

This Week's Story Features:

"THE PART-TIME 'PRINCESS'": "THE CLIFF HOUSE CONSPIRATOR"  
"WITH SUNNY—SMILING THROUGH!": "SOMEONE IN THE HOUSE!"

# The Schoolgirl

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Every Saturday

INCORPORATING  
'SCHOOLDAYS'



**"IT'S LOCKED!"**

An alarming moment for Babs & Co., in the grand long complete Cliff House School story which appears within.

# The CLIFF HOUSE CONSPIRATOR



Illustrations by Laidler

## A Grand Long Complete Tale by the Princess of School-Story Writers, HILDA RICHARDS

### At Midnight

"SHUSH!"

"Not a sound, girls!"

"Mind the stairs, Clara!"

Clara Trevlyn's attractive face, revealed in the feeble yellow glow of the candle she held, broke into a mock-scornful grin.

"Why, Babs! Think I can't see where I'm going—"

"Gresh! Clatter! 'Oh!' gurgled Tomboy Clara in dismay.

It seemed that Clara could not see where she was going, in spite of her assurances to the contrary. She had missed her footing on the first stair, and over she had sprawled, the candlestick clattering to the floor as she fell.

Barbara Redfern sighed. So did Mabel Lynn. Gentle Marjorie Hazeldene looked anxious. Janet Jordan grinned, while Rosa Rodworth, Peggy Preston, Jean Cartwright, and June Morrett frowned impatiently.

Wasn't that just like Clara! Lithe and sure-footed she might be on the sports field, but anywhere else she was just a clumsy goose!

"Oh, sorry!" gasped Clara sheepishly. She scrambled hastily to her feet, retrieved the fallen candlestick, and relighted it from the one Babs was holding.

"Do you think anyone heard?"

"I hope not," whispered Babs. "Listen!"

The nine girls stood listening tensely, outlined in the glow of nine fluttering candles, their shadows thrown grotesquely on the walls and floor of the passage down which they had been stealthily creeping.

Dead silence!

For it was after eleven o'clock, and Cliff House school slept. At least, it slept save for these nine chums of the Fourth Form. But there was no thought

of sleep in the minds of Babs & Co., absent from their dormitory on a certain midnight expedition!

Still dead silence, broken by a hissing gasp of relief from golden-haired Mabel Lynn.

"No harm done," said Mabs. "Come on. Let's get upstairs and started."

She sounded very excited; and it was an excitement reflected in the eyes of the other girls. Only Babs, perhaps, seemed a little subdued—which was most unusual for the sunny-natured captain of the Fourth Form.

However, it was Babs who now led the way up the stairs. Rather narrow they were, and only "carpeted" with linoleum. For the juniors' mission was taking them into the upper regions of the school. Their destination was a certain box-room.

The flames of the candles fluttered more wildly as the chums moved on. Slipped feet made no sound; there was just the softest of rustles from dressing-gowns now and again.

"Here we are!" breathed Babs.

She had halted in front of a door. A long passage, dotted with more doors, stretched away into darkness beyond the flickering radiance of the candles. This was the topmost story of Cliff House School; these were the innumerable box-rooms—for such they only were, being used for no other purpose.

"In we go!" whispered Mabs. "Goodness, Babs, but it was a ripping idea of yours to make this a secret rehearsal. No one will know what we're doing for a tableau, and everybody's going to get a stunning surprise when they do know!"

At the moment all Cliff House was very excited over the forthcoming Courtfield Pageant, which was due to take place in that neighbouring town in eight days' time.

Cliff House was to be represented in this very historic and quite famous spectacle. The Sixth Form were doing one tableau, and there was a vacancy in the procession for another tableau.

The Fourth were determined to fill that vacancy; so were the Upper Third, and the Lower and Upper Fifth Forms. In fact, there was keen rivalry throughout the school—a rivalry which, unfortunately, and due to certain circumstances, had been inclined to become rather bitter between the Fourth and the Lower Fifth.

So Babs & Co. were about to hold a secret midnight rehearsal of their tableau.

"Well, here we are!" said Mabs eagerly. "Close the door, Janet. Better pull the blind, Marjorie. Too risky to switch on the light, but I think



**BARBARA REDFERN**, popular Fourth Form skipper, plays the lead in this stirring drama, which deals with her efforts to aid Avril Rayner in her tragic plight.

we'll be able to see with these nine candles. Now let's get busy!"

Mabs, as the most enthusiastic and cleverest member of the Junior Amateur Dramatic Society, had naturally been placed in charge of all arrangements for the tableau. Mabs loved doing it, and she was determined that if her efforts counted for anything the Fourth should have the honour of representing Cliff House in the pageant, and that their particular tableau should be the best in the procession.

Sharing every bit of her enthusiasm, all the chums did get busy. The box-room was small, but it suited their purpose admirably. The boxes and packing-cases, and suitcases and trunks which it contained were just what they needed.

These suitcases and boxes were placed side by side in oblong formation. Then, one end Mabs arranged a big, deep packing-case, up-ended, so that it could be stood upon.

"That," she grinned, "is supposed to be the deck of a ship. This"—pointing to the packing-case—"is, if you use your imagination, the prow of said ship! There the fair Patricia will stand, gazing out to sea. In the distance she sees the proud and invincible Armada—galloon after galloon, the pride of Spain's mighty fleet. But Patricia smiles bravely, ready to give battle and conquer. She raises a slim hand and says—"

"Up, my bonny men, and give the Spanish onions something to cry about!" suggested June Merrett.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, something like that, perhaps," smiled Mabs. "Now to-night I think we ought to concentrate on positions. The whole effect of the tableau will depend on how we're positioned. You, Babs, as the fair and beautiful Patricia, will stand—"

She broke off abruptly, staring anxiously at the Form captain.

"Babs, old thing," said Mabs, "anything the matter? You look sort of—of worried."

Babs gave a guilty start and flushed awkwardly. She tried to laugh, but the cloudiness of her blue eyes proved just how forced it was.

"Oh, nothing's the—the matter—of course not!" she said, rather stammering. "I—I was only thinking, you know."

And how Babs was thinking! What startling, dismaying thoughts were racing through that pretty head of hers! For Babs had a secret—one which would have shocked her chums, had they but known it.

But they must not know it—must not know, as Babs knew, that the Fourth Form had been barred from taking part in the Courtfield Pageant!

Only that day, Babs had learned the terrible news from Miss Primrose, the headmistress of Cliff House. She had not been able to bring herself to tell her chums and Form-fellows. For one reason, they would be heart-broken; for another, Babs herself was, in a way, to blame, having unintentionally annoyed a certain Mr. Julius Braggott, who, with his influence and wealth, was practically running the pageant.

And then there was a third reason—the most important reason of all.

Babs was determined that the Fourth should participate in the pageant; it was essential that she herself should be one of the performers in the tableau, for in this way only could she help a friend of hers, a girl named Avril Rayner, who had been branded as a thief by the very man—Mr. Braggott—who was running the pageant.

The Form captain was thinking of these things now as she stood there in

the feebly lighted box-room, the dancing glow of the wavering candles shining on her pale cheeks, aware of the curious glances of her chums.

They had all noticed how preoccupied and worried she seemed. Usually so full of life, so merry and carefree, the contrast had been most marked. If only they had known the truth—

Their very eagerness, their enthusiasm over the pageant, had stabbed at Babs' heart. It made her realise what the pageant meant to them—how keen they were to take part in this historic spectacle.

This was their only chance to perform in it, perhaps even to see it; for the pageant, celebrating the granting of a Charter to Courtfield by Queen Elizabeth, was organised only once in every twenty-five years.

For the sake of the Fourth, as well as for the sake of poor Avril Rayner, the girls she had promised to help, Babs realised that in some way she must make Mr. Braggott change his mind. But how—how! That was what so worried Babs.

Again she tried to smile, to reassure her chums that nothing was the matter.

"You still like the idea of having this scene for the tableau, don't you, Babs?" asked Mabs anxiously.

Babs squeezed her golden-haired chum's arm.

"I do! It's going to be the hit of the show—the masterpiece in the procession." Babs laughed, moved across to the packing-case. "Now, I stand on here, do I? Hope I don't fall through! How do you think I should stand?"

And so Babs managed to pass off the awkward situation. How enthusiastic she would have been but for the worrying thought of her dread secret!

Certainly Babs was just the girl to take the part of the fair and beautiful Patricia, who had sailed with her father, Captain Rover, in the man-of-war Courtfield when it had fought with Drake against the Spanish Armada; who, when her father had been mortally wounded, had taken command, captured a galloon and brought it back in triumph to British shores.

Babs was undeniably pretty. She would make a strikingly attractive figure in the pageant—if she took part in it.

Again that dismaying thought occurred to Babs even as she clambered up on to the packing-case; but she tried to thrust it from her mind and tried to enter into the spirit of the rehearsal, to show the eager enthusiasm which would have been hers but for the secret locked in her heart.

"That's right, Babs! Point your left arm towards the window—no, a little lower; rather more rigid, old thing! You're excited, really; you've just sighted the enemy!" Critically, expertly, Mabs surveyed her chum as she posed on the packing-case. There's a slight smile on your lips—a challenging sort of smile, you know. That's it—while I get the others grouped on the deck!"

The rehearsal went on. Mabs, clever producer that she was, knew what she wanted to get the best possible effect. A change of position here; Clara told not to stand so stiffly and unnaturally; June not to giggle; Marjorie not in the forefront, looking very, very pretty with a rather tragic expression on her pale features.

Mabs smiled approvingly. "It looks splendid!" she exclaimed delightedly. "When we get a real representation of a ship's deck and prow, it'll be—"

She broke off, with a gasp. The girls relaxed from their positions, and eyes were turned in startled surprise towards the door. They had all heard it—a bumping sound from somewhere beyond the door, followed by voices, faint but unmistakable.

"Somebody else up here!" breathed Babs. "Who can it be?"

"Goodness! Hope we haven't been missed from dorm!" muttered Janet uneasily.

But of all the girls in that box-room, Babs was the most filled with consternation. The fat would be in the fire if they were discovered here by someone in authority.

Leaving the dormitory in the middle of the night was a serious offence, but it was not that fact which worried Babs. It was the thought that, if a mistress found them here rehearsing the tableau, she would want to know why they were doing it when the Fourth Form had been barred from the pageant.

Because Babs didn't want the Form to know the truth, fearing that if the girls rehearsed openly during the day they might be told, she had arranged this secret rehearsal at midnight, and had also impressed upon them the need for secrecy—in case one of the other Forms wanted to do the same tableau, she had explained.

Really alarmed, dreading the possible consequences, Babs leaped down from the packing-case and ran swiftly across to the door.

Cautiously she opened it, with Mabs and the others crowded behind her. And then the junior captain's blue eyes opened wide in puzzlement.

A thin strip of light showed under the door of one of the box-rooms farther along the dark passage. And from that room came a low murmur of voices.

"My hat!" whispered Babs. "Wasn't that Flora Cann's voice? I heard just then!"

"Sounded like it," whispered back Mabs.

"What's the Fifth doing up here?" demanded Clara, not quite so softly.

"Shush!" warned Babs. "Let's creep along and see."

On tiptoe the chums crept stealthily along the passage towards the box-room from which the voices were coming. The voice of Flora Cann, captain of the Lower Fifth, could be distinguished clearly now. The door was reached, and Babs & Co. paused.

