

SUPERB FREE GIFT NEXT SATURDAY: Details Inside

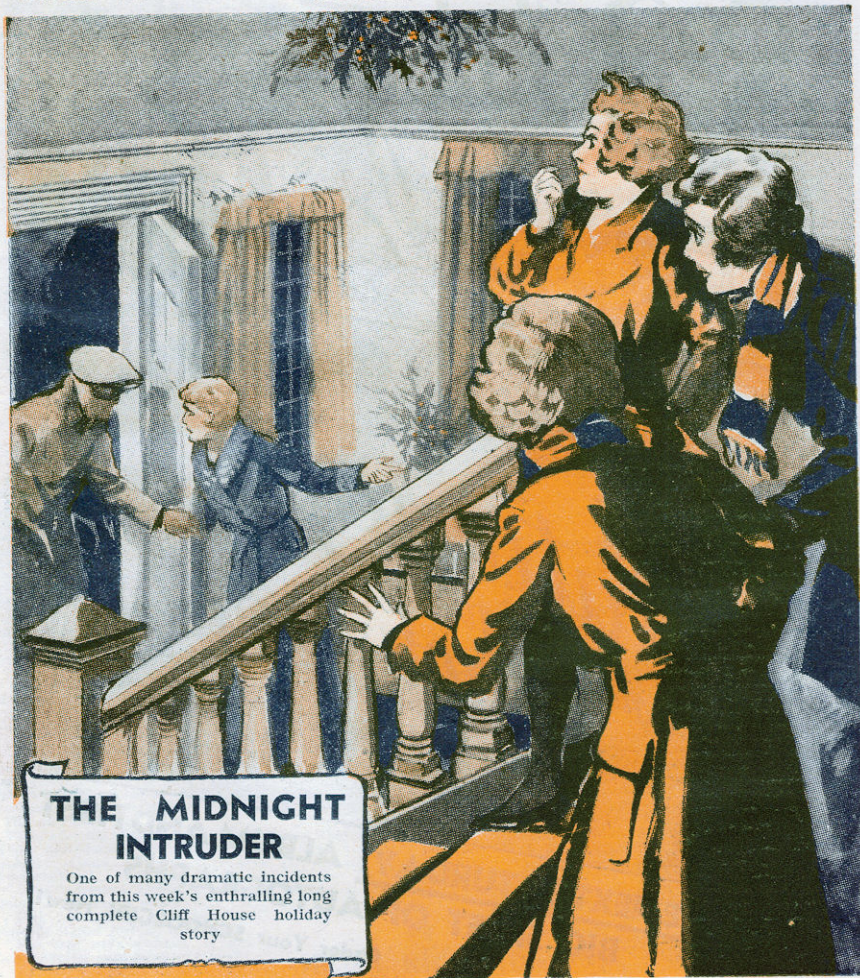
# THE SCHOOLGIRL

Every Saturday 2<sup>D</sup>

No. 336. Vol. 13.

INCORPORATING  
"SCHOOLDAYS."

Week Ending January 4th, 1936.



## THE MIDNIGHT INTRUDER

One of many dramatic incidents  
from this week's enthralling long  
complete Cliff House holiday  
story

## A Fine Extra-Long Christmas Holiday Story, Featuring the Chums of Cliff House School



# A SCHOOLGIRL TO SHIELD HER

"Who's for the Panto?"

"PANTO! Panto! Who's for the Panto?"

And Leila Carroll, her face flushed, her eyes sparkling, Sutherland House with a hop, skip, and jump, a bunch of white tickets in her hand, as she sing-songed those words like some excitedly triumphant child.

"Gee, girls, what a treat for all of us!" she cried, as she came to a halt. "Look!"

And proudly, jubilantly, she flourished the tickets in the air.

"Well, what are they?" Clara Trevlyn asked impatiently.

"Tickets! Ten of them!"

"But tickets what for, goose?" Barbara Redfern laughed.

"The pantomime—'Aladdin and His Wonderful Lamp,'" Leila chuckled. "It starts to-night at the Westend Theatre. Nunky's given me ten seats—first row stalls, mind you—and has made arrangements for us to have dinner at the Dorlandshire before going on to the show. Do we smile?"

Did they smile! Tickets for the Westend! With dinner at the world-famous Dorlandshire as a prelude! Could anything have been more exciting?

"Leila," Jemima Carstairs solemnly observed, "you're a wow!"

"Ceil, so giddy old bow-wow!" Marcelle Biquet joyfully shrieked.

"The real cat's whisker, in fact!" Janet Jordan announced ecstatically.

"And your uncle," Clara Trevlyn

THE strange mystery of Hope Caraway grows hourly deeper, more bewildering. And Babs Redfern, because she knows Hope to be innocent, has pledged herself to aid the girl who is so friendless and alone

asserted, "is a brick! A real diamond-studded gold brick, hall-marked, and stamped in every link! Tell him that from me when next you see him, Leila. Whoopee, Bessie!"

And Clara, in an impulsive access of joy, slapped fat Bessie Bunter on the back, and Bessie, the pleased smirk on her face fading into a scowl, grabbed desperately at her glasses as they slipped from her nose, to be caught in mid-air by smiling Marjorie Hazeldene.

They laughed! They danced! It was, they all felt, a fitting climax to a day which, if it had been happy so far, had left them all a little tired.

So far, the Christmas holiday which the Cliff House chums were spending at

Lord and Lady Sutherland's house in London had been one long round of thrills, delights, and excitements, with, it seemed, one glorious surprise following upon the heels of another. But this was one of the most pleasant of all.

For Babs & Co., in London, believed

in doing as London did. So far, they had very successfully lived up to that motto. Nothing could have been more wonderful or more exhilarating than the Christmas they had spent at Sutherland House.

But Christmas, with its round of gaiety and excitement, had come and gone, leaving them all rather bewildered and breathless by the lavishness and the splendour of it.

They had already visited Olympia to see the circus, and already, in Lord Sutherland's expensive limousine, done the sights.

They had explored Piccadilly; they had cruised the Thames. They had been to London's latest and most up to date cinema. They had visited the wax-works and the Tower.

No end, it seemed, to the things they had done, yet, despite it all, Christmas had passed like a flash.

What a whirl it had all been—what a whirl it still was!

And now—this! Oh, scrumptious—scrumptious! Bessie's mouth, indeed, was already watering at the thought of dinner in London's biggest and most exclusive hotel. She blinked suddenly, however.

"I sus-say, how many tickets did you say you'd got, Leila?"

"Ten, my cherub."

By  
**HILDA RICHARDS**



"But there are only nine of us!"  
"Well, yes, I guess that's so," Leila agreed, staring at the tickets in her hand. "A whole row, I guess."

"Two for Bessie," Jimmie flippantly asserted. "Dash it all, we can't squash old Bessie into a mere one seat, can us—what?"

That was hardly a compliment to Bessie, whose size was so frequently the subject of leg-pulling on the part of her chums, but it wasn't of course, the real solution.

The real solution, it at once became obvious, was that Lord Sutherland wished them to have the whole row, and had included an extra ticket, so that they should be able to claim that row, once they reached the theatre.

In any case, there could be no argument on the point, for Lord and Lady Sutherland, who were busy people on opening nights, had already departed for the theatre. That meant, of course, there was a ticket to spare. Not to use it, therefore, would have seemed a wanton shame to the Cliff House juniors.

"Well, nine tickets, and one over," Leila observed. "Which means, I guess, that we can include a guest. Now—

who?"

Babs looked up eagerly.

"Hope?" she asked.

"Hope Caraway?"

"Yes."

There was a pause. They all knew and liked Hope Caraway, the clever, charming little dancer whom Lord Sutherland had made the star of his next big show, which was opening early in the New Year.

Yet, for all that, Hope, with her tragic face, her big, wide eyes, was something of an enigma to them, and there had been certain unpleasant incidents at Sutherland House during the holidays in which Hope seemed to be involved.

"Please!" Babs begged.

"Well, O.K. with 'yes,'" Leila said.

"What about everyone else?"

"Oh, yes, do let's take her!" gentle Marjorie pleaded. "She's looked so awfully out of things since Christmas. It will cheer her up."

"Then I can go and tell her!" Babs asked eagerly.

"Yes, rather!"

Babs laughed. Her blue eyes shone with the delight she felt. Poor Hope, she reflected pityingly. It would, as Marjorie said, do her a world of good to be taken out of herself.

She turned, gaily starting off towards the stairs. Now she came to think of it, she had not seen Hope at all to-day, and she wondered, with a little throb of uneasiness, if she were in her room.

Strange, those long absences of Hope! Stranger still those haunting shadows in her eyes, the nervousness which Babs could have vowed was not a natural characteristic.

But Hope would be pleased to go with them—with her, especially. For Hope Caraway loved her as much as Babs loved Hope.

She reached the door, tapping gently. There was no reply.

Babs frowned a little. She knocked a second time. Again there was no reply. So, taking the liberty, she turned the handle of the door and looked into the room.

It was a large room, prettily and daintily furnished, like every apartment at Sutherland House, and across the floor, in the wall opposite, stood a curtained doorway, which led into a dressing-room adjoining. But obviously, Hope was not here. Babs' face fell in disappointment.

"Oh, what beastly luck!" she told herself. "Now where—"

And then, about to leave the room, she stopped with a start, her gaze suddenly glued to the door in the opposite wall.

Was she mistaken, or had she heard a sound coming from beyond that door?

But no, there it was again! A faint, moaning, almost heartbroken little cry.

"Hope!" she muttered. "The poor kid! She's crying!"

Instinctively she stepped across the floor. But before she had reached the door it opened. A girl with large, lustrous eyes and a dead-white face came out, biting her lips.

At sight of Babs she pulled up as if she had been shot.

"B-Babs!" she faltered.

"Hope!" Babs came forward while Hope, with a quick, almost guilty, look, closed the door behind her. "Hope, dear," she said gently, "what are you crying for?"

"I—I'm not crying!" Hope defended herself, and tried to smile—such a accusation.

"No, but you were," Babs said gently.

"I—I wasn't!"

"But I heard you!" And then Babs looked at her quickly. It struck her all at once that Hope was telling the truth. Certainly there were no signs of tears upon her cheeks, though the expression upon her white face proclaimed an agony which went deeper than tears could ever relieve. "But someone was crying," she persisted, "in that room. I heard them!"

Hope's face was ghastly.

"But no one was crying!" she denied.

"How could there be? There—there's no one in the room!"

Again Babs looked at her—rather penetratingly. If Hope was a professional actress, she certainly was not a convincing prevaricator. If her faltering voice had not done it, the startled, guilty expression upon her face undeniably proclaimed the fib. Someone was in that room—someone whose identity Hope was, for her own reasons, keeping a close secret.

"I see!" Babs smiled.

She wished she knew more; not out of idle curiosity, but because she did so want to help Hope. And how could one help a girl when one couldn't even guess the nature of the worry which preyed upon her mind?

"Don't tell me if you don't want to, Hope. But you know I have promised to help you, and I only wish to goodness you'd confide in me so that I could, Hope!"

She faced her squarely, and while the two girls stood looking into each other's eyes, neither of them observed that the door came open a little way, and that for just a moment a new face intruded upon the scene—the face of a rather proud, supercilious-looking girl, dressed in the white apron and cap of one of the housemaids.

"Hope," Babs added, "we're friends, aren't we?"

Hope smiled mistily.

"Oh, Babs!"

"We're friends!" Babs repeated the words almost fiercely. "A few days ago, Hope, you did me a very good turn. I wanted then to do something for you to repay that—I've still got it on my mind, you know. But I want to do something for you even more now, Hope."

