

TALES FOR ALL TASTES—Inside

The Schoolgirl

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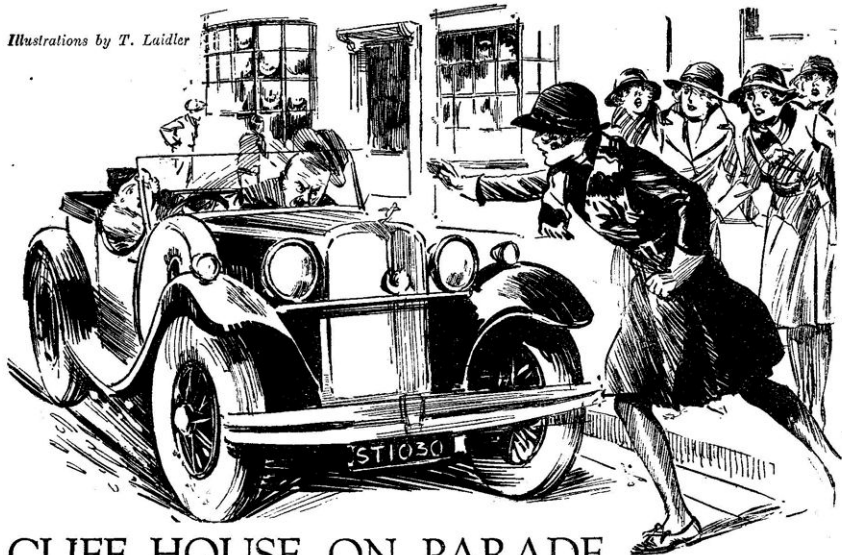


THE PRIDE OF THE PAGEANT

See this week's magnificent
long complete Cliff House
School Story

A Fascinating Long Story of the Famous Chums of the Cliff House Fourth—Complete This Week

Illustrations by T. Laidler



CLIFF HOUSE ON PARADE

Stunning News!

"NO costumes!" sighed Mabel Lynn, with a sad shake of her golden tresses.

"No tableau!" groaned Tomboy Clara Trevely.

"And no pageant!" Barbara Redfern said, with a fierce intensity, and in her blue eyes was mirrored a look of deepest anguish, as if she had just received some terrible blow.

She had. And so had all these other girls who stood grouped about her in the Courtfield High Street. There was quite a crowd of them—Babs, Mabs, and Clara; gentle Marjorie Hazeldene, Janet Jordan, and Rosa Rodworth; Jean Cartwright, Peggy Preston, and June Merrett—all chums of the Fourth Form at Cliff House School.

One other girl there was in that party, too. She did not wear the blue and gold colours of Cliff House; she was definitely older than Babs & Co. But to Avril Rayner, the stunning news had come as a shock which threatened to ruin the whole of her future.

Her violet eyes wide and staring, lips quivering, she stood gazing at a placard which was standing outside a news-agent's shop. The big black type read:

"COURTFIELD PAGEANT
CANCELLED!"

The words seemed to swim before her eyes; she clutched hold of Babs' arm—Babs, who was her friend, who had promised to help her in the crisis which had suddenly overshadowed her life.

But the historic Courtfield Pageant had been cancelled—and Babs would not now be able to help her.

By

HILDA RICHARDS

"Babs—oh Babs!" she said brokenly. Only Babs could understand the tragedy in those words—the tragedy of a girl who had hoped to see herself cleared of a terrible stigma, and whose hopes were now completely dashed.

"I'm sorry, Avril. I know what it means to you. But please try to cheer up. There must be some way—"

And Babs squeezed Avril's arm comfortingly—though truth to tell, she saw no ray of comfort in this unlooked-for crisis.

Mabs and Clara and the others were gazing at Avril with undisguised curiosity. They knew nothing of her secret, and therefore wondered why she, a non-Cliff House girl, should be so upset. Surely the cancellation of the pageant could not mean so much to her as it did to them?

"Well, that's the end of the Fourth Form tableau!" Jean Cartwright said disappointedly.

"And the Sixth Form tableau, as well!" put in June Merrett.

"It's a shame!" murmured Marjorie Hazeldene.

"A shame?" echoed Tomboy Clara, who could always be trusted to speak her mind. "It's a downright disgrace! To think that one man is the cause of it all. I'd like to meet this Mr. Julius Braggott and ask him just what he means by it."

"Yes," remarked Peggy Preston. "I wonder why he's suddenly decided not to finance the pageant?"

Babs could guess the answer to that question, but she did not state her opinions. She knew that Mr. Braggott had tried to prevent the Fourth Form from taking part in the pageant; had failed—and this was the unpleasant millionaire's way of showing his power. Because he was determined that the juniors should not take part, he had cancelled the whole thing.

"Well, I suppose we'd better be getting back to Cliff House," said Mabs miserably. "It's no use hiring the costumes now."

A look of deep disappointment crossed her pretty face. Mabs, as the producer of the tableau which the Fourth Form were enthusiastically rehearsing for the pageant, felt particularly upset. Everything had been going so swimmingly. Eagerly they had set out from Cliff House that afternoon to come to Court-

BARBARA REDFERN has been doing her utmost to aid Avril Rayner, but misfortunes—brought about by the schemes of those who are working against her—have made the Fourth Form captain's task doubly difficult. But with dogged determination Babs sticks to her resolve—and her ultimate triumph is all the greater because of the effort it has cost her.

4 "Cliff House On Parade"

field, anticipating the joys of hiring the necessary costumes. But now—now joy was turned to gloom.

The chums moved slowly across the pavement to the kerb, where their bicycles were propped.

"Wonder what the Sixth will think when they hear about this," muttered Jean Cartwright, springing lithely into the saddle of her machine.

"I know what I think!" said Clara aggressively. "We ought to get up a deputation and tell this Braggott man just where he gets off."

Babs, glancing down the High Street, smiled grimly.

"Well, here's your chance, old thing!" she said. "There's the villain of the piece himself!"

A few yards farther on stood an imposing white building—Courtfield's Town Hall. And down the broad flight of steps jauntily strode a short, podgy figure. It was Mr. Julius Braggott himself, his fleshy face wreathed in a sneering grin.

He climbed into the expensive open touring car which was drawn up by the kerb. Seated behind the driving-wheel was a girl of about eighteen, very attractive in a flashy way. She was Pearl Braggott, the millionaire's haughty daughter.

"Oh, that's him, is it?" Clara snorted. "Well, I'm going to give him a piece of my mind."

"Clara—" gasped Babs. She had not expected her tomboy chum to take her words literally. And, knowing Clara's hot temper, she rather feared the consequences.

"Clara, come back, goose!" she cried.

But Clara, head in air, was already striding purposefully towards the car. Mr. Braggott saw her approaching; recognised her by her hat as a Cliff House girl. He turned to his daughter. "Step on it!" he snapped. "I don't want to bandy words with any of those kids!"

The engine was already running. Pearl, with a spiteful grin, put the car into gear and started off to roar.

But Clara was determined to speak her mind to the millionaire. Recklessly regardless for her safety, she suddenly stepped out into the road, right in the path of the oncoming car.

There came a screech of hastily applied brakes. The car drew up with such a jerk that Mr. Braggott, shooting forward, hit his head against the glass windscreen.

He uttered a furious bellow. From the Cliff House girls, rushing on to the scene, came cries of alarm. For one awful moment they had thought their reckless chum would be knocked down.

Pearl, her face suffused with rage, flung herself out of the car.

"Look here!" she grated. "What do you mean by doing that idiotic trick?"

But Clara ignored her and strode round to where the millionaire was sitting, still rubbing his head and muttering furiously.

"Confound your impudence, girl!" Mr. Braggott was not in the best of tempers now, and his piggy eyes glared at the Tomboy. "Get out of the way, or—"

"I want to talk to you, Mr. Braggott," Clara said, in that blunt way of hers. "About the pageant—"

"Well, I don't want to talk to you, and that's straight!" snapped the millionaire. "You Cliff House girls are a pestering nuisance! The pageant is off, and if you don't like it you can lump it!"

Clara stared at him indignantly. Unlike Babs, this was her first encounter with the bullying millionaire; but, like

Babs, she realised just what an unpleasant type of person he was. She did not mince her words.

"I think," she said, very distinctly, "that you are most ill-mannered!"

Mr. Braggott turned purple. By his side, once more in the driving seat, Pearl leaned across her father, and looked as if she would attempt to smack Clara's face.

JUST RIGHT FOR EASTER

The next jolly number of THE
SCHOOLGIRL will be on sale on

THURSDAY

instead of on Saturday

PLACE YOUR ORDER NOW!

The tomboy's eyes glinted dangerously.

"I shouldn't if I were you," she said grimly.

Sounds of the altercation had been overheard by passers-by. A crowd was beginning to collect.

"Oh, Clara, do come away!" cried Babs desperately, rushing up to her chum.

Mr. Braggott saw her. A sneering smile came back to his face.

"There's the girl you can blame for the pageant being cancelled!" he shouted. "I wasn't having her take part in it—d'you hear? Now you know what it means to interfere with Julius Braggott!" he ran on, glaring at the white-faced Babs. "I've got the money and the power. What I say goes in this town."

The Cliff House girls were staring at their leader in amazement. What did the millionaire mean when he said she was to blame? But from the crowd which had gathered rose an indignant, protesting murmur. Mr. Braggott was not popular with the Courtfield town-folk—and even less popular now that he had been the cause of the pageant being cancelled.

"Go easy, there!" said one man audibly.

The millionaire's eyes gleamed nastily as he sought the speaker. And then it was that he saw Avril Rayner. Beside himself with rage, he hardly knew what he was saying.

"Take that—that thief out of my sight!" he bawled, pointing an accusing finger at Avril. "Got a job at Cliff House School now, has she? Huh! Perhaps they don't know what I know about her. She ought to be in prison for—"

Everybody was staring at Avril now. Crimson and sobbing, she suddenly broke through the crowd and started running down the street.

The condemning words rang in her ears. He had called her a thief before all these people. She could not bear it, innocent of the charge though she was.

"Oh, you—you beast!" cried Babs furiously. "You know it's not true that—"

"It is true! And don't you call me names!" stormed the millionaire.

Clara was gazing bewilderedly at Babs.

"My hat!" she gasped. "This has got me beaten. What's it all mean?"

"I'll tell you what it means!" said Mr. Braggott vindictively. "It means that that girl was employed by me at the manor, and stole a watch. It means that your friend"—with a glare at Babs—"has been helping somebody who is a thief! Huh! Nice goings on, I must say! What's that—that's that?" he suddenly barked, turning to his daughter.