"It's a jolly good idea, Florence," Flora Cann was saying. "But I don't think you ought to be Lady Patricia. Sheila would look the part much better—"

"I gave you the idea of Patricia standing on the prow of her ship and looking at the Spanish Armada, as I think you ought to take the part of Patricia!" interrupted the unpleasant voice of Florence Ellison.

In the passage Babs gave a start. She felt Mabs' grip on her arm. Next moment Babs had thrown open the door and, with her chums crowding at her heels, was striding into the box-room.

Startled gasps came from the group of Lower Fifth Formers assembled in that room, while Babs & Co. gazed at them with indignant consternation.

Florence Ellison was standing on two big trunks which had been placed on top of each other, one arm pointing to the door. The other Fifth Formers were grouped together on other suitcases and boxes which had been arranged to form an oblong.

"My hat!" yelled Clara Trevelyan angrily. "These giddy Fifth Formers are doing our tableau!"

And that horrifying fact was obvious to all the chums of the Fourth.



"HERE, I SAY," exclaimed Flora Cann furiously, stepping forward to confront the invading Fourth Formers, "what do you mean by bursting in here like this?"

"And what do you mean pinching our idea for the tableau?" retorted Clara, in that hot-headed, thoughtless way of hers which so often involved her in trouble.

But if Clara was hot-headed, so was Flora. The two girls were rather alike in temperament. On the slightest provocation, they would flare up, perhaps not really meaning the impulsive things they said on the spur of the moment.

Two pink spots burned in the Fifth Formers' cheeks now.

"What do you mean, Clara—pinched your idea? Look here, I don't want any cheek from Fourth Form kids!"

"Oh, for goodness' sake, stop shouting, you two!" said Babs. She stepped forward between Flora and Clara, who stood glaring at each other. "Do you want to get us all into trouble? But it's a fact, Flora," she added frowningly, "that we both seem to be doing the same tableau for the pageant."

"And the Fourth thought of it first!" put in Clara indignantly.

"Oh, naturally!" retorted Flora, with heavy sarcasm. "Then let me tell you my thought of the idea yesterday—at least, Florence did!"

The Fourth Formers turned their glares upon Florence Ellison, who suddenly flushed crimson.

"It's very peculiar!" commented Janet Jordan.

"What—what do you mean?"

Florence shuffled her feet awkwardly. "If—if you're accusing me of taking your idea, you're making a—a mistake! I—I tell you I didn't take your idea!" she repeated, with a vehemence which sounded so desperate that Babs shot a quick, keen glance at the Fifth Formers. "And why get upset about it in any case? The Fourth's out of the pageant, so what's all the fuss about?"

Babs went very white. She bit her lip to keep back the dismayed cry which came chokingly into her throat.

Goodness, the truth would surely come out now! Her secret would become known to her chums before she had had a chance to think of some way of persuading Millionaire Braggott to change his mind.

And, with something of a shock, she realised that the facts must be getting known throughout the school. But, unthinkingly, Florence had allowed her tongue to run away with her; had rather betrayed herself, as Flora's next words proved.

"Florence, what do you mean?" she asked puzzledly. "Is the Fourth out of the pageant—?"

Babs hardly dared to breathe. But there came an indignant interruption from boisterous Clara Trevlyn.

"What rot!" she exclaimed scoffingly. "Of course, we're still in the pageant." Overwhelming relief surged through Babs. The situation had been saved!

"Don't you be so sure!" retorted Flora at once. "Primmy said that the Form with the best record of behaviour for this week would represent Cliff House with the Sixth, and the Fourth's already got some black marks against it."

"Yes; thanks to the Lower Fifth and its underhand tricks!" snapped Clara furiously.

For a moment it seemed that there would be a battle of hot words between Flora and Clara. Girls of the Lower Fifth stood glaring at the Fourth Form juniors. Since the news of the

pageant, rivalry between the two Forms had grown intense.

But Babs and Mabs laid restraining arms on their tomboy chum.

"Come on—old thing!" said Babs soothingly. "We don't want to start any arguments. We'll get back to our rehearsal."

She turned to Flora.

"I must say it's rather queer you're doing the same tableau as us, Flora, but we'll fight that out later."

Just for a moment Babs threw a suspicious glance at Florence Ellison, who once again flushed hotly under that scrutiny. It was certainly peculiar that the senior should have made that remark, and that it was she who had suggested the Fifth performing the same scene.

However, Babs decided to let the matter rest for the moment, and, turn-



IN the silence that followed the sudden opening of the attic door, the only sound was Babs' sharp intake of breath as she recognised the girl who stood revealed in the candle-light. "Avril!" she whispered at last. "Avril—what are you doing here?"

ing, followed her chums out of the room.

Back to their attic they went, and there resumed the interrupted rehearsal, even more fervently enthusiastic now to make their tableau perfect. Theirs simply must be better than the Fifth's!

For another quarter of an hour they rehearsed. Then Mabel Lynn stopped them.

"That was splendid," she said. "But I think we'd better give over now and get back to dorm."

As she spoke there came the sound of soft footsteps in the passage outside.

"Hallo! Must be the Fifth!" said Clara. "Better give them time to get past before we go!"

So the little group of Fourth Formers waited. Two, three minutes, passed. And then Babs nodded.

"O.K.!" she said. "Come on!"

They stooped, picking up the candles. But even as they did so there came from the direction of the door a faint click—the click of a key being turned in the lock!

With one leap Babs was across the room. She grabbed at the handle of the door, tugging violently. But the door did not budge.

"Oh, my goodness!" she gasped. "The door—it's locked! Somebody's turned the key!"

And from the expression in the eyes of those startled Fourth Formers could be plainly read, even before Clara uttered it, that same condemnation: "The Fifth!"

WHILE OUTSIDE the door a figure straightened itself—the figure of Florence Ellison.

A vindictive smile wreathed her thin lips.

It was she who, having unobtrusively fallen behind as Flora Cann & Co. went downstairs, had locked the door, imprisoning Babs and the other juniors in the box-room.

And her mean little heart gloated as she hurried to catch up with her Form-fellows.

For, unknown to Babs, Florence Ellison was playing, behind the scenes, a vital part in the Fourth Form captain's efforts to help her friend, Avril Rayner.

Not if the mean and cunning Florence knew it would Babs take part in the pageant.

It was she who had overheard the Fourth Form chums discussing their plans for the tableau. She had promptly passed on the idea to Flora, hoping that by doing so she would herself be allowed to perform in the Lower Fifth's tableau. It was Florence who had been partly responsible for getting the Fourth barred from taking part in the pageant.

And the schemer had certainly been vastly surprised to learn that apparently the Fourth were still in the running. Somehow, her first trick seemed to have gone astray.

But it would not fail this time! Now Babs & Co. were prisoners. Assuredly they would get into serious

trouble when their absence from the dormitory was discovered next morning. And that would quite definitely put a finish to all their hopes of appearing in the pageant!



### Alarm in the Night

IN the fitful light of a candle, in the tiny bed-room she occupied at Granny Crawley's cottage in Friar-dale, Avril Rayner straightened up from the low dressing-table on which she had been writing.

"Well, that's that!" she sighed. "That'll explain everything, I think."  
Once again she read the brief message she had penned.

"Dear Mr. and Mrs. Crawley," it said.—"Please forgive me for leaving you like this. I am so grateful to you for looking after me, but I overheard to-day what that man Braggott said to you. I cannot have you getting into disgrace on my behalf, so the best thing for me to do is to go. Please do not worry as I shall be quite safe."

Avril nodded her satisfaction as she came to the end of that message; and then her lips tightened, her violet eyes hardened.

Back to her mind came the recollection of that unpleasant scene which she had unwillingly witnessed between the bullying Mr. Braggott and the dear old couple who had given her shelter.

How shocked and dismayed she had been to discover that Julius Braggott was the owner of this little cottage; that to his bailiff they had to pay their rent.

Julius Braggott—the man who, until recently, had employed her as junior secretary; who had—Avril shuddered a little—accused her of being a thief and thrown her out of Braggott Manor in disgrace, without even a reference to enable her to get another job.

Dismissed for a theft which had been perpetrated by his own daughter, the spiteful and extravagant Pearl Braggott! But, alas, Avril had no proof of that girl's guilt!

It was at the suggestion of Barbara Redfern, whom Avril had known for some years, that they had come here to take temporary shelter with the Crawleys.

But somehow Braggott had got to hear of her whereabouts; and, like the ruthless bully he was, had come here, using his power to bound her out.

"Either she goes," he had said to the dear old couple, "or you go! I'll have you put out, bag and baggage!"

"Oh, the beast!" Avril muttered now. A choking sensation came to her throat as she thought again of how the Crawleys had declared their intention of defying the millionaire; how they had arranged not to tell her, little realising that she had heard everything.

But she could not let them suffer for her sake. She must go—secretly, so that they would not be able to dissuade her.

Picking up the note, Avril crossed to her bed and pinned it to the pillow. Swiftly now she buttoned up her coat, and pulled her beret farther down over her way hair.

"She pondered. She must not disturb the old couple—and that she would obviously do in making an exit by the front door. The stairs would creak as

she crept down them; the heavy chain on the door might rattle. The bolt, stiff in its socket, would certainly grate as she pulled it back.

No, that way was out of the question. Then it would have to be the window. "Oh, dare I?" Avril thought nervously to herself.

Rather of a nervous temperament was Avril, for all her seventeen years. Always was she willing to be led, rather than to take the lead. And now, as she crossed to the tiny casement window, and looked down into the gloomy depths below, she knew a pang of fear.

It was a dark night; the garden below was wrapped in a mantle of blackness. From a near-by tree an owl hooded eerily, making Avril jump nervously. In the distance a clock chimed the hour of midnight.

Avril paused irresolutely. Almost her heart failed her as she thought of the hazardous descent which she must make in her flight from this cottage.

But if Avril was nervous, she was certainly not a coward. She would have risked anything for this old couple who had been so willing to risk everything for her.

She braced herself now, opened wide the casement, and tested the thickly growing ivy down which she would have to climb. She breathed a sigh of relief as she noticed how tenaciously the gnarled branches clung to the wall. Yes, it would support her.

One last look she flung round the room, blew out the candle, and then climbed over the sill. A palpitating moment as she lowered herself, her feet struggling for a grip in the ivy.

Slowly she descended, her heart thudding against her ribs as now and again she slipped. The shrill twittering of dozens of birds, disturbed out of their slumbers amid the leaves, frightened her, made her recklessly anxious to reach the garden below.

"Oh, thank goodness!"  
At last her feet touched the ground. She was trembling in every limb.

Carefully she stepped over a neat bed of daffodils, drooping as if in slumber. With a little gasp of terror she felt something tug at the hem of her coat, and looked a little weakly as she realised that it was a thorn on the trailing shoot of a climbing rose which had come adrift from its pergola.

Avril made her way noiselessly down the gravel path to the front of the cottage, and headed for the little gate which gleamed whitely in front of her.

Just once she looked back. The cottage was wrapped in silence, shrouded in gloom.

Through the gateway she went, closing the gate softly behind her. Now—where to go?

But Avril had already pondered that question. She had only one friend in this part of the world—Barbara Redfern, at Cliff House School.

Dear Barbara, whom she had known from childhood, in whose home in Hampshire her own mother was employed as housekeeper.

Barbara, of course, knew nothing of this flight from the Crawleys' cottage.

And in the direction of that friend Avril now wended her way.

"BRRRR! I'M COLD!"

Rosa Rodworth shivered, and glared irritably around her.

"You're not the only one!" growled Clara Trevlyn. "My hat, if only I had those cats here for five minutes, I'd—"

She left the sentence unfinished, but it was obvious that Flora Cann & Co.

would have had a thin time had they returned to the box-room in which the chums of the Fourth were still imprisoned.

