

TALES FOR ALL TASTES

The Schoolgirl

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**"I WON'T TAKE PART
IN THE PLAY!"**

Mabel Lynn's Dramatic Declaration, in this week's powerful long complete Cliff House School story.

A Grand Long Complete Story of the Girls of Cliff House School



NO ONE ELSE MATTERED

The Play's The Thing!

By

HILDA RICHARDS

TAP! Barbara Redfern, in Study No. 4 in the Fourth Form corridor of Cliff House School, put down her brushes, gazed critically at the huge scroll on which she was working, sighed a little, and turned. "Come in!" she bade.

The door of the study opened. A very pretty face, framed in a mass of dark brown hair as curly as Babs' own, looked in. The girl was older than Barbara, however, and carried herself with an uprightness and a dignity which marked her at once as one of the seniors of the Sixth. And indeed Stella Stone was that—and more. For Stella, in addition to being the most popular monarch of the school possessed, was also its captain. Barbara half rose. Stella smiled.

"No, don't get up, Barbara. May I come in for a moment?" And without waiting for the invitation she swung into the study, dropped into the armchair opposite Barbara, and looked at the work upon which Barbara was engaged. "Getting on, I see," she said appreciatively, "and—my, it's going to look magnificent when you've finished it, Barbara. How much longer will it take?"

"Oh, days," Barbara laughed. "Lot of work," Stella considered, still regarding the scroll. "Miss Fielding ought to be pleased with that. Still, a nice job—very, very nice, Barbara. I congratulate you." Whereat Babs flushed, for praise from Stella was praise indeed.

"But you're alone," Stella commented, as though suddenly becoming aware of that fact, and looking round quite sharply. "Where's Mabs?"

Babs bit her lip. "Oh, she—she's changed." "Changed?" Stella frowned. "You don't mean—changed studies?"

"Yes," Babs reluctantly admitted. "Good gracious! But I thought—" And then Stella, seeing that troubled expression upon Barbara's face, shook her head. Her face softened quite suddenly. "Barbara," she said quietly. "Y—yes?" Babs replied.

CLARICE DYSON came to Cliff House with the idea of having a good time. And as long as she achieved this selfish desire, no one else mattered. Clarice didn't care that she had all but wrecked the happiest friendship at Cliff House—that between Babs and Mabs. In fact, for her own gain, she did all she could to cause strife between chums. But Clarice went just a little bit too far. . . .

"I don't want to interfere; you know that, don't you? But—but—" And Stella gazed at her keenly. "But, Barbara, you know, although I am head prefect, that I have never regarded you and Mabs the same as the other girls. Some time ago—a long time ago now—you both did me a very, very good turn, and I've never forgotten it. I said then, Barbara, if I ever could repay that good turn, I would do so."

"Y—yes, Stella." "It's not my business, as I've said. But I've heard things, Barbara. I've seen things. There have been quite a few differences between you and Mabs lately, and—well—" She pursed her lips. "Until a week or two ago, Barbara, you and Mabel were the most inseparable girls in the school. If ever I had been asked to name an ideal friendship I should unhesitatingly have pointed to you and Mabel Lynn as having achieved it."

"Then—then something happened, didn't it? There were bickerings, strained relations, Bessie Bunter, who used to share this study with you, was expelled from—and—well—" She stretched forward, laying a hand on Babs' knee. "Won't you tell me about it—as a friend? I don't like to see such a friendship upset, Barbara. It's just possible that I may be able to help."

But again that shake of the head from Babs. "Mabs—Mabs and I are—are still friends," she said. "Oh!" Stella looked surprised. "But if she's left this study—"

"It's—it's not—not because—" Babs stumped. "Oh, how can I tell you, Stella? But it's true," she added with a flash of misery that went straight to the generous-natured prefect's heart. "Mabs has cleared out. She cleared out because of Clarice."

"The new girl—Clarice Dyson, you mean?"

"Yes!"

"Oh!" said Stella. "Why?"

"Well, Mabs and—Clarice don't get on very well, you see," Babs said miserably. "Mabs—Mabs denies it, of course, but—but I think she's a bit jealous of Clarice."

"And Clarice?"

Babs sighed.

"That's the worst part of it," she replied. "Clarice has tried so hard to be friends with Mabs. Mabs just won't have anything to do with her. She says that Clarice puts on all her nice ways just to convince me, which—of which, of course, is silly," Babs said, "because I've never found Clarice out in any lie yet. But oh, Stella, it's miserable," she added. "I wish Mabs would be different. It seems now that nothing ever will be the same again, and—and although I can't understand her, I—I miss her so much."

"And she," Stella nodded, "misses you, no! She hasn't told me that, but I know. Mabs is a very easy girl to understand, Barbara—though I must confess I am surprised by this—what did you call it?—jealous strain that has cropped up in her. It's not like Mabs to be jealous or envious."

"I—I thought so, too," Babs replied unhappily. "That's what makes it so beastly."

There was a thoughtful silence. Again Stella's gaze strayed admiringly to the scroll on which Babs was working. Certainly it was attention-compelling, a really beautiful piece of work incorporating no less than twenty coloured sketches which, when finished, would be the illuminated address to be read and presented to the school's benefactor, Miss Fielding, when Cliff House celebrated her birthday a week hence.

A whole week had Babs laboured on it, lavishing upon it all her artistry, her care, expressing in her work the tender regard she felt for the old lady who was, finally, to be its recipient. Stella smiled.

"Well, Babs, we'll have to see what we can do about it," she said. "Cheer up, you know! Meantime here's something that may help. I've just been discussing the idea with Miss Fielding herself, who has made a request that the Fourth shall add to the birthday programme the playlet which you did last term. Remember it?" "The Princess and the Peasant Girl."

"Oh, yes!" Babs brightened. "I remember. Mabs played the principal part."

"Didn't she write it, too?" Stella asked.

"Oh, no!" Babs shook her head. "It's a stock piece, you know. Quite well-known, I should say, as far as one-act playlets are concerned. Mabs played the part of the princess."

"Yes, of course, I saw her in it," Stella nodded. "Do you think she'd do it again?"

"Yes, rather," Babs laughed. "You know she's just doted on amateur theatricals."

"Then," Stella smiled, and rose, "break the news to her, Barbara. I'll leave all arrangements in your hands. I expect you'll do the producing again, won't you, as Mabs doesn't believe in producing a play in which she is taking part."

She turned as the door opened, and Clarice Dyson, with one swift questioning look from Babs to Stella, and back again, came into the room.

"Oh, hallo, Clarice! Come in! I'm just going."

"Oh, but are you?" Clarice exclaimed. "No, don't, Stella—not for a minute. I say, Babs, how marvellous the illumination is looking! And Stella, what a pretty blouse that is you have on! But I say, I've been hearing things in the Common-room. Is it a secret, Stella, about the play?"

Stella burst into a laugh.

"Good gracious, has it got round already? No, of course it's not a secret."

"Oh, I say!" And Clarice's eyes shone. "Then—then can I have a part?" she eagerly asked. "You know"—with a rush—"I played in exactly the same piece at my last school—really I did."

"You know it absolutely off by heart, you know. I mean the part I played, not the whole play, of course. I was the peasant girl!"

Stella paused. She looked at Babs.

"Who was the peasant girl when we put it on?" she asked.

"Philippa Derwent."

"What? Not the girl who's left?"

Clarice breathlessly exclaimed, and so eager was her tone, so convincing her enthusiasm as she stood there, that pretty flush on her face, her eyes a-kinde with excitement, that it was hard indeed to believe that she was the hypocrite which misunderstood Mabel Lynn knew so well. "Oh, I say, what luck! What perfectly delicious, scrumptious luck! Babs, I know the part. That was my part. Let me do it for Cliff House, please!"

Involuntarily Babs smiled—Clarice really could be such a child sometimes, so full of eagerness, so full of enthusiasm.

Why, of course, Clarice could play the peasant part. Her first feeling was one of relief that such an important part should be filled so easily.

Then she saw the look in Stella's eyes, guessed the thought that was passing through the head girl's mind.

Mabs!

If Clarice played, would Mabs consent to play?

She bit her lip.

"Please," begged Clarice.

"Well," Babs stumped, "I—I don't know. You—you see, Clarie, we haven't got much time to rehearse, and all that—"

"Yes, I know! That's why I'm suggesting that I should be put in," Clarice cried. "Because I know the words, you see."

"But it will mean you playing opposite Mabs."

"Oh!" Clarice stared. "I suppose she's playing the princess, then. But—but—" And she broke off, looking suddenly so bewildered and troubled that Babs really felt mean. "I—I suppose you mean that as Mabs isn't good friends with me, she might refuse to take the part?" she asked, disheartened.

"Oh, bother, no—no, of course not!"

Stella protested. "Mabs isn't that sort."

"Well, I really would like to play it," Clarice said. "It would save such a lot of fuss and bother, too—rehearsing somebody who doesn't know it, I mean."

Oh, surely, Babs, Mabs wouldn't make a bother about that—after all, it is for the school, isn't it? It's not as if it's a personal matter.

"I don't know why Mabs hates me so," she added, with a sigh and a doleful upcast of the eyes for Stella's benefit. "I'm sure I've tried ever so hard to be friends with her, haven't I,

Babs? But, of course, if it's going to lead to any bad feeling, I'd rather stand out."

Artless words! Artful in their apparent artlessness. Oh, surely, surely crafty Clarice had the knack of getting round people. Even Stella was convinced, and Babs, reflecting upon the contrast between her friend Mabs and this girl, felt utterly wretched.

Stella, however, in that brisk way of hers, clinched the question.

"Well, let's settle it," she said, "here and now. Barbara, you nip off and find Mabs."

"Yes," Babs agreed.

"While you, Clarice, stop here with me."

"Yes, Stella, of course," Clarice smiled delightedly. "But I say, don't you just love that illuminated address of Babs? I'll bet Miss Fielding will be so pleased with that she'll frame it. Look at the lovely sketch of the new theatre."

She moved in rapt admiration to the easel upon which the illumination was pinned. While Babs, rather flattered, went out into the corridor. She reached the door of Study No. 7, knocked and opened it. Mabel Lynn, alone in the room, swung round.

Her face glowed with pleasure at sight of her visitor; then, as if remembering, she drew back.

"Mabs!" Babs came into the study.

"Mabs, old thing, Stella wants you—in Study No. 4. But no, wait a minute," she added, catching the other's arm, as Mabs made an instant movement to obey. "Let me have a word with you first. It's about the play—you remember that ripping little thing called 'The Princess and the Peasant Girl' we did last term?"

"Oh, yes!" Mabs' eyes lighted up at once.

"Well, we're going to—to do it again," Babs said. "Then let it all out in a rush—that Clarice had asked for the part of the peasant girl, at which Mabs at first winced, and then stiffened. "So you see, Mabs—oh, bother, I know you don't like Clarice—"

"And," Mabs said between her teeth, "I've cause."