During the altercation Pearl had been whispering frantically in her father's ear.

"No! Why should I?" he snapped. "Why—eh?" The millionaire suddenly started, and threw a hasty glance at the still gathering crowd, noting the hostility which this scene was clearly creating. "Huh! Not a bad idea, Pearl!"

His podgy face creased into a vindictive smile.

"Look here, young lady!" Mr. Braggott said, addressing Clara. "You and your friends at Cliff House want the pageant to take place, don't you? Well, listen here! I'll reconsider my decision about cancelling it—on this condition. Drop this Redfern girl from your tableau, and tell your headmistress that she's to sack the Rayner girl! Got that? And that's my final decision! Right! Pearl, drive on!"

The engine of the car roared. Pearl shot in the gear, and the car seemed to leap forward, narrowly missing Clara and Babs.

THE CROWD had dispersed. Barbara Redfern was being bombarded with questions from her amazed chums.

"Babs, did he mean all that? Was it true?"

"How are you to blame for the pageant being cancelled?"

"I say, old thing, that's not true about—about Avril, is it?"

But for a moment Babs did not answer. She did not even seem to be aware of her chums' presence.

For she was gazing down the High Street, a curious expression in her blue eyes, her pretty face thoughtful. Something seemed to be attracting her attention.

Something was—the fact that the Braggotts' car had stopped a hundred yards or so down the street. Pearl was climbing out, to greet a rather tall girl whom Babs recognised immediately.

For that girl was Florence Ellison of the Lower Fifth Form at Cliff House. Florence was not a popular member of that Form. Indeed, she was decidedly unpopular, being bad-tempered and deceitful, as well as possessing other unpleasant characteristics.

And quite obviously, from the manner of her greeting, Florence was friendly with Pearl. Babs frowned as she saw that. The frown became even more pronounced when Florence and Pearl strode off together, leaving Mr. Braggott to drive away alone in the car.

Babs' thoughts raced. For a reason which she could not understand at that moment, pure instinct making her arrive at the decision, she was suddenly seized with an urge to follow the two girls. Why she should follow them, what she expected to see or learn, even Babs herself did not know.

But such instincts had come to her before, and never had they let her down.

"Babs, you must tell us—" Clara was saying bluntly.

"No time now, old thing!" interrupted the Fourth Form captain

quickly. "Later on. And you can take it from me that Avril isn't a thief! But you girls get back to Cliff House. I'll follow—"

"Why, where are you going?" questioned Mabs, in surprise.

"Never mind. Can't stop to tell you now. Cheerio! See you later!"

And, jumping on to her bicycle, Babs pedalled swiftly down the High Street, leaving her chums staring after her in complete amazement.

Babs trailed Florence and Pearl to Courtfield railway station. She was careful not to let them see her. Then, seeing that they intended to entrain somewhere, she quickly put her bicycle in the cloak-room, and hurried up to the booking office.

The two girls were even then passing through the barrier, tendering their tickets to the inspector.

"Two girls have just booked tickets," Babs said to the booking clerk. "Please will you tell me where they are going?"

The clerk smiled at her through his pigeon-hole.

"Why, yes; they booked to Lantham, miss," he replied at once.

"Then I'll have a ticket to Lantham, please."

Babs did not go on to the platform. She had no intention of being spotted by the girls she was following.

"This is where I turn detective," she told herself, and stood hidden from view at the top of the steps which led down to the platform.

The train came in. Porters shouted, and doors banged. Waiting until she was sure Florence and Pearl would have entered a compartment, Babs then sped down the stairs.

For a moment she thought she was spotted. Florence was occupying a corner seat in one of the compartments, but fortunately the senior had her back to Babs.

"Hurry up there, miss!" shouted the guard.

He opened a door, and Babs skimmed into the carriage. The train started.

During the short journey to Lantham, Babs had time to settle back in the seat and analyse her thoughts. Sound reasoning, as well as instinct, had sent her on this journey, after seeing Florence meet Pearl.

Babs felt that those two girls played a big part in the extraordinary happenings of the last few days. Pearl did definitely, because Avril had told Babs that it was the millionaire's daughter who had taken Mr. Braggott's expensive gold wrist-watch.

Pearl had wanted money, obtaining it by pawning the watch, but allowing Avril to shoulder the blame. She had allowed Avril to be accused of stealing the watch, and, without making an attempt to prevent the injustice, had allowed Avril to be dismissed from her position as junior secretary to the millionaire.

The Fourth Form captain believed Avril implicitly. She felt she was in a position to know that girl's character, for Avril was the daughter of the faithful housekeeper employed by Babs' own parents.

"I'll help you prove your innocence, Avril," Babs had said readily, and the way to do that had offered itself in the fact that Avril knew Pearl still possessed the pawnticket she had received with the money on the watch.

Get hold of that pawnticket and Avril's innocence must be proved. Having been refused admittance into the grounds of Braggott Manor, Babs had realised that her only hope of doing so was to take part in the

pageant, the performers in which were to have been entertained to a lavish tea at the manor.

And now, in the cancellation of the pageant, Babs saw some of Pearl's work. No doubt she had influenced her father to make his decision. And Babs was in Florence the girl who had been acting the part of "spy."

Florence would have no scruples in overbearing Babs' conversation with her chums regarding the Fourth Form tableau which they had been rehearsing for the pageant; and she would have been in the position to hear her discussing the situation with Avril, who now had a temporary position at Cliff House

"Goodness, surely Pearl hasn't come to redeem the watch," Babs breathed. "But, no; they're moving on again. Then, unless I've hit the wrong nail on the head, they've come all this way to make sure the watch is still safe. It must be displayed in the window."

Babs' surmise proved to be correct. For, after Pearl and Florence had passed on down the road, she moved forward to the window of the pawnbroker's shop, and surveyed its gleaming contents.

She knew what to look for. Avril had carefully described the watch to her. And there it was, in a blue velvet case on one of the shelves—a beautiful gold



"ON the assurance that you will keep the matter to yourself, I will tell you who brought the watch here," the pawnbroker said. "It was a girl named . . ." How Babs hung upon his words, feeling certain that he must name—Florence Ellison!

re-cataloguing the thousands of books in the school library.

"That must be it," Babs told herself thoughtfully, as the train rumbled on towards Lantham. "Of course, I can't be sure, but following these two might give me a lead as to future action. The point is, I've got to help Avril—and the only way for that is for the pageant to take place."

At that moment there was a grinding of brakes, and the train began to slow up. Lantham Station! Being an important and busy junction, the train would remain in the platform for some minutes—a fact which suited Babs.

Looking cautiously through the window, she saw Florence and Pearl alight, and walk towards the barrier, waiting until they were out of sight, she then followed.

It was going to be ticklish work now, keeping the two girls in sight without being seen herself. But the streets of Lantham were even more crowded than those of Courtfield, and, like an expert detective, Babs succeeded in trailing her quarry.

Her heart beat with sudden excitement as she saw them pause outside a shop in a side turning just off the High Street. For it was a pawnbroker's shop, with the sign of the three brass balls hanging overhead.

wrist-watch, its face of thin mother-of-pearl studded with tiny gems which glittered brilliantly, with an expanding gold bracelet.

"That's the watch!" Babs thrilled, and gasped as a sudden thought came to her. "Goodness, I wonder if it was Pearl who'd bring the watch here, that's a certainty. I'll go in and ask—perhaps they'll tell me."

Into the shop she went. An elderly looking man, with horn-rimmed spectacles, eyed her keenly from behind a counter. The pawnbroker himself, Babs guessed.

"I'm wondering if you can help me," she began. "It's about a watch you have in the window." Babs described it. "I wonder if you'd mind telling me the name of the person who brought it here?"

The man hesitated and looked at her more keenly.

"I recognise the watch you mean," he replied. "A very beautiful and expensive one. But I'm afraid it is contrary to the rules of this establishment to give the names of clients."

Babs looked at the man with desperate appeal in her blue eyes.

"But—but it is most important that I should know," she said. "Won't you please tell me. I assure you the matter won't go beyond myself."

Still the man hesitated. Then he smiled, the barrier broken down by the earnest entreaty in Babs' voice.

"On your assurance that you will keep the matter strictly to yourself I will tell you," he said. "The watch was brought here by a girl named—"

Babs tensed. She felt she already knew the answer. The man would give Florence Ellison's name.

But the answer came as a terrific shock.

"A girl named Avril Rayner!" the pawnbroker said.



A Captain's Dilemma

THE shock of her discovery in the pawnbroker's shop at Lantham almost numbed Barbara Redfern.

As in a daze she stumbled out of the shop and hardly remembered her journey back to Courtfield. Indeed, so preoccupied was she that she walked out of the station, completely forgetting her bicycle until she had reached a bus stop.

Back to the station Babs went, collected her machine from the cloak-room, and set out for Cliff House. And again and again the thought drummed in her mind:

Had Avril Rayner deceived her? Was Avril as innocent as she made herself out to be—or had she really taken Mr. Braggott's watch?

Babs simply could not believe that. Yet the pawnbroker had said that was the name of the girl who had raised money on the watch. In response to the agonised gasp from Babs he had repeated the name: "Yes, Avril Rayner. A girl of sixteen or seventeen, I should say—"

She had stumbled out of the shop then, waiting to listen to no more, unable to bear the shock, hurt as if she had been struck a blow.

"Oh, Avril—Avril!" Mechanically Babs' legs pressed harder on the pedals. She must hurry back to the school. She must see Avril, get the truth from her. The truth!

The afternoon was waning when Babs reached Cliff House. The sun was sinking in a blaze of crimson and golden glory to the west, bathing the old school in a rich glow.

But Babs, crossing from the cycle shed after putting away her machine, had no eyes for the beauty of that waning spring day as she neared the steps which led up into the school.

On those steps was a crowd of girls, and an argument seemed to be in progress. She saw Lydia Crossendale, the gress. She saw with her cronies, Brenda Fallace, Freda Ferriers, and Frances Frost.

She saw, too, Avril Rayner. Avril was obviously trying to enter the school; and just as obviously Lydia & Co. were barring her way.

Babs quickened her pace. Soon she could hear what was being said.

"You're not coming in here!" Lydia was saying, in that spiteful voice of hers.