It was well past midnight now. The candles were burning low, and the chill night air had long since penetrated through the girls' warm dressing-gowns.

"Well, we're in a fine mess," muttered Janet Jordan. "Goodness knows how long we'll be here!"

"I can hardly believe Flora would be capable of a trick like this," Babs said thoughtfully. "It's not like her. We're rivals, I know, but—"

She broke off, shaking her head.  
Yet the fact remained that it must have been one of the Lower Fifth girls who was responsible. And serious enough in all truth was their plight now.

Determined to keep the rehearsal a secret, Babs had told no one, except the girls concerned. They had crept out of the dormitory when the rest of the Fourth slept. Their absence would not be discovered—until the following morning.

And with discovery would come disaster.

Inwardly Babs groaned. Everything seemed to be going wrong. This would mean another black mark against the Fourth, and, though they had already been barred from the pageant, it would make her task to win back Miss Primrose's favour doubly hard.

Gentle Marjorie Hazeldene, who so far had not joined in the conversation, became suddenly excited.

"Couldn't we have a fire?" she asked eagerly.

Tomboy Clara grunted.

"We could have strawberry-ice if we had any ice," she said. "Don't be a goose, Marjorie! Where are we going to get coal and stuff from?"

Marjorie flushed.

"Well, you know, we can have a wood fire, Clara," she said gently; and her eyes travelled to the boxes on which some of the chums were sitting. "We could break up these old packing-cases, and set fire to them in the grate."

Clara's gloom vanished in a flash.  
"Why, Marjorie, you're a genius!" she cried. "That's the idea of a lifetime."

"Rather!" agreed Babs, her blue eyes shining admiringly. "If we've got to stay here all night we can at least be warm. Come on, girls; get to it!"

Get to it they did with a will. The old, unwanted boxes were easily pulled apart, and, with Clara energetically snapping the pieces across her knees, a big pile of wood soon lay at the side of the hearth.

As it happened there was already a quantity of tissue-paper in the small grate. This was lit with one of the candles, and then Clara piled on the wood. Quite soon there was a merry blaze.

"My hat, this is the stuff to give 'em!" chuckled Clara, rubbing her chilled hands.

"Come on, girls! Let's pull up these suitcases and gather round!" cried Jean Cartwright.

The shivering girls gathered round in a semicircle, laughing gleefully as they huddled together, basking in the welcome warmth of that merrily crackling fire.

It seemed to make all the difference. Gloom vanished, and spirits soared higher as the girls became warmer. They would almost have enjoyed this novel experience but for the fact that they knew they had been tricked, were prisoners here, and that trouble awaited them in the morning.

## ARE YOU AN "APRIL SHOWER" GIRL?

There is an "April Shower" girl and an "April Sunshine" girl. Give yourself this test to see which you are!

Do you  
—Simply love it when you are asked to play in the class netball team? Of course you do!  
—Look very hurt afterwards when the captain tells you it was only a trial game, and that Mabel Jones will take your place after all?

Do you  
—Almost jump for joy when mother asks you to whip the cream for her, knowing that she's sure to give you a "taster" when the job is done?  
—Try to think of something else important to do? Some homework that really should be finished when, after that, mother suggests that as you're in such a helpful mood, perhaps you'll just peel the potatoes for her?

Do you  
—Put your hat and coat on with

Clara piled on more wood. It was only a small grate, with bars across the front of it. The flames roared up the chimney, accompanied by myriads of sparks. A lump of soot fell down into the hearth.

"Careful how much wood you put on, Clara, old thing," warned Babs, eyeing the leaping flames a little uneasily. "We don't want to set the chimney on fire."

One of the candles flickered out. The others were getting very low now. And in the warmth of the fire the girls began to feel sleepy. For a few moments there was silence—and in that silence they suddenly heard the sound of footsteps in the passage outside.

Babs jerked up, a look of hope flashing into her blue eyes.

The footsteps stopped. Everybody sat tense, wide awake now. Was someone coming to release them—a little uncle, that someone be a mistress or a prefect?

The handle of the door rattled, and then the key turned in the lock. The door began to open. Babs sprang to her feet. Next moment a gasp of utter amazement burst from her lips.

"Avril!"

Avril Rayner it was, wearing outdoor clothes, who stood framed in the doorway!

**B**ABARA REDFERN and Avril Rayner stood facing each other in the dimly lighted box-room.

They were alone. The other girls, puzzled, but thankful at being freed, had gone down to the dormitory. Babs, promising to follow them shortly, had stayed behind to see Avril. She was completely mystified by that girl's dramatic arrival at Cliff House in the middle of the night.

"But, Avril, what are you doing here?" she asked.

Very nervously Avril told her of

developments at the Crawleys' cottage in Friar-dale; how Julius Braggott had threatened to evict the old couple from their home if she herself remained there any longer.

"Oh, Barbara, I couldn't let them suffer!" Avril said. "So I ran away, and not knowing where to go, I thought I—I'd come along here. I—I was going to hide in the school. Was—that it very wrong of me, Barbara?"

Babs was still feeling very startled. "You were a brick to think of Mr. and Mrs. Crawley like that," she said. "But coming to Cliff House—goodness, you've given me quite a shock. Where ever were you going to hide?"

"In this box-room, Barbara," the other girl explained hesitantly. "When I came along here to see you

so much haste you hardly bother to look in the mirror when big sister says she'll take you to the pictures?"

"Dawdle and discover there's a button nearly off your coat, a hole coming in your stocking, and the elastic on your hat loose, when



it's raining and the dog simply must be taken for a scamper in the park?"

Do you

—Tidy your bedroom, brush your hair and make yourself look your very best when your chums are coming to tea?

—Think it's too much trouble to worry about your bed-room or your appearance when it's a miserable day and nothing exciting is going to happen?

Do you

—Look thrilled when a favourite mistress at school asks you to carry a stack of books as far as the rest-room for her?

the other day, Mabel Lynn—that's her name, isn't it?—showed me round the school while we were waiting for you. That's how I knew about this room. And during the conversation she also told me how the girls climbed through the window downstairs when they broke bounds. So I knew how to get into the school, and—well, here I am."

She paused anxiously.

"Barbara, what am I to do now?" she asked. "Those girls saw me, and they'll know if I'm hiding here."

The junior captain came to a swift decision.

"Don't worry about them," she said. "They're all friends of mine, and if I ask them to say nothing, they'll be as mum as oysters. It's an awful risk, Avril, but perhaps you'd better hide

here for a day or two—I don't know where else you can go. I suppose you've heard or seen nothing of the missing watch, Avril?" Babs added abruptly.

Avril's violet eyes clouded, as she shook her head.

"Barbara," she asked wistfully, "do you think you'll be able to get that pawnticket from Pearl Braggott? You said you would, and it's the only way of proving my innocence."

Babs wondered if she should tell Avril that the Fourth Form had been barred from the pageant. Perhaps it would be better not to distress her; but, seeing Avril standing there so helpless and pathetic, a fierce resolve was born within Babs that somehow she would keep her promise.

And the only way to do that was to take part in the pageant. For all the performers in the procession were to be entertained by Braggott Manor, and it was by this means that Babs hoped to get into the millionaire's home.

Pearl Braggott, who had taken her father's gold wrist-watch, and who had then allowed Avril to shoulder the blame, had got money on the watch by taking it to a pawnshop in Lantham. The pawnticket was in Pearl's hand-bag, and if only Babs could get the ticket, then Avril's innocence would be proved.

"Don't you worry, Avril," Babs said now, not allowing another to see how worried she herself was. "I'll get that ticket. And now you make yourself as comfortable as you can here. You've even got a fire to keep you cosy. I'll come up and see you first thing to-morrow morning."

Babs stooped to put more wood on the fire, spluttering a little as another cloud of soot fell down the chimney.

"Now I must be going," she smiled. "The candles won't last out all night, but you don't mind that, do you?"

—Suddenly feel tired or make an excuse to yourself when you see the hot-water-bottle on the landing at home waiting to be taken downstairs?

Do you

—Pass round your sweets really generously when there's company at home or a crowd in the school playground?

—Tell your young brother that he can have which ones he likes as long as he doesn't pick your favourite when you're playing with him in the garden on a Saturday morning?

Do you

—Go shopping with mother to the big stores with a happy smile and a light step, carrying the basket and admiring all the lovely things you see?

—Go shopping with mother just to the little shop at the corner with a rather martyred face, grumbling because the basket's bulky, and saying you never could see who bought all the dowdy things that are displayed?

That's the end of the April Girl's test! If your answer is YES to all the questions—then you ARE an April Shower Girl!

If your answer is YES to all the first questions and NO to all the second ones—then you're an April SUNSHINE girl!

Good-night, Avril, and don't worry. Everything is going to work out all right."

"Good-night, Barbara, and I think you're wonderfully kind" said Avril huskily.

The Babs was gone. Down to the Fourth Form dormitory she sped, to find that Mabs and the others were already in bed. Then, just as Babs was taking off her dressing-gown, she became aware of a lurid glow through the windows.

"Goodness, what's that?" Conscious of an uneasy tremor, Babs crossed to the window. Mabs, Clara, and Marjorie, also aware of that peculiar glow now, climbed out of bed and joined her.

Together they gazed through the window. The ruddy glare became more pronounced, seeming to light up the night sky, revealing a part of the roof where there was an angle in the school building. And then, from one of the chimneys, they saw leaping flames, shooting sparks.

"Oh, my hat!" Tomboy Clara sounded rather excited. "One of the chimneys is on fire!"

But from Barbara Redfern came a gasp; and her voice, when she spoke, was tragic:

"Yes—and it's the chimney of that box-room we've just left!"



### Cause and Consequence

It took Babs' chums only a few seconds to realise that their leader had spoken the truth.

In consternation they stood at the window, the glow of the fiery chimney lighting up their faces with a scarlet tinge. Fascinated, they watched, unable to move in the shock of that dismaying discovery.

Higher and fiercer the flames leapt out of the chimney, fanned by the night wind, while showers of sparks were shooting in all directions. The side of the school building was lit up in the fiery radiance.

Now startled faces were appearing at the windows of other dormitories. Girls were stirring in the Fourth Form dormitory and rushing to the windows to join Babs and her chums. Voices were raised in alarm.

"Fire!"  
"The school's on fire!"  
"What shall we do?"

For a moment panic threatened; but then it was that Babs seemed to come out of her trance. Like the natural leader she was she took command of the situation, pacifying the girls, preventing a panic.

"There's nothing to be alarmed about!" she shouted, above the din. "Really there isn't! It's only a chimney on fire. It—it's in one of the box-rooms, I think. I'll race up there and put it out. No, don't you come, Mabs"—in a whisper—"try to keep the others quiet!"

In rather a state of panic herself, Babs raced from the dormitory, leaving the girls crowded excitedly at the windows. Avril was upstairs in that box-room—that was the realisation which filled Babs with alarm.

Quite obviously the whole school was being aroused. In a very few moments now mistresses and prefects and crowds of girls would be swarming up to the box-room; and if Avril were discovered there—

Inquiries and inevitable trouble

would be the result—both for Babs and Avril. After all, Avril had broken into the school, however innocent her intentions; and Babs was guilty of allowing a strange girl to hide on the premises.

"Godness," groaned Babs as she ran, "this is a fine kettle of fish! Avril mustn't be found up there, that's a cert."