She went closer to the girl, looking into her haggard face with such pleading, wistful eyes that Hope, with a

sudden contraction of the lips, turned her head away.

"Hope, dear," Babs said, "won't you trust me?"

Unobserved, the figure at the door moved a little.

Hope bit her lip.

"Oh, Babs, I—I'd love to," she said.

"But it isn't a matter of trusting you. If—if I only had myself to consider, I'd trust you with my life. It isn't that. Babs, it's true, I—I have a secret. But it's not my secret. It's a secret I can't share."

"But why not, dear?"

"Because—because— Oh!" And Hope shrugged wretchedly. "It's lovely of you to—to be so kind. You—you've done such wonders already," she said. "But I couldn't drag you into this, Babs. I daren't! You see—with a swift, hunted look round—it—it might mean—prison!"

She gasped as the last word came out, as if already she saw the menace of the word hovering about her. Babs winced a little. But she did not hesitate; she did not falter. When Babs gave her faith, that faith was strong.

"You mean, Hope, you've done—"

"No, not I! I've done nothing wrong!" Hope shook her head. "And neither has—"

"Oh, Babs, please don't question me!" she said wretchedly. "I'd love to tell you—I would! Everything—everything! But I can't—I daren't! For your sake I daren't! Just help me, Babs, as you have been helping me. Just believe in me!"

"Of course, Hope, I'll believe in you!" Babs said softly, and extended her hand, her heart wrung by the pitiful misery in the other's expression. "But don't forget, dear, I want to do more than believe in you; I want to help! And now, Hope—"

The figure at the door melted away.

"How would you falter."

"You would you like," Babs asked "to come to the pantio to-night?"

"How would she like it? The gladness that momentarily flashed into Hope's face, banishing for an instant all those heavy cares upon it, gave the answer. Then, with a quick look towards the door, she shook her head.

"But I—I can't! I daren't!"

"Oh, yes, you can!" Babs declared.

"Hope, you must! Forget your worries for a few hours, at least. We're all looking forward to your company. I've practically promised, on your behalf, that you will come. Besides, the change would do you good. Hope, darling, don't let me down!"

She smiled frankly, disarmingly. For a moment Hope paused. But that last argument swayed her. Then rather slowly she nodded.

"Very well," she said.

"You'll come?" Babs asked delightedly.

"Yes, and—and thanks!"

So that was arranged. Babs laughed, more pleased, if the truth be told, at that acceptance than she was at the thought of going to the pantio herself.

But as she tripped downstairs to break the news to her chums she frowned a little, wondering, as she had wondered so many heart-wearing times before, what secret worry preyed upon her friend's mind. Who was Hope concealing in the room beyond her bed-room?

She did not know. She wished she did! In any case, she told herself, it was no business of hers. But she wondered vaguely, remembering those incidents at Christmas, if Hope had been hiding that fugitive ever since the holidays. Was it that which accounted for

her strangely worried behaviour? Who was she hiding—for what purpose?

She remembered that word which Hope had spoken with such dread—"prison"! Did it mean—

"Oh, Miss Redfern!" a voice at her elbow broke in.

Babs started out of her preoccupation. She looked quickly into the face of the maid who stood before her, and who, it seemed, had materialised from nowhere.

"Yes, Nancy?"

"I—I was wondering"—Nancy Green looked nervous. For a moment the strangely green-grey eyes flickered as they fell before Babs' gaze—"I—I was wondering if—if you'd do me a favour."

"Why, certainly, if I can," Babs smiled.

"Well, I—I have to go out this evening—rather importantly," Nancy gulped a little. "It—it's not my evening off, though, and—and as Lord and Lady Sutherland are out, I—I can't approach them. Miss Leila is in charge while they're away. I wondered if you would mind asking her for me?"

"Why, of course!" Babs agreed.

She went on, rather wondering, however, why Nancy could not have asked such a simple favour herself.

Leila at once gave the required permission when she was tackled. Leila, at the moment, full of joy, was in a mood to give anyone anything. For Leila, being a native of New York, had never seen an English pantomime before—and certainly had never seen one of her famous uncle's productions.

"And is Hope coming?" she asked eagerly.

"Yes, rather!"

"Oh, topping!"

They all laughed. Everybody was in a recklessly gay mood. A few moments later tea was served—a tasty little meal.

Then, after tea, upstairs to change! Changing must be a protracted business this evening, with every one of them wishing to look her best.

What excitement then! What gay laughter and jests as the girls bundled into the two large rooms—like miniature dormitories—which, since the departure of the other Sutherland House guests, had been allocated to them so that they should miss nothing of each other's company.

Babs, Mabs, Bessie, Clara, and Marjorie in one, all falling over each other in their eagerness and excitement, the rest of the chums in the room adjoining.

Of course there were incidents—as when Bessie was found wearing Mabel Lynn's stockings, for which Mabel was everywhere searching; and when Clara, smoothing her unruly hair with brilliantine to make her recalcitrant quiff lie flat, emptied by accident the whole bottle down her neck.

Then Mabs, having dressed quicker than any, must discover that she had put on two silk stockings of different shades, and Bessie at the same moment discovered, through Marjorie Hazeldene's agency, that she had made the same mistake. Mutual recriminations!

But it all added to the fun! What did it matter? It took more than an hour to dress, but when they had finished, what a pretty, chattering, and radiant bunch of schoolgirls they presented.

Even Bessie looked marvellous in her new satin gown of green, which had been Lady Sutherland's Christmas present to her, and could hardly tear herself away from the mirror which fascinated her with the reflection it presented.

"Oh, I sus-say, what wouldn't my brother Billy give to see me now! You know, Mabs, I always did say that green was my favourite colour!"

"Except when it was red or yellow or blue!" Babs chuckled. "Still, I must say that it suits you. Half a tick, though!" And she pulled out a crease in the back of the frock which, being behind Bessie, the fat one had never noticed. "There, that looks better!"

"Oh, thuth-thanks!" Bessie beamed. "I'm not going to boast, of course—you girls know how modest I am—but I do think I look absolutely stunning to-night, you know."

"Stunning's the word," Clara agreed heartily.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bessie sniffed, without offence. She could not be insulted to-night. Bessie was much too pleased with herself. And, besides she hadn't finished yet! With a beaming smile, she ambled towards her dressing-chest.

"Well, here we are, all ready," Babs said ten minutes later. "Remains now only to pick up Hope—" She stopped, staring at Bessie, and swooningly passed a hand before her eyes. "Tell me," she said faintly, "is this glittering thing I see before me Bessie Bunter?"

"My hat!"

For there stood Bessie, beaming proudly in regal glory. Three flashing bracelets were upon each fat wrist. Five glittering rings shone upon five fat fingers. Round her ample throat no less than three gleaming rows of diamonds shone, and upon Bessie's newly waved hair was a scintillating tiara.

Bessie smirked.

"Well?" she said, pleased.

"Ye gods and little fishes!" Jemima gasped. "What is it?"

"My jewels," Bessie explained impressively. "The famous Bunter jewels, you know. I bought them at the Universal Stores—I mum-mean, of course, they're our family heirlooms."

"Made in Birmingham," Jemima said, "and cost five bob each. We know. We were there when your ancestral assistant behind the Universal counter handed them over, Bessiekins."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bessie glowered.

"Look here—"

"We are—we is!" Clara moaned. "With what remaining eyesight we've got. Oh, my only giddy aunt! Bessie, darling, you're never going out in those!"

"But I am!"

"Think of the temptation to highwaymen and thieves!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And reflect," Mabs put in dramatically, "what a positively sticky mess you'll get yourself into."

Bessie glowered.

"But that's silly. How can I get in a sticky mess?" she asked indignantly.

"Well, with all that paste—" Mabs murmured.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a shriek. Bessie merely scowled. She had expected to impress, if not to stun, her chums with her aristocratic elegance, and in that she had succeeded, but hardly in the way she expected.



CHUCKLING softly the four crept stealthily along the corridor to the room in which Babs, Bessie, and Clara were sleeping—little suspecting the raid that was to be made on them!

"Take them off, Bessiekins," Babs advised.

"But I won't take them off! Why the dickens should I?" Bessie heatedly protested. "They're the finishing touch."

"What-ho! They've nearly finished me," Jenima agreed. "But out of pure pity, old Bessie, we can't let you stagger about under that load of lead and glass for a whole evening."

"Ha, ha, ha!" Bessie turned red. But there was no help for it. Bessie might have ideas as to what constituted her most brilliant and dazzling best, but her chums had others, and Bessie finally had to be gloweringly content with just one diamond bracelet, the rest of her treasures being reluctantly relegated to the drawer from which they had been taken.

By that time they were all ready, with the exception of Clara, who was grumbling about the tight fit of her new shoes. It was while they were waiting for her to change that there came a tap on the door.

"Come in!" Babs sang out.

The door opened. Hope Caraway smilingly peered in.

"Can I come in?" she asked shyly.

Could she? With one accord every eye turned upon her. A murmur of admiration went up as, blushing, she entered, parading daintily on the threshold, marvelling as the chums themselves looked, Hope eclipsed them all.

She wore a long, high-waisted, white evening dress of silk, accented with white satin shoes, a single red rosebud tucked in at her waist, her glorious hair coiled in close ringlets about her shapely head, giving her a beauty that was at once dazzling and dignified.

"Oh, Hope, you look topping!" Babs breathed.

Hope flushed, her rosy lips parting. "Like it?" she asked. "It's a new dress. My mother—" And then hastily she corrected herself. "It—it's a new dress I had for Christmas," she went on, slightly confused. "At least, the material was given me for Christmas. I made the dress myself."

"Oh, I say!"

It was at this juncture that the butler arrived to announce that the cars were ready outside. That at once put an end to the discussion.

Gathering up their cloaks the chums, in a lighthearted group, swept daintily downstairs, delicately holding up the trains of their skirts.

The two footmen posted at the entrance of the hall flung open the doors, standing stiffly at attention as they chatteringly passed into the area outside where two magnificent limousines were drawn up to meet them.

Then off—laughing and talking animatedly and excitedly. Babs taking care of Hope, who was shyly quiet, despite the jubilation of the others, sat back in her seat.

The car slid round the corner of the square, through Great Mount Street into the bustle and lights of Regent Street. Babs, feeling for her friend's hand, found it and pressed it.

"Happy, Hope?"

"Oh, Babs, of course!"

Babs smiled.

Regent Street was ablaze. Everybody, it seemed, was abroad, holiday-making still in the Christmas spirit, though Christmas itself had passed three days ago.

The lights gleamed in the aurora of faint mist, the pavements were thronged with happy pedestrians on pleasure bent, the road was dense with

traffic. Ahead the shouting voice of a newsboy reached their ears.

The car smoothly, almost silently, purred on, until at the bottom of Regent Street they were held up by the pedestrian crossing by the policeman on point duty, to allow a crowd of happy shoppers to throng past.

Babs, idly looking out at the passing crowd on the pavements, gave a sudden start.

For on the pavement was a news-vendor, a large poster displayed in front of his knees. On that poster, plainly to be read, was the announcement:

"IS LETTY JONES IN LONDON?"

Letty Jones! Quickly, instinctively, Babs stole a glance at Hope, who for the moment was staring tranquilly in front of her.

Letty Jones! That had been the name which Hope herself, all unwittingly, had first given to Barbara at Victoria Station on Christmas-Eve. But at that time Babs and she had never dreamt that they would later meet under the same roof.