"But—please!" protested Avril nervously. "You have no right to stop me—"

"And nor have you any right to prevent the Fourth from taking part in the pageant!" snapped Lydia. "I've just heard it's your fault the pageant has been cancelled. Well, if you've any decency you'll clear out of here—"

Babs arrived at that moment with a rush.

"And if you've any sense of fair play, Lydia," she cried hotly, "you'll allow Avril to pass into the school. Miss Primrose has given her a temporary position here, and you've no right to interfere!"

"Interfere!" hooted Lydia. "I like that, coming from you, Barbara! I suppose you haven't interfered? I suppose you and this—this girl haven't been responsible for the pageant being cancelled. Well, the Fourth is going to have something to say about this, Barbara!"

The junior captain flushed and stood biting her lip. This was an unexpected and awkward development of the situation. She realised with dismay that many of the girls might take the same attitude.

Everybody had been looking forward to seeing the pageant, and now that Mr. Braggott had issued what amounted to an ultimatum, Babs could foresee difficult times ahead.

Girls like Lydia & Co., jealous of her popularity and power in the Fourth, would do their best to stir up trouble, making the pageant an excuse. Others, genuinely disappointed at its cancellation, would no doubt expect Babs to stand down and sacrifice her part in the tableau.

Babs felt in a quandary. She was as enthusiastic as anybody that the pageant should take place. But above all had been her desire to help Avril. Now, in view of what she had learned at Lantham, however— That altered her position somewhat.

Babs faced Lydia with level gaze. "I'm quite willing to listen to what the Fourth has to say at the right time and in the proper place, Lydia," she said. "This is not the proper place, and you have no right to prevent Avril from entering the school."

Avril, crimson and nervous, embarrassed because she was the cause of these heated words, and anxious only to ease the tension, tried to slip past Lydia.

"Oh, please don't argue on my account, Barbara," she said quickly. "I'll see you later—"

But Lydia, with an unpleasant scowl, deliberately stepped in Avril's path. "You're not coming into this school, so—" she began.

"Hallo, what's the rumpus!" Clara Trevelyn's cheery voice interrupted the proceedings. The Tomboy and some of the other Fourth-Formers had been putting in netball practice after their return from Courtfield. Now they had just come from the junior playing-field, hungry and ready for tea in their studies.

Clara, realising that an argument was in progress, and having seen Lydia deliberately bar Avril from entering the school, grinned mischievously.

"Catch, Lydia!" she called out, and threw the football which she had been carrying.

Lydia, unprepared for that action, caught the ball, but not with her hands. It thumped against her chest and sent her staggering.

"You cat, Clara!" she shouted angrily. "Look what you've done—"

The tomboy continued to grin, while Avril, relieved of Lydia's attentions, took the opportunity to slip past her and into the lobby. Babs followed close on her heels.

"Avril," she said quietly, when they were crossing Big Hall, "I want a word with you. I've just been to Lantham and—"

And, very seriously, Babs went on to tell Avril what she had learned from the pawnbroker.

Avril Rayner's eyes opened wide in horror as she listened, as she saw the doubt on Babs' face.

"Oh, Barbara, you—you believe I haven't been telling you the truth!" she cried, almost accusingly. "You think I am—a thief. But I swear I'm not. It's all part of the scheme to get me blamed—it must be. Barbara," she added in desperate entreaty, "don't you see that the girl who took that watch to the pawnbroker's must have given my name!"

Babs started. In the shock of what she had learned she had not considered that possibility. Goodness, what a blind fool she had been. Seeing Avril again, looking into those violet eyes of hers, suspicion and doubts faded. Avril was no thief—she had been mean ever to doubt her.

"I—I'm sorry, Avril," Babs said. "Please forgive me. Yes, I see it now. Somebody gave your name in case inquiries should be made. But what are we going to do now, with the pageant cancelled? You heard what Braggott said—and what Lydia Crossendale said. It's awkward—"

Avril looked troubled. "I know, I'm afraid I've been selfish in asking you to help me," she said miserably. "It's only causing bad feeling between you and the other girls. Don't worry about me any longer, Barbara. I'll—I'll leave here—"

But Babs shook her head. She smiled reassuringly.

"You'll do nothing of the sort! Don't you worry, Avril. You run along and have tea now, and remember that I'm still going to help you. I'll find some way of beating Julius Braggott and his daughter!"

But later that evening, after tea, Babs realised just what a tremendous task she had set herself.

Going into the Fourth Form Common-room with Mabs and plump Bessie Bunter, it was not long before she was conscious of a restlessness among some of the girls.

Lydia Crossendale strolled languidly across to Babs, just as she was about to commence a game of table-tennis with Clara.

"The Fourth wants to know what you intend to do, Barbara," she said.

"About what, Lydia?" "About the pageant. We've all heard what Mr. Braggott said in Courtfield this afternoon. I, for one, think you ought to drop out of the tableau."

"Hear, hear!" supported Lydia's cronies.

"And," continued the snob of the Fourth, thoroughly enjoying the situation, "I think that girl Avril Rayner should be forced to leave the school. After all, why should two girls jeopardise such a famous show as the Courtfield Pageant? I should have thought," she added, with a sneer, "that the marvellous Barbara Redfern would be only too pleased to make this sacrifice for the sake of the pageant!"

Babs flushed scarlet. There was a sort of indignation from Clara, while Mabs and Bessie and Marjorie, and one or two others of Babs' closest chums instinctively lined up beside their leader, as if scenting trouble and showing their intention to trouble and showing on many of the girls. It was obvious that she had already discussed the matter with them and gained their support.

"Lydia is right!" "Babs should do the decent thing!"

Before the junior captain could reply, however, Clara hotly defended her chum. "Well, you miserable things!" she exclaimed. "You're only too ready to condemn Babs when it's this Mr. Braggott who should be ticked off. He's the cause of the whole trouble, and for no reason at all, as far as I can see. What right has he to dictate that Babs shouldn't take part in the pageant? And as for Avril Rayner—well, I like her, in spite of what he said and called her. We all want the pageant to go on, of course, but not at the expense of Babs here, who's worked so hard to get the Fourth represented!"

"That was an unusually long speech for Tomboy Clara, but it showed how strongly she felt the position.

"Well spoken, Clara!" supported Mabel Lynn warmly. "If Babs doesn't take part in the pageant, then neither do I. The Fourth's tableau was her idea, and I agree with Clara."

Babs stood silent, painfully conscious of her position. Had it not been for Avril Rayner, perhaps she would willingly have made the sacrifice. But there was Avril to be considered; Avril whom she was determined to help. Somehow she must endeavour to make it certain that the pageant took place on the following Saturday. Somehow, too—equally important—she herself must be a performer.

How was she going to do it—how?

The situation showed every sign of causing a split in the Fourth Form. Babs' own chums loyally supported their leader. They would rather see the pageant cancelled altogether than that Babs should be victimised by an unpleasant man like Mr. Braggott.

But many of the other girls, swayed by Lydia, were just as convinced that Babs should make the sacrifice, not realising the truth behind their captain's hesitation.

Bitter words were spoken. There was the beginnings of a crisis in the Fourth Form.

And then matters were brought to a head in dramatic fashion—by the arrival of Stella Stone, the head prefect of Cliff House.

She appeared in the Common-room when tempers were on the point of breaking, when a helpless Babs was horrified to see Clara and Lydia hotly arguing.

The uproar died down instantly as Stella came into the room. The prefect frowned, realising what was afoot, and crossed over to Babs.

"Barbara," she said very quietly, "I hope you will fully realise my motive in coming here, and accept my words in the spirit in which they are uttered."

Instinctively Babs knew what was coming. Inwardly she groaned.

"I don't wish to influence you in making a decision," Stella continued gravely, "but no doubt you realise that you can make or mar the Courtfield Pageant. It has come to my ears what Mr. Braggott has said. While I don't admire him for his attitude, the fact remains that the pageant is dependent on him. The council are not in the position to run it should he withdraw his aid financially. Besides being an historic event, the pageant is also the means of providing the local hospitals with much-needed support. I hope you'll give that point full consideration when making a decision, Barbara."

And Stella having said that, went. She had not wished to influence the junior captain, but she had certainly made it clear what she expected Babs to do.

(Continued overleaf)

SUCH USEFUL HOLIDAY TASKS

There are so many preparations to make for the summer. What about devoting your spare time this holiday to looking ahead?

WHETHER you have a glorious three weeks ("far too long—school holidays!" mother will say to that), a heavenly fortnight, or a rather meany week only, for your Easter holidays, you're sure to have SOME time to spare.

What shall you do with it? Swot up your weak subject ready for next term? Shudders! Oh, no! Not unless you have been given a special command to do so!

Practise tennis in the park? A lovely idea, you say—but even that won't take up all the spare time, for when you're free to book the court, the girl-friend has to be on a visit to the dentist, or helping mother with the last touches of spring-cleaning.

So what about using your time all by yourself to make the most marvellous plans in readiness to greet the summer weather?

WHAT ABOUT—

Last year's summer frocks? Fish them out of the summer clothes trunk, and give them a thorough examination. Too short? Sure to be.

First, a few lettings-down of hems, then. Next an extra special washing and careful ironing, then placing on hangers in the wardrobe ready for the first terribly hot day, when other people will be sighing and groaning at how suddenly summer descends on us!

HOW IS—

Your rubber bathing cap? Is it all stuck together? The rubber quite perished? If so, that means a new one, I'm afraid.

But perhaps it has survived in spite of everything. In which case, give it a really gentle washing in lukewarm water with just a suspicion of your favourite face soap on the cloth. It will come up almost as good as new.

EXAMINE—

That bathing suit. No moth holes, I hope? But stitches will run in the very best bathing suits, so get out your darning needle and wool,

and repair any little catches that may surprise you.

Is it stiffish from salt-water bathing? Then why not wash it as carefully as you would a winter jersey? In the fluffiest soapy water, with two good warm-water rinsings. Then lay it flat in the garden to dry.

And don't forget to see if shoulder buttons are on firmly. No fear then of calamities at the school baths.

SORT THROUGH—

Your tennis kit. Your white shoes will very likely be nearer grey than white after a season's stay at the bottom of a cupboard with all sorts of things piled over them.

So give them a good wash first, scrubbing lightly with a soapy nail brush. Then rinse in clear water. Allow to dry before giving them the pipeclaying of their existence.

Examine your racket. Give the wood part a good polishing with furniture cream, see that the strings are in tiptop condition.

PUT AWAY—

Your winter school hat (if you go to a school where straw hats are the rule on the first day of the summer term).