By this time, naturally, Cliff House was in a state of terrific excitement. Everybody from the mistresses down had been awakened. Voices sounded from all parts of the building; doors were opening, and people rushing about.

As in the Fourth Form dormitory, there was inclined to be a bit of a panic at first. But a very agitated Miss Primrose had seen from the window of her bed-room that the school was not in danger, and that nothing more serious threatened than a chimney afire.

Swiftly she issued orders to undermistresses and prefects. There was not a general fire alarm, when everybody had to gather outside in the quadrangle for roles.

Instead, the headmistress ordered the prefects to conduct the girls down to Big Hall, while she and one or two of the mistresses and Piper, the porter, and Merryweather, the gardener, quickly made their way to the upper regions.

Babs, running up the stairs to the box-rooms, heard them coming. And then she heard something else which made her groan again.

"Cliff, clang!"  
From outside the school came the loud clanging of a bell. A fire engine must be racing to the scene.

"Oh, dear!" Babs felt desperate. "Who would have thought all this would happen just because we lit a fire in that box-room?"

Skimming along the passage, she reached the room now. The door was wide open, and a fiercer red glow shone out into the darkness of the corridor.

Babs rushed into the room.  
Avril was no longer there; that the Junior captain saw at a glance, after she had switched on the electric light.

No time to look for her. Quite evidently she was hiding somewhere else now. But she would be out of sight when Miss Primrose and the others appeared on the scene, and that was a relief.

Babs whirled into activity. The fire was roaring fiercely in the grate; jumps of burning soot were falling down into the hearth from the blazing chimney, filling the room with a sooty smell which caught at her throat.

But there was no danger, and water or sand would soon put out the blaze. Babs ran swiftly out into the passage where, in a small recess, she knew buckets of both water and sand stood ready for such an emergency as this.

Steering a little under their weight, she hurried back into the box-room with two buckets, one in each hand. First the sand went on to the fire.

Swoosh!  
The flames were strangled, although the roaring still continued up the chimney, where the soot had become well alight.

Babs picked up the other bucket and again heated the contents into the fire, drawing back hastily as clouds of black smoke billowed out into the room.

The water swamped over the hearth and floor, but it did the trick. Hissing, spluttering, belching out vast clouds of thick smoke, the blaze in the grate was now dead.

Babs coughed as the smoke got down into her lungs—a coughing which was echoed from the doorway. There stood Miss Primrose, Miss Charmant, Piper,

and a fireman in gleaming brass helmet.

"Well done, Barbara!" said the headmistress.

The fireman then took charge. "Not that there's very much to be done now, thanks to you, young lady," he said, with a smile at the smoke-blackened Babs. "That soot in the chimney won't blaze long now that the fire is out. We'll soon have it all down."

Babs put down the water bucket and joined Miss Primrose. The headmistress smiled.

"I am very pleased with you, Barbara," she approved and then the smile faded to give place to a grim frown. "But I would like to know who was responsible for starting this fire. I shall make the closest inquiries in the morning. Goodness gracious, the consequences might have been terrible!"

And Miss Primrose shuddered, dreading even to think of what would happen should a serious fire ever break out at Cliff House.

Babs' her face crimson under its coat of grime, stood still and said nothing. Miss Primrose, not knowing the full facts of the case as yet, was pleased with her.

But in the morning when inquiries were made—the Junior captain was a very worried girl when, five minutes or so later, she made her way back to the Fourth Form dormitory.

By this time the excitement had died down. The fire in the chimney had been put out by the Courtfield firemen, whose speedy arrival on the scene was explained by the fact that they were returning from a blaze at the fishing village of Pegg, on the coast.

The girls were marched back to their dormitories. Everybody settled down to resume the night's interrupted slumber, and soon Cliff House slept again.

All save Barbara Redfern. Babs tossed about restlessly in her bed, unable to sleep, anxiously wondering what would be the outcome of this incident, and fearing all sorts of complications.

It seemed practically certain that, as a result of the inquiries, the Fourth would learn how Babs had been keeping secret from them the fact that they were barred from the pageant. What was going to happen then?

And there was Avril. Babs had promised to help Avril, but the only way she could help her was by being a performer in the pageant, and so gaining admittance into Braggott Manor.

All other ways of seeking an interview with the bullying millionaire, of trying to get hold of the vital pawn-ticket, had failed. Now it seemed that this, the final way, had also failed.

Truly the fates were working against her, thought Babs.

A TENSE hush fell over Big Hall—a brooding silence.

It was the following morning. The whole school was congregated for assembly. A faint murmur of voices which had drifted over the hall dropped as Miss Primrose appeared on the platform.

The headmistress looked very grim. Prayers were said. Then Miss Primrose addressed the school.

"Girls," she began, "it is my intention now, while the whole school is assembled here, to make inquiries into last night's disgraceful disturbance. It must be obvious to you all that someone lighted a fire in the box-room. I intend to find out why, and who it was."

The headmistress paused. There was still that same brooding silence, but girls were looking at each other wonder-



ingly. In the ranks of the Fourth Form, however, uneasiness was expressed on many faces. Barbara Redfern, Mabel Lynn, Clara Trevlyn, and the others who had taken part in that midnight rehearsal were feeling far from comfortable.

"I have already questioned the domestic staff," Miss Primrose continued. "They all deny knowledge of who started the fire. In fairness to everybody, I have also interrogated the mistresses and prefects. As a result of these inquiries I must conclude that the person responsible for setting fire to the chimney is a girl of the Upper or Lower Schools. Before proceeding any further I give that girl, or perhaps there were girls, a chance to step out and make a full explanation."

Another pause. But nobody stepped out.

Flora Cann & Co. of the Lower Fifth, turned their heads and looked suspiciously at Babs and her chums.

Clara, seeing that look, glared back. The juniors all bitterly blamed the Fifth Formers for their present predicament.

If they hadn't been locked in the box-room this incident would never have happened. It was because they felt that they had been the victims of a trick on the part of Flora Cann to get them into trouble, that Babs & Co. had decided not to admit their guilt if it could possibly be avoided.

While Florence Ellison, the unknown cause of all the trouble, gloated triumphantly. Her little trick was having results which she had never anticipated, but which gave cause for every satisfaction.

"Very well, then!" Miss Primrose's eyes glinted behind her pince-nez; she snapped the words grimly. "Since the girl, or girls, will not confess, I am forced to take other steps. Neither the Sixth Form nor any other girls in this school will be allowed to take part in the Courtfield Pageant. Furthermore, no girl will be allowed to witness this historic spectacle. Courtfield will be out of bounds to Cliff House pupils on Saturday week!"

There was a horrified gasp from every girl in Big Hall. Voices were raised in

**FLORA** lost her head, thrusting out a foot over which the Tomboy tripped; and then the pedestal lost its head, as Clara sent it flying. Somebody in the background chuckled: "Oh, bust!"

protest, but Miss Primrose quelled the rising storm with a curt gesture.

"Silence! I shall be very sorry to have to take these extreme measures," she said, "but if I am compelled to enforce such steps, the delinquent of last night will be to blame. I give that girl one last chance to own up before the rest of the school suffers—"

There was a movement in the Fourth Form ranks.

Barbara Redfern, her face crimson, started walking towards the platform. "I lit that fire, Miss Primrose!" she said.

Although it meant the end of everything—her hopes of taking part in the pageant, and of helping to prove Avril's innocence—Babs could not stand quietly



by and see the rest of the school punished. She must even forsake Avril, rather than allow two hundred girls to suffer.

"You, Barbara—" began Miss Primrose in amazement.

Then Clara started breaking through the ranks to catch up with the junior captain.

"You're not taking the blame alone, Babs!" she said indignantly. "I was also responsible, Miss Primrose."

"And I, Miss Primrose. It was my idea to light that fire!" said Marjorie Hazeldene quietly.

The school stood gasping, startled by this development. Rosa Rodworth and the other girls who had taken part in the rehearsal were joining Babs and Clara and Marjorie as they marched towards the platform.

Florence Ellison, in the Lower Fifth, was smiling to herself.

But then came the final shock—the most staggering of all.

From the end of Big Hall another voice was heard.

"Please don't take any notice of these girls, Miss Primrose. They are only doing it to shield me. I set the chimney on fire!"

And Babs, spinning round in amazement, saw Avril Rayner running down an aisle between the ranks of assembled girls. She caught up to Babs. Her voice came in a frantic whisper:

"Barbara, I'll take the blame! It's the only way if you are to appear in the pageant!"



### Behind Their Backs

"WELL, I'm jiggered!" exclaimed Clara Trevlyn, in tones of great puzzlement. "Who the dickens is that girl, and what made her take the blame? Babs, she's a friend of yours. What's it all mean?"

Barbara Redfern evaded a direct answer to that question. "I wonder what Primmy's saying to her?" she said uneasily. "Avril's been in with her ten minutes now."

The scene was Study No. 4, some ten minutes after a very startled school had dismissed from Big Hall.

All the girls involved in the previous night's episode had crowded into the Form captain's study. They were all bewildered; all questioning. While Babs, completely unprepared for the unexpected development, hardly knew what to say.

Since assembly, Avril had been with Miss Primrose, and Babs would have given much to know what was transpiring.

For until she did know she could not answer her chums' embarrassing questions. In Big Hall, by whispers and gestures, she had somehow managed to convince them to say as little as possible. She disliked intensely the thought of Avril taking the blame for an affair in which she had played such a small part; but as that girl had said, it was to her own advantage.

On Babs taking part in the pageant depended the success of her efforts to prove Avril innocent of having stolen Mr. Braggott's watch. For Avril's own sake it was essential that the Fourth Form should win the honour of having their tableau included in the pageant.

It was a peculiar situation. But Babs was saved any further speculation by the arrival of Stella Stone, captain of the school.

"Oh, Barbara, Miss Primrose wishes to see you at once in her study," the Sixth Form prefect said.

With some inward trepidation, Babs obeyed the summons. Was it good news, or bad? she wondered. Miss Primrose's smile, as she entered, was somewhat reassuring.

Avril was still there—such a sunny-faced, smiling Avril that Babs blinked in astonishment.

Barbara, the headmistress said quietly, "Avril has told me her story. I realise now the reason for your conduct towards Mr. Braggott. I feel that perhaps I was over-hasty in condemning your conduct and therefore I shall cancel the black marks which were given to you and the Fourth."

Babs herself was smiling now. And Miss Primrose's next words almost made her dance with joy.

"Furthermore," continued the headmistress, "I am writing to the Courtfield Town Council this morning. You will remember, Barbara, that Mr. Braggott threatened to use his influence with them to demand that the Junior School should not be allowed to participate in the pageant. A letter from the council to that effect reached me this morning. I shall reply pointing out that I am the best judge of my girls, and insisting that they reconsider their decision."

"Oh, Miss Primrose!" exclaimed Babs rapturously.

"But that does not mean, Barbara," the headmistress broke in swiftly, "that I have decided the Fourth shall have the honour of performing. It still depends entirely on the behaviour of the girls involved. I might add," continued Miss Primrose, with a shrewd glance at Babs and Avril, "that I am not entirely sure that the Fourth Form were guiltless in last night's unfortunate occurrence. However, in view of Avril's statement, I will give you the benefit of the doubt and let the matter drop!"

So great was Babs' joy that she could almost have hugged the headmistress.

"And what do you think, Barbara," burst in Avril impulsively, clearly unable to control her excitement any longer, "I am to stay on here for a time. Miss Primrose has given me a temporary job of re-cataloguing the library!"

"Oh, wonderful!" exclaimed Babs, feeling slightly dazed by this glorious turn of events.

