell us what it is that worries her, how easy it would be to help her then."

Mabel Lynn shook her head. "She'll never do that," she said.

"There is a sort of sturdy independence about Polly that makes her suffer all her trials alone."

"I like her—like her ever so much," said Babs. "Why should she have been afraid to come to the village?"

"It's a mystery to me," said Mabs. "Poor Polly!" breathed Babs. "I have often come into the study when she has been alone there, and have seen her looking into the grounds as though every tree concealed some enemy."

"And so have I!" whispered Mabel. "If only we knew!"

Clara Trevelyn, Freda Foote, and Marjorie Hazeldene were walking ahead with Bessie Bunter.

It was Clara who had suggested to Bessie that the four of them should have a walking race to Uncle Clegg's, and that the winner should be rewarded by the finest cake that Uncle Clegg could produce.

There had been a wink at the others as Clara had suggested this, but the simple Bessie had never seen the wink, and, with her fists clenched, and breathing hard, Bessie was walking as though dear life depended upon it.

Clara and the others could easily have outpaced the fat girl, but that was not their intention.

"Oooh! Wow! Brhh!" Bessie was making wailus noises as she waddled along.

"Now then, Fatima," cried Clara, "no running! If you do you'll be disqualified!"

"I'm run-run-not running!" mumbled Bessie, only getting the word out with the greatest difficulty.

And she panted along, getting redder in the face every minute.

"Oh, I'm almost out of it!" cried Clara, winking at Freda.

"I know that I can't win," said Freda Foote. "Don't go so fast, Bessie!"

"Isn't Bessie a champion walker!" murmured Peggy, pretending to be winded.

Bessie staggered along, and now her exertions were making her take a zig-zag course along the road.

Once Clara had to stop, for laughter had got the better of her.

She leaned weakly against a stile, and watched the amazing Bessie.

Bessie's fat legs were truly moving at an amazing speed.

"Here, you girls," whispered Clara to the others, who had drawn back. "Quick! There is a short cut across the fields here. Wait until Bessie rounds the bend."

Babs, Mabs, Peggy, and the others saw Clara's suggestion at once, and as Bessie came to the bend, still going strong, the other girls swarmed through the hedge, and, running across a field, took the short cut to Uncle Clegg's little shop.

Bessie was not even in sight when they got there, and concealed themselves behind some trees near the shop.

And from this point of vantage, and holding their sides, they watched the fat figure of Bessie Bunter come panting along the road.

Once Bessie had turned, and, seeing the empty road behind her, and fancying that she had outdistanced the others, she broke into a kind of jog-trot as those girls watched her in glee.

Bessie was walking for dear life now, with her glittering little eyes focused on Uncle Clegg's.

In her anxiety to get to the shop she commenced to run, and it was at that moment that a laughing band of girls interposed themselves between Bessie and Bessie's goal.

"Oh, I—I say! I—"

The fat junior simply gasped. For the moment she thought that she was being confronted by the ghosts of the Cliff House girls.

Then, as she realised that her eyes had not played her false, a howl of dismay came to her lips.

"The cake!" she moaned. "I've won the cake!"

Babs shook her head. "Fatima!" she reproved. "And we saw you run!"

Bessie's red face looked guilty. "And, besides," said Clara, "we are here first."

Bessie Bunter was too exhausted to reply. She collapsed on the step of Uncle Clegg's shop, and looked up hopelessly at the Fourth-Formers.

"It isn't fair!" she gasped. "I jolly well reckon I—I've earned that cake!"

Laughingly Clara bent down, and with the help of Marjorie Hazeldene, hoisted Bessie to her feet.

"You shall have your cake, Bessie!"



THE PACE-MAKER! "Oh—h—!" gasped the girls in pretended fatigue. "Don't go so fast, Bessie—we shall never keep up with you!"

she laughed. "It's worth it, after the fun you have given us."

The heroine of the moment was borne into the shop, and there, when she had possessed herself of the largest cake that Uncle Clogg had for sale, she sat down and commenced to eat it.

And Bessie was still eating when her friends dragged her from the shop. Babs and Mabs walked on ahead, and as they turned that bend in the road that had helped them to outwit Bessie, from the shadows beneath the high hedges there stepped the figure of a man.

"He was none too well clad, and his face seemed concealed by the peak of a cap that came down over his eyes.

The man stood there as though intending to speak, and Mabs and Babs, conversation forgot for the moment, watched him.

He was none too prepossessing a personage, and what they could see of his eyes suggested a furtiveness that was in keeping with his garb.

Now he came forward, and when Mabs and Babs were abreast of him he gave a jerk of his cap.

"Excuse me, young ladies," he muttered, "but you're from Cliff House School, aren't you?"

Babs looked askance at Mabel Lynn. There was something about this man which did not inspire confidence.

"Why, yes," answered Mabel. "Then p'raps you won't mind my asking you a question or two, young ladies?" he ventured, looking shifty at the other girls as they came up.

"If we can help you in any way," murmured Babs, wondering what interest he could possibly have in the school.

"It's like this," he said gruffly. "My sister is at Cliff House, a new servant there. Goes by the name of Mrs. Livesey. Do you know her, young ladies?"

Mabs and the other girls shook their heads.

They did not know anyone of that name; but, even as Babs shook hers, she remembered the strange face that she had seen in the kitchen on the day that she had brought Polly in from the grounds, after Marcia had made her cruel accusation.

"Why, perhaps she is new to the school," she said.

"That's it, young lady," said the man, a touch of relief in his tones. "My sister is new. If you could just give her a message, you'd be doing me a mortal kind service!"

Babs hesitated. She wondered if it would be right to take a message into the school, and from this stranger.

But then, as she thought the matter over, she could see no harm in doing so—no harm at all.

"Why, yes," said Babs, "I think I could manage that."

"Me and my sister is mortal fond of one another," said the man, in his gruff voice, "and we have a kind of code. I expect you have codes yourself?"

He paused, and Babs looked at him curiously.

"Would you just tell her that the moon will be up at eight?" he asked quickly. "She'll know what that means. There is a power of meaning in that phrase 'The moon will be up at eight.' Do you mind telling her that, young lady?"

The next moment he had turned and shambled away, and, with mystified eyes, Babs watched him go.

Mabs was looking askance at her chum.

"I say," she exclaimed, "what a peculiar message!"

"What a peculiar man!" laughed Mabel Lynn, who had joined the chums of THE SCHOOL FRIEND.—No. 232.

Study No. 4. "His eyes weren't steady for one moment."

"Looked like a giddy burglar to me," chimed in Clara.

"I expect it is because he's poor," said Peggy softly. "And, you know, servants are not allowed to receive visitors at the school without special permission, so he's sent a message."

Babs nodded. "Well, anyway," said Babs, "there doesn't seem to be much harm in delivering a silly message like that."

"The moon will be up at eight!" laughed Clara. "I wonder if it is all a joke? Perhaps there isn't a Mrs. Livesey at Cliff House at all!"

"Anyway, we'll see," said Babs. They continued on their way, and perhaps in the minds of all those girls save Bessie Bunter, there was a thought that, just as the man's appearance had been strange, so also was this message just a little remarkable.

Into the grounds they hurried, and it was just as they entered the gates that Miss Steel, the Fourth Form mistress, came towards the road.

The mistress drew Babs aside as the other girls walked on. "Barbara," she said, "I have been meaning to speak to you all day about Polly Vane."

Miss Steel's usually stern face softened as she mentioned Polly's name.

"I am sincerely sorry for Polly Vane," she continued. "It seems that she has never been used to a big school before. She has spent to-day in your study. I wish you'd do your best to make her happy!"

Babs flushed. "I do, and I shall continue to do so, Miss Steel," she answered.

Miss Steel nodded, and smiled into Babs' eyes.

"I know you will—I know, Barbara," she said. "But I just fancied that I should speak to you about Polly Vane. If there is one girl in the school who can make her fall into the ways of the school, you are that girl, Barbara!"

And with that, and another smile, Miss Steel walked out into the road.

Babs watched her go, and as Miss Steel hurried off in the direction of Friaralee village, Babs remembered the strange man and the stranger message.