With a saucer of ammonia and water and a little brush, go over every inch of it, bringing up the nap and removing any grease spots or stains.

The garden's the place for this treatment, remember. For mother's sure to object to the smell of ammonia while she's cooking an extra-nice holiday cake!

Leave your hat in the garden to dry and air, too, before putting it away.

OVERHAUL—

Your camera. See that no rust has accumulated on the metal parts, and give the fabric part a generous "feeding" of furniture cream.

Make sure there's no film in, then give the shutter a good click, to make sure it's working thoroughly before putting in a new roll.

PAY SPECIAL ATTENTION—

To your school outfit for the new term. Press your tunic; see that your blouse is ironed with real skill. Put new laces in your school shoes. Turn out your school case and give it a polish. Examine your gloves, wash your scarves, and smarten up your blazer.

Then, when the new term comes along, you'll feel ready for anything. And, who knows—you may even be the new Form captain!



If Babs had been worried before, she now felt desperate.

What should she do?

BARBARA REDFERN was not the only girl at Cliff House to be worried.

In a study in the Lower Fifth quarters, Florence Ellison was also doing a lot of thinking.

Only her thoughts, unlike those of Babs, were selfish and cunning.

Florence was not a girl whom the Lower Fifth was proud to have in its ranks. Indeed, she was distinctly unpopular, owing to her unpleasant characteristics. But not even the Lower Fifth realised just how unpleasant Florence had been since Miss Primrose had announced that Cliff House should be represented in the Courtfield Pageant.

Nor, as yet, did Barbara Redfern suspect the full extent to which the scheming Florence had already gone in her efforts to prevent the Fourth from participating in the Courtfield Pageant, and was prepared to go, should she be driven to it.

For two reasons had Florence endeavoured to disgrace the juniors. First, because she herself, unlike those who appear in the pageant in a Lower Fifth tableau; secondly, because she was being paid by Pearl Braggott to ensure that Barbara Redfern was not among the performers who would be entertained to tea in Braggott Manor at the conclusion of the procession's march through Courtfield.

The former objective had failed, which only served to make Florence more bitterly determined that the second should not meet with a similar fate.

Of the two, this was the more vital from Florence's point of view; certainly it was the more vital where Pearl was concerned.

For Pearl had indeed taken the watch for the stealing of which Avril Rayner, then employed by Julius Braggott as a junior secretary, had been accused. Part of the money obtained from the pawnshop on that watch she had loaned to Florence, who knew the full circumstances.

So they were both in the scheme of things; to both it was vitally important that Barbara Redfern should not prove Avril's innocence!

Florence knew, of course, of Mr. Braggott's ultimatum. She knew, too, that as yet Babs hadn't fallen for it. So now Florence was thinking of ways by which she could make certain that Babs did not appear in the pageant; by which Avril could be further disgraced; and by which even yet the Lower Fifth, and not the Fourth, would appear in Courtfield's spectacle.

It was a heavy programme, so to speak, involving much thought and much scheming. But Florence, with her full share of cunning, felt equal to the task.

Indeed, she had already hit on a way of encompassing Babs' downfall. It was just a question of examining the method from all angles, and making sure she herself would be safe from the consequences. The unpleasant smile on her face proclaimed that she had come to a decision.

"I'll do it!" Florence muttered. "They'll either print it—and won't there be a row then! Or, if they don't, I'll be bound they return it to Primmy!"

Whereupon the Fifth Former became busy at the typewriter she had surreptitiously borrowed from Miss Charmant's study, during the Fourth Form mistress's absence.

She wrote a letter, after much con-

centration, to the editor of the "Courtfield Gazette," which read as follows:

"Dear Sir,—I have been asked by my Form to write you on the subject of the Courtfield Pageant. We hear this is in danger of being cancelled owing to the whim of an unpleasant gentleman named Julius Braggott, who seems able to twist the Courtfield Town Council round his little finger. We feel this is more than regrettable; it is disgraceful—a showing-up of unsavoury council politics. Julius Braggott should be bound and gagged at Courtfield. We don't want men of his disreputable type in this district. Hoping you will give this matter full publicity, yours truly—"

Grinning maliciously, Florence pulled the sheet of paper out of the typewriter, pushed the machine aside, and again became busy, this time with pen and ink and a piece of carbon paper.

On the table was an old exercise-book. It had belonged to Barbara Redfern, and the cover bore her signature. With the aid of the carbon paper, Florence now descended to the despicable trick of imitating that signature.

Half a dozen times she copied the signature; then, satisfied with her handiwork, she traced "Barbara Redfern" at the foot of the letter to the editor of the "Courtfield Gazette."

"And that's that!" Florence grinned. "Oh, what a shock in store for Barbara! And talking about shocks, I rather think Avril Rayner will be getting one, too!"



From Bad to Worse

SUNDAY passed quietly. Even so, there was an undercurrent of simmering trouble throughout the school, growing more tense in the evening, as though it were boiling up and up, threatening to overflow at any moment.

Barbara Redfern sensed it, knew that the pageant and she were to blame. Sunday was an unhappy day for Babs. Usually so sunny and gay, she had become depressed and preoccupied.

She could drop out of the Fourth Form tableau, which meant she would not participate in the pageant. If she didn't drop out the pageant would apparently be cancelled. In both cases she would not achieve her objective—that of getting into Braggott Manor, and thus helping Avril to prove her innocence.

It was no use her trying to see the millionaire and plead Avril's cause with him. Mr. Braggott had already made it plain that he would not listen to her.

She was thus faced with the necessity of making it certain in some way that the pageant would take place, though how, Babs frankly had to admit, she was baffled.

Monday came, and the threatened storm broke—in more senses than one.

No sooner had rising bell rung, and the Fourth Form was awake, than Babs found herself assailed with a bombardment of awkward questions from a group of girls led by Lydia Crossendale.

One and all demanded that she should make her decision that morning. Time was getting short. The pageant was due to take place on the Saturday, and costumes would have to be hired, rehearsals completed.

Babs, white and haggard after a restless night, her nerves frayed, felt she would scream.

Dressing swiftly, she almost ran from the dormitory, rather despising herself

for being afraid to face the Form, but desperately fighting for time.

She would see Avril. Between them they must—simply must—find some way out of this dilemma.

Just before bell went for lessons Babs went to the library, where she knew she would find Avril, and almost certain to be alone.

But, opening the door, Babs saw that her friend was not alone. Miss Primrose was also there—a very angry headmistress, whose curt words brought Babs to a startled standstill in the doorway.

"Then this letter is true!" the Head was saying, holding up a sheet of note-paper. "I can hardly credit that you have been so wicked as to take something which does not belong to you, but here is the evidence. Avril, what have you to say?"

Avril's reply came in a voice which was poignant with distress.

"Oh, it's not true—it's not true, Miss Primrose!" she cried. "I didn't steal the pencil from Pearl—"

Babs, horrified now, rushed into the library.

"Miss Primrose, what has happened?" she gasped.

The headmistress swung round.

"Ah, Barbara! I am glad you are here. What has happened, indeed? Much as I regret saying it, it seems that Avril is a thief, after all! And here is the evidence!"

From the centre drawer of the small writing-table at which Avril had been working Miss Primrose took out a gold propelling pencil.

"This pencil," she said, "has engraved on it Pearl Braggott's name. I have received a letter from Miss Braggott this morning saying that she has lost this pencil, and that she suspects Avril has stolen it. At first I refused to believe it, but to satisfy myself I questioned Avril. She denied it, but what am I to think when I find the missing pencil in this drawer?"

Avril sprang forward and seized Babs by the arm.

"Barbara, I swear it's not true!" she cried desperately. "Say you believe me!"

Babs looked from Avril to Miss Primrose. In the headmistress' eyes she saw unflinching condemnation. In spite of herself, she felt those former suspicions returning.

"Avril, I—I— Oh, Miss Primrose, there must be a mistake!" Babs said.

"The mistake is, Barbara," retorted Miss Primrose, "that we believed Avril innocent of that other regrettable affair, for which Mr. Braggott dismissed her from his employ. To my mind, the evidence is conclusive. How else could this pencil have been in Avril's drawer?"

I am very distressed to think that my faith and judgment in this girl have been so misplaced. It is obviously a habit of hers to take things which do not belong to her. This pencil will be returned immediately. I observe, Avril, that you have very nearly finished cataloguing all the books. You should complete the task by this evening, when you will leave the school. I hope you realise that I am being very lenient with you in taking the matter no further?"

But Avril hardly heard those words. She was staring in horror at Babs.

"Then you don't believe me, Barbara!" she cried pathetically. "You don't!"

Babs said nothing. She didn't know what to believe. Once more her confidence in Avril Rayner had received a shattering blow.

Silently she stood there. Then from Avril's lips burst a piteous cry, and suddenly she rushed from the library.

Babs watched her go, torn with doubt. But she knew that, in view of this incident, she would have to drop out of the Fourth Form tableau.

THAT WAS the first of the shocks prepared by the scheming Florence Ellison.

The second fell later that morning, in the Fourth Form class-room, with Babs herself as the victim this time.

Immediately after leaving the library the bell for lessons had rung, so not yet had Babs acquainted her Form-mates with her decision. But that decision was to be precipitated by the next bombshell.

Lessons were interrupted by the arrival of Miss Primrose; and if the headmistress had been angry in the library, Babs saw now that she was in a towering rage.

Once again she was holding a letter, and as she swept into the room her piercing eyes turned immediately to Babs.

"Pardon my interrupting the lesson so abruptly, Miss Charmant," the headmistress said, "but a very grave matter has been brought to my notice." She turned to the class. "Barbara," she snapped, "please stand up!"

Wonderingly Babs obeyed. "Did you write to the editor of the 'Courtfield Gazette' on Saturday?" Miss Primrose questioned icily.

"To the editor—Why, certainly not," Barbara replied puzzledly.

Miss Primrose frowned. "Please speak the truth, Barbara!" she said grimly. "This letter, bearing your signature, has been returned by Mr. Marshall. He says he dare not publish such a libellous letter!"

Babs stared, unable to believe her ears.

"But—but, Miss Primrose, I've never written such a letter," she stammered. "May I see it, please?"

She stepped to the front of an amazed class and took the letter. And then as Babs read that astounding missive, as she saw her own signature at the foot of that libellous letter, she almost fainted.

"Goodness!" she gasped. "It—it looks like my signature, but it isn't. Miss Primrose, I assure you I never wrote such a letter!"

The headmistress stamped a foot.