Miss Primrose smiled.

"I have the greatest confidence in Avril," she said. "I believe her story implicitly. And, Barbara, I must say I admire you for the way in which you have stood by her. I sincerely hope that everything will be cleared up satisfactorily very soon. Now you may go. I will fix up with matron about your sleeping quarters, Avril."

Arm-in-arm the two girls left the study.

"Isn't it marvellous!" enthused Avril. "Ripping!" agreed Babs, her eyes shining. "It was splendid of you to take the blame for that fire. It's certainly saved the situation."

Avril laughed deliciously.

"That's why I did it, but I had to pluck up an awful lot of courage," she confessed. "And, anyway, I was to blame, because I made the fire up after you'd gone. It started roaring, and I—I got so terrified I bolted. I—I hid in one of the other box-rooms all night, and creeping down this morning I happened to hear what your headmistress was saying. I realised then that I should have to act quickly, and—and that—"

"And, my hat, you couldn't have acted better!" Babs chuckled gleefully.

"You were a brick, Avril! But come on now, old thing! I must break the good news to the Form!"

Inwardly Babs was bubbling over with delight. Things couldn't have gone better. Now the Fourth would never know that secret she had concealed from them. Surely Miss Primrose's letter to the Courtfield Council would have effect, in spite of Mr. Julius Braggott. And—plain-sailing for the Fourth. Once more they could confidently go ahead with their rehearsals.

If Babs was pleased, the Fourth were jubilant. For the threat of punishment had hung heavily over their heads. But even amid their excitement there was bitterness.

"Well, I'm jolly glad things have turned out so well—thanks to Avril, but no thanks to the Fifth. They locked us in the box-room, and it's all their fault the trouble started," Clara pointed out.

"Hear, hear!" supported Rosa Rodworth.

"I vote we make the Fifth sit up for it!" went on Clara, in her most warlike mood.

"Yes, duffer, and get some more black marks!" pointed out Babs sarcastically.

At which Clara Trevlyn sheepishly subsided.

But, unbeknown to the Fourth, Clara's war-like words, shouted out in the Common-room, were overheard by a girl who happened to be passing.

That girl was Florence Ellison, the unsuspected cause of all the Fourth's misfortunes so far.

BRAGGOTT MANOR, the imposing residence of Mr. Julius Braggott, millionaire, stood bathed in the waning rays of a late afternoon sun. Surrounding it was an expanse of green, rolling parkland.

Up the long, gravel, tree-lined drive cycled a solitary figure—the figure of a girl in a Cliff House uniform.

Florence Ellison of the Lower Fifth dismounted when she reached the wide sweep of stone steps which led up to the pillared entrance. Leaving her bicycle propped against a tree, she ran up the steps and pulled the dragon-headed bell.

A butler answered her, bowed, and admitted her immediately. Evidently Florence was a frequent and well-known visitor to Braggott Manor.

"Miss Pearl is in the library, Miss Ellison," he said stiffly. "I will tell her you are here—"

"Oh, don't bother!" Florence said, a little haughtily. "I know the way!"

She brushed past the butler. Crossing the wide hall, she pushed open a heavy mahogany door.

In the spacious library, before a large open fire, a girl sprawled in elegantly a deep armchair. She looked up as her visitor arrived, but did not attempt to rise.

"Oh, hallo, Florence!" she said affectedly. "And do shut the door! What's brought you over?" she added ungraciously.

With a fawning smile, Florence shut the door and crossed the room. But hidden under that smile was a feeling of deep resentment against this millionaire's daughter who, although professing friendship, treated her in such an off-hand fashion.

Florence and Pearl Braggott were acquaintances of long standing, having first met at a preparatory school in Hertfordshire, but had rather lost touch with each other of recent years.

With the Braggotts taking up residence in Courtfield, however, Florence had very speedily sought to pick up the

threads of that old friendship and ingratiate herself once more in the graces of this girl who, for all her supercilious airs, was generous with her money.

Florence, in her usual dressmaking difficulties, had gained help from Pearl—a fact which Pearl never allowed her to forget.

"I've got some startling news for you, Pearl," the Cliff House senior volunteered.

Pearl sat up with a jerk. "Well, come on! Don't beat about the bush!" she said curtly, never thinking to invite Florence to be seated.

"It's about Avril—" the Fifth Former began.

Pearl's eyes narrowed. She jumped to her feet, displaying a tall, slim figure rather startlingly clad in orange velvet lounging pyjamas.

"Avril—eh?" she said, through her teeth. "What about her? I told pater to have that old couple in Friariele thrown out if Avril didn't go."

"Well, she's gone," Florence retorted, "and she's got a job at Cliff House!"

"What!" The angry red mounted into Pearl's cheeks. "What sort of job?"

"Re-cataloguing the books in the library. And she's getting jolly thick with Barbara Redfern!"

Pearl's hands clenched by her sides.

"Well, anything else?" she demanded. "I can see by that smirk on your face that you've got some more unpleasant news. Out with it!"

Florence flushed.

"Yes; and the Fourth Form's still in the running for the pageant, in spite of what you said your father was going to do. And—and," she added, lowering her voice to a whisper, "I believe Barbara Redfern knows something about that watch! I heard her talking to Avril, and she said she must take part in the pageant, because that was the only way she could prove Avril's innocence."

The red flush died from Pearl Braggott's cheeks, leaving them pale and strained-looking.

"Not so loud!" she hissed. "If pater only knew the truth about that watch—!" Pearl broke off with a little shiver of alarm. "And what else did they say?"

"That's all I heard, Pearl. What are we going to do?"

Pearl paced up and down restlessly.

"You mean, what are you going to do?" she said at last. "You're at Cliff House, so it's up to you. Somehow you've got to keep that Redfern girl out of the pageant! I can't think what clue she's got, but it's too risky to take a chance. I can't get that watch out of pawn until I get my next dress allowance, and that's not due for another fortnight. For goodness' sake, don't look so stupid!" Pearl went on passionately.

"Can't you think of something? You're in this affair as much as I am. Don't forget, Florence, it was you who pawned the watch, and you had some of the money!"

The smirk faded from Florence's face suddenly. Yes; she was equally guilty.

"I can see this Redfern girl's game!" Pearl went on savagely. "As one of the performers in the pageant, she'll be coming into these grounds next Saturday. She's going to try to trick me, but she won't! You've got to stop her! I can't do anything else!"

Florence nodded heavily.

Yes, it was up to her now. She shuddered to think what would happen if her part in this affair were ever discovered.

Pearl suddenly slumped down in the armchair.

"Look here, Florence," she said in a more conciliatory tone, "I'm putting



A  
**NEW WAY**  
WITH AN  
**OLD FASHION**

*There's nothing so smart as an old style—providing it is brought up to date. And lacing is in vogue again!*

**YOU** must often have admired those shepherdess-looking costumes in old pictures, or at fancy dress parties? And haven't you loved the corset-like lacing that decorates the front of the bodice?

I'm sure you have! Well, now it is definitely "in" again for modern fashions, and as it is so easy to do, and yet so decorative, I'm sure you'd like to try your hand at it.

It's going to look particularly smart on a summery frock that's just a little plainness.

Glance at the picture here, and you'll see what a difference it can make.

You will have to make a six or nine inch slit down the front of your frock first—and, of course, this must be hemmed to prevent it fraying.

Next, stab four eyelet holes down each side of the slit, and sew these around in blanket or buttonhole stitch.

Now you're ready for the lacing.

A length of fine cord, narrow ribbon, or plaited wool will do. All are equally suitable, though, of course, the wool is the cheapest, since you're not likely to have to buy this.

**BELT TO MATCH**

Lace this in and out the holes just as you do your walking shoes, tying the ends in a careless-looking knot at the bottom.

Your belt should match if you're to make a real job of the decoration. And what a good idea this is if your waist happens to have grown since last year so that the belt won't quite meet!

The lacing will certainly do the trick.

Make the holes as before, and lace the ends of your belt together.

Now, not only will you look just a little bit old-world, but you'll also be in the fashion. For fashions, after all, are nearly always old ideas, brought up to date and called new!

myself in your hands. You work this for me, and I'll not only let you off what you already owe me, but I'll remember you when I get my next allowance. Is it a deal?"

Florence's eyes glistened. Already her unscrupulous brain was active.

"It's a deal!" she concurred.

**THAT EVENING**, when Florence Ellison returned to Cliff House, she hung about in the Fourth Form passage as much as she dared without attracting attention to herself.

Her vigilance was rewarded.

Clara Trevlyn's booming voice in Study No. 4 informed her that the dresses for the Sixth Form tableau had arrived. Barbara Redfern's laughing voice added the fact that she and her chums had received an invitation from Stella Stone to inspect these dresses, which were in the music-room. Mabs declared that if they would wait another ten minutes or so, until after she had finished her prep, they would all go along and inspect them.

That was sufficient for Florence.

Here was an opportunity, she thought, of putting paid to the Fourth's hopes in the pageant.

Florence was suddenly very active. Skimming away from the Fourth Form passage, she dashed to her study, there took from the cupboard a large, empty bottle which had contained lemonade.

With this concealed under her blazer, she hurried out of the school and into the shed which was used by Mr. Merry-

weather, the gardener, for storing all his gardening implements and paraphernalia.

Two minutes later she emerged, still carrying that lemonade bottle. The bottle was full now—but the contents was not lemonade!



**Not Quite As Planned**

"**B**UCK up, Mabs!" said Clara Trevlyn impatiently. "Thought you were only going to be ten minutes!"

"Just one more line!" golden-haired Mabel Lynn pleaded, her pen moving at a feverish pace over the exercise-book in front of her. "And if you hadn't done so much chinwagging, I might have finished earlier!"

Study No. 4 was full of excitement. That celebrated apartment was quite crowded. In addition to Babs, Mabs, and plump Bessie Bunter, the normal occupants, Clara, Marjorie, and Janet, from Study No. 7, were there.

Mabs was just finishing off her prep. It was not usual for the golden-haired one to be last, but she had had a special task to do. She pushed back her chair now, however, with a merry laugh.

"Finished!" she cried. "Right, I'm ready now! Jolly good of Stella to allow us to look at the Sixth Form dresses for the pageant."

"Rather!"

"Yes, you know, I may like to try one on!" said Bessie, blinking through her thick, round spectacles.

"Help!" grinned Clara. "We're going to look at dresses, fattikins, not tents!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bessie looked offended.

"Oh, run—really, you know, there's no need to be rude, Clara!" she said, with dignity. "And while we're on the subject," she added indignantly, "I think—think it's jolly mean of you not to include me in the Fourth Form tableau. Sheer jealousy, of course!" she sniffed.

"Well," Clara wanted to know, "what could you be on an Elizabethan man-of-war?"

"Well, they could throw her out as an anchor!" suggested Janet.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" that would be too dangerous," said Mabs solemnly. "She'd probably pull the ship right under!"

Again a roar of laughter greeted that sally. But Bessie didn't laugh. Bessie didn't think it at all funny, and, really, she felt quite hurt at being left out of the tableau. In her opinion she should have been the fair and beautiful Patricia. Of course, Mabs was all right, but when it came to real beauty—

Unfortunately, from Bessie's point of view, she was the only one to share that opinion.

"Never mind, old thing," Mabs consoled gently, and, linking her arm in that of her fat chum, raced her across to the door. "Come on, girls! Off we go to inspect these jolly old dresses!"

In a merry group they all quitted the study, making their way up to the music-room. But at the end of the Fourth Form passage, just as they were rounding a bend, there was a little upset.