Babs looked distressed. How she hated this peace-making business! How she wished, with all her heart and her being—that Mabs understood Clarice more, that those two would be the good friends she wished them to be!

"But, Mabs, don't let your personal feelings come in the way," she said desperately. "After all, it is rather a break Clarice knowing the part, because goodness knows how we shall find another peasant girl to rehearse the part in time. Mabs, take it on, please," she begged—"do! For the sake of the school, you know!"

Mabs drew a deep breath.

"It might only lead to further trouble, Babs."

"Oh, Mabs, not if you—"

"If I—"

Mabs swung round questioningly. "You know what I mean, Mabs."

"No, I don't," Mabs said quietly.

"I only know, Babs, that you've been rather too ready to blame me for everything since that little hypocrite came into the school. Oh, I don't blame you! You can't see the way she's buttered up to you. You can't see how deceiving she's been! She got poor old Bessie thrown out of the study, and then made the study such a miserable place for me that I refused to work in it any longer. It's not your fault, though," she added bitterly. "Perhaps if somebody had twisted me round their little finger as

Clarice Dyson has done you, I should have acted just the same."

Babs groaned.

"But, Mabs—"

"Well, never mind." Mabs shook her golden head. She looked wretched all at once. "You've been all over this before, Babs. I'm sick of it. Yes, I'll play the part all right, but if there's going to be any little digs in

Bessie meant that the frock would go three times round slim Mabs!

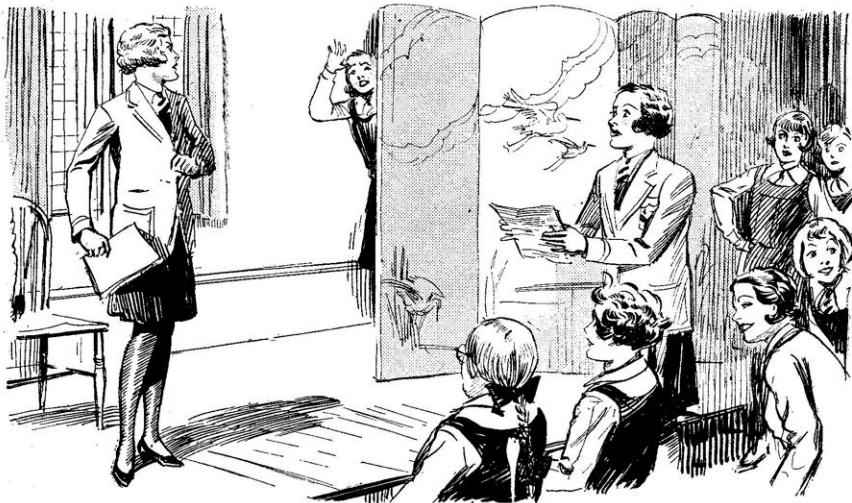
"And I can't afford another," Mabs said—"not yet. But wait a minute, Babs—I know! There's that old white evening frock of mine. I could dye that."

"Why, yes—the very idea!" Babs cried.

"Oh, then, I'll dig it out!" Mabs

Practically the whole of the Form, indeed, with the exception of Diana Royston-Clarke and the Terraine Trains, was present.

But Mabs, meantime, had done her work well. Throwing herself into the new task with zest, she had rigged a stage, had distributed new copies of the play, and had carefully gone through the props.



MABS broke off as she saw Clarice gesticulating and grimacing behind the screen. It was quite obvious that Clarice was doing her best to put Mabs off.

the back from Clarice Dyson, I give you fair warning that I shall back out right away. Tell Stella I accept. When's the first rehearsal, by the way?"

"When—when do you think?" Babs asked.

"Well, no time like the present," Mabs said. "What about after tea? I've got a list of the girls who played in the thing last term. Shall I go round and warn them?"

"Oh, Mabs, if you would!"

"Pleasure!" Mabs laughed, and gone in a flash was that expression of bitter resentment she had shown when speaking of Clarice Dyson.

She was the old Mabs again—the radiant, effervescent Mabs, enthusiastic at once in the cause of her dearest hobby—amateur theatricals. More eager, even, than Babs herself to get a move on and get the playlet in full swing.

"And I'll look out the props, too," she promised. "You know— And, oh good gracious!" she broke off, with a laugh. "Babs, what ever am I to do?"

"Why—what?" Babs asked.

"The purple frock I wore as the princess—it must be purple, too, you know. There are several lines in the play about it. Don't you remember what happened to that? I gave it to the Courtfield Sale of Work. I suppose that nobody's got a purple frock that they could lend me!"

But nobody had—only Bessie Bunter. Bessie had a purple velvet evening gown. But that, of course, was utterly out of the question. Once round plump

laughed. "Off with you now, Babs, and—!" She paused, flushed, then suddenly stumbled. "Babs," she added in a changed voice, "just one minute, old thing. Babs, I do want you to understand that whatever has happened between me and Clarice isn't levelled at you in any way. We're still friends, Babs?"

"Oh, Mabs, of course!"

"Thanks!" Mabs nodded. Just for one second her lip trembled a little. "That makes a lot of difference. I've hated myself sometimes, Babs, because—well, because you know. I don't want anything to upset our friendship," she added, "and as soon as ever that little cat has gone, I'm coming back into the study. But not yet—not yet! Now I'll fly!"

Babs watched her go, and the look in her eyes was very tender.

It delighted Mabs to feel that once again she shared a common interest with her friend Babs.

"Well, here we are!" cried Babs. "Now, wait a minute, and I'll read out the parts. All the girls who were in the play last time will be in the revival, of course, with the exception of Philippa Derwent, who, unfortunately, has left us. Her part will be played by Clarice Dyson."

"Hear, hear! Good old Clarry!" Lydia Crossendale cheered.

"But I dud-don't see why I shouldn't do it!" Bessie Bunter put in aggrievedly. "You know, Babs, my part's not a very fat one!"

"Well, you can't have everything to match your own sweet figure, what?" Jemima Carstairs beamed.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Funny!" Bessie sniffed. "I may be a bit plump, but that's what a naturally healthy and beautiful girl should be, you know. Not," Bessie added witheringly, "a skinny old skeleton like you! What I say—"

"Well, Bessie, for goodness' sake say it some other time!" Babs laughed. "Now everybody! The princess—Mabel Lynn."

"Hurrah!"

"The peasant—Clarice."

"Good old Clarry!"

"Leila Carroll—lady-in-waiting."

"Three cheers for the jolly old Stars and Stripes, what?"

"Bessie Bunter—cook!"

"But I've told you—"

"Jemima, governess. Jean Cartwright, the queen. Janet, you're the



More Than Mabs Could Endure

QUITE a crowd gathered after tea in the music-room where the rehearsal was to be held.

The news of the revival of "The Princess and the Peasant Girl," one of the prettiest and certainly the most successful playlet that the Fourth had ever enacted, had spread abroad, and girls were curious to see how Clarice Dyson, the popular newcomer, would deport herself.

gypsy girl. Marjorie Hazeldene, the Sister of Mercy. Marcello, you're the imp; and Rosa, Phyllis, Frances Frost, Doris Redfern, Pansy Carter, and Madge Stevens, ladies of the Court. Now, group up. Just one quick run through from the book, and then we'll act it on the stage."

They grouped together. Mabs, excited, eager, and intent now, grabbed her book.

She did not notice in her eagerness, however, that Clarice Dyson had edged towards her, and, with rather a mischievous glitter in her eyes, had positioned herself as close as she could possibly get to Mabs.

Mabs began to recite her part. "Oh, that I were a simple peasant girl! All these burdening cares of State were not meant for shoulders so young and frail as mine—" she recited. "Oh!"

"Here, I s-us-ay, you know, that's not in it!" Bessie expostulated. "It isn't in it, but—" And Mabs turned a glare at the girl who stood by her side. "That was the sharp point of your book you stuck in my shoulder then, Clarice," she said, and very coldly shrugged the shoulder out of harm's way.

"Oh, but my book never touched you!" Clarice cried.

"All right! All right! Now, please!" Mabs said anxiously. "Yes, Mabs, go on. Shoulders so young and frail as mine—"

Mabs went on. Clarice, drawing back, looked round. She caught the eye of Lydia Crossendale, who grinned and nodded her head, egging her on to another piece of mischief. Clarice winked wickedly. From her dress she drew a pin.

Mabs was in her stride now. All eyes were upon her; everybody listening spellbound. For the moment Mabs had forgotten Mabel Lynn of the Fourth Form at Cliff House. She was Princess Karina, speaking in the trembling accents of the princess, filling her tones with such wistfulness that more than one among her audience, carried away by her expression, found themselves unconsciously sighing in sympathy. She came to the most beautiful part:

"And I am a princess—Princess Karina. Soon—soon I shall be a queen. People look up to me, they worship me. With hushed voices they speak as my carriage sweeps by. Yet ah, if they but knew! If they could guess how happy I would be to change places with the lowliest peasant girl among them!"

"My good mother, whom they call the queen, lies dying—dying!" And here Mabs introduced such a realistically choked sob into her throat that Bessie Bunter sniffed in misery. "Am I pitted? No! Indeed, I am envied, for to others my bitter loss is counted as my glorious gain. I lose a mother—dear, tender, gentle mother. I gain a throne. Why—" And then Mabs leapt. "O-o-oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Lydia Crossendale.

In a moment all was confusion. Mabs gasped.

"Mabs, what ever is the matter?"

"You?"—and Mabs turned fiercely upon Clarice—"you little wretch!"

"Oh crumbs, what have I done now?" Clarice asked, in dismay.

"You stuck something in me."

"Don't be silly!"

"You did!" And Mabs rubbed the fleshy part of her thigh, then winced and drew from her skirt a pin. "I suppose," she added, "you deny all knowledge of this, Clarice?"

Clarice looked indignantly hurt.

"I certainly do. Really, Mabel, if you will leave pins in your clothes—in any case, it's like your cheek—to jump to the conclusion that I stuck the pin in you. As if I would!"

"Please, please!" Mabs begged distractedly. "Oh, you two! Clarry, get over there! No, on the other side of Jimima! Now, let's go again."

Lydia Crossendale and Freda Ferriers chuckled. Clarice, looking very red and resentful, moved off, conveying Lydia as she passed her by shutting one eye.

A smouldering Mabel Lynn went on, one angry eye upon the girl who had tried for the second time to make sport of her.

Clarice! That girl! She had stuck that pin in her. But, as usual, having worked the mischief, she had wriggled out of its consequences.

In rather strained atmosphere, the reading was finished. Mabs, looking anxiously closed her book.

"Right! That'll do," she said. "Now we'll run through it," on the stage. Clarry, you stand in the wings ready to make your entry. Everybody else stand back!"

Clarice smiled—a charming, dazzling smile. Daintily she disappeared into the wings—the wings, for the purpose of the rehearsal, being a tall screen set at the side of the stage—while Mabs climbed on to the boards and took her seat at the top of the music-stool, representing the bole of a fallen tree. A silence descended.