"Really, Barbara, why attempt to deny it, when the evidence is so obvious? I am shocked to think that a girl of this school could have written such a scandalous letter. I am thankful, indeed, that Mr. Marshall, the editor, has returned it to me. Should that letter have got into print, there would have been terrible trouble."

"But—but—" began Babs wildly.

"Silence, Barbara! You will write me five hundred lines, and in addition you are detained next Saturday, which means you will not be able to take part in, or witness, the pageant. That is assuming the pageant takes place, although I understand there is some doubt about the matter."

Babs shrugged wearily. "The pageant will take place, Miss Primrose," she said quietly. "As Mr. Braggott wishes it, I shall not appear in the Fourth Form tableau!"

And so Babs made her decision.

While Cliff House was jubilant, for now it seemed that nothing could stop the pageant.

The important thing was that she had obeyed Pearl Braggott's instructions to the letter. Now the money she owed Pearl would be forgotten, and the millionaire's daughter had also promised her a "present" when she received her next allowance.

Pearl was also pleased when she heard the news. She heard it from Florence's own lips that same evening, when, by arrangement over the telephone, the two girls met in Uncle Clegg's small teashop in Friarale village.

Wearing an ultra-smart and expensive coat trimmed with fur, and a dainty, exclusively designed hat, Pearl made a strong contrast to Florence, who, by comparison seemed soberly dressed in her navy blue coat and beret.

"You worked it, eh?" Pearl said eagerly.

Florence flashed a quick glance round the tiny shop. There was only one other customer besides themselves in Uncle Clegg's, and that person was seated three tables away in a corner, hidden from view behind an evening newspaper.

"Worked like a charm," Florence replied softly. "I planted that gold pencil of yours in Avril's desk, and she's leaving the school to-night. And Barbara Redfern's dropped out of the pageant, so you've nothing to fear, Pearl."

The millionaire's daughter nodded.

"I was beginning to get worried," she confessed. "I don't quite know what that Redfern girl expected to do, but perhaps Avril had told her about the pawnticket. It's got her name on it, of course, but there might have been awkward inquiries. Thank goodness I get my allowance next week, and we'll be able to get the watch back. I won't forget you, Florence."

The Cliff House senior smiled with satisfaction.



"CAN'T be too careful," Babs told herself. "I should have put that flag in a safe place." And stealthily Babs stole from the dormitory—little guessing the dramatic scene in which she was so soon to take part.

"Thanks, Pearl. I can do with some cash to get myself some new clothes. I seem to have worked things all right for you, but not for myself. I'm awfully keen to take part in the pageant. Still, perhaps I'll find a way yet of getting those Fourth Form kids out of it—"

"I shouldn't worry if I were you," put in Pearl. "You see, just to be on the safe side I've persuaded pater to cancel the pageant altogether. It's going to cause a bit of a bother, but he always does what I say. Coming now? I'll settle the bill!"

The two girls left the teashop. Two minutes passed, and the remaining customer stirred. The newspaper was lowered—to reveal the pretty features of Barbara Redfern!



No Choice for Braggott

"WELL, of all the mean, scheming things!" Babs spoke her thoughts aloud, forcibly.

It was by pure accident that she happened to be in the teashop when Pearl and Florence arrived. She had called in merely for a cup of coffee, on her way back to Cliff House after a flying visit to Lantham immediately after lessons.

Not wishing to be seen either by Pearl or Florence, knowing that there might be an unpleasant exchange of words, she had hidden herself behind the newspaper.

And how glad she was, now, that she had taken that precaution!

For that very illuminating conversation, so unexpectedly overheard, was helping her to understand many things which heretofore had been puzzling—that and another conversation to which she had been a party earlier on during the evening at Lantham!

"So Florence Ellison has been at the bottom of everything—bribed, of course, by the dear Pearl!" mused the junior captain. "And poor Avril! I know now that she's innocent. Oh, what must she be thinking of me for acting as I did?"

No longer did Babs entertain even the slightest suspicion of Avril. From Florence's own lips she had heard the truth about the finding of Pearl's gold pencil.

And from the Lantham pawnbroker she had learned that the girl who had taken Mr. Braggott's wrist-watch to his shop had certainly given the name of Avril Rayner, but her description left no doubt that the girl was actually Florence Ellison.

Babs had had a long talk with the pawnbroker, as a result of which they had come to a certain arrangement. That arrangement, however, looked like being upset by Pearl's statement that the pageant was, after all, being cancelled.

Babs frowned worriedly. "That would happen!" she muttered. "It's going to spoil everything, and just when things were fixed up so perfectly! But there's time yet. Braggott seems to change his mind every five minutes, so there's still hope—especially as it seems that the council are thinking of making him mayor next year. That ought to please him!"

She hastily finished her coffee, paid Uncle Clegg, and went out into the High Street, where she collected her bicycle from the side of the shop.

Arrived back at Cliff House, Babs at once sought out Avril. That girl's violet eyes shone happily when Babs told her what she had learned and done that evening.

"I'm so glad you believe me now, Barbara," she said. "That was what hurt. I thought you, too, had turned against me. But Miss Primrose doesn't know the truth—"

"She'll know it before long!" Babs answered reassuringly. "I'd tell Primmy now, but it's best that Florence should continue to think we don't know the truth. You're leaving here to-night, aren't you? Then I suggest you stay somewhere in Courtfield until Saturday and keep in touch with me. Don't forget our arrangement. It's going to mean everything to you, Avril."

"I know, Barbara. You were wonderful to think of it," Avril said, a little huskily. "But doesn't it depend on the Courtfield pageant taking place?"

Babs smiled, albeit she looked thoughtful.

"Not necessarily, although it will be more certain of success that way. Don't worry. Have you ever had peculiar feelings, Avril—hunches, as the Americans call them? Well, I've a feeling that the Courtfield Pageant is going to take place!"

"And I've a feeling that your feeling is right, Barbara," Avril smiled.

THE FOLLOWING morning the local newspapers were full of the sensational news that Mr. Julius Braggott had definitely decided to withdraw all his financial support from the Courtfield Pageant.

Since the millionaire had offered no excuse for his belated action, the papers were scathingly critical. Already unpopular in the district, tolerated only because of his wealth and power, Mr. Braggott's reputation suffered considerably.

The Courtfield Council, saddled with heavy expenses owing to the building of an arterial road, stated that they were not in a position to back the pageant. And so, with regret, since no financial support was forthcoming from other directions, they declared that the spectacle would have to be postponed for that year, at least.

Cliff House read the news with

dismay at first. Following dismay came indignation. Everybody had been eagerly anticipating the pageant. In the Sixth and Fourth Forms particularly, bitter words were said about Mr. Braggott. As the Forms which were to have represented Cliff House in the display, perhaps they had more reason to be disappointed.

"Well, of all the swindles!" declared Tomboy Clara indignantly. "Babs is sport enough to drop out of our tableau, and then this Mr. Braggott goes back on his word. Well, I never did think much of him, and now I think even less."

"And we've hired the costumes!" Mabs sighed. "They ought to arrive to-day, and this evening I was going to arrange a full-dress rehearsal. Oh, it's too bad!"

"Where's Babs?" cried Margot Lantham. "Babs is usually full of bright ideas. Perhaps she can think of something now."

"Yes, rather! Babs—Babs!" Babs, back in the good books of the Fourth now, smilingly mounted a chair in the Common-room, where this animated scene was taking place, after morning lessons.

"Not so much noise, you girls!" she laughed. "Now, what's the fuss?"

"The Form would like you to supply, free of charge, a nice juicy idea for making sure that the pageant takes place on Saturday!" said Margot, as calmly as if she were putting the simplest request imaginable.

Babs nodded seriously. "Well, as it happens, I think I can make a suggestion—"

"Let's have it, Babs!" went up a shout.

"But," smiled the Fourth Form captain. "I regret to say there will be a small stipulation."

"Oh! What is it?" Babs knew her next words were going to cause a sensation.

"That you give Avril a place in the Fourth Form tableau!" she replied coolly.

For a moment there was an amazed silence.

"That—that girl!" gasped June Merrett, remembering the cloud under which Avril had left the previous evening.

"But she's not even a Cliff House girl," protested Phyllis Howell.

"I know," said Babs, quite unperturbed by the outburst. "But I have a special reason for making this request. In fact, I think I'll tell you Avril's story!"

And Babs did—or, at least, as much of the story as did not involve Florence Ellison's name and would not spoil her own future plans. Babs thought it was best that the Fourth should know, and Avril had said she wouldn't mind.

Dumbfounded, the girls listened, and at the end of the recital very few of them were left any longer in doubt as to Avril's innocence.

"Poor old Avril!" said Mabs softly. "Well, as far as I'm concerned, there's no reason why she shouldn't take part in the Fourth's tableau."

"Rather not! Anything you say, Babs!" was the Form's verdict. "Now, what's this idea?"

"That we get up a deputation and beard this Braggott lion in his own den!" said Babs. "Point out to him that the hospitals are the chief sufferers, that everybody, including your Form, is made keen that the pageant should take place, and ask him to reconsider his decision."

"Isn't it a bit undignified?" criticised Margot Lantham.

"It needn't be," Babs denied. "My

point is that Mr. Braggott must know of the bad feeling and hostility against himself locally. Even he can't afford to be unpopular, and I don't suppose he wants to be, anyway. We might just catch him at the proper moment—a few well-chosen words might change his mind. I'd see him myself, but, as explained, I've been barred from the manor. But a crowd of us ought to get in. I'll keep in the background, and I suggest Mabs should be spokesman."

After further discussion, the idea was adopted with enthusiasm. "Ceapay" it went against the grain a little to plead with the ill-mannered millionaire, but for the sake of the pageant the Fourth Form was prepared to submerge its finer feelings.

That evening a big party set out from Cliff House en route for Braggott Manor. The party consisted of all the girls who would be performing in the Fourth Form tableau, and one or two others, including Babs.

Since she had dropped out of the tableau, Babs was actually a non-performer now. She wanted to see what result the deputation brought about before asking to be allowed to take up her part again.

The Fourth would welcome her with open arms, she knew. Gentle Marjorie Hazeldene, one of the prettiest girls in Cliff House, was at the moment taking the part of Patricia, the main character in the tableau. But Marjorie was not ideal for the part—she herself would have been the first to admit that she was not nearly so suitable as Babs.

Always very serious, in a way rather timid, Marjorie had not Babs' bold expression which was so necessary a characteristic in portraying the fair Patricia who, centuries ago, had commanded the man-of-war Courtfield when it sailed with Drake against the Spanish Armada and had courageously captured an enemy galleon.