Clara, rushing ahead in her usual impetuous fashion, not looking where she was going, bumped into another girl, who was coming from the opposite direction.

"Oh!" came a gasp as Flora Cann went staggering under the impact. "You clumsy chump! Can't you look where you're going?"

Clara, about to apologise, changed her mind.

"Clumsy yourself!" she growled. "Shouldn't get in people's way when they're in a hurry!"

The sight of Flora was like a red rag to a bull to Clara these days. Flora, accompanied by Sheila Ford and Ena Sparling, glared at the Fourth Formers. Mabs & Co. glared back. Memory of the previous night's mishap continued to rankle. They still blamed Flora, not knowing that the girl was ignorant of what had happened.

"We were just coming along to see you children," Flora said now.

"Wasting your time," said Clara biting. "We're not at home to you, Flora."

Flora Cann reddened under the contempt in the Tomboy's tone. Perhaps she rather wondered why Clara—and, indeed, all the other juniors—had that same bitter look of condemnation on their faces. But she ignored the remark.

"We, the Lower Fifth, think you juniors should get out another idea for your tableau," Flora said, in a way which was rather lacking in diplomacy in the present tense situation. "Not, of course," she added, with a sniff, "that you kids will be likely to take part in the pageant at all. That's going to be an honour for the Lower Fifth—"

For a moment Mabs & Co. were speechless, in the face of this cool request.

"Well, of all the cheek!" spluttered

Mabs at last. "Jolly well pinch our idea, and then you want us to think out another!"

"What a hope you've got!" Babs said, rather angrily.

"Yes, you know, you jolly well go and ch-chop chips!" chimed in Bessie, glaring through her spectacles.

"Oh, come on!" said Janet disgustedly. "Don't bandy words with them. Let's go and look at those Sixth Form dresses."

"Yes, come on!" put in Clara.

"Girls who can do a trick like you did last night, Flora, aren't worth wasting words on."

And Clara made to stride on down the passage.

But Flora, with a sudden outburst of hot temper, jumped in front of her, arms flung wide to bar the way.

"And what do you mean by that, Clara?" she snapped.

"You know very well what I mean. I suppose you'll be saying next that you didn't lock us in the box-room!"

Flora looked taken aback.

"Rot! I don't know what you're talking about. Anyway," she said wildly, "the Fourth won't jolly well be in the pageant. I'll see to that!"

Wild words, spoken in the heat of the moment. Words with no real meaning attached to them, but they were to have a strong bearing on future events—words which she and the Lower Fifth were to regret.

But Clara, for once in a way, ignored that challenge. Head in air, she strode on, intending to push past the Lower Fifth captain.

That contempt, however, seemed to infuriate Flora more than words could have done.

Not realising what she was doing, completely obsessed by a sudden blinding passion, she deliberately stuck out a foot as the Tomboy stalked past.

With a gasp, Clara went flying forward, hands outstretched to save herself. There came a sudden warning yell from Mabs.

"Clara, look out! Oh, my hat!"

Crash!

The warning had come too late. Clara, unable to stop, stumbled against a pedestal, on which stood a bust of a former Cliff House governor, and which was placed in a recess of the wall.

The bust crashed to the floor and broke into pieces. The pedestal toppled over with an even louder crash.

Fifth Formers and Fourth Formers stood horrified. A hoarse cry broke from Flora Cann's lips.

"Oh, Clara, I didn't mean to do that—"

"Flora, you did that deliberately! You know you did!"

And as that fresh voice broke upon their ears, every girl spun round, to behold Miss Primrose rustling on to the scene.

"How dare you behave in such a shameful way? You allowed your temper to run away with you! You will be detained to-morrow afternoon, and I shall certainly bear this incident in mind when I come to make my decision regarding which Form is to participate in the pageant. Now, please go!"

Wretchedly the Fifth Formers stumbled away. Babs, realising that Flora's temper had got the better of her, watched them go with a feeling of sympathy. However, before she could speak the headmistress addressed her.

"Ah, Barbara, I was looking for you," she said, a smile coming into her features. "I would like to see a rehearsal of the tableau you contemplate producing for the pageant. Do you think you could do it for me now?"

"Oh, rather!" exclaimed Babs

delightedly. "Yes, Miss Primrose, I'll get the other girls, shall I?"

"Yes, Barbara. Take them to the Fourth Form Common-room. I will go straight there. Your idea was splendid, and I am anxious to see what you have made of it."

With a kindly nod she turned on her heel and passed down the passage. Babs & Co., smiling happily at each other, dashed off to get the cast together.

But Flora & Co., who had overheard that passage, looked rather grimly at each other.

"Oh, what a hot-headed chump I am!" groaned Flora. "I've just about ruined our chances. Why can't I keep my beastly temper in check!"

Her two companions looked at her rather sympathetically. This was not the first time Flora's temper had proved her undoing.

"No use crying over spilt milk now," said Sheila gently. "Cheer up, Flora. But, I say, didn't those Fourth Formers say something about some dresses?"

"Yes, rather!" enthused Ena. "I heard Stella say that their dresses for the tableau had arrived. They're in the music-room, I believe. Let's go up and have a look at them. Stella won't mind."

And so, towards the music-room they turned.

It was a change of plan which was to have disastrous results for the Lower Fifth.

THE DOOR of the music-room opened. A figure crept stealthily out.

Flora Ellison grinned. It was a nasty, malicious grin.

"Well, that's cocked the Fourth Form goose!" she chuckled. "I don't think Barbara Redfern will take part in the pageant when this little lot is discovered!"

She heard footsteps coming up the stairs, and with a stifled "My hat, here they are!" quickly scurried away in the opposite direction.

AGAIN the door of the music-room opened, but this time to admit three figures.

Flora Cann, Sheila Ford, and Ena Sparling walked into the room and gazed around.

Their gaze fell on a large trunk which stood on the floor by the grand piano.

"There they are!" said Sheila.

"But I say," murmured Ena, sniffing the air, "what a funny smell!"

Flora was also sniffing.

"Piper must have been putting some stain on the floor," she opined.

But Ena shook her blonde head. "Doesn't smell like stain to me," she said. "It's more like—jiggered—if I know what it is like!" she ended, with a grin.

"Oh, bother the smell!" exclaimed Flora. "Let's have a look at these dresses!"

Across to the trunk they went. Throwing back the lid, they looked inside. Their nostrils were assailed by a pungent, tar-like smell which emanated from the interior of the trunk.

"My giddy aunt!" exclaimed Flora. "That smell seems to be coming from here—"

The words died on her lips. Suddenly she plunged a hand into the trunk and drew out a gown of soft grey material—the robe of the old-time monks who had lived at Cliff House when it was a monastery centuries ago.

But now Flora exclaimed in horror as she held up that robe and looked at it with goggling eyes. For on the front of it was a large dark brown stain—a stain that spread even as she looked at it.

"Creosote!" said Ena Sparling. "My hat, that's what it is!"

"But that gown!" muttered Sheila. "It'll be unwearable! Who the dickens could have done it?"

Who indeed? The three looked at each other. Then, flinging the robe aside, Flora rummaged feverishly in the trunk. One, two, three, four gowns she drew out in rapid succession. And every one of them had been saturated with creosote!

Again she dived into the trunk. But this time it was not a robe she drew out. It was a bottle—a large bottle which, from its stained label, had once contained lemonade, but from which now dripped a last trickle of treacly brown liquid.

Flora, the bottle clutched in her hand, rose to her feet. She eyed her chums in horrified dismay.

"Goodness! There's going to be a row about this!" she muttered. "Somebody must have done it on purpose!"

"Yes, but who?" almost whispered Sheila.

In stupefied silence now, the three seniors stood there, Flora still unconsciously clutching the bottle.

"QUICKLY, STELLA! I'm sure they're up to some mischief!"

Florence Ellison panted those words as she almost dragged Stella Stone from her study.

The head prefect of Cliff House was looking startled, if disbelieving.

"Florence, you must be making a mistake. I gave the Fourth permission to look at those dresses. They would not dream of harming them."

But Florence Ellison was acting well.

"I heard them!" she protested. "I heard Barbara Redfern say that they're going to spoil them. They're up there now—Barbara and Clara and Mabel—I heard them all. You'll just catch them in the act if you come quickly!"

Half-puzzled, half-angry, Stella accompanied the insistent Florence. The Fifth Former gloated inwardly. The Sixth Form costumes were spoiled—only too well did she know that, because it was she who had spoiled them.

But what Florence did not know was Barbara Redfern's sudden change of plans, owing to Miss Primrose's request for a Fourth Form rehearsal of their tableau.

Nor did she know that those footsteps she had heard coming up the stairs, as she quitted the music-room, were those of her own Form-mates.

Florence, the schemer, was due for a devastating shock!

"Oh, come on, Stella! Hurry!" she urged, clutching hold of Stella's arm in her impatience.

The Sixth Former, beginning to be impressed in spite of herself, ran lithely up the stairs. She reached the door of the music-room, flung it open, and then stood as if rooted to the floor.

While Florence, following her in, almost shrieked her dismay.

For Flora Cann still stood by the trunk, the ruined dresses about her, the bottle which had contained creosote still clutched in her hand.

Stella's voice came in a thin scream of anger.

"The costumes! Flora, what have you been doing?"

"I—I—" stammered Flora confusedly, and tailed off miserably before the terrible, accusing glare in Stella's usually gentle eyes.

As if suddenly galvanised into action, Stella strode into the room. Something like a sob came to her lips as she gazed upon the ruined costumes.

"Flora, you wicked girl!" she accused. "You must have done this!"

Florence Ellison found her voice. Something had obviously gone wrong—how, she did not know, could not in that moment think. But she was almost frantic. The Fourth were to have been blamed for this. The Fourth—Barbara Redfern—not her own Form-fellows!

"Stella, you're making a mistake!" she cried wildly. "It was the Fourth who did this. I heard them in here just a few minutes ago!"

Flora started.

"Yes, yes!" she burst out unthink-

ingly. "It must have been the Fourth—"

But Stella's eyes were still accusing.

"We will soon find out the truth of that statement, Flora," she said coldly.

"But I think I have seen sufficient evidence to convince me—"

Stella broke off and turned to Florence.

"Please ask Miss Primrose to be kind enough to come here," she commanded. "You will find her, I think, in the Fourth Form Common-room!"

It was Florence's turn to start. With a queer feeling of dread at her heart she made her way downstairs. As Stella said, the headmistress was indeed in the Common-room. And so was practically the whole of the Fourth.

Florence knew then that she had played a losing game. Almost sick with dismay she delivered Stella's message.

Miss Primrose frowned.

"You must excuse me, Barbara," she said, turning to the flushed Form captain. "You may cease now. I really

## JUST DAINTY HANKIES

*Aren't these jabots attractive?  
They're made only from hankies  
too! Nothing could be simpler*



WITH spring and Easter in the air, you must certainly consider those bright touches that are so essential to the appearance of spring clothes.

Collars, cuffs, and belts always help. So do jabots. (This is a word that seems to have come in again lately, there being no other word that quite describes those fluffy effects that decorate the front of frocks, and look so nice peeping through the opening of a coat.)

And the best of jabots is that they're just as smart when worn by young people as by those who remember them way back in the 1912's, or thereabouts.

There's only one difficulty, as a rule—and that's the price! But even this needn't worry you any more—provided you're one of those girls who always seem to be having hankies given you for every occasion—just when you've been dying for a camera, or something else!

Two hankies make the top jabot here. Place them together, the underneath one showing slightly below the upper one.