She remembered, on the same day, that a notice concerning Letty Jones had caused some rather poignant distress upon Hope's part. Was this—

"Oh crumbs! I say, I wish they'd get on, you know," Bessie grumbled peevishly. "We shall be late for dinner."

But they didn't get on. The hold-up, obviously, was going to be a lengthy one.

Babs found herself dreading that Hope would turn and spot the poster. For the first time she seemed tranquil, happy, and that name obviously had an association that was distressing.

But it was not to be. For even as she stared the newsboy, spotting her and imagining perhaps that she was anxious to buy a paper, shuffled forward.

"Paper, ladies?" he asked. "All the latest! Letty Jones bolted into the blue!"

Hope turned with a violent start.

"Letty Jones?" she stammered.

"Yes, miss. Police traced her to London, and then lost her," the obliging newsboy put in. "Absolutely at a dead end they are. But here we are!"

And cheerfully he pushed the paper into the car, while Babs, realising the mischief was done now, gave him a sixpence. She was too late to retrieve her change, for at that moment the car moved off.

There was a death-like silence in the car. By her side Babs felt Hope trembling suddenly. She was glad in that instant that she couldn't see her face. Unnoticed, she tried to fold the paper and slip it into the back of the seat. Then it was that Bessie, who had been staring at Babs, burst forth.

"I-s-u-s-a-y, did he say Letty Jones?"

Babs flung her a warning glance. Owing to the darkness in the interior of the car, however, it was wasted on Bessie.

"Did he, Babs?"

"Oh, be quiet!" Babs muttered.

"Well, he did, didn't he? Didn't you hear him, Hope?"

"Yes," Hope said, in a stifled voice. "Well, it's funny, you know," Bessie remarked—"jolly funny! I m-m-m-mean that name. Wasn't that the name of the girl who found your handbag for you at Victoria Station, Babs?"

Babs sighed in exasperation. She could have smacked her fat chum at that moment.

"Oh, yes—no! Oh, be quiet, please!" she pleaded.

"But why should I be quiet?" Bessie asked aggrievedly. "It struck me as funny, I mean. Why is she wanted by the police?"

"Oh, Bessie, how you do go on! I suppose there's more than one Letty Jones? After all," Babs said, with a lightness meant to put Hope at her ease, "it's not exactly an uncommon name."

"No," Bessie debated, "still, it—it's a con-con-co-operative—"

"Coincidence," Babs grimly corrected.

"Yes, a co-co—that's it," Bessie said grandly. "Really, Babs, you needn't tell me how to spell. But it's jolly funny, all the same. Jolly funny," went on Bessie. "If you ask me—"

But nobody did ask Bessie. And Bessie herself forgot what she was saying the very next minute, for the car, gliding past the Marble Arch, had pulled up outside the glittering entrance of the Dorlandshire Hotel!



Someone Knows Her Secret

GORGEOUS, the meal which followed. Gorgeous, the atmosphere, the gay whirl, the glittering lights, with one of Europe's most famous bands softly playing at one end of the huge, columned restaurant. It seemed like another world to the Cliff House chums.

As Leila said, it was some thrill, believe her! It was! The Dorlandshire, largest and most aristocratic hotel in Europe, attracted to it every celebrity in the world.

How lovely it was to speculate breathlessly upon the identity of each new guest who arrived! Sometimes so great was the excitement that the chums forgot to eat—except Bessie, who was more interested in the famous establishment's cuisine than in the identity of the people who came to sample it.

Babs, leaning back turned her interested attention to the visitors at other tables.

A man and a girl were just coming in; they were standing, the man his back towards them, at the entrance talking to the head waiter. Babs, in the hope of identifying a new celebrity, scrutinised the girl.

It was not good manners, of course. Babs admitted that. But it was all such a delightfully new and exciting experience that Babs felt that her curiosity could be pardoned.

She felt interested in the girl immediately she set her eyes upon her. A tall, graceful figure she was, immaculately gowned, with a white fur cape round her shoulder. Something vaguely familiar, Babs thought.

And then, as the girl impatiently turned, showing her face, Babs received the shock of her life.

For it was—

Yes—there could be no mistake!

Nancy Green!

Nancy, the servant-girl at Sutherland House, who only a few hours before had pleaded with her to intercede with Leila in order to take the evening off!

Was she dreaming?

Babs sat dazed. Almost hypnotised.

she watched the couple. The man turned. Babs had only the tiniest glimpse of a determined half-profile as he offered his arm to the girl. Then, with the head waiter hovering about them, they swept away into the next room.

Nancy Green! Nancy Green here, in this palace of wealth and luxury! Nancy, dressed like a duchess. She, the servant-girl at Sutherland House!

What did it mean?

AND THEN, after the gorgeous dinner among all those wonderful people, away to the Westend Theatre.

What a crowd when they arrived there! Every entrance possessed a queue, two-deep and yards long. Open-mouthed spectators stood at the magnificent entrance, watching with awe and envy as the carriages and cars swept up and gorgeously apparelled ladies and immaculately evening-dressed men alighted.

Thrilled to the marrow, the party entered the crowded foyer. People turned to stare admiringly at them—especially at the pretty Hope, glowingly, radiantly lovely in her beautiful white evening frock, even if her face was overshadowed by anxiety and care.

It was quite a struggle to get through the crowds, but they arrived at last at the entrance to the stalls, where Leila gave up her tickets. Almost at once a cheery voice hailed them:

"Hallo, girls!"

And there stood Lord Sutherland himself.

"Coming to be a good night!" he clucked. "Gad, the crowds! But wait till you see the show—you'll love it! I've been keeping an eye open for you, Leila. Didn't want you and your guests to feel I'd deserted you, you know. Still busy—very! Always am on first nights. Well, here are your seats. Like to come behind the scenes in the interval?"

"Oh, gee!" Leila's eyes shone.

"Wouldn't we!"

"Right-ho, girls, you shall—all of you!"

And then, as the orchestra struck up, he smiled at them again and disappeared.

Oh, it was all too lovely, too dreamlike to be true! But true it was. They sat enraptured when at last the lights went out and the curtain went up, and Aladdin, dazzlingly beautiful, stalked calmly out of a gold lamp and began to sing the opening number.

How they cheered her! And how they cheered the chorus when, dressed as little genii, they all came on dancing, pirouetting, swaying and singing until the whole stage was one moving mass of colour.

Glorious! The chums sat entranced and laughing by turns. No wonder Lord Sutherland was adjudged the greatest showman in Europe! No wonder his shows had a reputation for lavishness and originality second to none!

The old, old story of Aladdin, as they knew it, bore only the faintest resemblance to the extensive extravaganza which now opened before their eyes, but it was infinitely more colourful, more entertaining, more entrancing.

Hardly before they realised it, the curtain swooped down upon the first act, the lights went up.

"Oh, ripping!" sighed Clara Trevelyn.

"Marvelous!" enthused Mabel Lynn rapturously. "What did you think of it, Hope?"

"I think it is very beautiful and amusing," Hope said.

And then they saw, beckoning from a door near the stage, the form of Lord Sutherland.

They rose, preparing for a new thrill—a peep behind the scenes. In eager-ness they went, passing through the doorway, where a group of men in evening dress stood talking and smoking.

Babs glanced at them curiously as she went past, Hope following upon her heels. There was a pause as they waited for a troupe of chorus girls to pass.



AS the girl turned, Babs received the shock of her life. For she was none other than Nancy Green—Nancy, the mysterious maid at Sutherland House! What was she doing here?

Then suddenly Hope, feeling a touch upon her shoulder, turned.

"Why, Hope?"

Hope looked up. She saw before her a man in evening dress, with a cigar at a jaunty angle in his mouth, a leering grin upon a somewhat crafty-looking face.

She looked startled.

"Why, Buck!"

"That's me!" Buck Winch grinned. "Sort of funny, meeting you like this!" he grinned. "And yet—perhaps not so. I've been dying for a word with you, Hope, ever since you came in."

"I?"

"Why not? Old friends"—and Buck grinned again—"ought not to give each other the go-by—what? As a matter of fact, I've been following you round a bit just lately. I saw you to-night in the Dorlandshire. Oh, yes, I was there!" he added, with a grin, as she opened her eyes wide in astonishment. "Been doing well, haven't you, Hope? They tell me you've got the lead in his lordship's new show."

"Yes. Well," Hope said impatiently,

"Buck, please excuse me! My friends are—"

She made a quick movement to pass. But Buck Winch, with a sudden gleam in his eye, caught her hand.

"Just a minute! Take it easy!" he advised. "I'm not finished yet, Hope—not by a long chalk! You're on the up, girlie; I'm on the down. And I've something to say to you which might be of interest. About"—he eyed her narrowly—"Letty Jones!"

Narrowly the utterance of that name had the power to petrify, Hope could not have become more suddenly transfixed.

"Police looking for her—eh?" Buck grinned malevolently. "Wanted for embezzlement—eh? A tidy little sum—three thousand in cash. But Letty Jones has disappeared, hasn't she? And the police dunno where to look for her. Which," he added maliciously, "isn't to be wondered at, is it, when Letty Jones is being hidden by her own daughter in the house of one of England's belted earls?"

Hope's face turned as white as her dress. She flung a quick, hunted glance round.

"Buck, hush! How do you know?"

Buck chuckled.

"Never mind—I do!" he said. "Perhaps I've heard something; perhaps I've put two and two together. In any case, I do know; and, considering"—with mockery—"I'm hard up, I reckon that the police might pay me to know what I know. But don't look scared," he went on, with a leer, "I'm not going to tell them—not unless you force me to, Hope!"

Hope looked as if she was going to collapse.

"What do you want?"

His lips shut firmly.

"Money!"

"In other words," Hope said bitterly, "blackmail!"

He shrugged.

"Call it that if you like," he said. "I don't mind. The police would pay me, and they wouldn't call it blackmail. I reckon Sir James Forrest, whom Letty Jones robbed, would give fifty quid at least for the information I could give him. Ay, and glad to get it at the price! I don't want fifty quid from you. Only a matter of twenty or so, which I reckon you'll never miss, seeing how high and mighty in the world you are!"

Hope eyed him bitterly. Her white face strained before, had become desperate. With wide, dazed eyes she regarded him. Twenty pounds! Twenty pounds! She hadn't got it—she hadn't! The most she had was five pounds at the moment.

At the same instant she heard Babs' voice:

"Hope! Hope! Where are you, Hope?"

"Oh, my goodness!"

She spoke desperately.

"Buck, I haven't got it," she said, "not—not now! But—Oh, please, please, don't give me away! Here—" She groped feverishly in her handbag. She took out what notes it contained and thrust them in his hand. "Take that—that's all I've got at the moment! And—"

She stopped with a gasp. For at that moment Babs, in company with Lord Sutherland, was at her side. Both saw that transaction, and both looked a little startled. For a second Babs stared at the man, wondering vaguely where she had seen him before.

Then Lord Sutherland approached. His face was like flint.

"Buck Winch!" he said.

Buck grinned.

"Evening, your lordship!"

"How did you get round here?"

"Oh, walked!" Buck said jauntily.

"Well, get out!" Lord Sutherland said tersely. "I told you what would happen next time I found you in my theatre. You don't want it to happen, Buck?"

Again Buck grinned, but did not reply. But he turned suddenly and with a shrug of his shoulders, slunk off.

Hope, pale and trembling, gazed into his lordship's angry face.

"I—I'm sorry!" she stammered.