In double file the girls streamed down the Friardale lane on their bicycles. It was an ideal evening for cycling—keen, as it can be in early April, but bright. The fresh green of the countryside, the trees and hedgerows bursting into life, heralded the welcome approach of spring.

Cliff Cross was reached, and then the village. On the outskirts of Friardale, however, a surprising scene met the startled gaze of the Fourth Formers.

A big crowd had collected, and, to judge from the uproar, it was not a peaceful crowd.

"My hat!" exclaimed Clara. "What's the merry old rumpus about?"

"Better steer clear of it," advised Babs. "We don't want to get mixed up in any scenes."

The girls drew nearer, and now they could hear the shouting of the crowd.

"We want to talk to you!" went up a roar.

Then came another voice, husky with fear as well as rage.

"Get back, there! Don't you dare lay hands on me!"

Babs turned to Clara with a start. "It's Braggott!" she gasped.

"And having an argument!" nodded Clara. "Well, I must say he's asked for trouble, and he seems to be getting it. But they look a bit threatening, don't they? Think we ought to do anything?"

Babs frowned worriedly. She had no wish that she and her chums should be involved in an unpleasant scene, but it was obvious that the crowd might get out of hand if Julius Braggott was not careful.

They saw the millionaire now in the

centre of the excited mob. He was mounted on a horse which, startled by the noise and the crowd, was prancing restlessly, threatening to throw its rider.

"What'd you mean by cancelling the pageant, Braggott?" shouted one man.

The millionaire tried to ride away, but a forest of hands seized the horse's bridle.

"Keep off, confound you!" he bellowed.

That attitude did not please the crowd. They roared again, and surged in closer. One man, bolder than the rest, leapt forward and pulled Julius Braggott from the saddle.

"My giddy hat!" exclaimed Clara indignantly, her sense of fair play aroused.

Braggott, but he's one against a hundred! Babs—"

The junior captain, dismounting from her bicycle, suddenly rushed forward in the direction of the angry crowd.

"Babs," cried Clara, looking startled, "where are you going?"

Her chum made no reply, however. She reached the crowd, which parted at that moment in sudden panic as Julius Braggott's horse pranced wildly.

Just for a moment Clara hesitated, then in a flash she was following on Babs' heels. If her chum had decided to intervene on the millionaire's behalf, then she would not be unsupported!

But that was not Babs' sole intention, though, like Clara, she had been stung into action by the sight of one man having to face this seething mob.

The excited gleam in Babs' blue eyes showed that she had been smitten with a sudden idea. In a moment of inspiration she saw in this crisis the opportunity of saving the pageant—of saving April.

Thrusting her way through the crowd, Babs reached Julius Braggott's side. The millionaire was still blustering, but his ashen face showed that he was fearful of the consequences.

"Keep off!" he was shouting. "I'll—I'll call the police!"

At which there was a howl of derision, for Friardale's one and only policeman would not be likely to prove of much assistance.

"We want to know why you're cancelling this 'ere Courtfield Pageant?'" somebody shouted.

"That's my business!"

"And ours, too!"

The crowd swayed, pressed closer.

"Stop!" cried Barbara Redfern desperately. "Stop, please! Who says Mr. Braggott has cancelled the pageant?"

"It's in all the papers—"

"Yes; but Mr. Braggott's changed his mind!" shouted Babs. "Haven't you, Mr. Braggott?"

The millionaire bestowed a furious glare on the smiling girl beside him.

"Why—why—? Bother you, girl!" he snapped. "Certainly I haven't changed my mind—"

Up from the crowd went a menacing howl. Somebody hissed.

"Haven't you, Mr. Braggott?" persisted Babs coolly; while Clara, beside her now, grinned and waited breathlessly for developments.

"I—"

"Better make up your mind quickly, Mr. Braggott," whispered Babs. "You don't want the crowd to get out of hand, do you?" She broke off significantly. "You've decided not to cancel the pageant, haven't you Mr. Braggott?" Babs added loudly, at the same time holding up a hand for silence.

Magically enough, the din died away. The millionaire seemed to be fighting for breath. Stubborn, disliking being dictated to as he himself dictated to others, he still hesitated. Once again

the crowd voiced its feeling in a threatening shout. And Julius Braggott, deciding that discretion was the better part of valour, gave in.

"Yes—yes!" he stammered hastily. "I've decided not—not to cancel the pageant—dash you!" he added in a fierce undertone, still glaring at Babs.

Babs was unperturbed.

"And you won't change your mind again?"

"No—no!"

"Hurrah!" yelled the crowd ironically.

"And," continued Babs calmly, "you won't mind if I take part in the pageant?"

"No, no! Do what you like, but don't bother me!" snapped the million-

aire, between his teeth. "Anything else?"

"Nothing else at the moment, thank you, Mr. Braggott!" smiled Babs sweetly, while Clara almost hugged her with joy.

Savagely the millionaire turned away and remounted his horse. The crowd allowed him to pass, but a chorus of ironical cheers followed him.

"You jolly old genius!" said Clara boisterously. "The pageant's saved, and you'll be in our tableau, after all! Ripping!"

And that was the verdict of the Fourth Form—and, indeed, of the whole school—when the joyous news became known.



BRIDESMAIDS ARE SO IMPORTANT

SEE that the presents are set out and the accompanying cards and good wishes propped against, or on, each one.

AREN'T weddings the most exciting occasions? And how proud everyone is when things "go without a single hitch"!

Of course, mothers and fathers, and brides and grooms work very hard to make this so, but the bridesmaid does her share, too.

So if you're going to be a bridesmaid this Easter-time, perhaps you'd like to know some of the ways in which you can help to make everything a real success.

CHEERINESS is most helpful. I can assure you, though it doesn't sound much. There's such a lot for the grown-ups to do in preparation for a wedding, that it's no wonder they get tired and sometimes flurried. So you must remain your serene, smiling self, what ever happens.

MAKING out lists is a task you should adore. One important list is of the guests who will be invited to the wedding and the breakfast or reception. If you write down the name of every possible person you can think of, you'll be certain that no one will be overlooked.

THE BRIDE'S mother will send out the actual invitations. So if she is your mother as well, she'll find her task easier by going through your list to check her own. Then you can help her address the envelopes and do the posting.

PRESENTS will be arriving with every post almost. You'd hardly believe it, but even opening presents can be tiring, so if the bride is your sister, I assure you she'll be almost speechless with gratitude if you undertake this lovely task for her. But mind you get rid of the packages so that isn't left to mother, won't you?

PUNCTUALITY is another important gift in the bridesmaid. Whether the frocks are to be made at home or by a dressmaker, arrive just when you're asked to, so that the work is not held up.

OFFER to collect the other bridesmaids, to see that they arrive on time, too, for their fittings, and you'll be doing a favour indeed.

AS soon as all presents have arrived, make another of your little—or long, rather!—lists, so that it reads something like: "Mr. and Mrs. Charlie Brown—a cut-glass fruit-dish. Aunt Meg—a workbasket. Uncle Joe and Auntie Bea—a travelling clock." Then, when the bride comes to write her "thank you" letters, she can check them off with your list instead of going all through the presents that will very likely be packed away for her new home by then.

BE READY in good time on the day of the wedding itself, so that you can help the bride with her "something white and something blue; something borrowed and something new." Adjust her veil, arrange her frock, and hand her her flowers—all with mother's wistful help. (While you, remember, will still be cheery.)

HOLD the bride's flowers at the altar; travel back to the breakfast with the other bridesmaids. Pass the sandwiches; assist the bride to change into her going-away outfit. Kiss her—and the groom!—and make your good-bye from the station or pavement a real ray of Easter sunshine!



Failure For Florence

"WE'VE got to do something—and quickly!"

Pearl Braggott was speaking on the telephone from Braggott Manor. Florence Ellison was listening at the other end of the wire in the prefects' room at Cliff House. Pearl sounded agitated; Florence was startled.

"Yes, I've heard about the pageant, of course," Florence replied softly. "But be careful what you say over the phone, Pearl, for goodness' sake! Got any suggestions?"

"That's your job to think of ways and means! I'm paying you for it!" retorted Pearl unpleasantly, not heeding the senior's warning. "But Barbara Redfern mustn't take part in it, and the best thing you can do is to have another shot at getting her Form into trouble. And don't fail me, Florence. If you do—well, there's going to be the Dickens to pay, and you'll be in it as much as I am. If ever my father gets to hear the truth—"

Pearl broke off, shuddering a little. She was able to do very much as she liked with her dotting millionaire father, but she knew how terrible his anger could be if he were offended.

Once before Pearl had committed some misdeed which had got to his ears. He had not forgiven her for months, and—more dismaying for Pearl

—he had completely cut off her allowance during that time.

It was a fearful shock when Mr. Braggott, returning home the previous day in a furious temper, had informed her that the Courtfield Pageant was to take place, after all.

She had tried all her wiles, her cajolery, to make him change his mind; but Mr. Braggott, remembering the angry mob, having realised the unpopularity he had brought down upon his head by his action, was adamant.

Straightway he had informed a relieved council of his decision. Preparations were being hurriedly made to organise the pageant on a grand scale. Fortunately, most of the arrangements had already been in hand.

And Pearl, desperate, panic now, had telephoned Florence Ellison.

"Leave it to me, Pearl," replied Florence hastily. "You've hidden that pawnticket in a safe place, I suppose? That's the only evidence against you, isn't it?"

"Yes; I've hidden it all right," came the reply. "But I'm not worrying about that. It's the fact that Barbara Redfern might succeed in getting my father to listen to her. And I daren't stop her coming here if she's a performer in the pageant. So you've got to make sure she's out of the thing altogether. Get her into disgrace—detained—oh, anything! Let me know what happens."

Click!

Pearl had rung off. Florence, with a dark scowl, walked from the prefects' room. She resented Pearl's tone and

attitude; but she was also frightened of her own position. Pearl was right. Something had got to be done. Florence racked her brains. Having gone so far already, she was prepared now to go to further and even more desperate lengths.

Meanwhile, Cliff House was in a state of feverish excitement. The Sixth Form had announced itself satisfied with its tableau, and Miss Primrose had signified her approval.

Their costumes, which had been spoiled by Florence in an effort to get the Fourth disgraced, and for which the Lower Fifth had been blamed, were replaced with new ones.