"I wonder is the new servant a Mrs. Livesey?" she murmured to herself. "Perhaps matron would tell me."

In the distance, Clara, Freda, Peggy, Mabs, Marjorie, and Bessie were entering the school, and already the autumn sunlight had gone and the short day was coming to a close.

Babs looked about her.

She had a sudden feeling that there was a lot of mystery surrounding that strange message, and more especially because these nights were moonless.

But, anyway, she intended finding Mrs. Livesey, if there was such a woman in the school, and, intent on this, she turned her steps in the direction of the servants' quarters.

As she came through the quadrangle she was conscious suddenly of two things.

One was not surprising, but the other was.

There was a light in Study No. 4, and, seated at the window, looking out into the night, Babs could see Polly Vane.

But there was someone else interested in the night, and that someone was near to Babs.

She had suddenly appeared from the gloom, and leaning against the wall of the quadrangle, she was looking up at Polly Vane, as though she found an infinite interest in doing so.

Babs stepped back into the shadows,

and watched the woman who was glimpsing Study No. 4.

The woman seemed nervous, and now and then, she would look to right and to left of her as though afraid of being observed.

What could it mean? As Babs asked herself that question she saw the woman's face more clearly, and she recognised the woman's garb at once.

She was one of the Cliff House servants.

The next moment, and, swift-footed, the woman had stepped from the cloisters and had hurried away through the shadows.

With blank astonishment in her eyes, Babs watched the secretive figure depart, and when she had gone Babs hurried off in the direction of the servants' entrance, intent on running Mrs. Livesey to earth.

Coming into the kitchen, she saw a maid who was known to her—Emily Carter.

"Oh, Emily," said Babs, as the maid smiled at her, wondering perhaps what the captain of the Fourth Form did in the kitchen, "is there someone of the name of Livesey here?"

Emily's expression changed.

"Yes, Miss Babs," she answered. "She's only a stop-gap, though. I shouldn't think she'll stay long. She doesn't like work, and she puts upon all the others in consequence."

Suddenly the girl checked herself, and looked towards the door that communicated with the school.

It had opened, and a woman stood on the threshold of the kitchen.

Babs recognised her at once.

It was the figure she had seen in the cloisters, the woman who had been watching Polly Vane.

"This is Mrs. Livesey," said Emily, turning away as Babs flushed awkwardly because of the scrutiny of the woman's eyes. For a moment Babs felt unable to find words in which to address this strange newcomer.

Where before she had fancied the message extraordinary, now the mystery of it had assumed a new significance.

Why should a woman have been watching Polly? What could this strange message mean, and had it any connection with Polly?

"Oh, Mrs. Livesey!"

Babs stammered rather than spoke the words. She felt that it were wiser not to let her feeling be too apparent, and it was no good standing there and saying nothing.

"Yes?"

The woman spoke in a harsh, and metallic voice, and she showed no respect to Barbara Redfern, although it was obvious that Barbara was one of the scholars of Cliff House.

Babs felt decidedly awkward. There was something overbearing about this white-faced and angular-looking Mrs. Livesey.

"I have a message for you," said Babs, fighting to find composure.

Those eyes were very disconcerting. They were keen and steady, and there was nothing furtive about them. They were the eyes of a masterful person.

"What message?" said Mrs. Livesey, coming nearer, but not removing her eyes from Babs' face.

"Someone we met in the road—my friends and I met him," answered Babs, colouring at the woman's lack of politeness. "He told me to tell you that the moon would be up at eight."

A shadow crossed Mrs. Livesey's face, and her cheeks went even more white. She muttered something that to Babs sounded like "The fool!"

"That was all he said, Mrs. Livesey."

said Babs, and now she walked towards the door.

A dramatic change had come over Mrs. Livesey's face.

"Oh, that's my brother!" she said quickly, almost nervously. "Thank you, my dear—thank you!"

For a moment Babs looked at the woman, and then, turning, she hurried from the kitchen.

She had suddenly become afraid of those eyes. How different they had looked as they gazed up at Polly, how different when they had first looked into Babs' face, and how different when Mrs. Livesey spoke in that ingratiating way.

Instinctively Babs mistrusted the woman, and she was happy when at last she had placed a good distance between herself and the kitchen.

Outside her study door she paused. She felt that she was on the threshold of a mystery, such as she had never known before.

And, even although she thought thus, little did she realise what that mystery was, or where it would lead her to.

Babs Feels Convinced!

"POLLY!"
Barbara Redfern turned the handle of the study door, and, as she looked into the room, to her surprise she saw that the seat by the window had been vacated.

The room was empty. The light was still on, but of Polly there was not a sign.

"She must have gone down to the Fourth-Form Common-room."

Intent to find Polly, Babs turned and hurried down to the Common-room, to find Bessie Bunter telling the story of her wonderful walking race.

Clara and Freda were egging the fat junior on, and the wonderful story of the race was growing in wonder—and imagination—as Bessie proceeded.

"I say, Clara!" called out Babs. "Have you seen Polly?"

Clara looked up. "Nunno!" she answered. "Perhaps she's in the dormitory?"

Babs only paused for one moment in the Common-room, and then ran upstairs towards the Fourth Form dormitory.

On the threshold of the room she paused, for a rather unusual sound was coming from it.

The sound of sobbing. Gently opening the door, Babs stole into the long room to see a sight that gave her pause.

Polly Vane was stretched upon her bed, and she was weeping bitterly.

"Polly, what is the matter, dear? What is the matter?" cried Babs, running towards the unhappy girl and kneeling beside the bed, what time she slipped a comforting arm about Polly's shoulders.

Polly looked up through her tears. "Babs, Babs!" she whispered. "I am unhappy, so unhappy!"

"But, Polly," said Babs, "what is there for you to be unhappy about? You have friends here, and we all like you."

"I know, I know!" sobbed Polly. "But I am afraid—terribly afraid!"

Babs frowned. "Afraid of what, Polly?" she asked. "Is it Marcia again? Has she said anything to hurt you—anything cruel?"

"No," murmured Polly brokenly. "It isn't Marcia, Babs."

Barbara Redfern was mystified. She had no intention of trying to get Polly to tell her anything that Polly did not want to tell.

"Oh, if only I could speak—if only

I could tell you all, Babs!" moaned Polly. "How well would you understand them?"

She sobbed on Babs' shoulder. "But I can't, Babs, I can't!" she murmured brokenheartedly. "Oh, if only I could!"

Babs did her best to comfort Polly. She could see the stricken look in Polly's eyes, and how white and worried the tear-stained face was.

"Don't cry, Polly, dear!" whispered Babs. "I feel sure that everything will come all right in the end. You must be brave, you know! You must remember that you have loyal friends about you, and if there is any danger, those friends will stand by you. You must always remember that, Polly!"

Her words seemed to help Polly, and at last her tears ceased.

"Now don't cry any more!" soothed Babs. "Have a good rest. It will not be long now before the girls come to bed. Turn in now, Polly, and try and get a good night's sleep."

Bending, she kissed Polly tenderly, and

and looking fixedly at an old newspaper, was none other than Mrs. Livesey, the new servant.

And Mrs. Livesey little knew that she was being observed.

In a flash Babs took in the picture at which the woman was looking at this moment.

It was the badly-printed photograph of Beryl Wingate, and, even as Babs stepped ever so softly into the room, a gasp of astonishment came to the woman's lips.

"It is she, I am sure it is!" Babs heard those lips murmur, and then she gave a slight cough.

And what a picture of fear and shiftiness was that face that was turned towards her now.

Mrs. Livesey was looking at Babs as though Barbara Redfern were a ghost, and not a mortal being at all.

It was obvious that she was too amazed to find words, and to Babs it seemed evident that she had never expected to be interfered with.

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Her words seemed to help Polly, and at last her tears ceased.

"Now don't cry any more!" soothed Babs. "Have a good rest. It will not be long now before the girls come to bed. Turn in now, Polly, and try and get a good night's sleep."

Bending, she kissed Polly tenderly, and

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was ringing through the school, and, with a last look about her, Babs put out the study light, drew out the key of the door, and walking into the corridor locked the door behind her.