"Now, Mabs!" Mabs prompted. Mabs started. She started wistfully. Everybody was silent, enthralled, and Mabs, once again forgetful of herself, put her whole heart and soul into the words she was uttering.

Then suddenly a movement from behind the screen arrested her attention. She turned in that direction, and for a moment faltered.

For there facing her, screened from view of the audience, was Clarice—Clarice making all manner of grimaces, obviously with the intention of putting Mabs off her part.

Mabs turned a little white and moved her head.

She continued. Again arrested by a movement behind the screen, she turned. Clarice again—Clarice gesticulating and contorting her face in expressions of contempt. Mabs' eyes flashed.

Oh, if Mabs could only see—if she could only know!

She went on, less certainly now. Impossible to infuse enthusiasm into the part when Clarice was grimacing and mocking at her out of sight of everybody else—when Clarice was deliberately and maliciously trying to put her off.

And then Mabs stumbled over the lines she was saying, and was annoyed to find herself being prompted by Bridget O'Toole.

"But, hark, who is this?" she cried. "Was that a step I heard?"

She had to look towards the screen this time. For those words were the cue for the peasant girl. She stiffened as she saw Clarice—Clarice standing there, an expression of scornful contempt on her face, and her lips unmistakably forming the word: "Rotten!"

Mabs paled. But the next minute on came Clarice—Clarice acting the part to the life, so shy, so sweet, so innocently winsome that the change she managed to introduce was little short of wonderful.

She simpered at Mabs. A breathless pause ensued as she spoke her first lines in clear, bell-like tones.

No doubt about it—Clarice could act.

Never for a moment did she falter; never once was she at a loss for word or gesture, giving, even in that first rehearsal, a most polished performance.

Mabs winced when in her part of princess she took the peasant girl's hand.

"Arise, little peasant maid!" she said pleasantly, and stopped, with a sharp gasp, as, taking Clarice by the hand, that girl secretly availed herself of the opportunity to pinch her fingers. "Why, you little cat—" she cried involuntarily.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Mabs, that's not in the piece!"

"She pinched my finger!"

"Oh, rubbish!" cried Lydia Crossendale contemptuously.

"I tell you—"

"But I—I didn't, you know!"

Clarice looked crimson with dismay.

"Oh, Mabs, how could you tell such fibs?"

"Yes, rather! Get on with the play,"

Freda Ferriers snorted impatiently.

"And don't jolly well make things up. We all know you don't like Clarry, but

what's the reason why you should mess up the play?"

"What?"

"Well, isn't it so? You've done nothing but row with her from the moment rehearsal started."

"Please!" cried Mabs. "Please! Oh, great goodness! Mabs, please do go on!" she added. "Don't—don't make a scene!"

"Who's making a scene?" Mabs flashed.

"Well, well—" Mabs gasped. "Now, Mabs—"

Mabs breathed deeply.

"Yes, please go on!" Clarice begged.

"Don't let's upset everyone, Mabs."

Again Mabs made an effort at self-control. Oh, this—this—

She couldn't go on! She couldn't! If these sort of things were going to happen at every rehearsal—

But she saw Mabs' eyes, pitiful, pleading—perhaps just a little hint of reproach in them. She mastered herself. Well, she'd go through with it—or try!

But she couldn't—couldn't! The next words choked her.

"Dear, dear little peasant girl,"

she said. "How sweet, how kind, how beautiful you are! What generosity is in your simple nature! How I, a princess though I may be, would like to change places with you, peasant maid. I would give my kingdom to be like you. One of such a sweet disposition—"

She stopped, she choked. Oh, mockery, mockery in the words! She couldn't do it! She couldn't!

"Well, go on, Mabs!" Mabs said anxiously.

"And—and—" Mabs stumbled.

No, she couldn't! How, even playing, could she call Clarice sweet? To be like her! With those dark eyes laughing in mockery at her all the time. With pursed lips, ready, the moment her back was turned to the audience, to sneer contempt at her. She had no faith in the part, she had no faith in herself.

"I—I can't do it!" she cried, in a strangled voice.

"What?"

"I tell you I can't do it! I won't do it!" Mabs' chest rose and fell. "It's hateful! It's mockery! It's—it's—"

And, speechless for a moment, she stared wildly at the audience. "I—I don't want the part!" she cried.

"But—"

"I won't take it—I won't!" And then, afraid for her own self-control, her self-possession, Mabs suddenly

flung down her book, turned, and rushed off the stage. "Oh, oh!" she almost screamed. "Let me get out! Let me get out—please!"

And so fierce was her attitude, so frightening, somehow, the passion which flamed in her face, that the stupefied audience gave way to her.

Reaching the door, with a hot mist of tears blurring her vision, she flung it open and burst into the corridor outside.

She was not aware of the stupefied silence which followed her exit, of the murmur which went up. She did not hear Babs' voice, broken, faltering, as she called after her:

"Mabs! Mabs, come back!"

"Well!" gasped Rosa Rodworth,

"My only giddy aunt! There's a paddy for you!"

"Clarice—"

Clarice, the picture of remorse, stood white-faced, in the middle of the stage, biting her lip.

"But—but I never did anything!" she cried. "Oh, Babs, you say—"

Babs bit her lip. Oh, what an earth was the matter with Mabs? Why couldn't she forget her enmity towards Clarice, even for a few moments?

But it was no good. Mabs plainly could not play the part. Everybody was looking askance at the other.

"Well, let's get on!" Clara Trevelyn suggested. "If you ask me, this rehearsal looks like being a slight wash-out."

"But Mabs—we can't go on without Mabs," Babs cried desperately. "She's got the biggest part! Look here, hold on, please, everybody. I'll go and fetch her!"

"Oh, fiddlesticks!" Rosa snapped. "If she comes back we'll only have the same sort of thing happening all over again. It's either Mabs or Clarry who's got to be dropped from this play, and for my part, I say, drop Mabs. Somebody else can swot up her part, surely."

There was silence. It wasn't easy to swot up that part. The part of the princess, as Babs said, was the biggest of the lot. Mabs occupied the stage for practically the whole run of the piece.

More than half the words in the play belonged to her.

Clarice coughed.

"Er—Babs, may I make a suggestion?"

"What?" Babs asked worriedly.

"Well—" Clarice looked demure.

"Tell me if I'm being cheeky," she said, "but I happen to know the princess' part, too. If you could get another peasant girl, I'm sure I could take it. Though, of course, I'd have to swot it a little."

"Well, there you are!" cried Rosa. "What's wrong with that? The peasant maid can be played by somebody else—young Madge Stevens, for instance. Madge did understand the part when Philippa had it. Didn't you, Madge?"

"Yes, rather!" Madge Stevens said eagerly.

Rosa grinned.

"Think you'd be able to do it?"

"Oh, I'm sure I could!"

"Then," Rosa triumphantly exclaimed. "What about it? There you are. Babs! Shift Clarry into the princess' part, give Madge the peasant girl, and we're all set. And blow Mabel, with her little tantrums! Well, what about it?"

Babs sighed. She felt, in that moment, she didn't care. She had been so happy to find an interest with Mabs again. She had so hoped that the play would have been the means of bringing them together, and per-

haps of finding fresh foundations of understanding between her and Clarice. But Mabs, it seemed—Oh, well!

"Let's try," she said lifelessly.

"Oh, Babs, you mean I can have the part?" Clarice cried.

"Yes."

"Oh, thank you!" And Clarice dimpled. "You know I've always longed to play that part," she exclaimed. "Not—with a modest shake of the head—that I shall be any-



Bessie is Annoyed

"MABS! Oh crumbs!" Bessie Bunter, entering Study No. 7, broke off with a blink of consternation. And small wonder. For Mabs, still



Ribbon bows are one of the easiest of trimmings to make—and one of the smartest, too.

HAVE you noticed that bows of ribbon seem to be all over the place this spring? I've seen them on handbags, on shoes—and even on coats.

And to think that at one time the only place where one could wear a bow was on the hair! All the same, I managed to wear two then—in spite of the fact that it took nearly a quarter of an hour every night to wind them around my bed-post so that they were fresh and crease-free in the morning.

But to-day you can wear bows with carefree charm on your frocks—your day frocks at that.

These, here, are "mock" bows—that is to say, they're economical, and don't require as much ribbon to make as the ordinary bow would.

Half a yard of ribbon will make two beauties.

MOST ECONOMICAL

Cut your ribbon in half and run a gather through the middle of each piece. Cover this little gather with a snipping from one end of the ribbon. No one will then dream you've been so cunning, and when sewn on to the neck of your frock, they'll look most extravagant—as well as very charming.

A little more reckless is the other idea. You'll require three quarters of a yard of ribbon for this.

Then make three bows. Sew one to the sleeves of your dress, and perch the other cheerily in the top of your beret.

You'll find them most fashionably flattering!

BOWS CAN GO ANYWHERE

thing like so good as Mabs was. She seemed to just make the princess live, you know."

Which, everybody considered, was a real sporting tribute on Clarice's part, and had the effect of sending Clarice bounding in the estimation of all who heard it—except, perhaps, Bessie Bunter, who, of all those girls, knew exactly the type of creature Clarice Dyson could be. She blinked.

"But I sus-say," she said, "Clarice is not fair—"

"Neither are you. You're dark!" June Merritt chuckled. "Now pipe down, and let's get on with it!"

And Bessie, suppressed, unwillingly piped down. The rehearsal, started afresh, was gone through again, this time with shining-eyed Clarice in the leading role, doing her utmost to impress, and Madge Stevens, a little nervous, playing up to her.

While not far away, in the silence of Study No. 7, Mabs was sitting at the table, her golden head on her arms, her shoulders shaking as she sobbed.

Not for the first time, since the coming of Clarice, Mabs felt a wild longing to run away from Cliff House. And all because of Clarice's son!

sitting at the table, was sobbing as if her heart was breaking.

"Mabs!" said Bessie weakly. "For a moment it seemed that Mabs had not heard. She hadn't. For once in a way forlorn Bessie had opened the door rather quietly.

For Bessie had just come from the music-room rehearsal, having said her extremely short piece, to commiserate with her chum upon the meanness of their common enemy's latest move.

But Bessie had not expected to see Mabs like this—broken, quivering, sobbing her heart out on the table of Study No. 7.

It raised within Bessie the queerest of emotions.

"Mabs—Mabs, old thing!" she gulped.

Mabs, at that, did look up. She looked up, crimson and confused, hastily dashing the tears from her eyes, flinging round in fierce defiance.

But when she saw Bessie she gulped. "Oh, Bessie, please—please shut the door!"

"Yes, Mabs," Bessie said thinly, and, her fat face very woebegone and troubled, came further into the room.