As the punishment, the Lower Fifth had been forced to pay for those new costumes—which was another reason why Florence was not anxious for her scheming efforts to be unmasked. The Lower Fifth, furious at having to pay for something which they had not spoiled, were bitterly resentful, and had vowed vengeance on the real culprit.

It occurred to Florence that if she could make the Fourth appear to blame, she might stir up trouble, ending in the disgrace of Babs & Co. Flora Cann, captain of the Lower Fifth, already suspected that the juniors were the culprits.

But, try as she might, Florence could not think of a scheme which would produce the desired result without involving too much risk on her own shoulders. She looked round for other means—and found her opportunity on the Wednesday.

For that was the day when Miss Charmant, the pretty mistress of the Fourth, arrived back at the school from a shopping expedition in Courtfield with something which she regarded as a treasure.

The "treasure" was in the form of a flag—somewhat tattered and torn and ancient, but a very special flag, for all that, and quite valuable in an historic way.

Meeting Babs & Co. in Big Hall, Miss Charmant proudly and enthusiastically displayed the flag.

"Barbara," she exclaimed, "here's something which I am sure will interest you! I picked it up in a very musty antique-shop in one of the back streets of Courtfield. Don't you think it's wonderful?"

Babs and Mabs and Clara and Marjorie surveyed the flag; they were not very impressed. Why the Charmer should be so pleased with her purchase surprised them. Certainly they failed to see what was wonderful about the flag. Babs decided she wouldn't have it as a gift, and Clara mentally described it as a "bit of dirty old rag."

"It—it must be very old, Miss Charmant," Babs said politely.

The Charmer's blue eyes twinkled. She could see that the chums were not enthusiastic, so she proceeded to give them a surprise.

"It is old—extremely old—Barbara. I think this flag dates back to the sixteenth century. In fact, from what the musty owner of that musty shop told me, I gather that this flag was flown on the masthead of the man-of-war Courtfield when it sailed against the Spanish Armada."

"What!" It was an incredulous, simultaneous gasp from the four chums. "Ah!" Miss Charmant smiled. "I see you are interested now. But it's a fact, Barbara. This very flag was flown by the ship which is to be represented in the Fourth Form tableau."

"Oh, how marvellous!" exclaimed Babs, her blue eyes shining now. "May I look at it, please, Miss Charmant?"

"Do."

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The flag had once been white, with a strip of red stretching diagonally from one corner to another; in the top white section a pair of crossed swords had been embroidered, also in red; the other white section was decorated with what, on a closer inspection, Babs saw to be the Courtfield crest.

The chums were duly impressed now—very much so.

"My hat!" exclaimed Clara. "It must be very valuable, Miss Charmant."

"Historically, it is," the mistress agreed. "The antique dealer was telling me that the flag was presented to the Lady Patricia when she returned in triumph, and it remained a treasured family possession, passing down from generation to generation. Quite recently, I believe, the family became extinct, and the flag passed into the hands of this dealer. Barbara," added the mistress, "I thought the Fourth might like to borrow it for their tableau."

"Oh, Miss Charmant, that would be marvellous!" said Babs delightedly. "Perfectly ripping!" said Mabs enthusiastically.

"Then you may," smiled Miss Charmant, as she carefully rolled up the flag. "But you'll be very careful with it, won't you? But then I know you will." "I should say we will!" promised Babs.

At that moment Florence Ellison happened to pass the little group. She heard the last part of the conversation, and saw the flag, which Miss Charmant was rolling up. A peculiar gleam came into Florence's eye as she continued on her way across Big Hall.

While Miss Charmant, with a smiling nod at the chums, carrying the flag under her arm, began walking away in the direction of her study. Babs, however, after a whispered conversation with Marjorie Hazeldene, suddenly ran after the mistress.

"Oh, Miss Charmant," she said, "something has just occurred to me! That flag, being so old, must be very fragile. It might get damaged in the pageant, so I thought we ought to make a copy of it. Marjorie would do it beautifully. It—it was awfully kind of you to say we could use it in the tableau, Miss Charmant; but you know how things happen, and I should hate to see the original flag spoiled."

The mistress smiled.

"That is very thoughtful and nice of you, Barbara," she said. "Yes, I should be very disappointed if it were damaged. Why do you take the flag now? I expect Marjorie will want to start working on it straightaway."

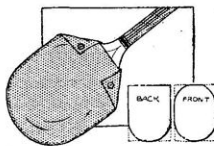
Another girl of the Lower Fifth passed through Big Hall at that moment. Flora Cann, captain of that Form, saw Miss Charmant hand the rolled-up flag to Babs, and knew that Marjorie was to make a copy of it. Flora looked suddenly interested.

Thus Florence Ellison knew about the flag; so also did Flora Cann. But the former didn't know that Babs & Co. intended making a copy of the original, while Flora did.

Babs and her chums, unaware of the interest which was being taken in them, spent an extremely busy afternoon making their flag for the tableau.

Marjorie, expert needlewoman that she was, made a beautiful job of it. The original flag could not have looked more exquisite when it fluttered proudly in the breeze as the ship Courtfield sailed from English shores to dot battle with the might of Spain hundreds of years ago.

THAT NIGHT there were strange movements in the school when everybody should have been asleep.



READY FOR THE TENNIS SEASON

With the first fine days, thoughts of Tennis are in the air. So what about a present for that precious thing—your racket?

THOUGH tennis is not yet in full swing among schoolgirls, I'm sure you've already looked lovingly at the rare blue skies and thought longingly of the good times on the courts that are in store.

You must have dragged your racket out from the back of the broom cupboard, from the top of your wardrobe, or down from the loft already to see that it's in good condition, ready to do its best for you in the duels that are to come so soon.

If you've had a rubber cover to your racket it's quite likely that it will have "perished" through disuse, for nothing is so fond of doing this as rubber—as you've tried to save a rubber bathing cap from one summer to the next must have discovered.

SO EASILY DONE

So what about making a new one for your racket? It's not a bit difficult, I assure you. In fact, it's easy—much easier than learning to play tennis, anyhow!

Macintosh is the best material to use for this—and it's quite likely that one of the family has an old mac that is simply asking to be made use of.

So here's the opportunity to put it to some real use.

Lay your racket on the macintosh material and mark around it with chalk. Then cut around it, leaving a little extra for the seam—half an inch will be sufficient. This is the front piece.

The back piece is cut to shape at the tip of the racket, but straight towards the handle part.

But look at the diagrams in the drawing here, and you will see exactly how I mean.

Now sew these two pieces together—at the rounded parts and down the sides, leaving the other end open to slip your racket into.

Now fold the square corners of the under-piece over, and make button-holes there. Sew buttons on the top piece and fasten the buttonholes out to these.

Now you'll be able to take your racket out in the most appalling storms, and it won't even get wet.

How you'll be envied, too, as you're able to slip the cover off so easily. No fumbling with strings or any worry about loosening elastic.

If it's as successful as I hope it will be, it should go a long way to help you in your play—until you're champion!

Flora Cann was the first girl to break one of the strictest rules at Cliff House and leave her dormitory after lights-out. The captain of the Lower Fifth crept downstairs to the Fourth Form Common-room.

Her mission, whatever it was, did not take long to accomplish. Less than a minute had passed before Flora emerged from the Common-room, made a swift visit to her study, and then returned to the dormitory.

Chuckling softly to herself, she climbed back into bed and went to sleep.

An hour later another figure quitted that same dormitory. Florence Ellison was the girl this time.

Surprisingly enough, Florence also made her way down to the Fourth Form Common-room. Cautiously she crept in, paused a moment to make sure the coast was clear, and then switched on the light.

Her glittering eyes roved the room; she saw something on a table, moved across to it, and dived a hand into the pocket of her dressing-gown.

Meanwhile, upstairs in the Fourth Form dormitory, Barbara Redfern stirred. Babs usually slept lightly, but soundly; but to-night she woke up suddenly, disturbed by a small detail which was worrying her.

She sat up in bed, threw back the bedclothes, and pushed her feet into a pair of fluffy slippers.

"Can't be too careful," she told herself. "I should have put that flag in a safe place. Nothing's likely to happen to it, but it's best to be on the safe side. The Charmer would be awfully upset if

anything happened to it. I should have put both the flags in the cupboard, not left them lying on the table in the Common-room."

Babs put on her thick dressing-gown and stole silently from the dormitory.

FLORA CANN couldn't sleep.

She was, too, was worried. She was worried by what she had done barely an hour ago.

"No, it's not playing the game!" Flora muttered. "The Fourth haven't been fair to us over the pageant, but two wrongs don't make a right. I—I think I'll slip down again and put things right." Barbara and her friends will get into awful trouble if I don't!"

So Flora made another excursion from the Lower Fifth dormitory. Flora was hasty-tempered, but she was not vindictive. Indeed, she had many likeable qualities and a generous nature.

Her feelings towards the Fourth were bitter at the moment. She felt that the juniors had won the right to appear in the Courtfield Pageant by unfair means. There had always been rivalry between the Fourth and Lower Fifth, and Flora liked it. It was fun to work japes, and have japes worked against them.

But matters had gone beyond the japing stage recently. The spoiling of the Sixth Form pageant costumes had been a willfully wanton act—and the Lower Fifth had been blamed for it!

Out of a spirit of revenge Flora had played a trick on the Fourth that night. But Flora was not a vengeful

part of girl, and she regretted her action now.

Let the Fourth descend to such mean, spiteful acts—but not the Lower Fifth. She'd put matters right before it was too late. Nothing would ever be known of what she had done. The Fourth would not suffer, and the Fifth would have a clean conscience!

Flora made her way down the stairs about five minutes after Florence left the dormitory—possibly it was her going that had disturbed Flora—and two minutes before Barbara Redfern emerged from the junior sleeping quarters.

So there was quite a procession down the stairs, with each girl innocent of the fact that others were abroad in the darkness of the sleeping school.

Flora went first to her study. Then, with something tucked under her arm, she crept softly in the direction of the Fourth Form Common-room.

Hurrying round a corner, she bumped into a figure which was standing still and rigid as a statue. The figure gasped, turned.

"Barbara! Oh, goodness!"

"Flora! What are you doing here?"

The senior was groaning to herself. Just when she was going to put things right, and she had to bump into Barbara Redfern!

"I—I—I—," she stammered, at a loss for words.

But Babs was no longer listening. Something else was claiming her attention—something which had caused her to pull up abruptly, with the result that Flora had bumped into her.

Light streamed out from a partly open door farther down the passage. Babs knew it to be the door of the Fourth Form Common-room. Someone was inside that room—doing what?