It would make the room secure from prying eyes if she left it locked and kept the key in her own possession.

She could tell Mabs her doubts and suspicions at the first opportunity that offered.

Babs hurried down the corridor, and she had almost come to the end of it when something gave her pause.

To her utter amazement she saw that Polly Vane herself was crouching back in the shadows at the end of the corridor, and that Polly was looking down the staircase as though what she saw there gave her an unexplainable terror.

Babs hesitated. She wondered should she go on and make it plain to Polly that she had been seen, or would it be wiser to wait until Polly had hurried back to the dormitory.

As she came nearer to Polly—a Polly who was unconscious of Babs' presence—Babs saw for the first time what it was riveted Polly's attention.

Standing on the stairs, partly concealed by the gloom, were two figures, and there could be no mistaking who they were.

Marcia Loftus and Mrs. Livesey were below, and they seemed to have something of intense interest to discuss, for the faces of both of them were keen and they were whispering in undertones.

Babs crept nearer.

"What is she whispering her friend's name Polly Vane stifled a cry that had come to her lips, but when she saw who it was stood at her side some of the fear left her eyes.

"Babs!" she whispered. "Oh, Babs, I am afraid—dreadfully afraid!"

One trembling hand was pointed in the direction of Mrs. Livesey, who murmured brokenly. "I am afraid of her!"

"But why, Polly?" asked Babs, so soft that her words could not reach either Marcia's or Mrs. Livesey's ears.

"I cannot tell you! I cannot!" said Polly.

And, as she spoke, Mrs. Livesey turned and hurried down the stairs, and Babs only had time to draw Polly back into the shadows as Marcia ran past them and towards the Fourth Form dormitory.

Polly's heart was beating fast, and her eyes were wells of nervousness.

Babs could see this, and her heart went out to the stricken girl with the tearful face.

"We mustn't stay here, Polly!" she whispered. "It is late! Come, it is time we got back to the dormitory!"

Polly seemed too afraid to move from the spot, but there was a comforting feel about Babs' arm, and Polly allowed herself to be guided up the stairs.

Babs' mind was going over what she had seen.

So Marcia knew Mrs. Livesey, and that conversation on the stairs had seemed peculiarly secretive.

What plot was Marcia forming? Why had she seemed so strange and furtive?

And memory came to Babs—memory of how Marcia had shadowed Polly and had been captured for her pains.

Was there any connection between those incidents and this one?

Babs and Polly entered the dormitory, to find that already most of the girls were in bed.

As they entered Marcia, engaged at that moment in undressing, raised her eyes and looked suspiciously in their direction, but Babs was careful not to return the glance.

She did not want Marcia to know that she suspected Marcia Loftus of acting against Polly.

That thought had certainly come into her mind. She could find no other explanation, and even when, lying in bed, she tried to solve the problem, the only solution that Babs came to was that Marcia was mixed up in some plot against Polly Vane.

And in an adjacent bed poor white-faced Polly was weeping bitterly.

Whose Hand?

"O H, daddy! Daddy! If only all this danger would pass!"

Polly Vane stifled her words in her pillow as she sobbed out that appeal.

The terrors that she had been feeling all this time were coming nearer, and now she knew that it might not be long before they took actual shape, and then—

It was awful to contemplate all this danger, and she felt that she could not stand the strain any longer.

There was only one consoling thought, and that was the loyalty of Babs' friendship, the kindness of the Fourth-Formers.

But not the kindness of all of them!

The fear that she had had of Marcia Loftus had grown.

That happening of the evening had shown her only too plainly that Marcia was not only against her in her thoughts, but actually working against her—working for her undoing.

Twelve o'clock, and still sleep had not come.

Polly turned on her side and closed her eyes, and as she did so the door of the dormitory was softly opened, and eyes looked into the darkened room.

No sound came save the regular breathing of those girls who slept.

It seemed that the figure by the door was hardly human, for no sound came from it, not even as it entered and paused by the door in the darkness.

Who was this intruder? Why had she come?

Polly was drifting into frightened dreams. Worn out, nature was having its will and sleep was conspiring to close those reddened eyelids.

And as slowly the curtain of slumber fell upon Polly, that figure by the door tiptoed nearer and more near to Polly's bed.

Perhaps the intruder fancied that she was unobserved, perhaps already there was a feeling of triumph in her heart, and she even paused for a moment to look down into Polly's face.

There was no look of pity or sympathy there. It was harsh and calculating, and the woman was carrying something that now, with a swift movement, she wound about Polly's head.

The next moment she had bent and had picked Polly up in strong arms and had swung a veil about her own face as she ran swiftly back towards the door.

But if she had fancied herself unobserved, if she had triumphed in the fact that Polly's cries were safely muffled, she had not counted with a girl who could act sudden and in the defence of a friend.

Babs had been conscious of a sound stealing into her dreams, and she had

awakened with a start, to see what she had fancied at first, to be, a shadow by Polly's bedside.

She had rubbed her eyes, and as she had watched that shadow it had taken shape and form, and, just as she realised that a woman stood near to Polly's bedside, she had seen that figure bend and pick Polly from her bed.

And as the woman had run to the door Babs had sprung from her bed.

"Girls—quick! Mabs, Clara, Peggy—quick!" she cried.

Babs' frantic cry rang through the dormitory, and already the intruder and her burden were through the door of the dormitory.

Startled girls awoke with Babs' cries ringing in their ears.

They did not act upon to think. They were keen to act upon Babs' alarm, and as Babs raced to the door they followed fast after her.

"What is it?" cried Clara. "What has happened, Babs?"

She tore after Babs as she shouted the words, and Babs cried back to her.

"Polly has been captured by someone!" she called back.

"Polly captured!"

Peggy Preston redoubled her efforts, and now she, Babs, and Clara were racing abreast to where they saw the figure of a woman going as fast as she could down the stairs.

Down the staircase tore the three girls, with the other Fourth-Formers hard behind them.

They were very near the woman now, and as she caught at the great door, as a light streamed into the hall from an electric torch that Miss Primrose held, the girls dashed forward to intercept her.

Miss Primrose had been alarmed, as had the others of the school, and now she was witness of a most amazing sight.

Babs had darted at the woman, and Clara was at her side.

The next moment, like dogs pulling down some wild animal, Babs, Clara, Peggy and Mabs were doing their best to get Polly from the woman's grasp.

But the woman was strong, and she fought desperately to retain her captive.

The sound of cries, the rush of footsteps as more girls joined in the melee, made pandemonium ring through Cliff House.

But the girls did not mean to be baffled.

Once the woman broke away, with Polly struggling in her grasp, but Clara was at her, and Babs was close behind, and they hung on and clung on, and they fought grimly to prevent her leaving the precincts of the school.

Now Miss Steel and two other mistresses were rushing down the stairs to lend their aid, and also came the servants intent to help, with schoolgirls dashing up with cries on their lips.

The woman saw that it was useless to continue the struggle.

With a frantic cry of anger and disappointment, she loosened her hold on Polly, and opening the door dashed out into the night.

Polly was safe, and Babs realised that; but Babs was not going to let this woman get clear so easily.

After the woman she darted, with Clara and Mabs hard behind her.

"Let's get her, girls!" cried Babs. "Let's see who she is."

Suddenly a shadow darted between them and the speeding figure, and as she swerved Babs fancied that she caught sight of the lean face of Marcia Loftus.

But, in the night, she could not be sure, and there was no time to wait and see.

(Continued on page 661.)

The Truth About Polly Vane!

(Continued from page 656.)

They tore after the panting figure ahead of them, and Babs, in advance of the others, put on a spurt.

The woman's veil was streaming in the wind, and, with a leap, Babs caught at it.

The woman was pulled up with a jerk, but the next moment the veil came away in Babs' grasp, and a hat came away as well, and a cruel and venomous face was turned to look with anger at Babs.

A cry of triumph came to Babs' lips. "Mrs. Livesey!" she exclaimed. "Just as I thought."

But at the very moment that she spoke, just as Clara and Mabs came tearing up, Mrs. Livesey darted off at right angles, and was lost to sight in the dense undergrowth.

"Which way did she go?"