"Oh dud-dear!" she sighed. "Oh goodness, you know, I—I'm not crying, really, Mabs. A big Bunter nun-never cries, but—o-o-oh!" And to Mabs' consternation Bessie burst into tears.

"Bessie!"

If anything were needed to give her strength it was that. Bessie, tender-hearted old chump that she was, standing there, in tears. And, in truth, Bessie was amazed at herself.

She had not had the faintest intention of crying when she entered the study, but sight of Mabs' distress had so violently affected her that now she simply could not help herself.

Mabs gulped.

"Bessie—Bessie, darling!" And Mabs dashed the tears from her own eyes.

"Bessie, you goose!" she said trembling. "Bessie, you silly old thing! Here, sit down. Sit down by—the fire. Now, Bessie—Bessie, darling, do give over, please! What are you crying about?"

"Oh crumbs! I dud-don't know!" Bessie weakly sobbed. "But—but when I—I sus-say, you know—feverishly she dabbed the tears in her eyes—"I kirk can't bear to sus-see you so upset. Mabs! And all through that kik-cat Clarice! But I'm better now," Bessie confessed.

"Not, of course, that I—I really was crying at all, you know. That was—was just my asthma. It comes on like that sus-sometimes."

Mabs smiled mistily.

"Dear old thing!" she said. "Have some tea, Bessie?"

"Thank-thanks! That's jolly nice of you! But," Bessie said, "oh, Mabs, did you know?"

"I know what, old thing?"

"They've given your part to Clarice."

Mabs winced.

"Have they?"

"Yes, they have." And Bessie, her tears forgotten, flamed afresh with rage. "It's a shame, Mabs, a jolly shame! And Babs, you know, let them do it."

"Perhaps," Mabs gently suggested, "Babs couldn't help herself, Bessikins."

"Well, perhaps she couldn't," Bessie considered, a little mollified. "All the same, that cat just asked for the part. I was there. She just jolly well wanted to make everything a awful mess for you, Mabs, and sus-so, after getting you out of it, she grabbed the part for herself. It's not fair!" Bessie proclaimed bitterly. "It isn't jolly well fair! Mabs, why don't you insist on taking the part?"

"Because," Mabs said gently, "if Clarice is acting in the play, Bessie, I just don't want it."

"Well, why don't you demand that Clarice jolly well be taken out of it?" Bessie demanded fiercely.

But Mabs shook her head. She wanted the part, yes; but she couldn't act in it, not while she had to face Clarice—Clarice with her spitefully sly digs, her veiled hostility. She would much rather be out of it.

But Bessie, who felt most keenly and strongly on the matter, had other views. Perhaps of all the girls in Cliff House only Bessie Bunter guessed what Mabs had suffered at the new girl's hands.

But Bessie was fed-up. Bessie had been dangerously near being fed-up ever since, through Clarice Dyson's device, she had been turned out of Study No. 4 a fortnight ago. Somebody, Bessie vowed grimly, had jolly well got to put a stop to Clarice Dyson's artfulness.

But who?

Well—Bessie paused—why not herself? It was a Bunter's duty, surely, to nip this sort of thing in the bud. It wouldn't have been so bad if Clarice's

spite had stopped with her, but to see Mabs suffer—

She rose suddenly, a look of unusual determination on her face. She blinked at Mabs.

"Why, Bessie, you're not going?" Mabs asked, in surprise.

"Yes, I am!" Bessie said fiercely.

"But the tea—"

"I—I'll kik-come back for tea."

And Bessie valiantly marched towards the door.

Mabs gazed after her. She smiled tenderly.

Up the passage tramped Bessie. The rehearsal in the music-room had finished now, and she was just in time to see Clarice go into her study as she strode along. Her grey eyes gleamed. She reached the door and flung it open.

"Here, I say, you new girl!" she cried.

Clarice was stooping over the fire, which had gone rather low. She paused with a piece of coal between the tongs, to stare in astonishment at the belligerent fat one.

"Hallo, fatty!" she cried. "You kirk talking to me?"

"Yes, I juj-jolly well was!"

"Well, thanks for having said so much. Close the door after you."

But Bessie stood her ground. Bessie was on the warpath now.

"Look here—"

"Oh, buzz off!"

"I won't buzz off!" Bessie said defiantly. "I've jolly well come here to tell you what I think of you. It's all very well you getting me pushed out of this study, and all that, but when you try to hurt old Mabs you've got me to reckon with!"

"Really?" sneered Clarice, and laughed.

"Yes, really!" Bessie said stoutly. "I know you, Clarice Dyson. Here, I say!" she added, in sudden apprehension. "What are you doing?"

But it was quite plain what Clarice Dyson was doing. With sudden irritability she lifted the tongs above her head. The tongs shot forward and outward, releasing the piece of coal they contained.

Just in the nick of time Bessie ducked as the lump, whining over her head, struck the wall opposite with a crash. There came an exclamation from somebody in the corridor.

"Why, what ever—"

"Babs!" shrieked Bessie, wheeling round. "Babs! You saw she threw that coal at me!"

Babs it was, returning a little later than the rest of the cast from the music-room, where she had been making arrangements for other rehearsals to culminate in a final grand dress rehearsal on the following Wednesday.

She stared in amazement at Clarice.

"Clarice!" she cried.

"I—I didn't!" The ready lie bubbled to Clarice's lips at once. But there must have been something in the sudden confusion of her face which made Babs gaze at her sharply again. "That fat duffer!" she spluttered.

"Wait a minute!" Babs shook her head. "Bessie may be a duffer, but that's not the way to talk to her, Clarice. And you might have hurt her, throwing that piece of coal at her!"

"But I didn't throw it at her!" Clarice cried.

"Why, you great fibber!" gasped Bessie.

"All right! All right!" Babs, rather harassed, came into the room. "Clarice," she said, "I saw that piece of coal come out of the study. It was meant for Bessie!"

Clarice pouted. "Well, that's not to say I meant to hit her with it."

"Why did you throw it, then?" Babs asked quietly.

"Nothing. Only—only just to scare her."

"I see!" But Babs' lips pursed. She was tired—tired of this bickering. "It wasn't a very nice thing to do, though, was it?" she asked. "Supposing you hadn't missed her?"

"Oh, well!" Clarice said impatiently, and bit her lip. She felt irritated all at once—irritable really because, for once, she had no glib defence to cover up her spite. "Of course, if you take that fat duffer's word against mine—"

"Who are you calling a fuff-fuff duffer?" Bessie glowered from the doorway.

"Thanks, Bessie, don't say any more—please!" Babs begged. "That's enough. The matter's dropped now, but please, Clarice, do be more careful. Bessie, if you'd like to do me a favour, you might run to the tuckshop and buy me a cake—here's the shilling!" And she gave the fat one that amount, at which Bessie gladly scooted off.

But Clarice, frowning sulkily, dropped the poker and shrugged.

"I shan't want any tea, Babs!"

"Why ever not?" Babs asked.

"Well, since—since—" And Clarice bit her lip.

"Don't like to feel that—if you don't mind"—and here the ready tears came into her eyes—"I won't have tea at all. I—I don't feel like it."

And as if to prevent herself from breaking down in front of Babs, she quickly clapped her hands to her eyes and bolted from the study.

Babs looked after her, shaking her head. Her heart was heavy.

For once she had neither zest nor enthusiasm. She was still thinking of the scene in the music-room—of Mabs rushing out in that sudden storm of fiery passion.

Oh, this quarrelling and endless trouble between her and Clarice! Now Clarice herself, giving the first faint tinge of truth to those accusations which Mabs had so often made. Babs, always generous, allowed that Clarice might have acted in a moment of impetuosity. But how helpless, she felt, to argue with the girl, when she was so ready to melt into tears.

And the play, too—Clarice, in spite of her earnestness, was not as good in Mabs' part as Mabs herself. Oh, bother the whole wretched business!

She did not get herself tea. She felt suddenly she had no heart for it. She looked at her illuminated address, sighed, and without any enthusiasm picked up her brushes again.

Bessie Bunter looked on.

"I sus-say, Babs, I've got your cake."

"Have you?" Babs smiled faintly. "That's a good old kid! Well, you can have it, Bessie!"

"Eh? But—oh, crumbs, Babs, did you really mean that?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I sus-say—" And Bessie, overwhelmed, hugged herself. "Aren't you having tea, Babs?"

"No! Please don't bother me, Bessie. I want to get on with this."

And Bessie, with one wondering stare at her chum, departed.

Meanwhile, Clarice Dyson had tripped along the corridor. Magical the change which overcame her tearful face the moment she had skipped past the door of Study No. 4. A smile appeared where before had been a pout; her eyes shone with sudden malicious mischief. What a fool Babs was! She knew

now that she would worry over that tiff—and, thought Clarice vindictively, serve her right!

For Clarice was in high feather. All Clarice's schemes since she had been at Cliff House for a short time while her father had gone abroad had prospered. She had sworn to wreck the friendship in Study No. 4—she had, with a cunningness that gave her infinite pleasure brought that about!

Mabel Lynn and Bessie Bunter, her hated enemies, she had vanquished—as surely and as utterly as if she had got them both expelled from the school.

Babs, whom she had set out to fool, was still being fooled—and, in spite of everything, she was enjoying that good time which she had vowed, upon her entry to Cliff House, to have.

Now—what a lark!—she had collared

set the school alight, you'll have your work cut out to get the piece shipshape by the day of the show. And your sweet little Babs, loving you as she does, isn't the one to let you slack now, you know. Rather not! Which," Lydia added thoughtfully, "brings me to another point."

"Oh, yes!" Clarice cried. "Rosa, pass the salad, will you? I'm famished!"

"On Wednesday next," Lydia said,

remember, we met him at the Lanthan Assembly Rooms?"

"I struck up a friendship with him then. He told me this would be coming off. Of course"—Lydia coughed—"I asked him straight away to send tickets, and he said he would—for you, for Rosa, for Freda, and myself. There they are. But, too bad," she added mockingly, "you can't come, Clarry."

"Yes, too bad, isn't it!" Clarice muttered. "But you think I'm going to miss it? Private view—eh? Why, goodness gracious, I wouldn't miss it for anything!"

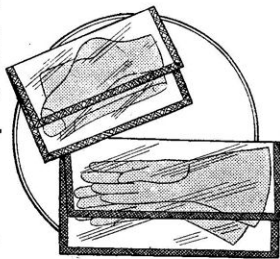
"But the rehearsal?" Lydia asked.

"Blow the rehearsal!"

"But what will you say to Babs?"

"I," Clarry replied contemptuously, "shall say nothing to Babs. Why

ORDER AMONG—



—THE ODDMENTS

It's a pleasure to be tidy with these cellophane bags to hold your garments.

WITH spring-cleaning in the air, I'm sure mother has asked you once or twice lately: "What about tidying up your room, dear? And as for that chest of drawers—" She's almost overcome at the thought.