### A VELVET BOW FINISH

Gather them together at the opposite ends, and sew a pretty velvet bow to hide your stitching, however nice.

A pin beneath the bow will make a most satisfactory fastening, so that it can very easily be attached to the neck of your frock.

How charmingly demure you will look then!

The second jabot is made from only one handkerchief. It can be plain, embroidered, or coloured—

just as you like—or according to the contents of your handkerchief satchel.

Personally, I'd like to see this one made of fine, white lawn—and you're almost certain to have one of these to spare for such a decorative purpose!

Linen, lovely as it is, might be just a little heavy for this purpose, I'm thinking, for, as you know, it tends to hang rather stiffly than gracefully.

Catch the hankie by one corner, and gather it. Then sew either a posy of artificial flowers over these stitches, or another bow, if you think flowers too extravagant.

Pin this to your frock, as the first, and you'll be able to change over from one to the other before even the sharpest eyes have time to detect the faintest grubby spot on either.

### AN EASTER-TIME NOTION

Incidentally, I've an idea that these jabots will create rather a stir among the other feminine members of the family. They'll be intrigued when you tell them they're merely made from hankies, and frankly admiring when they see the finished results.

So what about making mother one or two, or even three, for a surprise Easter gift? I'm sure they'd be the very thing for her to entertain her morning frock for the more restful afternoon.

And she'll love her nice daughter's thought, too!



## 14 "The Cliff House Conspirator"

must congratulate you upon your tableau. It is excellent!"

And with a kindly nod she made her exit. Straight up to the music-room she went. She was scandalised when she saw the ruined costumes, and heard Stella's tale.

"Miss Primrose," concluded Stella, "these girls have accused Barbara Redfern and her friends of—of this vandalism. Obviously it has been committed within the last few minutes, for the crescents are still spreading."

Miss Primrose's face set in grim, stern lines.

"Then Barbara Redfern could not have done it!" she said, in a terrible voice. "I have been with the Fourth Form girls for the last ten minutes, at least."

She turned to the unhappy Flora Cann & Co.

"Is your crime not bad enough without attempting to implicate innocent girls?" she asked frigidly.

"But—but we know nothing about it," stammered Flora wretchedly.

"Stella tells me she caught you practically in the act!" the headmistress thundered. "Look! There is even crescent on your fingers. There seems

to me not the slightest doubt of your guilt. And," she added, "I myself heard you threaten to get the Fourth barred from the tableau. I am indeed thankful that your duplicity to lay the blame on innocent girls has not succeeded. Enough! Do not attempt to argue!"

The words of indignant protest which trembled on Flora's lips trailed into silence as she saw the terrible expression of Miss Primrose's features.

"There will be no question now of the Lower Fifth participating in the pageant," the Head went on vibrantly. "By this disgraceful act you have ruined every chance you had. You will be punished severely for this wanton behaviour. Now go!"

White-faced, stunned, Flora and her chums went. The shock of this blow had left them numb. The knowledge of their innocence only made the blow more bitter and paralysing.

Who had ruined the costumes?

Flora Ellison's words, spoken only a few minutes ago, had sown the seeds of suspicion in their minds.

Was it possible that the Fourth Form had done this, to lay the blame on the

shoulders of their rivals, and so get them into disgrace?

Flora Cann could not be sure, but the suspicion was there, and rankled bitterly in her heart. Certainly it never occurred to her that a girl of her own Form was responsible.

As for Florence, she was mad with rage at the unexpected twist her scheming had taken. Her villainy had recoiled upon her own head with dismayingly effect. For now—

Now it was the Fifth, and not the Fourth, who were out of the pageant. Which meant that she herself would not be able to take part at that historic spectacle.



"Stop Press!"

"BABS! I us-say, Babs!" Plump Bessie Bunter burst into Study No. 4 like a cyclone. Her little eyes were gleaming with excitement; her round face was one big, shiny smile.

Barbara Redfern and Mabel Lynn, seated at the table discussing points in connection with the Fourth Form tableau, did not evince any interest as their plump chum's voice rang across the study. They went on talking.

"Babs! Mabs! I've just us-sen-ed it!" And Bessie ran up to the table and grabbed at Babs' shoulder with a plump hand. "I've us-sen-ed it!"

"Babs looked up. 'Oh! Well, go and see it again, Bessie dear!' she said, with a frown. 'We're busy—'

"It's a nun-nosity—"  
"Blow the notice!"  
"About the pageant—"  
"What!" Babs and Mabs sat up then. "What's it say about the pageant?" asked the junior captain eagerly.

Bessie now pretended to look hurt. "Oh, nu-really, you know!" she said, with dignity. "I've bin trying to tut-tell you, and you wouldn't listen. I've a jolly gig-good mind now to tell you thuth—that the Fourth—"

"Sorry, Bessie! We're all ears now. What about the Fourth?"

"They're to tut-take part in the pageant."

But before the words were out of Bessie's mouth, Babs and Mabs had streaked from the study, and were rushing down the passage towards Big Hall.

The Fourth Form to take part in the pageant. Oh, it was wonderful, marvellous!

Bessie's word wasn't to be doubted, although sometimes she did get things mixed, and in her short-sighted way missed reading a vital word which changed the whole import of her news.

But Bessie's excitement had been genuine enough, and a sudden cheer in Clara Trevlyn's voice from the direction of Big Hall told Babs and Mabs that their plump chum had made no mistake.

It was Saturday afternoon. At assembly that morning Miss Primrose had said that after dinner she would announce which Form was to have the honour of jointly representing Cliff House in the pageant, with the Sixth.

Babs and Mabs raced into Big Hall. A large group of Fourth Formers clustered round the notice-board.

"Let's see it!" cried Babs excitedly.

And then with shining eyes she read the wonderful news. There it was in

## SOME NEW IDEAS FOR

## SCHOOLGIRL COOKS

## MARZIPAN DELIGHTS

IT'S fun making marzipan sweets—no cooking and no stodgy ingredients required.

Whiz go three ounces of ground almonds into a bowl, followed by one ounce and a quarter of icing sugar, and the same amount of finer sugar. A brief stir with a wooden-spoon, so that the ingredients become familiar with one another.

Then the flavourings—half a teaspoonful of lemon-juice, a quarter of a teaspoonful of orange-flower water, and a quarter of a teaspoonful of essence of vanilla. Then another stir.

Whip up the white of an egg and with a little of it moisten the ingredients so that they form a stiffish dough. Put aside the rest of the white of egg—it will come in useful.

And now for the fun! Maybe you've one or two tiny bottles of vegetable colourings left over from Christmas festivities. Now's the time to make use of them.

Break off a small piece of marzipan, and let's make a pod of fresh green peas. Put the small piece into a saucer, and add to it the tiny drop of green colouring.

Knead it well in with your hands. Mould the paste into a tiny pod—pointed at one end with a wee stem at the other—and leave the edges slightly open to reveal a row of baby green peas which you will roll and lay neatly side by side. Then set the pod aside to dry.

## ALL SORTS OF SHAPES

Now, a mushroom! Mould a small piece of uncoloured marzipan to resemble the head of a mushroom. Carefully score the inside edge with a sharp knife. Make a tiny stalk of marzipan and dip one end in egg-white before securing it to the mushroom. Sieve a little cocoa over the inside of the mushroom, and dip the outside in castor sugar, and lay it to dry beside its fellow vegetable.

A new potato is a roughly shaped ball of paste with a few "eyes" inserted with a skewer. Afterwards dipped in a mixture of cocoa and icing sugar.

A pale-green apple sweets sweet with a wee stem of paste, and a clove pushed in the opposite end to give a realistic touch. A few drops of cochineal mixed with a little water and applied to the apple with a fine paintbrush, will give it bright, rosy cheeks.

Daddy will like marzipan walnuts. Tint them green or pink. Roll each into a ball, and press half a walnut in the centre.



And here's another favourite—take the stones from a few dates and insert wee balls of marzipan. Paint the dates with white of egg, and roll each one in cocoon.

Marzipan Fritols are most exciting! Take two equal-sized pieces of marzipan. Tint one pink—the other green. Roll each out to a thickness of a quarter of an inch, then lay one on top of the other and cut them into small blocks with a sharp knife. Roll any left-over bits into small bits—blow—the green and white so that they are prettily striped.

## SNOW EGGS

Introduce Snow Eggs to your family next time you're left in charge of the cooking department!

Stand a saucer over a small saucepan of boiling water, grease it with buttered paper, then, very gently break an egg into it. While the egg is cooking you can make the snowy sauce.

Melt half an ounce of butter—or a piece half the size of a small egg—in a saucepan. Keep the light low, so that the butter doesn't brown—then stir in a dessert-spoonful of flour. Finally add a quarter of a pint of milk, a little at a time, stirring well to keep it smooth. Continue stirring until the sauce comes to the boil, when it will thicken.

Pour this over the poached egg, sprinkle the top with finely-grated cheese, and put it under the hot grill for a minute or two to let the cheese brown.

Serve very thinly-cut slices of buttered brown bread with your Snow Eggs, and everybody will vote it delicious. Incidentally, poached eggs that are to be served on toast can be most successfully cooked in a buttered saucer in the absence of an egg-poacher, and you need have no fear of egg breaking, as it might if poached in a saucepan.

black and white, over Miss Primrose's signature, indisputable, conclusive:

**"THE COURTFIELD PAGEANT.**  
 "With the official approval of the Courtfield Council, it has been decided that the Sixth Form and the Fourth Form shall represent Cliff House School in the Courtfield Pageant, which is due to take place on Saturday, April 4th."  
 ("Signed) PENELOPE PRIMROSE,  
 ("Headmistress.")

"Hurrah!" cheered Clara, and it was taken up in a chorus.  
 Babs felt like singing; dancing for joy. "With the official approval of the Courtfield Council..." Then that must mean that Miss Primrose's letter to the council had had effect. In spite of Mr. Julius Braggott's threat, the Junior School was participating in the pageant.

"I must find Avril and tell her the news," Babs murmured happily.  
 Avril would be delighted. This meant everything to her. It meant that

that their Form had won the coveted honour to be represented in Courtfield's famous and historic spectacle.

"We're looking for you, Babs!" cried Mabs. "It's been suggested that we all go along to Courtfield straight away and hire our costumes!"  
 "Marvellous idea!" laughed Babs.  
 "Avril, you come, too. You're free now, aren't you?"  
 "Oh, yes, and I'd love to come!" smiled Avril.

Ten minutes later a whole stream of juniors, mounted on bicycles, pedalled down the drive of Cliff House, en route for Courtfield.

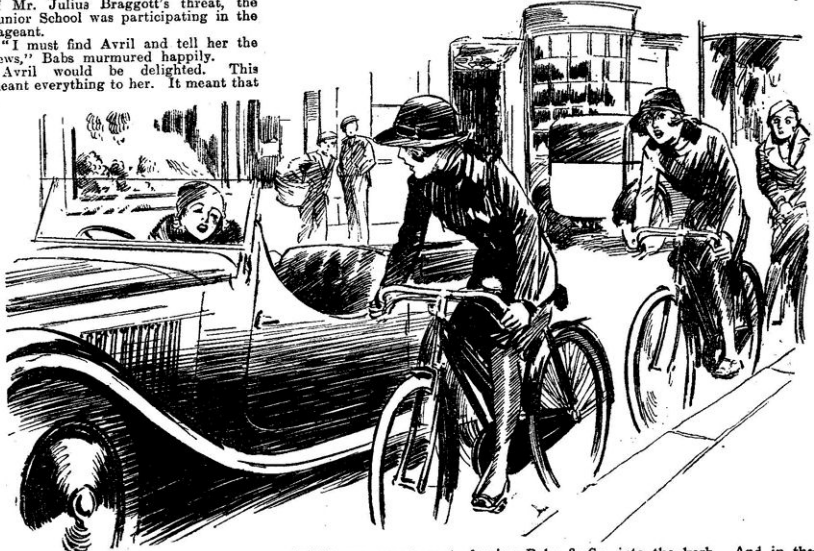
There was no hockey or netball fixture that afternoon, and the trip to Courtfield in the bright spring weather was an ideal substitute. A better sub-

owing to the traffic, when the shrieking of an electric hooter threatened to deafen them.