"I hope you are!" Lord Sutherland did not look pleased. His gaze was very condemning as he fastened it upon her. "I thought you understood, Hope, that I wouldn't have that man in a theatre of mine. I believe—bitterly—you were present at the Athenæum Theatre when I caught him burgling my safe six months ago. The man is a crook, a scoundrel! I should have given him up to the police then, but I didn't. You heard me warn him off?"

"Y-yes!" Hope faltered.

"He is a friend of yours?" Lord Sutherland pursued.

"Oh, no—no!" Hope gasped.

"No? But I distinctly saw you giving him money!"

Hope bit her lip. She fastened a hopeless, despairing look upon him. Oh, how could she explain—how—how? Buck Winch was a crook, she knew that. Everybody who had any connection whatever with Lord Sutherland knew it.

She remembered that scene at the Athenæum, when Buck Winch, acting then as publicity manager of the show which had given her introduction to the stage, had been caught rifling Lord Sutherland's safe; she remembered

Lord Sutherland's stern warning—not only to Buck, but to everyone else who should be found in future to have had any dealings with the man. Tolerant Lord Sutherland had allowed him to go free that time, and since then Buck Winch had not been seen again.

"You invited him here?" Lord Sutherland asked sharply.

"Oh, no—no!"

"Then why—"

"I—I—" gulped Hope. Her tongue cleaved to the roof of her mouth. "I—I met him by accident," she said. "He—he said he was hard-up, and—"

"So you gave him money?" Lord Sutherland frowned. He glanced at her sharply. Was he convinced? "Well, let it pass," he said abruptly now.

"Though I must say, Hope, that I am seriously disturbed—yes, and disappointed. I thought you, above all people, would respect my wishes."

"Y-yes!" Hope said miserably.

She looked pale, shaken. Babs, startled as she was, only half understanding, shook her head in pity. Poor Hope, she reflected. And yet—oh, why had Hope spoken to the man. Even if she had felt sorry for him, why give him that money? She put a hand on her arm as Lord Sutherland moved away.

"Hope!" she muttered. "Cheer up, old thing!"

But Hope did not cheer up. Not inwardly, at all events, though when they took their seats again she tried desperately to rally. There was a hunted, far-away expression in her eyes, an anxiety in her face. Once or twice she gulped and looked round, dead and blind, apparently, to what was going on. She seemed glad, indeed, when the show was over.

And Babs, even in the midst of her own enjoyment, felt faintly puzzled. Once more she found herself wishing that Hope would open up her heart to her, though, she told herself, she was behaving unreasonably; she did not altogether believe that story Hope had told Lord Sutherland. She had a distinct impression that she had kept back something vitally important.

Buck Winch! She did not recognise the name, though she was sure she had seen him before.

Where?

Babs shook her head. She gave it up at last. Her mind, curiously enough, travelled from him to Nancy Green—Nancy, the servant-girl, who had appeared at London's most luxurious hotel that evening, dressed like a duchess. Had that, too, been an hallucination?

Immediately they arrived back at Sutherland House, she found an opportunity to tackle Nancy about it.

"Oh, Nancy," she smiled, "did you enjoy your evening?"

"Yes, miss, thank you!" Nancy said. "Go to a show, or something?"

"No, miss. I went to see my aunt at Hertford."

"Oh!" said Babs, and smiled again, though she nodded thoughtfully. If Nancy had been to Hertford, then most assuredly she could not have attended the Dorlandshire Hotel.

She looked round for Hope. But Hope, most mysteriously, had vanished.

Hope at that moment was racing up the stairs.

She raced with a sort of desperate frenzy, stopping only when she had reached the door of her own room, to

throw a half-scared look back as if afraid that she had been followed.

With trembling hands she felt in her handbag, took out a key, and let herself in. At once she tripped across the room to the door communicating.

"Mother!" she breathed.

An electric fire burned in the room, glowing redly in one corner. With a nervous backward glance Hope switched on the lights. They flared up, revealing the pain-filled face of a middle-aged woman, who lay on a divan bed under a tiny window—a face, despite the evidence of the dreadful illness written so plainly upon it, that was startlingly like that of the girl who now approached her bedside. She smiled wanly.

"Hope!" she muttered.

"Mother!" There was anguish in Hope's face as she caught the cold hand in hers. "Oh, mother, I've been thinking of you all the evening," she said. "I hated to leave you. But—but I couldn't get out of it."

"Dear Hope!" her mother said, and her eyes were very tender. "Hope, I, too, have been thinking of you," she whispered. "And it's a shame, darling, that you should suffer as you are suffering. I—I'm sorry that all this has happened, my dear. A spasm of pain crossed her face for a moment. "But, Hope, it won't be much longer. You haven't heard from Bob, Hope?"

Hope shook her head.

"No, mother!"

"It's five days now since he went," the other said. "Oh, Hope, what can have become of him? If—if he has met with another accident—"

"No!" Hope cried. It was wonderful to see how brave, how bright she could be at once for the sake of this dear suffering mother whom she loved.

"Bob's all right, mother," she said. "Trust him! You know he wouldn't communicate with us until he had good news, and—and I expect he's having difficulty in—in his search. They say that there have been dreadful snow storms and blizzards in the North. That is hardly going to make his job easier, is it?"

"No!" Her mother fell for a moment into a moody silence. "No, Hope," she said. "But—but, oh, I can't help but worry. It—it's so unfair—so worrying. I've no right in this house. Every moment I stay here imperils you. Oh, Hope, if I were strong enough—"

Hope smiled.

"Well, silly, if you were strong enough, what would you do?"

"I'd go out of here. I'd give myself up to the police!"

"Now, mother!" And Hope spoke sharply then as she came over and laid her slim hand against her mother's lips. "Mother, please!" she cried, and there was panic in her tone. "You mustn't talk like that. You mustn't—you hear? It's all right, I tell you. Nobody knows you are here—nobody need ever know. It can't be long now until we hear from Bob."

She stopped, flinging round quickly.

What was that? A sound outside the door in her own room. She tried not to allow her mother to see the startled look that came into her face, but for a moment tensely she listened.

Her mother spoke:

"Hope, my dear—"

But Hope, for once, was not listening. Her heart was thudding—thudding.

Footsteps! She heard them again! And then quietly, softly, with a look meant to reassure the pitifully pain-wracked figure on the bed, she stepped



to the door and dragged it open. And then her face paled.

For vanishing through the door on the other side of her own room, she caught a glimpse of a servant-girl's white apron as it fluttered round the corner.

Hope's face drained of colour. She looked suddenly as if she was going to faint. Her carefully cherished secret, which she had been at such pains to conceal, was discovered. Someone in Sutherland House knew now that she was hiding her mother—the notorious Letty Jones, who was wanted by the police—in this room?

Who? She did not know. Did it matter, anyway? Weakly, giddily, she staggered across the room to the door, but when she looked out, the corridor was empty.

The unknown spy had vanished, taking her secret with her!

That now? Hope thought despairingly.



The Raiders

PATTER, patter, patter!

"Hush!"

"Quiet!"

Four chuckling figures stole along the corridor in Sutherland House. The corridor was that in which the bed-rooms containing Babs, Mabs, Bessie, Clara, and Marjorie were sleeping. The time, roughly, was half-past twelve on New Year's Eve. The four stealthy, creeping figures which now, with soft chuckles, tiptoed on each other's heels, were Leila, Marcelle, Janet Jordan, and Jemima.

That the four were up to mischief would have been at once obvious to anyone who had chanced at that moment to see them.

In each girl's hand was clutched a large, feather-filled pillow, and in each girl's eyes there was a merry twinkle. They were up to mischief, the mischief being Leila's invention. Leila had decided to liven things up.

"Now quiet, I guess," Leila breathed as they halted outside a door.

"Quite!" Jemima agreed solemnly.

"Are you ready?"

"What-ho!"

"O.K. I Go!" Leila cried.

"What-ho! Up, guards, and at 'em!"

"Give 'em ze beansticks!" cried Marcelle excitedly.

Crash! went the door, revealing five peacefully sleeping figures reposing in their beds. With a yell the invaders were upon them, pillows flashed white in the moonlight which streamed in through the windows.

Five pillows smote as one. Up from Bessie Bunter went a spluttering yell. Up from Clara went a shout. Up from Babs went a shriek as the pillow, deftly wielded by Leila, burst upon her head.

In a moment all was confusion.

"Ow-wow!" yelled Bessie.

"At 'em!" shrieked Leila.

"Gee! I give you bif!"

"My hat!"

There was a moment of dismay. Clara, snorting furiously, rolled out of bed. Grabbing up her pillow, she whirled it round—whack! And another yell came from Bessie as the pillow, in the darkness, smote her upon the head.

Babs, meantime, desperately flung herself to one side and caught a sheet. With this in her hand she ran towards Marcelle, intending, like a gladiator, with the net and the trident, to enmesh

her in its folds. But it wasn't Marcelle she caught. It was Mabs.

"Ow-wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Whoa, there!" Jemima chuckled.

"Ho, he, he, is that you, Janet?"

"It is!" Janet Jordan said grimly.

"Then take that, with my merry old compliments, old spartan!"

And—biff! Janet took it. At the same moment came a breathless chuckle from Leila Carroll.

"O.K. I Scram!"

"But—"

"Get out!" Leila cried tersely.

"Here, come back!" cried Clara.

"Not to-night!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the invaders, chuckling with triumph, scuttled.

There was a moment of dismayed silence in the room. The night attack, carried out with such cunning surprise, had been entirely successful.

## THE SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN LIBRARY

for December

Ask for

No. 516.—"BABS & CO.'S  
MAGIC CHRISTMAS,"  
by Hilda Richards.

No. 517.—"JILL AND HER  
JUNGLE SCHOOL," by  
Sybil Shaw.

No. 518.—"WHEN MARION  
WENT TO HOLLY-  
WOOD," by Muriel  
Holden.

No. 519.—"THE GIRL IN  
THE PURPLE CLOAK,"  
by Rhoda Fleming.

NOW ON SALE  
4d. each

If it had been Leila's idea to wake things up, she had certainly succeeded, for, jerked out of peaceful slumber into the whirl of pillow-warfare, no five girls on earth were more wide awake at that moment than Babs, Mabs, Bessie, Clara and Marjorie.

They had been beaten. Not only beaten, but utterly and completely routed, without having struck a single effective blow in their own defence.

Clara, switching on the lights, looked wrathful.

"My hat! Of all the idiots—"

"Who? Them?" asked Babs.

"No, us. To let ourselves be caught like that."

"Well—"

"Well!" Clara sniffed again. "Are we going to take that lying down?" she demanded.

"Strikes me we did," Mabs laughed. The five eyed each other grimly.

"Tit for tat," Clara said. "If Leila wants to liven things up, then we're ready. One good turn deserves another—and here's the reprisal! We're five to one at all events. Grab your pillows, girls!"

"What-ho!"

"No!" Babs cried.

"Eh!"

"Wait a minute," Babs frowned. "Look before you leap. Reprisal, yes; but we're not jolly well going to give them a second laugh. Supposing it had been us who attacked them?"

"Well, supposing it had?" Clara glowered.

"What should we have done when we got back here? Just crept quietly into bed? We shouldn't! We should have been expecting what they're probably expecting—a return attack. Think that out, old hot-head!"

Clara paused.

"You mean—"

"I mean they'll be waiting for us," Babs reasoned. "Probably with another little surprise. Nice pack of idiots we should look, shouldn't we, to go and stumble into another trap? We've got to think of something more artful than that."

There was silence.

"Well, you seem to know all the answers, Babs, so what?" Mabs laughed.