"Who was she, Babs?"

Mabs and Clara were excited as they looked into Babs' face.

"I don't think we can catch her now, girls!" gasped Babs. "She's got well away. It was the new servant at Cliff House, a woman called Mrs. Livesey, the new servant!"

The three girls were looking blankly at Barbara Redfern.

"But why should she have attempted to abduct Polly?"

"What was the meaning of the strange message?" gasped Clara.

Babs shook her head.

"There is only one person who could help to solve this mystery," she answered, "and that's Polly; but Polly won't speak."

They stood there and listened; and once, when a sound came from the undergrowth, they darted into it. But they found no one; and, search as they might, Mrs. Livesey was nowhere to be found.

The three girls turned and ran back to the school, and as they went from the undergrowth a figure rose—the breathless figure of Mrs. Livesey.

She had lain quiet, watching the girls, and now her eyes glinted.

"You've escaped me this time," she whispered hoarsely; "but next time I'll get you—get you when your friends are not there to help you!"

And, with that dark remark, she stole back into the undergrowth, and so disappeared in the night.

Babs Has Her Suspicions!

"I SAY, girls, what a nice how-do-you-do!"

Clara Trevlyn was one of the last girls to return into the dormitory, and, behind her, the mistresses were still on the stairs, discussing the remarkable happenings of the night.

Clara looked about her just as Babs and Mabs had done.

She had expected to find Polly Vane there, but there was not a sign of Polly.

"She's with Miss Primrose," said Freda Foote. "Isn't it exciting, girls? Fancy a real live attempt at kidnaping!"

"Thank goodness, we saved Polly!" cut in Peggy.

Marcia Loftus, seated on her bed, was eyeing the group of girls.

Like the others, she had no thought of sleep at that moment.

"Who could that woman have been?" asked Peggy Freen curiously.

Clara turned quickly.

"Don't you girls know what we discovered?" cried Clara.

A chorus of "Noes!" came in reply. Babs' eyes were alight with excitement.

"Girls," exclaimed Babs, "it was a servant in the school, a new servant, who tried to kidnap Polly!"

From near at hand there came a gasp, and Babs swung round to see that Marcia was looking at her in blank astonishment.

Babs did not proceed with what she was saying. She was looking down at Marcia's slippers.

There was mud on them.

The next moment Babs had walked towards Marcia, and was looking down at her.

"You seem rather struck about what I said just now, Marcia?" she exclaimed.

Marcia flushed.

"What do you mean, Barbara Redfern?" she answered sulkily. "I can show surprise if I like."

Babs smiled.

"So you were out in the grounds, too, Marcia?" she said softly.

Marcia sprang to her feet.

"What are you meaning to imply, Barbara Redfern?" she cried angrily, whilst the girls looked on in mystification.

"Your slippers seem to have had a dirtying, Marcia," Babs remarked quietly, and as Marcia drew back Babs laughed.

"Don't try and say you weren't in the grounds," she added. "I am sure that you were. But it seems strange that you did not come to the aid of your companions of the Fourth Form."

Marcia's eyes narrowed.

"You can think what you jolly well like, Babs Redfern!" she said sneeringly. "Who cares what you think?"

And as she spoke the door opened and a frightened-looking girl revealed herself in the doorway.

It was Polly Vane.

The next moment, with her hands outstretched, she ran towards Babs.

"Oh, Babs!" she said, in low tones. "How can I thank you—all you who saved me from—that woman? It seems too wonderful to be true!"

She shivered, and looked apprehensively towards the door, as though at any moment it might open, and that woman who had captured her return to make a further attempt.

Babs, following the direction of Polly's gaze, laughed.

"Don't worry, Polly!" she exclaimed. "You won't see that woman in Cliff House School again!"

Polly seemed a prey to terror.

"No," put in Mabs; "Mrs. Livesey, if that was her name, has gone for good." Polly nodded.

"Yes," she whispered; but those comforting words had not made much impression on her.

She was still trembling as she returned to her bed.

The Fourth-Formers watched her, and, in the eyes of most of them there was sympathy.

At last the dormitory was hushed to silence, and, with no further alarms, peace and sleep descended upon it.

Sleep—yes, but not for all.

Polly couldn't sleep.

True, she had been preserved by the loyalty and bravery of her friends of the Fourth, but for how long had the shadow been lifted?

This action had proved how determined her enemies were. That fact could not be blinked at.

She lay in bed looking at the ceiling and wondering how long she would be before a further attack, and she was still wondering when morning's early light stole into the dormitory to awaken the sleepers.

There were two girls who were up betimes.

They were Marcia and Babs, but they did not speak as they dressed, and Marcia, as soon as she was ready, hurried away.

Babs, fully dressed, perched herself on Polly's bed, and chatted to Polly as Polly's tired hands completed her toilette.

With her arm linked through Polly's, she and Babs sauntered below and to Study No. 4, and, of course, the topic of their conversation was the happening of the previous night.

Polly, tired out, had collapsed in a chair, and Babs, sauntering over to the window, was watching the sunlight glorifying the autumnal tints on the trees. And as her eyes strayed across the quadrangle and towards the road, a cry of surprise came to her lips.

She had seen a sinking figure dart from the cloisters and run in the direction of the road, and Babs had recognised that figure at once.

It was Marcia Loftus, and, in Marcia's hand there was a letter.

To Polly's amazement, Babs darted across the room, through the door, and down the staircase.

Polly was much too surprised to follow, but had she done so she would have seen Babs taking the stairs three at a time and racing out into the sunlight.

Down the drive she tore, and as she ran in the distance she could see Marcia speeding ahead of her.

It was not Babs' way to eavesdrop; but, in the defence of Polly, she realised that there could be nothing wrong in what she was doing.

Babs' suspicions had been aroused, and she had wondered why it was that Marcia, a late riser usually, had got up so early and had left the dormitory with such speed.

She was soon to know.

Tearing down a side-path, she saw Marcia leaving the school gates, and, hot foot, Babs followed.

Marcia did not know that she was being followed, and Babs took good care that she should not know.

Care was needful when Polly's safety and happiness was at stake.

Into the road Babs ran, to see that Marcia was walking now, walking quickly, and turning a bend in the road.

For what purpose had Marcia come out so early?

That look she had given Polly was evidence to Babs that Marcia was here with no good object in view, and she would not have thought of following Marcia had she not thoroughly realised this.

Round to the bend ran Babs, and, from that point of vantage, she saw Marcia hurry to where stood a figure.

Babs scowled as she saw who that woman was.

There, and greeting Marcia now as though she were on friendly terms with Marcia Loftus, was Mrs. Livesey herself.

Mrs. Livesey and Marcia were walking in the direction of Friar-dale village.

Babs had seen enough.

The colour had drained from her cheeks, for now she knew only too well, now she knew that Marcia Loftus was in league with Polly's enemies.

All Babs' doubts had not been foolishly founded, and as she watched them she wondered what plan they were plotting.

The next moment she turned and hurried back in the direction of the school.

She was telling herself that it was well that she had followed that sneaking figure. To be forewarned was to be forearmed, and now Babs meant to keep watch and ward over Polly.



THE SECRET DREAD! "Babs!" whispered Polly, pointing down the stairs. "I'm afraid of that woman! I—I can't tell you why, but I am!"

When Danger Came!

SILENCE, girls!"

Miss Steel raised her eyes and looked sternly at the class. Since the lesson had opened he had had a real difficulty in checking the murmuring and whisperings that had been going on.

Nor was she entirely ignorant of the cause of any unruliness. Perhaps it was only natural that, after the happenings of that previous night, the girls should be just a trifle out of hand.

Miss Steel was none too concentrated herself this morning.

The amazing attempt to abduct Polly Vane had, to a certain extent, unnerved her, cool as she was.

And that a servant should have attempted to do the kidnapping!

Miss Steel knew now that Mrs. Livesey was missing, and there could be no doubting the fact that she had been the guilty party.

"Barbara!"

Miss Steel was looking at Babs. A moment since Babs had been talking in undertones to Mabel Lynn, and the purport of their conversation can be imagined.

Babs flushed and bent over her books again, as silence came over the class at last.