There are undies in the hankie drawer, belts in the jersey and blouse compartment—and stockings everywhere they shouldn't be. While, your gloves— There's one on the hall-stand, and another in the pocket of your blazer.

Naughty, naughty! But I'm not really cross, and you'll admit it's rather suspicious that I should know so much about it! You see, I'm just as bad myself!

But being grown up, I've decided that the only way to cure myself is to have periodic tidy-ups (or should it be tidies-up?)

And I had what I thought was a

cute idea for organising a little order among the oddments—so I'm passing it on to you.

TO BUY—OR MAKE

You can see what I'm getting at from the little picture here. These cellophane bags are just the things for keeping the "smalls" in—the things that will insist on losing their place among the general scheme.

Of course, they can be bought—they can almost as easily be made.

Did you know you can buy cellophane by the yard—from the "threepenny and sixpenny," too?

For a case to hold your gloves you'll need a piece measuring about sixteen inches by fourteen.

Fold it envelope wise—but without a point—and bind the edges with glued-on ribbon or tape.

Then tuck your gloves into this every time you take them off and you'll be able to see at a glance just which ones are there.

The stocking-case will need a piece of cellophane measuring fourteen by ten inches.

And so you can go on. I should certainly make one for belts, and possibly another one or two for those best, silky undies that aren't worn on every occasion.

These cases also make the most welcome present. If you know any one who's thinking of getting married—and lots of grown-ups do around Easter-time, don't they?—I'm sure a bride would appreciate a set of these enormously.

For not only does it mean no more frantic search in looking for precious "sets" of things—but it also means they're kept gloriously dust-free.

that hated Mabs' part in the play. She had the Fourth literally at her feet.

In high feather she flounced into Study No. 1, that apartment shared by the languid Lydia Crossendale, Freda Ferrier, and the Stormy Petrel, Rosa Rodworth. The trio were at tea.

"Come in!" Lydia invited cordially. "Shut the door, Freda. Come in, Clarry! Like some tea? Or are you teaing with dear Barbara?"

"No, thanks; got out of that!" Clarice laughed. "Babs is a bit livid at the moment because I heaved a chunk of coal at Bessie Bunter. But never mind Babs. You saw the play?"

"Yes, rather?"

"Was I good?"

"Were you good!" Lydia chuckled. "You were marvellous! Really marvellous! Not so much in the part, of course, but in the way you got it. What exactly did you do to Mabel to make her so upset?"

Clarice laughed.

"But"—Lydia frowned—"you've let yourself in for it, Clarry. Righteous and commendable as the impulse is to

"which is a half-holiday, there is going to be a rehearsal, isn't there?"

"Eh? Oh, yes! A dress rehearsal. That's two days before the show itself."

"A pity," sighed Lydia.

"Eh?"

"Well, it is, because"—and Lydia, with a shake of the head, fished something out of her handbag and passed it across the table. "Too, too bad!" she murmured. "Those are invitation cards."

Clarice blinked. But she hardly needed to be told that. She was reading those invitation cards.

"Mr. Herbert Greatbanks requests the pleasure of your company at a party to be held as a private view of his new film, 'Starry Highways,' at the Enterprise Studios. Tea will be served during the film and an informal dance and entertainment will be held afterwards."

Her eyes flamed.

"Lydia, who did you get these?"

Lydia chuckled.

"From Mr. Greatbanks, the famous film star himself," she said. "You

should I? I'm going, I tell you! Babs and the rehearsal can go to pot! I'm out," Clarice stated distinctly, "for a jolly good time, and I'm going to have a good time—especially as I'm not likely to be at this school much longer. But keep it dark, of course!"

"Oh, of course!" Lydia mockingly agreed, and winked at her companions.



The Dawn of Doubt

AND go Clarice did, saying never a word to Babs, in the interim, of her intention, never by so much as a word or a hint letting the considerably worried captain of the Fourth guess that she would not be on hand when the most important Wednesday afternoon rehearsal took place.

Clarice meant to have a good time. It was amusing, in the interval of having that good time, to play and act and

quarrel with Mabel Lynn and Bessie Bunter. Amusing to deceive Babs and pose as something of a heroine in front of the Form.

But Clarry really didn't care a snap of the fingers for any of them, and certainly not enough to allow them to interfere in the smallest degree with her own personal pleasures.

From the moment she saw those invitation cards she set her heart upon going to the film studies.

In the meantime, however, to keep up appearances, she worked. No denying, she worked hard. It was obvious that she never, never would be as good as Mabs in the part of Princess Karina, but her rendering of it was good, and it was certainly not likely to let the show down.

Next day, after lessons, there was rehearsal. On the Saturday there was one. On Wednesday.

Barbara, after lessons, fluttered anxiously round the studies, collecting her cast.

She was a trifle worried when she went into Study No. 7.

"Clara, Janet, Marjorie," she said, "rehearsal in ten minutes. Oh, Mabs!"

"Yes?" Mabs replied, a little stiffly.

"I—I suppose you wouldn't care to come and give us the benefit of your advice? I'm rather in the dark about some parts of the production."

"Will Clarice be there?" Mabs asked.

"Well, yes, of course!"

"Then how is it that she's just gone out with Lydia, Freda, and Rosa?"

Babs stared.

"What, not Clarry?"

Mabs shrugged.

"They went out five minutes ago. I was standing by the window, and I saw them. Still, they may only be going a little way—or Clarry, perhaps, may only have accompanied them as far as the gates. If she's at the rehearsal, I don't think I will come, if it's all the same to you, Babs. I don't want any more scenes. If not—"

But Babs' heart gave a leap at that. If not—oh, no, Clarry wouldn't, couldn't let them down. The whole piece depended upon her!

Hurriedly she ran along to the other studies, collected the cast, and dashed into the music-room at the appointed hour. But no Clarry Dyson was there.

"Oh, she can't have let us down!" Babs cried.

But it soon became patent that Clarry had let them down. Five, ten, fifteen minutes went by, by which time the players were becoming restive. But obviously the play could not go on without the princess.

"Well!" Clara said. "Oh, bother it! Never mind Clarry. Babs, fetch Mabs."

"What's this? Who's talking about me?" came a voice, and Mabs herself appeared in the doorway. "What? Not started yet?" she cried. "Hast! Clarice turned up, Babs?"

"No," Babs said worriedly. "Oh dear, Mabs, I wonder if you'd help us out?"

Mabs' face overshadowed. "I don't think," she said, looking round, "that my taking Clarice's part is going to help you out at all, Babs. The rehearsal, I gather, was originally arranged for Clarice's benefit, as she had the biggest and the most difficult part to play."

"Well, yes," Babs admitted.

"So—"

"Oh, for goodness' sake stop prattling!" Clara cried. "Give Mabs the part! Let Mabs have it back. Would you take it, Mabs?"

Mabs flushed.

"On conditions," she replied.

"And those?"

"That," Mabs said distinctly, "I play the part on Miss Fielding's birthday!"

There was a pause. Girls looked questioningly at each other. For once Clarry was not in favour. Everybody knew by this time that she had gone out with the Co. from Study No. 1, and as everybody else had been willing to put their own pleasure on one side for the benefit of the rehearsal, they considered, very rightly, that Clarry should have made a similar sacrifice. Moreover, they knew Mabs could do the part. They knew she could do it better than Clarry.

Calmly Mabs waited. Her heart, however, was pounding. Would she get her chance again? She wanted it, if only because it would mean a closer liaison between herself and Babs.

But she was not going to be dragged in to fill the gap which Clarry made. Moreover, she felt that Clarry, having let the rehearsal down once, would not

hesitate, if it interfered with her own whims, to let it down a second time.

Babs looked round.

"Well," she asked, "are we all agreed?"

"Yes!" came the chorus.

And so Mabs, once again, was reinstated.

SMOOTHLY, SLICKLY the rehearsal went. So astonishingly smoothly, indeed, that Babs, in her role of producer, hardly had occasion to interrupt proceedings at all.

No doubt about it that Mabs was just made for the part of the princess. She seemed to infuse enthusiasm into everybody, to bring out the very best in all of them.

Once, twice they ran through it, and even then finished ahead of scheduled time. Madge Stevens of the Third was entranced.

"Oh Mabs," she said, "that was lovely. 'I never seemed to be able to do the peasant girl properly playing opposite Clarice, but with you—'" And she laughed. "Mabs, you won't let them take it away from you again?"

"No fear," Mabs said.

And she meant that. Not, indeed, that there was likely to be any question on that score. Babs especially was delighted. Being with Mabs that afternoon, talking to her, listening to her advice on certain points, all the shadows that had fallen between them had melted away once more. Again Mabs was her own joyful self, happy in close contact with the girl she loved better than any other on earth, willing to forget everything just in sharing the happiness of Babs' company.

And next to Mabs, Bessie was happy, too. She beamed.

"Oh crumbs! Oh, I sus-say, you know, it's just like old times. Babs, I wonder if Miss Primrose would give me permission to have tea with you in Study No. 4?"

"Why, you haven't been invited," Babs laughed.

"No, but if you only asked her—"

Bessie wheedled.

So Babs went to Miss Primrose. Miss Primrose, in a good humour, gave permission at once.

She even went so far as to say that if, by the end of the week, Bessie's good behaviour was maintained, she might move back permanently into Study No. 4—news which the fat one received with a gurgle of delight.

And to Mabs and Bessie's vast delight, tea was partaken in Study No. 4—a merry tea, all eager talk of the play, of Babs' illuminated address, which, after nearly a fortnight's work, was now nearing completion.

Never once even a reference to Clarry Dyson. Just like the old happy times! But if Clarry was not mentioned, she was very near to Babs' thoughts. She was wondering, wondering. It dawned upon her suddenly what a lot she had missed since Mabs had left the study.

This Mabs—her Mabs, radiant, happy, tender. Ah, this was the girl she knew and loved, the girl she had always believed could never be different!

Extraordinary that Mabs should have changed so much with the arrival of Clarry Dyson. That had been one of the biggest surprises and shocks of Babs' whole career at Cliff House.

Could there, after all, have been something in Mabs' contention that Clarry acted like a spitfire towards her behind her back?

But no—no!

Yet—again Babs remembered the

You Can While Away a Wet Afternoon by

MAKING A MINIATURE GARDEN

WHAT a lovely present a miniature garden would make for a grown-up relation!

The garden itself is just an oval-shaped brown earthenware dish such as you see every day in the kitchen at home.

Scatter a handful of pebbles in the bottom and then fill the dish three-quarters of the way up with soil.

A few moss-covered stones—you can get these from the woods—piled high at one side will suggest a hill, and be careful to pack them firmly with plenty of soil, won't you?

A MOSSY "LAWN"

If you can find sufficient moss to cover the soil in the "valley," so much the better, otherwise you will have to set a handful of grass seed, and the lucky recipient will have the fun of watching it grow daily and

cutting it down occasionally to keep it tidy.

Buy one or two of the tiniest plants and set them on your hillside, and on the extreme top you can plant an acorn, but be sure to soak it in water for a few days before you plant it.