"I'm thinking," Babs said. "Shush!" And, with a thoughtful frown, she pouted her lips and placed a hand across her forehead. "When plotting against the enemy, always think of what the enemy will be doing. Just now," Babs considered, "the enemy, expecting a return visit, is watching its door."

"Well, I could have said that!" Clara snorted.

"Aha! But you couldn't have told me this," Babs said archly. "Supposing, instead of the door, the return visit comes by way of the windows?"

Four pairs of eyes stared at her. "The windows," Babs went on quietly, "are french ones. They open on to a veranda. We all know what fresh air feeds Leila and Jemima are, so it's a safe bet that they're open now. In the garden there's a ladder. While those four are watching the door, naturally, they won't be thinking of the windows. You see?"

Clara beamed.

"Oh, my! That's the ticket!"

"But we'll have to dress," Babs said.

"It means going out, you know, Bessie, you needn't come if you don't want to." Bessie didn't want to. Bessie might feel aggrieved, at being awakened so violently from her sleep, but Bessie's private opinion of the whole business was that it was an idiot's game from beginning to end, when a warm, inviting bed clamoured for her attention. She said as much.

Not that the information caused a great deal of sorrow in Babs' camp. Bessie, they all agreed, was likely to be more of a nuisance than a help in an expedition of this nature.

So very quickly Babs, Mabs, Clara, and Marjorie dressed. Very determinedly they armed themselves with pillows. With the gleam of battle in their eyes and anticipation of victory in their expressions, they tiptoed across the floor in the wake of their leader. They reached the corridor.

"Now, quietly," Babs whispered. "We'll let ourselves out through the small door on the right of the hall. No sound."

"Lead on!" Clara announced, and grimly swung her pillow.

Down the corridor they crept. They reached the floor of the wide gallery, from which a single flight of carpeted stairs led down into the hall below.

"No here?" she whispered. "No, Marjorie's behind. Her shoe slipped off," Mabs said. "Wait for her, Babs." And then she drew her



breath in sharply. "Babs, look! What's that?" she cried.

Babs tensed. She had seen it in the same moment. They had all seen it, in fact, and with startled eyes they gazed in the direction of the very doorway through which they had intended to make their exit.

Near the door was a small window, and, her head and shoulders showing as a black silhouette as she flashed a pocket torch through it, was a girl.

Once, twice, three times the light flashed, while the chums stood, screened by the darkness at the top of the stairs, almost holding their breaths. The signal was answered by a faint whistle from outside.

"Babs, what is it?" Marjorie Hazelende breathed.

Babs stood tense.

"Slush!" she whispered.

Thrilling, wondering, the four girls stood still. Now they saw the silhouette move from the window and approach the door. They heard a click as the key in the lock, the faint scrape of a key about them as the door opened, framing the shadowy figure of a man who stood outside. By some odd trick of light the moon at that moment shone full upon his features.

Babs' pulses raced as she beheld him. For the man, who carried a bag in his hand, was masked!

"A burglar!" gasped Clara. "But who—who let him in?"

They blinked. The girl, whoever she was, had disappeared now. They heard the intruder, however, blundering forward. It was Clara who acted. She jumped forward towards the switch on the wall, pulling it down. At the same time she gave a shout.

"Lord Sutherland! Quick—quick!"

From downstairs came a startled exclamation. Behind them a roar in Lord Sutherland's voice, the quick opening and closing of a door, followed by a cry in Lord Sutherland's voice. In the hall there was a quick scamper of feet, and the girls, staring, saw the intruder, having dropped his bag, rushing across the floor. Clara let out a cry.

"After him! After—"

Three at a time she skimmed down the stairs. Then, as if she had been shot, she pulled up. Babs, cannoning into her, reeled back with a gasp. Mabs, behind her, pulled up just in time. The door was open, the quarry had gone. But from behind a curtain near the doorway a figure had suddenly appeared. It was the figure of a girl fully dressed, a torch in her hand, the light shining upon her startled face.

It was—  
The figure of Hope Caraway!



No Answer

"HOPE!" Babs gasped.

"Hey! Hey! The voice of his lordship boomed from above, and Lord Sutherland himself, hugging his dressing-gown about him, appeared there.

He blinked at the girls, all bunched together, as though they had been struck in that attitude, and quickly glanced at Hope.

"What's this? What's this?" his lordship spluttered. "Hope, what are you doing there?"

Hope's face was ghastly white. She

opened her lips, but words would not come.

His lordship's eyes narrowed. Very grimly he strode down the stairs. He went to the door, still open, and closed it. Then he picked up the bag which the intruder had left behind. It clanked when he moved it, with the sound of steel clashing against steel. He opened it, peered in. And then his face became set.

"So!" he said, and his eyes travelled again to the stricken face of Hope. "Burglar's tools, eh? Somebody let him in. Who gave the alarm?"

"We did, your lordship," Janet Jordan said.

"And you—Hope!" His eyes narrowed a little. "What are you doing here?"

"I—I—" gasped Hope.

"Don't stutter, girl!"

"I—I came down" Hope whispered faintly. "I left something here in the room behind the curtain. You—you see."

Her voice trailed off. She could not bear, in that moment, to face the hard suspicion in his lordship's gaze.

Babs, gazing at her, was aware of a strange constriction in her throat, a sudden longing to go forward and put her arms about those forlornly shaking shoulders.

But she didn't.

For even Babs was shaken. Even Babs, for once, felt her faith falter. She had seen the girl at the window. She had seen the girl open the door, admitting the burglar. Her mind for an instant went back to that scene at the theatre, when Hope had been seen giving money to the worthless Buck Welch. If Hope had opened the door, what was she doing here—in the hall?

"I'm afraid," Lord Sutherland said harshly, "I don't see, Hope. What do you know about this?"

His hand swept in a gesture towards the bag.

Hope's eyes widened in horror. The cry that came to her lips was stricken.

"You—you don't think—Lord Sutherland—"

"I'm not making any accusation. On the other hand, Hope, your own common sense must tell you that the circumstances in which you were found here are highly compromising. A man is let into the house for the purpose, obviously, of robbery. Someone let him in. That someone was a girl. Un-expectedly alarmed, the burglar flies. But we find you here—fully dressed, a torch in your hand, unable convincingly to account for your presence."

Hope gulped.

"But please, Lord Sutherland, I—I know nothing about this!"

"Very well!" His eyes did not lose their hardness however. "I am not going to accuse you, Hope, though many would say that I have every reason for doing so. However, I must tell you, until I have an opportunity to make further inquiries, you are under suspicion. Whatever your movements, the outstanding fact remains that someone in this house is in communication with a burglar outside, and there is no guarantee, once this excitement has died down, that the man will not make another attempt. If you are innocent, Hope, you will not object to being watched. You will go to your room now. But you will not go alone. I will call my niece, Leila, to sleep with you."

Hope caught her breath.

His lordship moved away. There was a moment's deathly silence. Hope, a drooping, tragic figure, a figure for compassion, if ever there was one,

stood in the middle of the room, one trembling hand to her hot head—the action of a girl utterly undone. Her eyes, for a moment, found Babs'.

It was enough! Ugly as the circumstances were, black as the evidence was, Babs knew in that moment that Hope had spoken the truth. Her heart leapt to meet the appeal. Help Hope she must!

She herself moved forward, intercepting Lord Sutherland as he approached the stairs.

"Lord Sutherland!" she said.

"Well, Barbara?"

"I—I—" Babs bit her lip. "Is it necessary to wake Leila?" she asked.

He stared at her.

"Why, most certainly it is!"

"But—but couldn't one of us do it?"

Babs asked desperately. "I mean, couldn't I do it? It—it seems a shame—" Oh, goodness, how to put it!

"Let me do it, Lord Sutherland."

He gazed at her frowningly. Clara and Marjorie looked surprised. But Mabs, who shared Babs' secret and saw the idea at once, nodded her head.

"Good idea!" she approved.

"Besides, Babs is a much lighter sleeper than Leila."

Another pause. Then his lordship shrugged.

"Very well! If you are keen on the job, have it! But keep a careful eye upon her, mind, and report to me if anything should happen. Hope," he added, "come here! Miss Redfern has very kindly offered to take charge of you. I put you on your honour to give her no further trouble."

"Y-yes, your lordship!" Hope faltered.

But the look she threw at Babs was that of a grateful prisoner most unexpectedly relieved.

FIVE MINUTES later, in Hope's bedroom, Babs cut short that girl's sobbing thanks by placing a protective arm about her shoulders. She looked earnestly, searchingly, into her face.

"Hope," she said, and there was compassion in her expression. "Things have gone too far now for you to keep your secret any longer. I want to help you! I have helped you, and I want to help you some more! But I can't go on blundering in the dark. Hope—you understand?"

Restlessly Hope nodded.

"You mean—?"

"I mean," Babs said quietly, "I want you to tell me everything!"

And this time, Hope, her resistance it seemed, crushed by the dreadful new crisis which had overwhelmed her, told everything.



Touch and Go

PITIFUL, pitiful, that story. It distressed Babs, seated there on Hope's bed, her arm about the girl's slender waist, to listen to it. It touched her tender heart to see the emotion with which it was recited. Never, never had she felt as sorry, as warmly compassionate towards anyone at that moment as to Hope Caraway.

The story took a long time, what with Hope's outburst of tears, her frequent pauses to recover coherence. Yet in effect it was all so very simple.

Letty Jones, Babs was not surprised to learn, was Hope's mother, a tragic little woman who had married and been widowed twice—the second time within

twelve months of her marriage. She had two children, both of them by her first marriage to Arthur Caraway—grown-up Bob and little Hope.

While her son had been abroad and Hope training for her stage career in London, Mrs. Jones, in order to occupy her mind, had been acting as a confidential secretary to Sir James Forrest in Glasgow.

That was the introduction to it. The real story started the Monday before Christmas, when to Mrs. Jones' boundless joy, Bob had unexpectedly come home, transferred from Canada to the London branch of the firm for which he was working.

Aching for sight of his mother, Bob had rushed to Glasgow by train and had the train arrived to scheduled time, would have spent four or five hours in his company.

But snow had delayed the journey, and Bob, instead of arriving at ten o'clock in the morning as he had expected, had not arrived until two in the afternoon. He had gone straight to his mother's office.

And there he found her in the act of packing up three thousand pounds in banknotes. It was Mrs. Jones' duty, every Monday, to deposit that sum in the bank, but to-day, owing to the Christmas rush, she was rather later than usual in starting out upon her journey.

She had not seen her son for three years. Overjoyed, heretofore such a careful little woman, she had almost forgotten her mission in the overwhelming joy of this unexpected reunion. Time, like some unheeded bird, had passed on swift wings. Only when the first raptures of that never-to-be-forgotten meeting faded, had she noticed it.

"Oh, great goodness! Ten to three! And the bank closed at three!"

Alarmed, almost scared, Mrs. Jones had rushed off. Bob had gone with her—Bob, protesting that his train back to London left again at three-thirty. They reached the bank in a state of terrible anxiety. Mrs. Jones, despite her son's protection, frantically clutching the bag which held such wealth.

Consternation! The bank was closed! "Poor mummy, it must have been terrible for her, to find that," Hope put in at this point. "It was the very first time in all her life she had ever missed the bank."

Babs nodded sympathetically. "Poor Mrs. Jones," she echoed. "But go on, Hope!"

Hope went on. Her mother, almost frantic at this neglect to discharge her duties; overwhelmed by the imminence of her son's return, what more natural than that she should elect to see him off? And see him off she did, returning, with that precious bag still tightly clutched, to her own room in Glasgow, determined as soon as ever the bank opened on the morrow, to make good her omission.