It was a pity that her conversation with Mabs had been interrupted, for Babs had been engaged in telling Mabel of what she had seen on the road of Marcia and Marcia's strange meeting with Mrs. Livesey.

Once or twice Babs had glanced at Marcia, and she had seen the furtive glances that Marcia had cast at Polly Vane.

There was no sympathy in that glance, none at all. It was not like the looks that the other girls had given Polly, for the happenings of the night had drawn Babs' friends nearer to the pale and sad-eyed girl, who seemed to find it so difficult to rivet her mind on her work.

Polly's feelings this morning, after the attempt to take her from the school, can well be understood.

To her it seemed that the danger had only been stayed for a short while, and that soon the inevitable must happen, and she fall a victim to those mysterious enemies who were compassing her about.

THE SCHOOL FRIEND.—No. 232.

These feelings were not due to anything cowardly in her nature, for had she not battled bravely against the terrors that had gone?

No, they were inspired purely and simply by a belief in the desperate purpose of those strange people who had brought this shadow upon her life.

Tears lay in her eyes, and those eyes had not been free of tears for many a day now. At first she had kept them back; at first she had told herself that something must happen to make her safe, but, as day had followed day, and those forces that were working against her had come so alarmingly close, she had been unable to fight against a sorrow that had begun to consume her.

Now she felt weak and incapable of work. Sleeplessness was not a little responsible for that, and, added to the lack of rest, were all these carking doubts.

Poor Polly Vane! She was a very pitiful-looking little figure this morning, with the dark lines beneath her eyes, and her shoulders shaking with the sobbing that she sought to check.

To three girls in the Form those tears made no appeal at all.

Lady Hetty Hendon, Marcia Loftus, and Nancy Bell were putting those tears down as a fresh sign of Polly's guilt. All three were sure that she was guilty of something. They were convinced that she was at Cliff House hiding from justice, and Marcia had conveyed to her friends the information that Mrs. Livesey was a detective.

"No wonder she's nervous!" whispered Nancy Bell. "Shouldn't wonder if the police arrive to-day and arrest her!"

Marcia nodded, and, as she looked up, she caught the eyes of Clara and Marjorie on her, and she turned away again. There was something challenging in Clara's glance, something that conveyed to Marcia the fact that it would be just as well for Marcia if she were more circumspect in her actions towards Polly Vane.

Marcia really had a healthy fear of Babs and Babs' chums.

It was upon a silent Form that the sound of a tap on the class-room door came.

Heads were raised inquiringly to see who came to bring a momentary break in the work at lessons.

To their surprise they saw Stella

Stone, the headmistress of Cliff House, come into the room and walk towards Miss Steel's desk.

"Ah, Stella!" said Miss Steel, looking up and smiling a welcome.

Stella returned the smile.

"I have just seen Miss Primrose, Miss Steel," she said softly. "She has gone down to Friardale village upon some matter that seemed very urgent."

"Yes, Stella," murmured Miss Steel. Stella Stone was looking at Polly Vane.

"She sent me here with a message to Polly Vane, Miss Steel," continued Stella. "It seems that she wanted Polly to follow after her to the village as soon as she could. Miss Primrose mentioned that she would be going on to Clemenatis Cottage, and she wanted Polly to meet her there."

As Stella had been speaking fear had come very plainly to Polly's face, and now she was positively as white as a sheet.

"Very well, Stella!" said Miss Steel.

"I will see that Polly goes to Friardale."

"Thank you, Miss Steel!"

Stella smiled, and turning, walked back to the door and passed out into the corridor.

Some of the girls were watching the departing mistress, but not so Babs.

Babs' eyes were on Polly, and she had noticed at once the terror that had come into Polly's eyes.

Polly was trembling and holding at the desk before her, as though afraid to let the desk go from her hands.

"Polly," said Miss Steel. "You heard what Stella said?"

Polly had risen to her feet, and she was looking pitifully afraid now.

"Yes, Miss Steel," she answered.

"Then you had better go now, Polly," said Miss Steel softly. "You may keep Miss Primrose waiting unless you hurry."

Polly was obviously finding it difficult to speak.

She stood there as though incapable of action.

Miss Steel was looking at her in surprise.

"Well, Polly," she said at last. "What are you waiting for?"

There was inquiry in Miss Steel's eyes at that moment.

"I cannot go to Friardale, Miss Steel," said Polly, her voice trembling.

A murmur of amazement ran through the Form, and Miss Steel looked blankly at Polly.

It was amazing, Miss Primrose had left instructions, and Miss Primrose's instructions had to be obeyed. Yet here was a girl who declared that she could not go to Friardale in accordance with the headmistress' wish. It was unbelievable.

"What!" exclaimed Miss Steel. "You don't want to go, Polly?"

All eyes were on Polly Vane now, and she stood there, nervous and apprehensive.

"No, Miss Steel," she answered, trying to speak, but finding it very difficult.

"But why don't you want to go?"

Miss Steel had leaned forward, and was scanning Polly's face closely.

Polly lowered her eyes. They were filled with tears.

How could she tell her reason? Oh, if only this message had never been sent!

Miss Steel seemed a prey to some impatience. She was telling herself that on no account must Miss Primrose be kept waiting, and she was also considering the fact of being blamed for Polly's lateness.

"Polly," she said sharply, "I cannot listen to such a foolish statement! You

will not explain why it is that you won't go to Friardale, so I take it that really there is no reason. You must go. Miss Primrose must be obeyed in this matter."

A cry came to Polly's lips, and she swayed in her seat.

"No, no, no!" she breathed.

"But, Polly, I insist!" said Miss Steel, thinking that it was for some childish reason that Polly did not wish to go.

Polly did not move. She felt that all eyes were on her; she felt that here indeed was the end; and yet she dared not explain why it was she did not wish to go down into the village.

"Now, Polly, go and get your hat and coat as once. I cannot have Miss Primrose disobeyed like this."

Miss Steel's voice was keen and commanding. She was accustomed to get her way, and she was telling herself that Polly's behaviour was most unusual.

Babs, as she watched Polly, was experiencing some of Polly's terror.

She felt that Polly would not have acted like this unless there was some very good reason why she should not go to Friardale.

But then, again, there was another very important side to this matter, and that side was the fact that Miss Primrose was going to Clematis Cottage.

That alone seemed to suggest that the meeting had some connection with the happenings of the night before, and it occurred to Babs' astute mind that Miss Primrose wanted to settle this matter away from Cliff House School.

It was this that made Babs wonder now at Polly's reticence, and the more she thought it out the more she wondered.

"Polly, I insist on your going, and at once," said Miss Steel, as she rose from her seat, she waved from her desk and came to Polly's side.

Tears lay thick on Polly's cheek.

"Come now, Polly," said Miss Steel, in softer tones. "We have wasted too much time already."

Babs could see that Polly meant to obey.

She had stepped from her desk, and was walking listlessly towards the door.

Polly did not look either to left or to right, as she walked tiredly from the room, and as Babs watched her go a new alarm began to steal into Babs' heart.

Babs was realising that it was only by the best of good fortune that Mrs. Livezey had not succeeded in her good project of that previous night.

Was it of that woman's presence near the school that Polly was afraid?

"Didn't Polly look strange?" whispered Clara to Marjorie.

Marjorie nodded.

"Looked as though she were terrified," answered Marjorie.

The whisperings among the girls had recommenced, but Babs had no part in that.

She was worried now, dreadfully worried, and on Polly's account.

Short as the time had been that she had known Polly, her like for the wistful-eyed girl had become very great, and Babs was feeling that never before had Polly needed a friend as badly as she did now.

She was beginning to picture all kinds of things—all kinds of new dangers that might beset Polly Vane, and by the time that the class was dismissed Babs had almost worked herself into a frenzy.

There was a short break between this lesson and the next, and already the girls were clustering about the Form-room discussing how peculiarly Polly had behaved.

Babs was still seated at her desk. There was an interval of ten minutes, but what could she do in ten minutes?

Dared she—dared she?

The chatter of her chums was coming to her ears.

"I have never seen anyone so scared!"

"Polly looked jolly well afraid!" exclaimed Clara.