Babs, riding in the lead, with Avril close behind her, turned with a start. Bearing down on the cyclists was a powerful open sports-touring car. Its hooter blaring, it came racing along at a speed which must have been far in excess of the 30 m.p.h limit imposed in towns.

Next moment the luxury car was sweeping alongside the string of Cliff House girls, dangerously close, its big mudguards inches only from their handlebars.

"Look out!" shouted Clara warningly, as she was forced to swerve into the kerb. "The reckless, crazy chump—"



THE car swept past, forcing Babs & Co. into the kerb. And in the driving-seat was Pearl Braggott—taking a malicious delight in her reckless scaring of the Cliff House chums.

Babs, as one of the performers in the pageant, would be allowed into the grounds of Braggott Manor, and that then she would be able to obtain the vital evidence which would prove Avril's innocence.

Along to the library sped Babs. Avril was there, busy re-cataloguing the thousands of books which lined the walls of that lofty apartment. Many happy hours had she spent there since her appointment by Miss Primrose. All her troubles had become submerged in the joy of having a position, if only temporary, and being near Babs and all her friends who were so kind and charming.

Avril's violet eyes sparkled as she heard the news.

"Barbara, it's—it's almost too good to be true!" she exclaimed rapturously.  
 Babs laughed.

"But it is true right enough, and soon your name will be cleared, Avril," she said.

And then the door of the library burst open, and in rushed Mabs and Clara and Rosa and Janet, and a crowd of other excited Fourth Formers.

Not all of them would be taking part in the tableau, but they joyed to think

substitute on this particular afternoon, for weren't they going to select their costumes for the pageant? Entrancing prospect!

Gaily, happily, Babs and her companions skimmed along the lane. Avril rode beside the junior captain, having borrowed Jenima Carstairs' bicycle.

Their laughing, chattering voices made that merry throng seem as bright as the warm afternoon sunshine which shone down from a blue sky flecked here and there with soft, fleecy clouds.

Through Friardale and on to Courtfield. On a Saturday afternoon that town was a busy place, with its market stalls in the square and its big shops.

Babs & Co. were making for a big theatrical costumier's place which was situated half-way down the High Street. The Cliff House Junior Dramatic Society had done business there before, and the chums were well-known by the proprietor. His stock was large and varied.

They were all spinning down the busy main thoroughfare, riding in single file

Swoosh!

The car swept past Avril and then Babs. If anything, it seemed to swerve in even closer, bare inches separating it from the bicycles. Babs felt the rush of wind as it careered past in a cloud of dust, heard a faint laugh—and caught a glimpse of the girl who sat in the driving-seat.

"Pearl Braggott!" she muttered angrily.

The car rushed on at undiminished speed, brilliantly if recklessly driven. Obvious it was that Pearl, in that spiteful way of hers, had deliberately sought to scare the Cliff House girls. But if one of them had lost her nerve and wobbled outwards—

There was a startled cry from Avril. Babs, looking over her shoulder, saw that Avril had lost her balance and crashed into the kerb. She sprawled on to the pavement, the bicycle clattering down beside her.

In a moment Babs and the others had braked. They clustered round Avril, but she seemed to have suffered no

injury. Plainly the reckless driving of Pearl Braggott had caused her to lose control of her machine.

"I'm all right!" she panted, scrambling quickly to her feet. "But that car—"

"Yes!" exclaimed Clara indignantly. "That driver nearly had me over. The crazy road hog! Drivers like that ought to be taught a lesson—"

"Girls, look!"  
The words came in a horrified gasp from Babs. Her blue eyes wide, she was staring across the pavement. Wonderingly the other girls looked in the same direction.

"They saw that Babs was pointing to a placard on a board outside a news-agent's shop. And then, as they read the words on that placard—"

"Oh, Babs! It can't be true!" exclaimed Mabs incredulously.

"My goodness!" Clara echoed, while Avril seemed struck dumb.

For in large black type the newspaper poster proclaimed:

### "COURTFIELD PAGEANT CANCELLED."

In utter consternation Babs rushed into the shop and bought a copy of the "Courtfield Evening Gazette."

On the back page, in the stop press column, she found the dread announcement. With her dumfounded chums crowded about her, she read the following item:

"A sensation was caused at the meeting of the council this afternoon. Mr. Julius Braggott announced his decision to withdraw all financial aid from the Courtfield Pageant. It is learned from the mayor that, as a result of this, the pageant will have to be cancelled."

"Babs! Oh, Babs!" It was Avril Rayner's sobbing voice. But Babs hardly heard it in the welter of emotions and thoughts which whirled through her numbed brain.

The pageant cancelled!

What a bitter blow—a cruel blow! And it meant— It meant many things; but uppermost in Babs' mind was the realisation that her efforts to help Avril had suffered a smashing setback from which there seemed no possible recovery.

Not now would she be able to enter Braggott Manor as one of the performers in the pageant. Not now would she be able to get the vital evidence which would prove Avril's innocence of the crime for which she had been so unjustly accused!

But Babs, even as she stood there, reading that announcement which seemed to spell the end of all her hopes and plans, vowed that not yet was she beaten.

Avril's name must be cleared—and Babs determined that it should be cleared.

Even if the pageant was cancelled, Avril should be proved innocent!

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

## HILDA RICHARDS

Emily (Fowey, Cornwall).—Thank you very much for the nice snap-shot of your cat, Queenie, and your dog, Mimi. They did look friendly together. You must be a new reader, Emily, my dear—or you'd have heard all about my Juno by now. She is an Alsatian, and is three years old.

Mavis (Cape Province, South Africa).—As a tomboy of course, Clara Trevlira is my favourite character. Hope you had a nice, happy, tomboyish holiday by the sea. Plenty of swimming—though it makes me shiver even to write it, as it's still only early spring in England.

"Tomboy" (Cape Province, South Africa).—Hope you, too, have happy holidays by the sea. I rather suspect that Mavis and you are chums, and spend a great deal of time together. Am I right?

Olive (Wallasey, Cheshire).—Very pleased to receive your charming little letter. Juno is very well, thank you. I have her a pat and a hug from you, and she sends you back a very hearty paw-shake.

Glady and Joan (Liverpool).—"Cave" is a Latin word, meaning "Beware." When Babs & Co. whisper "Cave" they mean: "Look out, Miss So-and-so's coming!" Write as often as you can in your letters, and am always pleased to hear from you.

"Pepper" (Southampton).—Jean Cartwright is tallest girl in the Fourth at C. H., and Marcelle Biquet is the shortest. My precious Juno doesn't like the cold really—though when she gets out into the snow she frolics about in great glee; and incidentally covers her mistress with snow! Do write to me again, my dear—soon!

Mary (Gorleston-on-Sea).—The meaning of your name, Mary, is "Blessed." You would be in the Upper Third—with Madge Stevens and Co.—if you went to C. H. Very best wishes, my dear.

Doreen (Buislip Manor, Middlesex).—Your request is very flattering, Doreen, but really and truly I can't possibly grant it. You see, I made a strict rule a long time ago not to send any photos of myself to readers, so I must abide by it. You'll forgive me, I know! With very best wishes.

Bessie (Meltham, Yorkshire).—So sorry, my dear, but it is a strict rule of the office not to publish readers' full names and addresses, so I cannot put you in touch with a pen-friend. Juno thanks you for the pat and hug—I gave it to her with full Yorkshire warmth, and she greatly appreciated it!

Joan (Caboolture, Australia).—You would be in the Lower Third, with Mary Treherne from Australia, if you went to Cliff House. So you would feel quite at home there, wouldn't you?

Elna (Ayr, Australia).—Your club sounds fascinating, Edna. And what good work it is doing, too! Any more scares riding bareback? Hope for yet another letter from you soon.

Rae (Caboolture, Australia).—Yours was a very tiny letter, wasn't it, Rae? I do hope

## REPLIES TO YOU



you'll have more to say next time, for the longer my readers' letters are, the better I like them, you know!

Yvonne (Montreal, Canada).—Ask your nearest news-dealer to get the "Schoolgirls"

Own" Library for you. Don't merely ask him if he has got them, but ask him to order them for you. He should get them without the slightest difficulty.

"An Admirer of Babs and Clara" (Moungatootori, New Zealand).—I'm afraid you don't tell me enough of yourself for me to say which Form you would be in at Cliff House. Please write again and tell me your age, and I will reply at once—by post, if you'll enclose your name and address.

"Babs' Lover" (Manchester).—Lucky girl to live on a farm, and to have so many peacocks outside the house! Your canary sounds very clever to "sing for his supper" as he does. Juno sends him a "Wuff" of applause.

Margaret (Stranmore, Devon).—Pleased to answer more questions for you, my dear. Barbara Redfern has Brutus, a lovely golden retriever; Bessie Bunter, Ting-a-Ling, a Pekinese; Janet Jordan, Gyp, a frisky and mischievous Pomeranian; Jemima Carstairs, Tramp, a dear mongrel; and Rosa Rodworth, Lady, a Cairn. How's that? Just what you wanted to know? Good!

Stella (Shanklin, Isle of Wight).—Well, Stella, you said you'd want to see your name in print, so here it is! Bessie Bunter's age is 14 years 3 months; Mabel Lynn, 14 years 6 months; and Stella Stone, 15 years 6 months. Juno sends you a frantic tail-wag.

"A Schoolgirl Admirer" (Dublin).—Thank you very much for your long and interesting letter. I will certainly try and introduce the characters you suggested into Cliff House stories in the near future. Please write another of your charming letters soon, my dear.

"Diana's Admirer" (Guernsey).—Well, Jay, here's your name in print. Does it look nice? Please don't forget to send your cats for me, and give Ernie an extra stroke, because I believe she's your favourite. Yes, please write often.

Eileen (Sheffield).—I answered your big question by post, Eileen, but here are just a few lines as you asked to see your name in print. I hope, though, that before you see this I shall have received another letter from you.

Brenda (Harford, Cheshire).—Congratulations, Brenda, on winning the prize for essay on dogs. Juno says it was a fine subject to write about, but she extends you a hearty paw-shake for having acquitted yourself so well.

Mavis (Liverpool).—Thank you very much for the two nice blotters you sent me, and for the nice things you said about my Cliff House stories. I will try and feature Jemima as prominently as possible.

Joan (Leeds, Yorkshire).—I'm not the Editor of THE SCHOOLGIRL, my dear, but I'm in your letter to him you asked that a reply should be put in these columns, he passed your letter on to me. He thanks you for the suggestion for a new series of articles, and I'm to say he's giving it serious consideration, as he thinks it is a very good idea.

## "CLIFF HOUSE ON PARADE"

is the title of next week's exciting long complete Cliff House School story. It deals with Babs' efforts to clear Avril's name, and how she finally triumphs makes a magnificent climax to this novel series.

All your favourites of the Fourth are to the fore in next Saturday's brilliant tale, which you simply must not miss.

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