Then—midnight. A startling telegram saying that Bob, her boy, had met with an accident. The telegram was from a London hospital. Would she come at once?

"She went?" Babs asked.  
"She went," Hope affirmed with emotion. "She caught the next train. But mindful, even in that extremity, of the money, she would not leave it in the house. She took it with her, intending, if she was forced to remain in London, to bank it there. Oh, Babs, can't you picture her—worn out, probably frantic almost with distress—tired after her long day, and then called upon to make this journey at a moment's notice?"

Babs' face softened with the pity she felt.

"And—and in the train she went to sleep. She had a compartment to herself, she says. She sat in a corner seat, the bag on her knees. She wouldn't even trust it to the rack. It was her responsibility, she said, and it troubled her really to have to carry such a fortune about with her. She dozed. She remembered the train passing through Carlisle. She woke up suddenly with the snow blowing in her face, to find the carriage door open, and the bag gone."

"Obviously," Hope continued, "the bag had slipped through the open door. Where was it? The next station was Kendal, which meant that the bag might have been lost anywhere between that station and Carlisle. A distance along the line of something like forty miles."

Babs, listening, could picture the nightmare state of the poor woman's mind. She was distraught, stricken. The train must be stopped—at all costs it must be stopped—but when she tried to pull the communication cord her nerveless hand slipped; she fell, striking her head against the handle of the door.

Some interval of unconsciousness must have elapsed, and, waking with a splitting headache, she had found herself for a period unable to remember anything.

The train, in the early hours, reached London. Dazed and stupefied, she wondered why she had come there.

The telegram in her handbag told her.

Still suffering from one of those unaccountable losses of memory which are so frequently the result of a blow on the head, she had hurried to the hospital, the bag still remaining a blank in her mind.

She had reached the hospital. There, to her relief and glad amazement, she had found Bob up and well. The concussion with which he had been admitted had apparently yielded to treatment. He had been well enough, indeed, to leave with her.

"And—and not until they got outside," Hope whispered, "did her memory come back in full. That was when she saw the placards of the morning papers. It gave the news that Letty Jones had disappeared with three thousand pounds."

From that moment the story moved swiftly. Frightened, timid, Mrs. Jones had been. Bob, distraught, realising how feeble her story would sound to the police, had got in touch with Hope. Hope, acting mistress of ceremonies at Sutherland House, had hit upon the idea of smuggling her mother in.

Bob, on a forlorn hope, had got leave from his employers, and had hurried northward with the avowed intention of searching every inch of the snow-bound railway line from Carlisle to Kendal in quest of the missing bag.

But the shock, the numbing horror of the situation in which she now found herself, had been too much for Mrs. Jones. Her nerves had cracked under the strain. A chill, obviously caused by exposure when she slept in front of the open door of the railway carriage, had set in.

"And so you see," Hope gulped, averting her face, "she's ill. Babs—ill. I've hidden her. I've done what I could for her, but—but she needs more than I can do. She needs a doctor. But I daren't call one."

Oh, goodness, what a frightful mess it was!

"I—I thought," Hope faltered, "that everything was all right. Oh, Babs, can you wonder I haven't enjoyed my Christmas here? But it's mother I'm



"I'm sorry. Doctor Redfern isn't here," the butler said. "Not here?" Babs repeated dully. So her midnight dash to fetch aid for Hope's mother had failed, after all!

scared about—mother! If the police get an inkling that she is here, you know what it will mean. She's worrying still about the money, about the trouble she is causing me."

"Poor soul!" Babs said, out of the tenderness of her heart.

"And—and"—Hope's lips quivered—"to-night, Babs, you saw that man, Buck Winch? I don't know how he's found out, but he knows, Babs—he knows I am holding her here. He tried to blackmail me. You saw me give him money—to keep him quiet."

"Babs sat very still.

"And then— Oh!" Hope shook her head worriedly, miserably.

"She went on to tell Babs what had happened when she got back. How she had been found out by some mysterious servant girl. (Why did Babs' mind snatch so suddenly at the name of Nancy Green?)

"Babs, I was panic-stricken," Hope breathed. "Somebody in the house knew." She drew in her breath. Her face went white at the memory.

"There was only one thing for me to do. I did it."

"And that?" Babs questioned.

"I found a fresh hiding-place—downstairs in the cellar. There's a little room there which was unused and empty—quite dry and clean. I made another bed up. I put the electric fire on. But, Babs, I'm afraid—afraid!" She shivered.

"Babs' arm around her tightened.

"Hope, why?"

"Because—because—" Hope shook her head. "She—she's so ill—dreadfully ill. I can't get her to talk. She lies there with a face like marble staring at me, Babs—staring with such dreadful eyes. Sometimes"—she caught in her breath—"I feel she is going to die."

For a long moment there was silence. Babs sat still and stupefied. Downstairs. Her mother lay ill—dying—perhaps. She rose.

"Hope," she said.

"Y-yes?" Hope whispered.

"Let us go—let's see her now. If—"

"Babs paused. She did not speak the thought that was in her mind, but she took the girl's hand. "Come, Hope!"

Hope went.

**B**UT WHEN Babs had seen that pitifully staring-eyed figure on the roughly made bed that lay in the centre of the dark, if dry, cellar, she had no further hesitation in speaking the thought. "If Mrs. Jones was not dying, she was dreadfully in need of help."

"Hope," she said quietly, "it's got to be done. You've got to have a doctor for her."

Hope stared at her agonisedly.

"But—but—"

"And you've got to have him at once," Babs said.

"But, Babs, how can—"

"Shush, dear! I've thought it out. I have an uncle in Harley Street. My uncle, Duncan Redfern, is a specialist. I'm going to him. I'm going to fetch him now—at once! I'll have to tell him; but you needn't be afraid, Hope. When I've explained things he'll come at once, and he'll tell us exactly what to do. It means, of course," she added, "that I'll have to get in and out unseen."

Hope trembled.

"Y-yes?"

"Right—ho!" Babs, having made up her mind, became intensely practical. "I'll go by the side door—the one by which the burglar came through. When I come back with my uncle, I'll

tap three times. That will be in about an hour. Listen for the taps. Let us in. You understand?"

"Oh, Babs!" Hope gasped.

But Babs did not stop. The case was urgent. Already there was a dreadful fear in her heart. Urgent—urgent the case! And upon her haste might depend a woman's life.

Softly she and Hope climbed out of the cellar into the hall. There Babs drew the bolts.

"Now don't forget—three taps!" she reminded.

"No," Hope said desperately. "Oh, Babs, how splendid you are!"

But Babs didn't hear that. She was outside, fighting with the blustering storm which blew the snow, already lying thickly upon the ground, into her face.

She was glad that it deadened her footsteps as she tramped up the alleyway which led to the street, and there, by the greatest of good fortune, found a belated taxi ploughing its way through the night. She hailed it, gave her uncle's address.

## NEXT WEEK'S FREE GIFT

In addition to the Autograph and Photograph Album which will be presented FREE with THE SCHOOLGIRL next Saturday, you will receive the first big sheet of Film Stars' autographs. These are the stars whose autographs you will secure next Saturday:

**WALLACE BERRY; LILIAN HARVEY; KATHARINE HEPBURN; CHARLES RUGGLES; CONRAD VEIDT; CARY COOPER; LESLIE BANKS; MERLE OBERON; ANNA LEE; SONNIE HALE**

Harley Street was reached at last. Babs ran up the steps. The house was shuttered and silent. She tugged frantically at the night bell—tugged again and again.

At last, after what seemed an age, she heard footsteps. A face peered out at her from behind the door. Not her uncle's face; the face of his butler, a man she had never met before.

"Dr. Redfern?" she inquired. "I want him urgently. Tell him it is his niece, Barbara!"

The butler stared at her.

"I'm sorry, Dr. Redfern isn't here."

Babs fell back.

"What?"

"You should know, if you're his niece. He went home to Northumberland for Christmas. Would you like to come in?"

But Babs mechanically declined the invitation. Her uncle not in! Oh, why hadn't she thought of that? Of course he would have gone home. She turned away, sickened, her mind suddenly seeming to spin. What now—what now?

Find another doctor?

But what other doctor would agree to steal like a thief into the home of Lord Sutherland, to attend a woman wanted by the police, hidden in his lordship's cellar?

It was impossible of course! Impossible! Yet—yet—and dread gripped Babs' heart as she thought of the circumstances.

No, she must do something—she must—she must! And yet she must see Hope first. She daren't take the risk, even though the circumstances were so

desperate, of calling in medical assistance without her consent.

Mechanically she climbed into the taxi which, fortunately, had not moved, the driver having remained on the off-chance of taking his fare back.

In a daze she was whizzed back through the soundless white London to the gates of Sutherland House.

She paid off the driver; with quick little steps marched again down the alley. The side door loomed up before her. She raised a hand to knock.

And then—

Almost at the very moment her knuckles should have made contact with the woodwork, the door opened.

For a second Babs stood still. The next she became aware that two figures stood in the darkened hall in front of her.

The figures were those of a man and a girl—a man who was carrying a bulky sack slung over his shoulder. He was speaking to the girl. Babs heard his voice.

"Good work, Nancy. See you tomorrow, then?"

The voice—she recognised it. Buck Winch!

Then—then—

Babs the thousandth part of a second to realise the situation. In one all-revealing flash the whole thing became clear to her. Buck Winch and Nancy Green!

Nancy, dressed like a duchess, had been in Buck Winch's company that evening. She remembered now why the sight of him in the theatre had struck her with such a forcible sense of familiarity.

Buck had been Nancy's partner at the Dorlandshire—Nancy had been conspiring with him. It was she, not Hope, who had let him in on the previous occasion!

All in the veriest flash of time that truth flashed across Babs' consciousness.

She saw now the whole hideous scheme. Nancy, of course, was the traitor. It was Nancy who had found out about Hope's mother—and had betrayed that secret to Buck! Nancy who, as his conspirator, obviously knowing nothing of Babs' absence from the house, had let Buck Winch in for the second time that night. And here was Buck—well primed with loot—about to make his exit.

Was he?

Even as she recovered her breath, Babs started forward.

"No," she cried, "you don't!"

Two exclamations sounded as one. The first from the man—the second, a thin cry in Nancy's voice.

Buck Winch wheeled, staring with goggling eyes towards her, and in the same moment Babs made a grab at the bag on his shoulder. In very surprise the man released it.

Then:

"Buck, quick! Get out!" hissed Nancy.

Crash! The bag went to the floor with a clatter. Babs felt herself pushed violently. Bewildered and dazed, she was flung across the hall, and the man hurried past her into the passage outside. She heard the footsteps of Nancy flying towards the stairs. At the same moment from the corridor came a trembling voice:

"Babs!"

"Hope!"

Then:

What happened? Babs, caught in a daze of bewilderment—everything had happened with such terrific suddenness—heard a sudden scream. The scream was in Nancy's voice—Nancy, now half-way up the stairs. Simultaneously the lights went on.

Babs blinked.

"Why, what—"  
But there was Nancy—Nancy, no longer in her servant's get-up, but with a dressing-gown thrown about her shoulders. Nancy, her hand on the switch, screaming at the top of her voice.

Hope, emerging from the corridor, stood still, her head spinning, her eyes gleaming with the shocked surprise she felt at the burglar's bag of loot on the floor between her and Babs.

Then—  
Crash! A door opened. The bellowing tones of Lord Sutherland.

"What the dickens—"  
And then his lordship appeared at the top of the stairs, glaring down at the scene before. He almost shouted Babs' name.