"I wonder why?"

The conversation went on about Babs as she thought matters out, and those valuable moments were passing. Soon the interval would be gone!

Would it be breaking bounds?

Yes, it would, she told herself; and yet was there not every reason why she should follow after Polly? It was useless to go to Miss Steel and try to carry her point. Miss Steel was carrying out her headmistress' instructions, and Miss Steel did not know all that Babs knew.

No, there was only one thing for it, and one alone, and that was to act without permission.

Babs told herself that she would be prepared for what punishment she might get.

She would have a free conscience, anyway.

She would know that she had acted in Polly's interests, and because she was afraid for Polly.

Polly's whole attitude had tokened a feeling that something gravely dangerous was about to happen; and, after all, was that not an incentive enough for a loyal friend to help her?

Babs had reasoned matters out. There were two minutes to go before the class resumed, and the next instant Babs was out of her desk.

"Babs, where on earth are you going?"

Mabel Lynn had turned to see Babs at the door.

"After Polly," whispered Babs.

"There's something wrong. I have a feeling that there is."

"You'll jolly well get gated if you do go!" cried Clara.

"Wonders will never cease!" mocked Marcia, raising her eyebrows. "Dear good little Barbara actually breaks bounds and rules!"

And Marcia Loftus made a hurried departure, with Clara Trevely in pursuit.

As Babs ran into the corridor she heard Miss Steel walking towards the classroom, and Miss Steel's voice came to her

ears, calling to her to stop; but Babs had no such intention.

She had weighed matters carefully up, and had come to the conclusion that what she was about to do was right, so she intended going through what she had set herself to accomplish.

This was no foolish joke—no breaking of rules just for the sake of doing so.

No, there was a much bigger reason for her action, and the reason was Polly, and at the moment the only person who mattered in the whole world was Polly.

Hatless, Babs ran out into the grounds, and as she ran she wondered how far Polly had got on her way to Friardale Village.

It seemed hours ago that she had left the Form-room, but really it was only minutes, and already Babs was making up for those, for she was tearing along like the wind, and had come to the road.

She could imagine the consternation that she had left behind her in the Form-room.

Miss Steel's anger would know no bounds; but that was something that could not be helped.

Sufficient it was to know that now she was free and able to help Polly if Polly needed help.

But, even as Babs thought that the fear came to her that perhaps already something had happened that would rob her of that opportunity.

That anxiety left her wings.

Where was Polly?

Babs' eyes scanned the road and the distant fields, for she remembered by what circuitous route Polly had gone home in the days when she had stayed at Clematis Cottage.

Had she had the good sense to act today as she had acted then, or would the urgency of meeting Miss Primrose act against taking the longer way?

Anyway, as she ran into the road and looked to right and to left of her, it was to find that there was not a single traveller on the road.

The sun had passed behind some black clouds, and the rising wind was singing a mad song in the trees that swayed before its blast.

Babs ran on.

Where was Polly?



WHY WON'T POLLY COME?—"So you won't come, Polly?" asked Barbara Reffern for the last time. "N-no, Babs, I'd sooner not!" faltered Polly Vane.

Perhaps all her fears had been groundless. Perhaps, by now, Polly had met Miss Primrose.

If that were the case this would all be for nought, and it might be difficult to explain the reason for her leaving the class-room without permission to do so.

Babs ran on, and as she hurried towards the bend in the road, she paused, irresolute.

A sound—a strange sound—had come over on the wind towards her.

"What was that?"

As she spoke the words to herself, she yawned and she had listened intently.

She had faintly recognised one word, but she could not be sure.

There it was again, faint and only half articulate, but now the wind blew and carried the burden of that word to her.

"Help! Help! Help!"

Babs' face went as white as a sheet as she recognised that meaning word.

About her were the dark and shadowy fields, swirling around her was the wind, rising to fierce intensity.

How it all toned with the sudden fear that gripped her heart, the fear of the empty road, the fact that Polly was nowhere in sight.

Had all her terrors in the class been justified?

Had something happened to Polly Vane, something terrible?

Oh, if she could only determine from whence that sound was coming.

Babs ran to the bend in the road, and looked around it, but she could see no figure there; but again that cry came, and, running to a stile, she looked over it and towards a distant clump of tall and leafless trees.

The cry seemed to have come from that direction.

Could she could find assistance!

Babs looked up the road and down the road, but there was no sign of anyone who might render assistance, and there was no time to wait.

Her terror had made her feel convinced that the cry had to do with Polly Vane.

Over the stile she stepped, and now she was running for all she knew how across a ploughed field and in the direction of the trees she could see on the rising ground above her.

If only that cry would come again!

Babs felt so convinced that it had been Polly's voice, although why she was convinced she could not explain, for the cry had been so faint actually.

It was because she was so wound up, so anxious to safeguard Polly, that every thing conspired to give her additional fear on Polly's account.

Mounting the rise, she ran into the trees. They towered gloomily above her; but, search as she might, she could find no Polly there and no sign of Polly's enemies.

"Oh, where have they taken her—where has she gone?"

Babs clasped her hands and looked about her with terrified eyes.

She seemed so incapable of helping now. Oh, if only she knew if that cry had really come from Polly! If only she knew where Polly was!

Babs' eyes were filled with tears of mortification, and she lowered them and looked blankly at the ground.

As she did so she became conscious of the fact that the turf upon which she was standing bore signs of a struggle, for it had been kicked up by feet.

Her heart fluttered, and, as she looked more closely she saw what lay on the grass.

It was a small piece of paper, and there were other pieces, pieces that seemed to

have been laid intentionally, just as paper is laid in a paper-chase.

Could it be that this was some sign, some aid to anyone who was searching for Polly?

It might, or it might not be; but, be that as it may, Babs decided at once to follow that trail of paper.

There were not many pieces, it is true; but, few as they were, they certainly provided a link, and, into the deeps of the wood, with her eyes bent to the ground to look for the slightest clue, Babs hurried.

Once she paused in surprise.

She had come to a spot where there were the marks of the footsteps of three people, and a little farther behind there had only been the marks of two people.

Now, with her heart beating so fast that she did not know how to control it, Babs measured the steps of the third person.

The shoe for shoe it seemed to be—was small, as small as Babs' own, and a cry came to her lips.

"Polly's—Polly's shoe!" she whispered to herself. "It must be!"

Babs looked about her.

She was realising that she was alone, and that those who had captured Polly might be desperate in their intention to keep Polly a prisoner.

She would have to act with caution if she wished to succeed.

Oh, if it were Polly!

Of course, she told herself, there was still the chance that she was following to the discovery of a mare's nest. It might even be that already Polly was with the headmistress.

If that were the case all would be well, but still Babs would know that she had acted for the best, and what punishment she would receive she would be able to bear bravely in knowledge of what had urged her to act as she had done.

She followed on now.

There was a piece of paper caught in a low branch of a tree, there was another some fifty yards ahead.

How low and far those papers were between, and yet she found them!

It was slow work, it is true, but so keen was Babs that she persisted in that tedious duty she had set herself, and she wondered what would reward the end of her search.

Now and then she paused, waiting expectantly for some sound to aid her, but no sound came, save the sighing of the wind.

How gloomy was everything about her!

The swaying trees and the chill touch in the wind as she worked her way slowly forward into the depths of the wood!

If only she could find Polly.

How far she had gone Babs did not know, but suddenly she paused, for the wind had carried something to her ears.

Crouching back, she listened again, and now she realised what it was she heard.

The sound of voices had come to her ears, and there could be no mistaking the fact, no mistaking it at all.

Oh, how her heart trembled! How she stood there, wondering if Fate had led her really to aid Polly Vane!

But not for long did she pause.

It was probably the time to act now, and act she would.

Babs was creeping along like a Red Indian. She stole down the aisle amid the trees, and it was to come to a sudden standstill, for she was conscious that soon the path would end.

Through the leafless trees she could see a clearing, and there was something in that clearing that sent a flutter to her heart.

A hut was placed in the centre of it,

but she could see no sign of a living soul.

From whence had the voices come?

Babs crept nearer and more near, and suddenly she fell silently into the undergrowth.