If you've crocus plants in the garden you can very carefully unearth one or two and transplant them to give a splash of colour later on.

With a handful of sand you can make a winding path up the hillside, and at the foot you can put a pond, made from a small mirror, with, perhaps, a tiny duck skimming the surface.

You can buy china fowls and animals quite cheaply.

Heaps of other ideas will suggest themselves to you once you get to work on your miniature landscape garden.

Bessie Bunter incident. And again, why had Clarice let down the rehearsal without a word of warning?

For the first time Babs began to feel a tremor of doubt. Surely if Clarice had been called away she could have left some message?

Still, never mind. She could tackle Clarice about it when she came in.

Clarice, however, did not come in until a few minutes before call-over. Mabs and Bessie had left the study then to busy themselves with prep—a labour which Babs, privileged to spend extra time on the illuminated address, was excused. She came in rather breathless, rather flushed, a gay smile upon her lips and her eyes kindling.

Babs, seated at the easel, swung round.

"Clarry!"

"Babs!" Clarry cried, and went forward, hugging her. "Oh, my goodness! Babs, have you missed me?"

"Where have you been?" Babs asked.

"Eh?" Clarry pouted. "Oh, Babs, don't look at me as if I'd done something wrong. You know very well where I've been. Didn't you get my message?"

"Your message?"

"Why, of course! I asked Mabel Lynn to give it to you."

"Oh!" Babs said, and stopped. Mabs! Mabs had given her no message. Had Mabs deliberately withheld that information from her?

Clarice grinned. It was a clever fib, she told herself, made up, as it was, on the spur of the moment. She said:

"Why, where do you think I've been, Babs?"

"You were seen going out with Lydia & Co.," Babs told her.

"Oh, yes, but, of course, I didn't go all the way with them," Clarice retorted carelessly. "Lydia & Co. went to Courtfield, you know. I went to Friardale—to visit little Ivy Greene. You see, Babs, I received a letter from Ivy this morning. I meant to show it to you, but forgot it. She asked me especially to go over this afternoon, and—it was silly of me, I know, but I didn't remember until the last moment—and then, when I tried to find you, I couldn't. So, I just left the message in the study and packed off."

"In the study?" Babs cried. "But you told me you gave it to Mabel Lynn."

"Oh!" Clarice bit her lip. She had not been thinking as clearly as usual. She was still thinking of the excitement of Herbert Greatbanks' party. (What a really glorious party it had been!) "Oh, did I did I say the study?" she asked. "That—that was a slip. But—but, oh, Babs, I'm fearfully sorry about the rehearsal. How did it go off?"

"Another girl took your place."

"Oh, I say! Did she know the part?"

"Yes," Babs said.

"Did she do it very well?"

"Very well indeed," Babs said.

"Well, thank goodness for that," Clarice gushed. "You know, Babs, I've been worrying ever so about the rehearsal. But, I say, I must do my prep. Babs, darling, give me a hand off with this coat, will you?"

All bright—all animated was Clarice. She was evidently pleased. She did not, Babs thought, look as if she were sorry about having missed the rehearsal. And there was that fib. Why had Clarice said that she had given a message to Mabel Lynn, and then contradicted the statement by saying she had left it on the study table? Babs found her heart hardening a little.



"I TELL you, I'm going to the party," Clarice said vehemently. "Babs and the rehearsal can go to pot!" It mattered nothing to Clarice that her selfish resolve might ruin the Fourth Form play.

"Babs, help me off with the coat," Clarice cried. "The sleeves are so tight. One, two, three!"

And she laughed gaily as she plunged forward, and Babs, pulling back, staggered a little, finding the coat falling about her. She lifted it; handed it to Clarry.

"Thanks, Babs!" That girl laughed. "Phew! Isn't it a weight? Now I'll just go and pop this in the cloak-room, shall I, and then I'll come back? And you must tell me all about things. Won't be long," she added gaily.

And she darted away, while Babs, shaking her head, turned to re-seat herself at the easel. As she did so a piece of pasteboard lying on the floor caught her eye.

It was a crumpled, soiled piece of pasteboard, and it had obviously dropped from Clarry's coat pocket. It said:

"Mr. Herbert Greatbanks requests the pleasure of your company—"

And the date was to-day. The time 4 p.m.

Babs drew in a deep breath. So that was where Clarice had been! Clarice out seeking her own pleasure, ready to lie about it as soon as ever she came in.

Something seemed suddenly to slip in Babs' brain. It was as though some shutter had moved aside, revealing for the first time a glimpse of that other Clarice. The fibber, the deceiver, the schemer, who had set up the barrier between herself and Mabel Lynn. Her eyes flashed; then her face became deathly pale.

Clarice—Clarice! How could a girl be so wicked?

And yet Babs, ever ready to see all sides of a question, paused. Definitely her suspicions were aroused. The pasteboard seemed to speak for itself,

But, she reflected, after all, mightn't Clarice have picked that up somewhere? Might she have carelessly slipped it into her pocket?

What would she say if confronted with it? Just, of course, deny all knowledge of it. She could hardly do anything else after having fibbed her excuses already.

Babs set her lips. Very deliberately she folded the card and put it into her own pocket. Well, she was warned now. Oh, fool that she had been not to see this before! But she wasn't sure—not quite. She'd watch Clarry, she resolved.

Clarice came back.

"Well, there we are," she cried. "All ready, Babs?"

"Some tea, old thing?"

"No, thank you!" Babs said.

"Still getting on with the old illuminated address? I say, it does look topping!" Clarry prattled enthusiastically. "By the way, Babs, what about the next rehearsal? When are we having that?"

Babs swivelled slowly.

"Clarry, I might as well tell you, you're not in the play."

"Oh, Babs!"

"The girl who took your part—"

"Oh, was she good?" Clarice asked, and dimpled, not a bit dismayed apparently to hear that news. On the contrary she was secretly very, very relieved. For Herbert Greatbanks had invited her and Lydia over to his own private house to-morrow after lessons, and she had been rather worrying as to what excuse she could make to get out of rehearsals. "Babs, I'm so glad, because, of course, if she was good,"

Clarry said, "she'll want the part herself."

"Yes," Babs admitted.

"Then—then—" Clarry pouted.

"Well, I don't know. I do like to be fair, Babs. And, bother it! I did let you down, didn't I? If she took my place she ought to have the part, you know. Although"—ruefully—"that's rather cutting off my own nose. But I don't mind, Babs—no really."

Babs blinked. Again she found herself floundering. How very sweet! How very sporting of Clarice that was! Certainly, not the attitude of a girl who was so always out for her own ends. Certainly not the words of a fibber, a schemer, the deceiver she had almost persuaded herself that Clarry must be.

Again she wavered against her own judgment, asking herself fiercely if she was wrong, and not guessing at that moment that Clarry was fighting her own sly battles. She looked at her wonderingly.

"The other girl," she stated, "is Mabel Lynn."

Clarry winced. Then she smiled. "Oh, is she? Oh, I'm so glad!" she gushed. "Better than I was—much! Well, perhaps that'll help Mabs to forget her troubles. I'll run along and congratulate her, shall I?"

And without waiting for a reply she darted off, leaving Babs filled with complete bewilderment, and telling herself, despite the voice of caution which whispered in her ear, that there must be some mistake. Clarry could never, never reconcile this behaviour with the attitude of Mabel Lynn's scheming enemy.



None Must Know

BUT Clarice Dyson never reached Mabel Lynn's study, though she really had intended to visit Mabel. For once Clarice really was grateful to Mabel Lynn—grateful, in the first place, because, having tired of the play, she had no further wish to bother herself with boring rehearsals.

But more than ever grateful because the intercession of Mabs meant she was free to-morrow to pay the proposed and exciting visit to Herbert Greatbanks.

Never before had Clarice visited a real film star in his own home, and she was thrilled with the prospect. And Mabel Lynn—silly, idiotic Mabel—above all others had made that visit possible.

Yes, very grateful was Clarice. She cared nothing for the play, nothing for Babs—nothing for anything or anybody who came between her and her own pleasures, and to make a clean break away from the play would solve all her problems.

So pleased was she, indeed, that she was almost prepared to be nice to Mabel, and probably would have been had not Margot Lantham come up the corridor at that moment. Margot had a letter in her hand.

"Oh, here you are, Clarry!" she said. "I was just bringing this to you."

"Oh, thanks!"

Clarry took the letter. She glanced at the French stamp upon it. Then her heart knew a leap as she recognised the handwriting—the neat characters of her father's hand. Her father in France—writing to her!

She slit it open.

And then she scowled.

"Dear Clarry," the letter com-

menced—"I am extraordinarily pleased with the good reports I have received from Miss Primrose about you during my absence, and I am more pleased than I can tell you to hear that you have been elected to play the principal part in the play which is to be given at the school on Friday.

"As my business on the Continent has been rushed through rather sooner than I expected, I find that I am free to return to England almost at once, and I shall certainly avail myself of your headmistress' very kind invitation to come along and see you in the play. As you will remember, Clarry, I promised if you behaved yourself at Cliff House that you should have the world cruise, upon which you have set your heart, upon my return.

"It is a pleasure indeed to find that you can keep a promise at last, and provided that I hear no bad reports of you when I meet Miss Primrose, I shall have the greatest of pleasure in rewarding you as I promised."

"Oh, great goodness!" Clarice gasped.

She had not expected this—not this! Her father, the old gate-crasher, returning almost immediately! Her father, puffed with pride, expecting her to be in the principal role of the play! He was coming here! He would find her, not in it, but in it!

Clarice at once saw her danger. Deceive others she might, but her father—no! He would want to know why she had been dropped. He, if anybody, would find out the truth, and once he started investigating her activities at Cliff House, what might not come out?

Panic seized Clarice. In a moment she had reacted to the situation. What a goof she had been to let the part go! But never mind! The cause was by no means lost yet. It would be easy enough, she thought, to get round Babs, to get the part back.

But it wasn't. For, when returning to Study No. 4, she told Babs she had changed her mind, Babs looked her very straightly in the face.

"Clarry, I'm sorry. But I've promised Mabs."

"But, bother it, Mabs won't mind."

"Mabs will mind—very, very much." Clarice felt baffled. Well, what now? She'd got to do something. She must do something. Somehow, she'd got to get Mabs out of it. If Mabs were out of it, her own reinstatement would be almost automatic, as she was the only other girl in the Form who was word perfect.

Desperately she set her wits to work. But what could she do? There seemed two courses of action open to her—two courses only. One was to land Mabs into some dreadful trouble which would mean detention on the day of the play. The other, wildly enough, was to lure her away and shut her up in some place.

Both of them bristled with difficulties. And, most unexpectedly, Barbara seemed to be on her guard at last. No doubt but that Babs' attitude towards her had undergone a change.

Clarice scowled. Oh goodness! What was she to do?