"Why, Babs!"  
"Lord Sutherland!" faltered Babs.  
"What the dickens—hey, you!" He caught Nancy, who stood white-faced, quivering, clinging to the banisters. "You gave the alarm. What's all this?"

"Burglars!" gasped Nancy.  
"Hey?"

"I—I followed Hope down. I—I heard her," Nancy got out, acting now as she had never before acted in her life. "I saw her let him in."  
"It's a lie!" quivered Hope.

"And then—then Miss Redfern came in. Oh!" Nancy put a hand to her heart. "Hope was helping the thief. She was letting him out!"

"It's a fib!" Hope cried, white to the lips.

"A fib, hey?" His lordship stamped down. "A fib, hey? Then what are you doing here? This is the second time to-night I've caught you." His eyes flashed upon Babs. "Wait a minute, Miss Redfern," he said grimly, as she opened her mouth. "I'll deal with you next. Now, Hope—"

Hope looked ready to faint.  
"I—I can only say that it—it's a lie," she repeated.

"When you were seen?"  
"I—I wasn't seen—not doing that," Hope said desperately. "I never knew the man was in the house until—until—"

She gulped, throwing an imploring look at Babs.

"Lord Sutherland," Babs interjected. "Just a minute! Just a minute! I'm going to get this argued out. Now, Nancy, you say you followed Hope?"

"Yes, your lordship!"  
"And you saw her let the burglar out?"

"Yes, your lordship! Then—then Miss Redfern came in. She went for the burglar, and he dropped his bag." She paused.

"Oh, Barbara, where have you been?"

"I've been outside," Babs replied truthfully, her face aflame.

"What for?"  
"To see my uncle!"

"Hey?" His lordship's brow went up. "Funny time of the night to see your uncle, isn't it? What uncle?"

Babs bit her lip.

"Well!" His lordship looked testy. "Pass over that. When you came back, what happened?"

"I—I reached the door," Babs said. "It opened. I saw a man and a girl. The man was Buck Winch."

From Nancy came a gasp.  
"I heard him say: 'Good night's work, Nancy.'"

"Oh!" Nancy gasped.  
"And then?"  
"No, wait a minute—wait a minute!" Nancy jumped forward. "Your lordship," she cried bitterly. "I protest! I

protest! Miss Redfern is trying to blame me. She's trying to shield Hope—at my expense. Now I'll tell you," she went on tempestuously, and her eyes flashed, her chest heaved. "Miss Redfern and Hope are in this together!"

"What?"  
"They are! I know! I've seen them, and there's another in it, too. A woman—a woman who is in this house now. A woman wanted by the police. Her name's Letty Jones."

A startled cry came from Hope.  
"Letty Jones?" His lordship looked amazed. "But she—"

"She's here, in this house! Miss Redfern and Hope are hiding her. I know! I've seen them. I've seen her. She was in the drawing-room next to Hope's room this afternoon. I happened to find out, though I didn't know then who she was. Hope knew that I'd seen, and she shifted her into the cellar—"

there!" And dramatically she flung out a hand towards the curtain. "They're both the accomplices of thieves. Having been caught themselves, they're trying to throw the blame on me!"

She stopped. For Hope, with a stricken cry, tottered on her feet. Babs, jumping forward, was just in time to catch her as she collapsed.

But the damage was done then. His lordship, grimly determined, was already striding towards the curtain.

AFTER THAT—

Like some ghastly dream the events that succeeded. Like some terrible nightmare they must have been to dazed and half-crazed Hope Caraway.

For Mrs. Jones was found, of course. That seemed to vindicate Nancy. The police were sent for. The woman was taken away in an ambulance to the

## NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS

*What about some resolutions this year?  
They're fun to make—even if they  
are difficult to keep*



I'VE determined to make some resolutions this year—partly because I'm simply dying to write in the diary my silly brother gave me for Christmas, and partly because everyone in the family says I'll never keep them.

FIRST: I resolve not to call my brother "silly" any more. What a hope!

SECOND: I will mend my stockings as soon as ever the teeniest hole appears—not wait until it's the size of a house and then tell mother that they're just what she wants for polishing the grates.

THIRD: I'll turn back my bed every single morning—and make it myself on Saturdays.

FOURTH: I'll leap out of bed with the agility of a cat and the grace of a gazelle the very first time mother calls. Not just grumble "Coming!" and then settle down for another snooze.

FIFTH: I'll not clean my school shoes on my feet, and so find my ankles smeared with blacking when I come to take my stockings off at night.

SIXTH: I'll hang my toothbrush up on its nail after I've used it. I do hate cleaning my teeth with a soggy brush because I don't do this.

SEVENTH: I'll help mother wash-up the breakfast-things every morning—and without telling her all the time how hard I have to work at school, either!

EIGHTH: I'll take an apple to school with me to eat mid-morning, and put an extra penny into the

charity-box instead of spending it on chocolate. And when I weaken—as I shall!—I'll think of my complexion.

NINTH: I'll stop scribbling on my blotting-paper and cutting my rubber in half to test the blade of the pen-knife my sill—I mean big brother gave me!

TENTH: I'll keep my school case tidy, and only take home with me what I need for one night's work; then perhaps I shall be able to find at least a new nib when I want one.

ELEVENTH: I will not switch on the wireless until my homework is finished—oh, at least, nearly!

TWELFTH: I will try to call it "radio," instead of wireless. Mabel Smythe does—and she's so awish, she must be right.

THIRTEENTH: Sounds an unlucky one, so I'll take a risk. I'll eat spinach with my dinner. (There, I know that one didn't stand a chance! I loathe spinach!)

FOURTEENTH: I'll keep accounts of how I spend my pocket-money: I'll wear my school hat as it's meant to be worn—not turned down all round. I'll never read a book that hasn't got at least 600 pages in it. I'll keep this diary to the end of the year. I'll—

FIFTEENTH: I think I'd better resolve just to be myself. That'll be one resolution I shall find I've not broken when I come to open this diary for the second time in two months!



(All rights of this publication are reserved, and reproduction is strictly forbidden.)



## ALL ABOUT NEXT SATURDAY'S BEAUTIFUL GIFT AND NEW STORIES

**M**Y DEAR READERS,—What a thrilling surprise! Weren't you excited to know that with the very next number of your favourite SCHOOLGIRL, on sale next Saturday, you will receive free:

A Superb 52-page Film Star Autograph and Photograph Album, and the first Sheet of Film Stars' Autographs!

I really think this is one of the finest gifts THE SCHOOLGIRL has ever presented to its readers. Let me describe the album.

Its actual size is five inches by three. The cover is printed in silver and its contents include reproductions—charmingly arranged—of actual photographs of all your favourite film stars. Altogether, there are eighty photos.

But that is not all. Space has been left in the album to receive the autographs of the stars, reproductions of which will be given away with subsequent issues of THE SCHOOLGIRL.

So, when you have collected all the autographs and have arranged them in the album, you will possess a unique collection of signatures and photos of the world's most celebrated screen actors and actresses.

In addition, the last four pages of the album have been left blank, so that you can include any other signatures, either of your friends or of famous people.

The album is lavishly printed on glossy art paper, and is a gift that every schoolgirl must have.

Remember, this lovely album will be presented FREE with THE SCHOOLGIRL next Saturday. There will be an enormous demand, so, to avoid disappointment, you must ORDER YOUR COPY AT ONCE!

And be sure to tell all your friends about this lovely gift.

### NEW STORIES

To celebrate the presentation of this wonderful free gift, I have arranged for a marvellous programme of new stories. There will be three new features in next Saturday's number, in addition to the first of a new-term series of long complete Cliff House School stories.

Do you remember Diana Royston-Clarke—Diana, the Good-Time Girl,

Diana the daring, the captivating? Of course you do! And when I tell you that Diana is the "star" of the new series of Cliff House tales, well, I can imagine the cheers!

Yes, Diana is to feature in this brilliant new series of Hilda Richards stories, with Babs, Mabs, Bessie, Clara, and the rest. And what a series! Thrilling, novel, arresting, just the very sort of story that I know you all love!

Make sure of reading the first story in this new series next Saturday. It is entitled:

### "THE GIRL WHO OUTSHONE DIANA."

Those of you who admire the famous Flying Sisters will be delighted to know that Kit and Joan Fortune are to continue to feature in a complete story each week. But—and here is the big surprise!—the Flying Sisters are setting off on a trip round the world in their famous plane, the Sky Queen II. You can imagine the adventures that beset them in different countries—the thrills they encounter in strange lands.

You'll love this enthralling new series of the famous sisters, which is, of course, written by Ida Melbourne. The first story appears complete next Saturday.

A delightful serial featuring that engaging character, Sunny McAllister, is the second treat. This merry serial of mystery and adventure will, I'm sure, be immensely popular with you all. The first long instalment appears next Saturday, and the title is:

### "WITH SUNNY—SMILING THROUGH!"

It is written by that very favourite author, Renee Frazer.

Now we come to my last big surprise—a new series of complete mystery stories, to which many favourite authors are to contribute. Each story will be complete in itself—a new character, a new mystery, a new setting every week!

Look out for the first of these gripping thrill-and-mystery "surprise" stories in next Saturday's extra-special GIFT number.

My final word. Make quite, quite sure of your SCHOOLGIRL next week by ordering it now!

Your sincere friend, YOUR EDITOR.

police infirmary. Miserably, dejectedly Hope went with her. Babs found herself facing his lordship.

"Well?" he said, rather bitterly. "You seem to have made good use of my hospitality, Babs."

Babs explained. As best she could she told, fearlessly and frankly, all that she knew, since now there was no need for further concealment. His lordship listened, tolerantly, frowningly. He only stopped her when she mentioned the name of Nancy Green.

"Barbara," he said seriously, "not that—please! Surely you cannot believe that Nancy had anything to do with this? She would hardly have alarmed the house, had she been guilty. I am willing to accept your explanation. I am willing to believe," he added, "that you acted out of a misguided sense of sympathy, that you were taken in by the stories of three scheming rogues. But I am glad that the matter has come to a head. Hope Caraway, obviously, is the accomplice of thieves. Her mother is a thief. Buck Winch is a thief. And if I want any evidence of her association with Buck Winch, what better proof could I have than that I saw with my own eyes? I shall not charge Hope Caraway—nor Buck Winch—for your sake, Barbara. I am sorry that you have been taken in so. Go now to your room, and let's hear no more of this nonsense."

Babs bit her lip. "And—and Hope?" she asked. "And—He said sternly, "has sacrificed any claim she might have on my consideration. I shall have nothing further to do with her!"

"But—our lordship—"

"That is enough, Barbara," he said finally. "The matter is closed."

And, from his point of view, it was. But not from Babs'.

THE FIGHT was finished, apparently. The scheming wiles of Nancy Green had won the day. But had they? Not if Babs knew it.

Babs went to her room, but she did not go to sleep. Her mind was in torment. She had tried so desperately to help Hope—this was the result. For some reason Nancy Green had her knife into Hope. Nancy Green, unquestionably, was Buck Winch's accomplice.

How she longed to tell that girl what she thought of her! How she longed—

Why shouldn't she?

It would give her some satisfaction, at least. The thought preyed upon Babs' mind. Fiercely, furiously, she wanted to have it out with someone. The thought of having failed Hope, added to that of her own incompetence, made her burn.

Well, she was in disgrace. She knew it, even though Lord Sutherland, in his own tolerant way, had tried to be so nice about it all. Why shouldn't she have it out with Nancy Green?

Now? Yes, at once!

Babs rose from her bed. She slipped on her dressing-gown.