It was for a very good reason.

From behind the hut a figure had come.

Babs caught her breath, and her eyes were large with excitement and interest. The newcomer was none other than Mrs. Livesey, and, at this very moment, the man who had called himself her brother, was walking away through the distant trees.

It must mean—it must be that they had captured Polly, and had brought her here.

What other explanation could there be?

Babs' heart was beating wildly as, from her place of concealment, she watched the woman.

To the Rescue!

IS Polly there?"

As Babs murmured the words to herself she saw Mrs. Livesey walk towards the door of the hut in the clearing, and the woman seemed to be saying something to someone who was within the hut.

Babs was slowly beginning to realise that there must be a prisoner in the hut, for Mrs. Livesey was taking up a sentinel-like post before the door.

Who else could she be guarding but Polly Vane?

Babs' eyes lit up.

There was only one person to contend with, she was telling herself, for the man had gone, and she wondered whether he had gone, and for what reason?

Perhaps it was to find some conveyance that they might spirit Polly away in, and, in that case, it meant that action must be urgent, that something must be done speedily to save Polly Vane.

Babs cast about in her mind for some means of rescuing Polly.

A desperate idea came into her mind to venture into the clearing, and openly demand Polly's release from Mrs. Livesey, and, if needs be, enforce her demand by action.

But this idea she dismissed. She would be no match for that powerful woman, no match at all.

No, something more subtle must be adopted.

If only she could have brought Clara, Marjorie, Mabel, and Peggy Preston with her!

Mrs. Livesey's keen eyes were looking into the clearing, and once Babs felt terror creep into her heart.

She felt that Mrs. Livesey had seen her, but the next moment she knew that her assumption had been wrong, for the woman had turned, and was looking in another direction.

Babs was forming plans, to dismiss them quickly; but at last she decided that it was wiser to skirt through the trees, and come to the back of the hut.

If she were to act from here Mrs. Livesey would have due notice of such action.

Babs crawled back, and when out of earshot and sight, she sprang to her feet and darted into the trees.

She could still keep the clearing in view, and there was no chance of her losing her way.

With care she worked her way through the thickly-clustered trees of the wood until, at last, she could no

longer see that grim figure of Mrs. Livesey seated by the door of the hut.

Babs' heart was beating fast. She felt that soon the moment would come when she would need every ounce of courage that she possessed.

Crawling along, she came to the fringe of the trees, and now she could see the back of the hut, and, wonder of wonders, there was something there that sent a flood of light into her eyes.

A small window had caught Babs' attention.

For some moments she could not move, for the idea that had come to her was making her tremble with excitement.

But then she thought of Mrs. Livesey's companion.

At any moment he might return and make any attempt at rescue quite impossible.

Now she could almost touch the hut by extending her arm to its full extent. The moment had come.

Careful not to make a sound, she rose to her feet, and the next moment her hands had gripped the ledge of that little window.

Babs drew herself up, straining her muscles to do so, and now she was looking into the darkness of the hut.

As she did so she heard the faint sound of a movement, and at last, her eyes becoming accustomed to the darkness, she saw what it was lay on the floor below her.

There, tied hand and foot and with a silk handkerchief wound about her mouth, was the girl she sought.

Polly Vane's fears had indeed been very real, and a gasp of excitement was stilled on Babs' lips.

worked in fear lest, at any moment, Mrs. Livesey might come in or her companion return!

Babs had many terrors, and one of them was that Polly might be too numbed and cramped to help herself.

From without no movement had come, and how Babs blessed that fact! Mrs. Livesey's appearance on the scene would spell disaster to all their hopes.

Babs had never worked with such feverish impatience, and, once when Polly wanted to speak, Babs shook her head for fear that the slightest object might betray them.

To Babs those moments whilst she was untying Polly's bonds were endless years. But at last she had the satisfaction of seeing Polly free, and now Babs was assisting Polly to her feet.

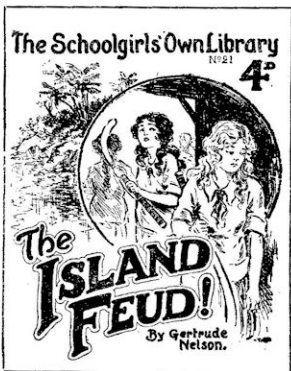
Polly could stand but weakly at first,

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Oh, if only she could succeed in her plan!

Babs clasped her hands for a moment, steeled herself to act, and then acted. Creeping from the trees, she wormed her way across the grass.

She knew that the slightest sound would be fatal to her scheme, and she had no intention of making any sound.

But, alas! for her hopes. Once her hand, touching a dried twig, snapped it, and the sound was alarmingly noisy, and Babs waited breathlessly, fancying that Mrs. Livesey would appear from around the hut at any moment.

But that figure of the mysterious woman did not come, and, with relief, Babs wormed her way forward again.

Her fears, her feelings can be well imagined.

The danger was that, at any moment, her scheme might be nipped in the bud.

But, with every instant, she was coming nearer and more near to the window.

Polly lay below her—Polly, the captive, the girl she had come to save, and had so provisionally found in the very nick of time.

Polly's eyes, terrified and tearless now, were looking up into Babs' face as though she fancied Babs to be the subject of fancy rather than a real live being.

But now she began to realize that Babs was human enough, for the next moment Babs was on to that ledge and was swarming through the little window.

A cry had come to Polly's lips, to be checked as soon as it came.

Polly was amazed, and, oh, what a wonderful light of hope and relief shined in her eyes as Babs bent over her.

"Don't make a sound!" whispered Babs. "If you do we are lost, Polly!"

Polly nodded as Babs untied the silk handkerchief that bound her lips. The next instant Babs was at work on the cords that bound Polly's wrists and her ankles.

Oh, how frantically she worked—

and it was obvious that she was in pain now that the blood was in circulation again.

Not for long that pain, though. Movement was becoming easier as the precious seconds flitted by. Babs had waited apprehensively, fearfully.

From without came a movement, and Babs realised that someone was walking towards the door.

It was a frightful moment of anxiety. Suddenly Babs noticed an old iron roller, and with frantic haste she rushed at it and jerked it against the door. Then, to make the opening of the door doubly difficult, she caught up a piece of wood and fixed it under the cross-piece.

Now she knew that there was not one moment to be lost.

Too much time had already been wasted.

Catching at Polly's arm, she indicated the window of the hut, and drew Polly towards it.

In an agony of suspense she lifted

Polly so that the girl's rather nerveless fingers might get a grasp of the ledge.

Polly managed to hold on and draw herself through the window, and, as Babs waited, she heard the sound of a hand rattling on the door of the hut. The door rattled, the timbers creaked, and someone without tried to force it open by inserting a pole in the aperture at the top.

Babs swung round, and, raising herself cautiously, and careful not to make a sound, she was the next moment drawing herself up as Polly had done.

Perched for a second on the ledge, she could see Polly lying face downwards in the long grass.

Babs poised herself, and then leapt lightly to the ground, and, without any sound that could have alarmed Mrs. Livesey and warned her that her captive was making good her escape.

Babs was now so excited that she hardly knew how to control herself.

Matters had gone with a smoothness that was almost uncanny.

First the finding of the paper trail, then the discovery of Mrs. Livesey, then finding Polly. And now they were free and in the open, and hope was in sight.

It seemed that success was assured, and perhaps it was through over-confidence of this that disaster came, swift and sudden.

As Babs sprang to the ground and caught at Babs's hand, Polly, who had risen quickly to her feet, kicked against something in the lush grass.

It was an aged kettle, and the dull, metallic note that it sent out certainly came to the ears of a woman who was still attempting to force open the door of the hut.

Mrs. Livesey, with superhuman strength, forced the door of the hut sufficiently for her to enter.

As she looked within a cry of rage and dismay came to her lips.

"Gone!" she cried. "The girl has gone!"

Her eyes travelled to the window, to which she ran, and, raising herself, looked through it.

Babs, raising her eyes at that moment, saw that malevolent glare in Mrs. Livesey's eyes, and a cry of fear came to her lips.

"Quick, for pity's sake quick, Polly!" she screamed.