Meantime, Mabs was working feverishly to finish off the illuminated address. It required just a few touches now.

Mabs, happy, enthusiastic, flung herself into the work of preparation with characteristic zest and terrific energy. There were long consultations with Babs. How Mabs loved those, and how

Clarice scowled to see them both together! Advice from Babs, instructions from Mabs, Mabs, anxious to relieve her chum of as many responsibilities as possible, did everything.

Except one thing—and that she discovered at break the following morning. In dismay, she flew into Study No. 4, where Babs, having finished the illumination, was rolling it up and sealing it with ribbons and wax, while Clarice broodingly looked on.

"Oh, Babs," Mabs cried, "my dress!"

Babs blinked.

"Your what?"

"My dress. You remember, I haven't a purple dress for the character of the princess. I said I'd dye my white one. Babs, I wonder, would you—could you give me a hand?"

"Why, of course," Babs said. "Just a tick, Mabs, old thing!"

She went out without even a glance at Clarice.

Oh, it was good to see Mabs in this merry mood again—good to be doing things with her! In glee, they scurried to the cloak-room together, where Babs prepared the water and mixed the dye. "Now," Babs said, "in it goes, Mabs."

In it went. Together they stirred and plunged the garment. Then they withdrew it, let the water run from it, and Mabs held it up, all wet and dripping, for Babs' inspection.

Babs shook her head.

"Pretty feeble!" was her verdict.

"More mauve than purple."

"Goodness! You mean the dye's not strong enough?" Mabs asked.

"Yes."

"Then—then—"

"Supposing," Babs asked, "we mixed some indelible ink with it?"

The idea—good old Babs! Trust her to get round the question. Oh Mabs flew, returning presently with a bottle of the indelible. That, added to the water, certainly did make a difference. Babs smiled.

"Well, that should do," she said. "But—Oh goodness! Look at our hands! Mabs, I vote we leave the dress to soak during afternoon lessons. It should have taken a good colour by that time."

And leave it to soak they did. After lessons they flew to the cloak-room again. Mabs could have shrieked her delight when they took the dress out again—it really was a glorious purple. But when she made to wring it, Babs shook her head.

"No, old thing, I wouldn't. It would only cause it to dry patchy and streaky. The best plan is to hang it up just as it is and let it drip until it's practically dry. Then you can iron it." "But that means," Mabs objected, "that it won't be ready till to-morrow."

But, as Babs pointed out, it couldn't be helped. At Babs' suggestion they took the dress in its bowl of dye down to the kitchens, and there, after obtaining permission from Mrs. Carey, the housekeeper, hung it up in the drying-room, with the bowl placed on the floor beneath it to catch the drips.

So that was settled. And now the stage was all set for to-morrow.

Clarice, meantime, was growing frantic. All sorts of desperate ideas she was turning over and rejecting, foreseeing in most of them disaster to herself. To get Mabs out of the play! She must get Mabs out of the play! But how—how?

To-morrow came. Still her mind was not made up. At eleven o'clock the

birthday celebrations would start, with the production of the play, and an early telegram from her father informed her that he expected to arrive at Cliff House from London about ten a.m.

Oh, heavens! She thought, what about one last desperate appeal to Mabs? Supposing she could bribe Mabs to let her have the part? Would Mabs—

But Clarice, by that time, was too distraught to think out any plan to its logical conclusion. If Mabs could only be prevailed upon to give up the part to her!

Eagerly she hurried along to Study No. 7 and gasped in relief when she found Mabs there alone. The golden-haired girl turned sharply at her entry. "Mabs?" Clarice gasped.

"Well?"

"Mabs, I—I'm sorry for—for being a beast," Clarice said, with a sincerity which, however, did not deceive Mabs. "I—I just wanted to tell you that I've been feeling rotten about it. I—I'd like to make it up, Mabs."

"Yes?" Mabs asked.

"And—and—" Clarice came farther into the study. "Oh, I know you've cause to hate me," she said. "I'm sorry, Mabs, really. But—but you're not a girl to bear malice."

"Thank you!" Mabs said.

"And—and if you had an opportunity of doing another girl a good turn, you'd do it, wouldn't you, Mabs?"

Mabs smiled queerly.

"Meaning," she guessed, "that you want me to do something for you?"

"Well, yes," Clarice nodded. "Of course, I'll make it worth your while." Mabs' lips curled a little.

"You needn't worry. What is it?"

"Well," Clarice gulped, "it—it's the play, Mabs. You see, my father is coming to see it, and—and he rather expects me to be playing in the lead. Well"—Clarice heaved a deep breath—"I—I can't explain, but—but Mabs, I simply must be in the leading part."

"And so," Mabs said, gazing at her, "you want me to let you have it?"

"X-yes."

"And isn't that just like you check?" Clarice drew back in astonishment.

"But Mabs—Mabs, old thing—"

"Thank you, you needn't put on endearments now," Mabs said scornfully. "It's your own fault you lost the part, in the first place. If you hadn't led the rehearsal down you'd have still been in it. Well, I'm in it, instead, and I mean to stay in. That's all, Clarice!"

And Mabs moved towards the door. Clarice's face whitened.

"Mabs! But I tell you—"

Mabs shrugged. She went out. Clarice, her face livid, followed her into the passage.

"Mabs, listen—"

But Mabs walked on just as if she had never heard. Clarice, desperate and frenzied, followed her, pleading, cajoling, and at times threatening.

Down into the kitchen Mabs went. She entered the drying-room and took her frock from the hook, frowning a little. Oh, good gracious, it was still damp!

Better take it into the study and hang it up in front of the fire, she thought.

She went out, the frock in her hand. Rather anxiously she tripped back up the stairs, passing Clarice with a shrug of the shoulders.

Clarice hit her lip. She followed. Well, she'd got to do something.

At the end of the corridor she hesitated. She saw Mabs go into the study



THE GIRL WHO WAS ALWAYS FIRST

Ruby liked to be first in everything.
But not after one certain occasion!

"MY sister's got a pair of those new shoes, the ones with square heels and toes!" Caroline Smith said excitedly. "They're the very latest, you know!"

Ruby White looked up from the school towel in which her face had been buried. "Had a pair of those two months ago," she spluttered, and then down went her face again.

"Oh!" It was just a flat little noise from Caroline. She'd been longing to describe those shoes in detail. But of course there wasn't much point now.

Nellie Bilgh, who had a reputation for "putting her foot in it"—though she didn't mean to be unkind—couldn't resist mumbled.

"Well, you know Ruby! She's always first with everything!"

Ruby was always the first in her Form to appear in her winter hat at the beginning of the autumn term; she was the first to don the school's new check scarf when it was introduced.

Her name was on top of the charity list every week—her threepence being the first received.

She was the first to know when Miss Barnett, the chemistry mistress, was getting married. She was the first to send flowers.

She was first out of the cloak-room now. "Come along with me to see those heavenly new puppies in old Thurgood's windows?" she asked.

Off they trooped, Caroline, Nellie and the others, with Ruby going first.

The puppies certainly were lovely.

"Look at the cute little, wovey paws," thrilled Caroline.

"Doesn't that tartan collar look sweet on that Scottie!" said Nellie. "I must get one for ours when I've saved up enough."

Ruby broke in. "Oh, they don't cost much," she said, and she didn't mean to sound patronising.

"Ours had a complete set ages ago. I think we were about the first people to think of them."

"If you would be!" Nellie muttered under her breath, but only Caroline heard her, fortunately, and gave her a gentle nudge that meant "shut up, chump!"

Soon they parted, and Ruby and Caroline went on their way homewards.

"Isn't it marvellous about the new swimming pool in the park?" Caroline said. "Doesn't it be heavenly in the summer?"

And then Ruby sighed a tiny sigh. "Wish I could be the first to dive in!"

Caroline looked at her. "Oh, Ruby, you are an old silly!" she said. "They're going to have that champion lady diver to take the first plunge. And the mayor will be there—and the band—and everyone."

"I know," said Ruby. "It's not just because I want to show off in front of all those people. But somehow— Well, wouldn't it be nice just to say I'd been the first—"

"Oh, you're hopeless!"

Caroline shrugged. Really, there was no help for Ruby.

It wasn't that she was really vain; it wasn't that she liked swanking; it was just that she liked to be the one who could clinch almost any discussion by saying she had been first.

"Good-bye, Ruby!"

"Good-bye, Caroline; see you to-morrow!"

THE DAY of the opening of the new swimming pool drew near. Most schoolchildren were to be given a holiday to be present—for the pool had been a special gift to the young people.

"Fancy! A real, live film star, all the way from America coming to perform the opening!"

"And the mayor!"

"And a champion diver!"

"And a free tea!" said the practical Nellie.

"Yes; but the film star's not coming from America specially," said Ruby. "She happens to be in England on holiday."

"Is she?"

"Oh, I didn't know!"

"For how long? Where is she staying?"

Ruby was able to answer all questions, and very happy to do so, especially after having been first with the information.

"She's stopping at the Imperial on Friday—for the opening of the bath," she said. "Arriving on Thursday night."

Thursday came. Ruby usually went to a dancing class on Thursdays, but this time she put it off.

"Got something else to do, girls," she said to the others.

A very hasty tea she snatched.

They gathered up her autograph album and brand-new fountain pen and dashed off to the Imperial Hotel.

It was fun waiting. The porter chatted to her.

He wasn't quite so amiable. "Pretty chilly, waiting, isn't it?" he asked.

"Oh, no!" said Ruby stoutly, but she shivered.

All the same, it was worth it. She'd be the first to have the film star's autograph.

It began to rain.

"Seven o'clock," the hotel porter told her when she asked the time.

Ruby wished she'd brought a mac. Still, it wouldn't be much longer now. Smart cars were crawling up, and early diners began to arrive.

"Not long now," Ruby decided, and she thought longingly of the fire at home. Golly, she was frozen!

"Eight o'clock," said the porter.

A page boy came down the hotel steps and spoke to the porter. He nodded, then looked at Ruby.

"Say, miss," he said, quite kindly, "you'd better trot along home; the film star's sent a message; she won't be here till the morning—"

Dejectedly Ruby went home, and even over the fire she still seemed shivery.

"At nine o'clock the telephone rang.

"For you, Ruby," her mother said.

"Hello, Ruby!" It was Caroline speaking. "What do you think? Oh, I'm sorry you didn't come to-night. Do you know that film star came and watched our dancing class?" It was thrilling. She gave us her autograph all round, and promised us front row seats at the opening to-morrow. And—"

Ruby could only get out a feeble gasp. "Say, miss," she said, quite kindly, "you'd better trot along home; the film star's sent a message; she won't be here till the morning—"

"For you!" Caroline finished.

A little more excitement from Caroline, and she hung up.

THE EMPTY seat for Ruby next day was very near to the film star, the mayor and the champion lady diver.

How Ruby would have loved it. But she was in bed with a feverish chill, and the seat remained empty.