She opened the door, passing along the chill corridor, and swiftly made her way to Nancy Green's room. She did not knock. She just turned the handle and entered.

And then she stood still, catching her breath in a biting blast of cold air.

She blinked.

The air came from the window, which was open at the bottom.

The moon sent slanting rays of silver light into the room, and those rays glinted upon the head of a girl, who, half in and half out of the room, was leaning through the window. She had

not heard Babs' entry. It would have been surprising, considering that she was giving her whole and undivided attention to someone outside, if she had. But standing suddenly still and statuesque in the darkness, Babs heard her voice.

"Is that you, Buck?"

The hoarse, throaty tones of a man came out of the gloom.

"Yes! I had to come back. What happened? Is everything all right?" She thrilled.

"Everything! I fixed it," Nancy replied. Every word came distinctly to Babs' ears. "There was a bit of a rumpus, but it's O.K. They've hooked off Hope Caraway and her mother to gaol."

"Have they now? And what about the loot I left behind?"

"Lord Sutherland's taken that," Nancy replied. "He put it in a room on this landing. A nice fool you were, Buck, to let yourself be bowled out by that Redfern girl."

Babs' lips compressed.

"Well, how was I to know?" Buck grumbled from below. "The little cat was on me before I could think. I thought for a minute that it was all up. But I say, Nancy"—eagerly—"tell me about the loot. Has his mibs taken it out of the sack?"

"No!"

"Good! It's still there, then? You know the room?"

"Of course I do!"

"Good again! Well, look here—" And Babs, in the darkness, tensed, thanking her lucky stars now that she had not given her presence away.

"There's no harm in having another shot," Buck went on anxiously. "Third time lucky, they say, and his lordship will hardly be expecting another visit from mo to-night. Nancy, there must have been hundreds of quids worth of

loot in the bag—and you know the arrangement. Fifty-fifty. What about letting me in again?"

A pause. Then Nancy:

"No, Buck, too risky!"

"Oh, come on, be a sport! Blow it, it's not often you get the chance of raising five hundred so easily!" Buck urged. "And nobody will suspect you—now. If they suspect anybody, it will be that Redfern kid!"

Another pause. Babs' eyes gleamed suddenly. She hung breathlessly upon Nancy's reply. But for a long moment that reply was not forthcoming. Nancy Green, obviously, was tempted; was weighing up the question. Then suddenly she leaned farther forward.

"All right, Buck! But no blunders this time, remember. I'll let you in in five minutes. Tap gently three times like you did before."

Babs waited to hear no more. Her eyes were gleaming strangely now. Her mind was racing, as suddenly the plan shot through her head.

As Nancy commenced to withdraw, Babs slipped out into the passage, adroitly annexing the key of the door as she did so. She closed it softly, inserted the key on the outside, and turned it.

"That's fixed you!" she muttered grimly. "I don't fancy you'll think of making a row when you find you're a prisoner."

She padded off down the corridor. Her heart was racing as stealthily she descended the stairs and crossed the hall. She reached the door, and peering through the side window, saw the broad shoulders of her quarry slinking in the darkness. She pulled her dressing-gown about her.

Tap, tap, tap!

Softly the taps sounded on the door. Babs was prepared. Softly, silently she undid the bolts, pulling the door open. Buck Winch, a vague and indefinite

shape in the darkness outside, stood there.

"Good girl, Nancy!" he said.

"Everything all right?"

"Everything!" Babs answered, in a whisper.

"And what about the boodle?"

"That's where I told you it was—in a room upstairs," Babs whispered. How thankful she was for the darkness, so that the man could not see her face. "But don't talk!" she added. "Even whippers carry. Follow me."

Buck Winch, unsuspecting, gave a chuckle.

"Lead on, Eldorado maid!"

Babs closed the door, Buck having shuffled inside. Babs took his arm, piloting him towards the stairs. Up them, one at a time, the two stealthily climbed, pausing at every creak. Along the landing, Babs led him, pausing finally outside the door of the room in which Lord Sutherland slept. She stopped.

"This is the room," Babs said grimly. She pushed the door. It opened. Buck, with a chuckle, stepped inside.

In a flash Babs had shut the door with a bang. From inside the room came a startled exclamation in Lord Sutherland's voice, a roar in Buck's. Then the lights went on.

What happened?

Babs, clinging grimly to the door, did not know. But she could guess. She heard the rustle of the bedclothes as Lord Sutherland flung himself out. She heard the thud of his steps as they raced across the room. She heard his voice, followed by a blow, a thud. Then the door shook as a heavy body reeled against it. And Buck Winch, evidently hors-de-combat on the floor, sent up a wail.

"Don't hit me again!"

"Who let you in?" thundered Lord Sutherland.



"I PROTEST—I protest!" Nancy stormed. "Miss Redfern is trying to blame me; she's trying to shield Hope—at my expense. If you want the truth, Hope and Miss Redfern are protecting a woman who's hiding in this house—a woman who's wanted by the police!"

"It was her, Nancy Green, the little traitor!"

"What?"

"Yes, her!" Buck went on violently. "She didn't tell me, though, that she was going to dump me in your bedroom! We agreed to go fifty-fifty in the loot, you see? She's tricked me all right, though—probably to save herself. And I'll tell you some more!" Buck went on furiously. "Her name isn't Nancy Green. She's Alice Finlayson, the girl who took part in your show before you gave Hope Caraway the job. Yes, she is! She was wild with you for giving another girl her place. She wanted to make you and Hope Caraway suffer, and so she came over Christmas as a temporary servant to muck up your party. I met her by accident—"

"And fixed up the burglaries with her!"

"Well, if you want to know—yes!"

"Bah! Get up, man, get up! No, wait a minute, you're not getting away this time. I'll take the trouble, on this occasion, of tying you up till the police come, Buck. Meantime, we'll go and have a talk with Miss Alice Finlayson."

Babs smiled grimly.

She paused for a moment longer. From inside came a whimper in Buck's tones. Fairly caught as he was, all the fight had been taken out of him.

She paused a moment, debating whether to make her appearance now or slip quietly away, then stopped as from the front door came a thunderous knocking.

From inside the room came a hoarse exclamation; Lord Sutherland's bang the door open. He stared at Babs.

"Barbara, what are you doing here? And who's that?"

"Bang! Bang! Bang!"

"Somebody in a hurry, I think," Babs replied.

Somebody was in a hurry. A mad,

frantic hurry. Knock, knock! Then rings. Doors along the corridors were opening; startled voices inquiring. Clara poked her head out, saw Babs, and immediately joined her and Lord Sutherland in the corridor. From another room Leila emerged.

Bang, bang, bang!

"What the dickens—" Lord Sutherland frowned.

He went to the head of the stairs, but the butler, in his dressing-gown, was rushing to open the door now. There was a rattle of bolts. A key squeaked in the lock, and the door flung open. Immediately a round-faced young man carrying a brown leather handbag bounced into the hall.

"Where's my sister?" he shouted.

"Your what?"

"My sister, Hope Caraway—and my mother!"

"Here, here!" Lord Sutherland yelled. "Come up here, young man. Now," he added grimly, "who are you? And what in the name of all that is sacred do you mean by making this hullabaloo in my house at this time of night?"

The young man gasped.

"I—I'm sorry," he stammered. "I suppose you're Lord Sutherland? I had to come. You see—this bag—" He held it up. "I'm Bob Caraway, the brother of Hope. She's here with my mother!"

Babs' eyes widened.

"Oh, my goodness! Then you—"

"Wait a minute, Barbara, wait a minute," Lord Sutherland exclaimed,

but his eyes fixed more kindly upon the man. "I regret to tell you," he said, "that Mrs. Jones left here some hours ago—under arrest. Hope went with her."

Bob Caraway stiffened.

"You mean—she—she was arrested?"

"I do!"

"For—for stealing £3,000? Oh, my

hat!" The young man's eyes blazed. "But she didn't steal it!" he cried. "She didn't! It slipped from her lap in a railway carriage. She lost it—as she believed, in the snow. But she didn't drop it in the snow."

"What?"

"She dropped it in a tunnel," Bob went on. "It must have been the rush of the wind as the train roared into the tunnel which caused the door to open. If the police had only taken the trouble to believe the story, and search they'd have found the bag."

Babs gulped.

"Oh, my goodness! Then—then they have found it?"

"No; but I have!" And Bob touched the bag. "This is it," he said. "I found it this morning. It's all here, the whole of the £3,000, with Sir James Form's deposit book and everything. I went to find it. I did find it, and now I want my mother to prove her innocence."

What wonder that even Lord Sutherland looked dumbfounded! What wonder Babs was excited. Oh, this was wonderful, wonderful! Babs' eyes shone; Babs laughed. Hope's mother was saved! Her innocence was proved!

And so it turned out. For Lord Sutherland, extremely anxious to do everything to right what he considered to be a great mistake, went off with Bob Caraway there and then.

He went off, taking with him the crestfallen Buck Winch and the scared Nancy Green—or, as she was known to be now, Alice Finlayson.

He returned without either of them, but with Mrs. Jones and with Hope. Hope was radiant.

For her mother, from that moment, was free. And Hope herself, proved guiltless of all the harm that had been laid at her door, was rejoicing with her.

It was true that Babs & Co. had not found the missing bag, but Babs & Co.—and Babs in particular—had certainly done everything to clear Hope's good name.

Great was the rejoicing at Sutherland House that night. Nobody, after that, thought of returning to bed. They toasted each other, they sang, they laughed, they danced.

It was just like Christmas all over again, with Lord Sutherland, the surprised but genially beaming host, moving among them, Bob and his mother the guests of honour.

He gave everybody much happiness when towards morning the party broke up.

"I want," he said solemnly, "to express my most sincere apologies to Mrs. Jones and to her charming daughter for the things I have thought and said of them. I admit I was taken in. To show that you forgive me I would like you, Mrs. Jones, and you, Hope, to remain here as my guests until the end of the holiday."

"Hurrah!" cheered Leila.

"But I think that all our thanks"—with a beam at Babs & Co.—"should be given to Barbara Redfern. And I want you all"—raising his glass—"to join with me in one final toast before going to bed. That is—to Barbara Redfern!"

"To Babs!"

"Good old Babs!"

The toast was drunk with enthusiasm and with laughter. But nobody drank it with more heartfelt gratitude than Hope Caraway, the girl who, thanks to Babs, had come through her trials and tribulations with flying colours, and whose feet, from now onwards, seemed destined to step firmly the ladder to fame, prosperity, and popularity!

THE END.

## The RETURN of DIANA

Yes, it's true! Diana Royston-Clarke, the famous Firebrand of the Fourth, is returning to Cliff House! You will meet her again next Saturday—the same daring, dazzling, impetuous Diana—in the first of a brilliant new series of long complete as ever Diana; as hot-headed as ever. As captivating as ever is Diana; as always was, compelling admiration, demanding attention—the most fascinating character in schoolgirl fiction. But Diana finds that she has met her match at last. For a new girl, friend of Diana's, come to Cliff House and outshines Diana! Margo Lantham is the girl, and in a flash Margot becomes one of the most popular girls in the school. Brilliant at games, pretty and charming, she wins the instant affection of the Fourth—and Diana is forgotten. But not for long. Diana is determined to shine, is resolved to have ALL the limelight! And when Diana makes a resolve—then things begin to happen!

Next Saturday's Brilliant Long Complete Story is entitled:

**"THE GIRL WHO OUTSHONE DIANA"**

By Hilda Richards. Don't Miss It!

**FREE GIFT NEXT SATURDAY**