Polly had also seen that face for the moment that Mrs. Livesey remained there, and a cry of fear had come to Polly's lips.

She turned as Babs turned, and the two girls tore away and past the hut into the open clearing as Mrs. Livesey, with a shout of rage, came round the hut to see them speeding away to safety.

"Polly, run Polly—run for your very life!" shouted Babs.

The two were speeding towards the trees, and behind them, her face livid and her eyes filled with intent, came Mrs. Livesey.

But she was a big woman, and the two girls were more lithe than she, and they were making ground.

Babs, casting a quick glance over her shoulder, realised this, and hope came again to her.

But then she thought of Polly, and all Polly had gone through, and she wondered for how long Polly could stand this mad race at which they were running.

Polly was panting already, and her face was white.

Babs was dreadfully afraid that she might faint, and in that event how could she battle against Mrs. Livesey?

She had seen how determined the woman was, and that determination had made Babs afraid, dreadfully afraid.

Into the aisles of trees they tore with Mrs. Livesey's cries rousing noisy echoes in the deep wood.

How sombre and gloomy it seemed now, and how in harmony with all Babs's thoughts.

But they must win through! They must get free from this woman!

"Faster, faster, Polly!" pleaded Babs. Polly responded nobly. By everything in her power she sought to keep abreast with Babs.

But Babs had to catch hold of her hand, for Polly was beginning to lag, and Babs was more than ever afraid that they could never reach to the safety of Friar-dale Road in time.

Suddenly, as they darted forward, Babs saw a figure loom darkly ahead of them, and, with a frantic cry, she clutched at Polly's hand, and they cut off at right angles.

"Mrs. Livesey's brother!" she breathed. "I recognised him! Oh, Polly, Polly, if only we could get free!" They crashed through the undergrowth, and behind them there came the dual cries of Mrs. Livesey and her brother, as they tore after in pursuit.

It was becoming a nightmare to Babs. The hope of saving Polly, the hope that had once seemed so flattering, was now becoming less and less of a possibility.

How could they hope to get away from these two determined people?

But Babs gripped Polly's hand in her own, and told herself that it would not be for want of trying.

Once Polly stumbled, and she would have fallen had not Babs held her up and forced her forward.

Once on the road they might find safety, or perhaps see a policeman who could help them.

A glance over her shoulder had told Babs that their pursuers were surely gaining, and as yet there was no sign that they were coming out of the wood.

But they had found a path, and Babs hoped that the path would bear them on to the field that she had crossed, and then they could rush across the field and down to the Friar-dale Road.

Hope always comes, however despairing a heart is, and Babs still hoped on. It helped her.

THE SCHOOLGIRLS' WEEKLY

EVERY WEDNESDAY—TWOPENCE.

Don't delay a moment longer. Place an order with your newsagent for a copy of this Splendid Schoolgirls' Paper at once. It is crammed with Grand Stories of just the sort you like so much.

A treat for all girls.

COMMENCING NEXT WEDNESDAY

"THE TROUBLESOME TWINS!"

A sparkling, mirth-provoking serial by Joan Vincent.

A Great New School Story by Louise Essex:

"FROM HEROINE TO OUTCAST"

begins in the issue of November 3rd.

Had she not thought of Polly she would have collapsed herself, for she had been through tortures since that moment in the class when Polly had demurred about going into Friarale to meet the headmistress.

"Oh, Polly, look—look!"

A joyful cry came to Babs' lips, for before her she could see the light through the trees.

"We're coming to the open!" she cried.

"Oh, Babs, I can't go another yard!" moaned Polly.

"You must—you must!" said Babs, fiercely, almost drawing Polly forward.

Polly should not be caught; she should not fall into the hands of those people again.

How they ever reached the fringe of the trees she did not know.

Behind her the cries of Mrs. Livesey and her brother sounded alarmingly near.

Babs fancied that she could already feel that woman's breath on her face, and the fear gave her a new courage, and she literally carried Polly along in a new impetus, a new will to win through.

They had passed the trees now, and before them was the ploughed field, and over it they tore.

Once Polly stumbled and fell, but Babs picked her up and urged her on. But it seemed that all chance of escape was hopeless now, for Mr. Livesey and her brother were coming nearer and more near.

A frantic glance at them showed Babs how near they were.

Once more she caught up with at the stile; they stood by, and Babs knew it; but she steered herself to be brave as they raced across the field and at last came to the stile.

And there, at the very moment when the Friarale Road was within sight, and there might have been hope of safety, Babs and Polly found themselves in the grip of their two pursuers.

"Get you!" cried Mrs. Livesey, grasping Polly.

And as she cried that, as Polly sank terrified to the ground, and Babs recoiled

in dread and fear, there came a cry, and three figures in blue came darting over the stile.

"And we've got you!" cried a stern voice, as an elderly gentleman followed the three policemen, and watched the men arrest Mrs. Livesey and her brother.

Babs hardly knew whether all this was true or the substance of a dream.

The terror was still on her face and still on Polly's, for neither girl had realised what had happened.

Babs was looking at the dignified gentleman, and wondering who he was, and as she watched him she heard a cry come from Polly:

"Daddy, daddy—you! Oh, daddy!"

The next instant, crying with joy and relief, Polly was in the elderly gentleman's arms.

For some moments she clung there, and then, through her tears, she looked up at him.

"And has the shadow passed now, daddy?" she sobbed.

"Yes, little Beryl," he whispered—"all gone!"

Babs had drawn closer.

Here was surprise on surprise; and now Polly was looking at Babs, and how appealing and thankful were Polly's eyes.

"This is Barbara Redfern, daddy!" she murmured. "Barbara, who saved me! Barbara, who never knew that I was Beryl Wingate!"

She crept from her father's arms as he walked towards Babs, and took Babs' hands in his.

"My daughter had a secret to keep," he said. "And I can see what a friend you have been to her a loyal friend."

He paused, and for a moment looked at Mrs. Livesey and her brother as they were led away by the police.

"I sent Beryl down here to get away from danger," he said, looking deep into Babs' eyes. "But the danger followed her."

He advertised her as missing to put them off the scent; but they were here, and Beryl had to remain. It was our only way of catching the whole gang, who were out to capture my poor little daughter and extort money from me."

He laughed now.

"Barbara Redfern, loyal friend of my daughter's," he said, "those people are only the tools of more powerful people, but in the catching of them we have got the whole lot, and you are responsible."

Babs clasped her hands as Beryl Wingate—for Beryl Wingate it really was—came near to her and linked her arm through Babs'.

"You two girls must be lifelong friends," said Mr. Wingate softly; "though you will see little of each other, for Beryl must return to her old school. And I am going to make a handsome present to Cliff House for this, you see if I don't."

"But Mr. Wingate," said Babs, "how was it that you were here?"

Mr. Wingate smiled.

"I sent for Miss Primrose," he murmured, "thinking it wiser to meet her at Clematis Cottage, and fancying that she would bring Beryl. But she came alone, and imagine my fears when Beryl did not arrive! We have scoured the countryside; and we saw you break from cover, and waited. There is our story, Barbara. But it isn't so wonderful a story as that which you are going to tell me, that I do know!"

"Dear, loyal Babs!" whispered Beryl Wingate. "Here is a wonderful story of bravery and thorough friendship!"

Babs smiled down into Beryl's eyes.

"It was nothing—nothing," Polly Vane, she answered, and added: "You will always be Polly to me now!"

And the wonderful present that Mr. Wingate made to the school! It was nothing less than a brand new library to the school to commemorate what Babs did!

Marcia Loftus, for once in a way, felt thoroughly ashamed of herself, and, in a rather sullen manner, apologised to Beryl.

And during the short time she stayed at the school, Beryl Wingate, without a worry and without a fear, was one of the happiest of girls.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

So the mystery of Polly Vane is solved at last, and if there is a happier girl than Polly in the whole world it is, perhaps, Barbara Redfern, who has done so much for her. But there are more stirring times immediately ahead of the chums of Cliff House, so you must not miss next Thursday's magnificent new long complete story of their adventures, entitled: "THE FOURTH FORM MONITRESSES!" By Hilda Richards.

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