Caroline came to see her in bed.

"The dancing class is giving the film star one of those puppies from Thurgood's," she said. "Would you like to be first to sign the presentation card as you saw the puppies?"

"No, rather not!" said Ruby firmly. "It was your idea; you thought of it first!"

And Caroline flopped down in a chair, helpless with surprise.

with the frock, saw her come out, two minutes later, without it.

Clarice's eyes gleamed suddenly. Supposing—supposing she stole that frock, and hid it?

She waited until Mabs, intent upon borrowing Barbara Redfern's electric



"DIDN'T you get my message?" Clarice asked innocently. Mabs shook her head. "Well, I asked Mabs to give it to you," the new girl went on. Deliberately she was trying to make it appear that Mabs had failed—knowing full well that she had not given Mabs any message!

iron, vanished into Study No. 4. Then quickly she slipped into Study No. 7.

There was the frock, still damp and bedraggled, spread out over a chair in front of the fire. Feverishly Clarice snatched it up, quickly stepping towards the door. There, half in and half out of the study, she waited until the door of Study No. 4 opened again and Mabs came out. Then suddenly she leapt into the corridor.

"Why!" Mabs stared. "My frock! Clarice!"

But Clarice had her scheme in mind now. Mabs must be lured away. Once Mabs was out of the way, the part must be hers. No surer way of luring Mabs than by running off with her frock. She flew.

"Well, my—my hat!" Mabs gasped. "Clarice!"

But Clarice was flying like the wind. Mabs' face set. She did not guess the other's game. Anger filled her suddenly. Without another thought she flew in pursuit. At the bottom of the stairs leading to the dormitories Clarice turned. Mabs, with a yell, flew after her. Up the stairs, two, three at a time. On to the landing above, up another flight, up another—

"Where," Mabs thought, "was the girl going?"

But she stuck to the pursuit.

Now they had reached the attics. Still Clarice did not pause. Along the passage which led to the turret her feet skimmed, Mabs still after her. They were in the highest and loneliest part of the school now. One tiny, narrow flight of stairs stood at the end of the passage, and up these Clarice flew. The breath rasped grimly in Mabs' throat. Well, she had caught her!

But had she? What Clarice had schemed for was working out well. At the top of the flight was the punishment-

room, that bare and solitary place of confinement where girls awaiting expulsion were kept before being removed for ever from the school.

It was not inhabited now, and the door, as a consequence, was unlocked, the key being on the outside. Clarice reached it, opened it, flung in the frock, and turned as Mabel Lynn came up.

"Why, you—you—" Mabs choked.

"Where's my frock?"

"Find it!" Clarice sneered.

Mabel glared. Then, looking through the doorway, she saw it—her beautiful frock, dyed with such painstaking care, lying in a damp and ruffled heap upon the floor.

Unthinkingly she took one step forward, then, with some quick suspicion of a trap, turned one foot in, one foot out of the doorway. At the same moment Clarice leapt.

Too late Mabs twisted. Clarice was upon her. One swift, tremendous thrust she gave. Mabs, half-unprepared, went staggering into the room. One foot caught against the carpet. She heeled over, and then—crash! A million lights shot before her eyes as her head struck against the iron rail of the bed, and she fell forward.

Clarice stood rooted.

"Mabs!" she cried.

Mabs did not move. Her face was white, ghastly; the lips parted.

"Mabs!" she panted.

Still no movement.

Oh, what had she done? At that moment the clock in the tower struck ten.

Clarice came to herself with a jerk. Her father—he would be arriving. She gritted her teeth. Well, it wasn't her fault, she told herself. Mabs had done it herself.

Just for a moment she hesitated; then, making up her mind, closed the door, locked it, and pocketed the key.

Then guiltily she flew downstairs again, just in time to meet Mr. Dyson when the taxi he had hired deposited him at the door of Cliff House School.

WHILE on the floor of the punishment-room Mabs lay unconscious.



A Tell-Tale Clue

"A QUARTER to eleven! Where can she be? Where can she have got to?" Mabs asked distractedly. "The curtain goes up in ten minutes, and she hasn't put in an appearance! Has anyone seen her?"

But nobody had, and the girls in the dressing-room of the new theatre looked more than a little fed-up. Really, it was too bad, they all thought. Where the dickens had Mabs got to?

Mabs was almost distraught. Where was Mabs? Mabs was gone, and the frock which she was to have worn had gone with her.

She had combed the dormitory, the kitchens, the music-room, and even the tackshop, but Mabs was not to be seen. Where—where was the girl?

The door opened. Stella Stone came in.

"Nearly ready, everybody? Barbara, you're wanted on the telephone."

"Oh, goodness, who is it?" Mabs asked.

"I don't know. A girl, I think—it sounded like a girl's voice. Better hurry; she sounded urgent!"

Mabs went out. In the prefects' room she picked up the receiver. Then she jumped.

"Mabs, is that you?"

"Yes, Mabs." Clarice Dyson, in the telephone booth just outside the school, imitated Mabel Lynn's voice perfectly.

"Mabs, I'm so awfully sorry," she said, "but I can't get back!"

"Oh, my hat! Where are you?"

Mabs gasped.

"In Friardale. I flew down here when I left you to get some ribbon for the frock. I didn't find out that I hadn't any until the last moment. I—I had an accident in the High Street; tried to dodge a car, and slipped, spraining my ankle. I just can't walk, Mabs. I shouldn't be any good if I came back. Look here, ask Clarice to play the part, will you?"

Mabs groaned. Oh, great goodness! She hung up the receiver, while Clarice, in the telephone booth outside the school, smiled grimly and calmly.

Well, that was all right. Mabs hadn't an earthly chance of investigating her story. Mabs, in the punishment-room, was as safe as houses. By the time she

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"FORMS IN

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was discovered, the celebrations at Cliff House would all be over, and she—Clarice—would have left with her father.

Everything was lovely.

She hurried into the school just in time to meet Babs anxiously coming out of Big Hall. Babs stared at her.

"Clarry, where have you been?"

"Oh, just down to the tuckshop! My father's there, you know, standing treat."

"Then—then get into the dressing-room!" Babs gasped, and paused starting a little. "Mabel has met with an accident. She can't play, and you'll have to take her part."

Clarice beamed.

"Oh, I say, what luck! But what hard lines for Mabel! Where has she met with the accident, Babs?"

"You don't know?" Babs asked.

"Goodness me, why should I know?"

"Well, she phoned up—? And then Babs paused again. Very, very queerly she eyed Clarice. "Clarry, when was the last time you saw Mabel?" she asked in a suddenly changed voice.

"Oh—well, about breakfast-time!"

Clarry said.

"You're sure you haven't seen her since?"

"No, of course not!"

"You weren't with her, by any chance," Babs asked, "when she was ironing the dress she dyed yesterday?"

Clarice stared.

"No! Why, I never even knew she had dyed a dress! But what's the matter, Babs? What are you looking at me like that for?"

Babs did not reply. But she stared; she stared hard and searchingly at Clarice, her expression suspicious and pointed. She stared at one particular portion of Clarice's dress, the white cuff of her blouse. Clarice looked at it.

Then her cheeks went the colour of chalk, for upon that cuff was a deep purple stain.

"Clarry," Babs asked quietly, "what have you done to Mabel?"

"I tell you I've done nothing!"

"Yes, you have!" Babs' face became grim. "You've hidden her, Clarry—you have! Oh, I know! You badly wanted that part back, didn't you? Remember you asked me to give it to you? You've seen Mabel Lynn since breakfast! You've handled the frock she was going to wear! You—"

And then she stopped as Clarice blusteringly gave back, and Miss Primrose stepped on the scene. She looked quickly from one girl's face to the other.

"Barbara, what is this?" Miss Primrose asked. "And what about the play?"

"The play," Babs stated, "can't be held—not for a little while, Miss Primrose. Because, you see, Mabel Lynn has disappeared."



"CLARICE!" Mabs panted. "Come back! Give me my frock!" But Clarice rushed on, unheeding. Her spiteful plan to keep Mabs out of the play looked like being a success.

"What?"

"And Clarice," Babs said levelly, "is responsible for her disappearance!"

"Barbara!"

"Because," Babs added steadily, "Clarice wanted to play her part. But Clarice won't say, Miss Primrose, where she's hidden her!"

"My goodness, Barbara, what an extraordinary statement to make! Clarice!"

"It's a fib—a fib, I tell you!" Clarice panted. "I—I don't know anything about it! I—I haven't hidden Mabel Lynn! I—and instinctively her hand went to her pocket and clutched upon the key of the punishment-room. "I haven't seen her, I tell you!"

"Then," Babs asked, "will you explain how the dye of Mabs' dress comes to be showing on your blouse?"

"That—that was an accident! I—I've been dyeing something myself! It's not fair—it's not fair!" Clarice shouted.

"She's just making it up, Miss Primrose! She's never liked me! She and that cat Mabel Lynn, they've been plotting against me ever since I came into the school! She—?" And then she gasped. "Babs! Babs, you cat!"

But Babs, her face suddenly white, had stepped forward. Like a tigress pouncing upon her prey, she leapt upon the key which Clarice, in her perturbation, had accidentally withdrawn from her pocket.

Too late, Clarice drew back. In a moment Babs had grabbed at the hand—had forced the key from its grasp. Miss Primrose blinked.

"Why, gracious me, that is the key of the punishment-room!"

"And that," Babs said quietly, "is where Mabel Lynn is, Miss Primrose. Will you come with me and see?"

And while Clarice, seeing all her

frustrated schemes crashing in the dust, burst into a wild fit of sobbing, Babs walked quickly across the hall.

Miss Primrose, with one wondering look at the new girl, followed her.

A DAY of celebration and rejoicing that was at Cliff House. Apart from the unavoidable postponing of the play for half an hour in the morning, everything went with a swing.

For Mabs, thanks to Babs, was discovered. Callously left by Clarice, she was just recovering consciousness when Babs and Miss Primrose opened the punishment-room door.

Fortunately, her hurts were slight, and in ten minutes she was her old merry self once more. Twenty minutes after that she went on the stage, to play the part of her life, and to be overwhelmed by the congratulations of an admiring crowd.

Happiness—happiness all round! But there was one girl who did not share it; one girl, indeed, who had schemed and plotted to make this her great triumph, who never even saw it.

That was Clarice Dyson, who, before the play commenced, found herself ranged before Miss Primrose and her disillusioned father in the headmistress' study, who listened with burning ears to the recital of her misdeeds, and who, after being reprimanded, was taken away by her father before the programme even commenced.

That night Bessie Bunter was reinstated in the favour of the headmistress and rejoined her chums in Study No. 4. Mabs moved back at the same time, and the little family circle, starting upon a new and happy lease of life, was complete once more.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

NEXT SATURDAY

Saturday's enthralling long school story, the first of Mada Richards, entitled:

"CONFLICT"

begin the Fourth and the Fifth.