She meant to find out. Forgetting Flora, the junior captain tiptoed down the corridor. Reaching the Common-room, she peered in through the open door, hardly aware that Flora Cann was standing beside her.

The sight which met Babs' gaze filled her with horror. Standing by the table was Florence Ellison, hacking at a flag with a pair of scissors!

"Stop—stop! You wicked thing, Florence!" cried Babs, and rushed into the room, with a startled Flora close on her heels.

The schemer of the Lower Fifth spun round with a panting cry; the scissors dropped from her suddenly nerveless fingers.

"Oh, Florence! It—absolutely ruined it! But thank goodness it's not the original flag— She broke off, gazing at the table. "Where is Miss Charmant's flag?" she went on wildly. "It's gone! Florence, if you know anything about it—"

Florence looked startled.

"The original flag?" she gasped. "But there was only one—"

"I think I can explain," interrupted Flora, and threw a look of contempt at her Form-fellow. "Barbara, don't be alarmed! I—I have the original flag. I took it, you see. I was going to play a trick on you Fourth Formers—hide the flag and make you think it was lost. But then I realised just what a mean sort of trick it would be, so I was bringing the flag back here when I bumped into you in the corridor just now. Here it is, Barbara—and I—I'm sorry!"

And from under her arm she took the precious flag, handing it to Babs.

Such relief surged through Babs that

for a moment she was unable to speak. Then she laughed.

"Sorry! Don't be sorry, Flora! If it hadn't been for you Florence would have spoiled this one instead of the imitation which we had made for our tableau!"

Florence Ellison looked as if she would cry in the fury of her disappointment and rage. She had ruined the wrong flag, and had been caught in the act!

She suddenly tried to rush from the room, but like a flash Babs was upon her. The senior struggled wildly. Flora leapt to Babs' aid, and then

circumstances. Flora, I know, will support me. If you don't tell us everything, Florence, we shall report this matter to Miss Primrose!"

Under that threat the scheming Fifth Former broke down. She confessed everything.

"But Pearl Braggott was behind it all!" Florence said wildly.

"I don't doubt it," Babs replied. "But I rather think the dear Pearl has a shock coming to her—the same as you've had one. Florence, take a tip and tell Pearl nothing about this—don't see her, or communicate with her! In



WHAT a scene it was—such a cavalcade as old-world Courtfield had never witnessed before! And all were agreed that the star of the Pageant was Babs—who had so nearly been kept out of the show.

Florence had no chance. But in the struggle a crumpled-up piece of paper fell from the pocket of her dressing-gown.

While Flora held her fellow-senior, Babs bent down, picked up the paper, and smoothed it out. Written on it many times was her own name, and one glance told Babs that in each case it was a carbon tracing of her signature.

Understanding came to her as she eyed Florence.

"So it was you who imitated my signature to that libellous letter?" she accused. "This proves it. And," went on Babs icily, "I think I'm beginning to understand many other unpleasant things which have been happening lately!"

Florence stood still now, a dark scowl on her pale features.

Babs stepped up to her.

"Florence," she said grimly, "you've been caught red-handed doing a most despicable thing! I don't usually like taking advantage of such a position, but I think it's justifiable in the cir-

fact, that's more than a tip—it's a warning! Understand? And then we'll keep mum about this!"

Florence slunk back to the dormitory. Babs carefully put away the flag which she had borrowed from Miss Charmant, and then refully surveyed the ruined imitation one.

"Well, thank goodness it was nothing worse! We can soon make another one!" She smiled at Flora, who had remained behind with her. "Flora, we seem to have been the victims of some nice little schemes. You've been thinking the Fourth had done things, and we've been thinking the same thing about the Lower Fifth!"

"Looks like it, Barbara," nodded Flora.

"I've an idea," went on Babs, with a smile. "You lost the chance of appearing in the pageant through Florence. Why shouldn't the Fourth and the Lower Fifth combine in a tableau?"

"You—you mean that, Barbara?" asked Flora excitedly.

"Of course I do. The Fourth will be pleased to have you. We'll be able to get up a wonderful tableau together—the best in the pageant!"

And erstwhile bitter rivals became friends.

nor wrote to Pearl Braggott. Which considerably mystified that girl and filled her with growing apprehension.

On Friday evening Babs received a telephone call from Avril Raynor. It was very brief.

"Everything all right, Barbara?" asked Avril.

"Rather!" Babs laughed deliciously. "By this time to-morrow, Avril, your name will be cleared!"



The Day of Days

"HERE she comes! Oh, Babs, you look perfect stunning!"

"Like a picture!"

"It's ravishing, Babs!"

And Barbara Redfern, the object of all those compliments, stood blushing in

out of the Tudor period. Richards was no longer a Cliff House schoolgirl, but a girl of that Merrie England of long ago.

She was no longer Barbara Redfern, but the fair and beautiful Patricia, who had sailed with her father, Captain Rover, when the good ship Courtfield had set out to fight the Spanish foe.

She was the courageous Patricia who, upon the death of her father, had taken command, continued to give battle, and victoriously captured a Spanish galleon.

Babs dimpled as she stepped forward among her chums.

"Then you like it?" she asked demurely.

"Couldn't possibly be better!" declared Mabel Lynn. "Babs, you'll be the pride of the pageant!"

Babs curtsied gracefully.

"Thank you, fair dame!" she said blushing. "But is everybody nearly ready now? It'll soon be time to start out, you know. Here, Clara, let me give you a hand with that ruffle. You look as if you're eating a melon!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The rest of the performers in the junior tableau were dressed to represent the ship's company, and very gay and picturesque they looked, in period dress of all colours and varieties.

Some favoured doublets and silken hose, others preferred to be classed as the "lower deck hands," in ragged breeches, and shirts, and jerseys, with gaily coloured sashes, and kerchiefs knotted round their heads.

Ten minutes later the Fourth Formers were ready. They were joined by Flora Cann and the girls of the Lower Fifth who were taking parts in the tableau. Altogether there were fifteen performers—ten juniors and five seniors.

In a laughing, chattering throng they made their way downstairs. Although it was barely one o'clock, dinner was long since over. Everybody in the school was going to Courtfield to see the pageant; indeed, many had gone determined to get the best possible position of observation.

Stella Stone and those performing in the Sixth Form tableau were waiting in Big Hall, talking to Miss Primrose. The seniors looked very solemn in their sombre grey cloaks and shaven-headed wigs. They were dressed to represent the monks of the old Klyffe Abbey, as Cliff House had been known in the Middle Ages, when it was a monastery.

Miss Primrose's kindly face lighted up in a smile as she saw Babs.

"You look charming, my dear!" she said. "In fact, you all look splendid! Cliff House will be represented in the pageant with credit and distinction. But hurry along now, girls. The coaches have just arrived."

Coats were donned over costumes. Then out into the quadrangle everybody swarmed.

The weather could not have been more perfect—beautifully warm, gloriously sunny.

Lined up in the Friardale Lane, outside the school, were six big luxury coaches. These had been hired to take the performers to Courtfield, and also as many of the other girls who could afford to pay the extra over the local bus fare, and who preferred the comfort and speed of the coach to the hard work of cycling.

Five of the coaches were crammed with cheering, happy girls—seniors, juniors, youngsters of the Third Form. Even the presence of the mistresses failed to curb their boisterous enthusiasm—not that the mistresses would



THE WEEK seemed to pass on wings, with excitement working up to fever pitch at Cliff House.

Babs' happy idea to make the Fourth Form tableau a combined effort with members of the Lower Fifth was hailed as a generous, sporting action, which received the full approval of every girl concerned, and Miss Primrose's delighted permission.

Together they rehearsed, enthusiastically, friends now, instead of rivals. The costumes arrived. Mabs, the producer, declared herself perfectly satisfied.

The flag was returned to Miss Charmant, after another copy of it had been made by Marjorie Hazeldene. Nobody knew the truth; Florence kept very much in the background, and, remembering Babs' threat, neither saw

the doorway of the Fourth Form dormitory.

It was Saturday—the day of days—the day of the Courtfield Pageant. And Babs was already dressed for her part, and the others were hurrying into their costumes.

Tomboy Clara Trevlyn was not in the habit of using "pretty" expressions, but her description of Babs now could not have been bettered. Framed in the doorway, the junior captain did indeed look like a beautiful picture.

She wore a long, flowing gown of white brocade, clasped in tightly at the waist. The stiff medici collar reached up to her chestnut curls, showing off the glory of her heightened colour.

Babs looked as if she had just stepped

have attempted to curb it on an occasion like this.

Miss Primrose was travelling to Courtfield in her own car. As a revered local celebrity, she would be an honoured guest, first at the town hall, and then at Braggott Manor.

Now the performers had all clambered into their own special coach.

"All aboard!" shouted Clara Trevlyn.

"Right away, driver!" yelled June Merrett.

The driver grinned. The coaches moved off, increasing speed, heading swiftly for Courtfield.

Courtfield—
It teemed with thousands of visitors, who had come from far and wide to watch the historic spectacle. In the town it was a day of rejoicing, of gaiety, of celebration.

Excitement and bustle, excitement and exuberance everywhere!
"Here we are!" cried Clara gaily, climbing down from the coach.

"And there's the merry old ship!" exclaimed Mabs delightedly.

A remarkably faithful representation of the ancient man-o'-war, Courtfield, had been constructed on a long cart, complete, even to mast and sails, with a raised poop and elaborately carved figurehead.

The whole effect was obtained with painted canvas, on a wooden frame-work, of course, but it looked just like a miniature ship on wheels. It was to be hauled by a "crew" of eight men, all picturesquely dressed in the costumes of sixteenth-century sailors.

"And there's Avril!" Hallo, Avril! Hallo!" called Mabs, as her friend came up to the Cliff House group. Very charming Avril looked, as a sailor of the period, rather like a gay buccaneer, with her bright-coloured sash and kerchief, and long ear-rings.

"Oh, I'm so excited, Barbara!" exclaimed Avril. "And—everything is going to be all right!" she added rather anxiously.

"Of course it is," replied Mabs at once. "You've seen Mr. Davy?"

"Yes. He looks very handsome as a courtier—he's in the Queen Elizabeth's Court tableau, you know."

"Ripping!" And Mabs laughed deliciously, as if anticipating some thrilling event of the near future.

Then came the excitement of taking up positions. Mabs climbed up on to the poop; and the other Fourth Formers and Flora Cann & Co. grouped themselves in the well of the "ship."

Stella Stone and the seniors of the Sixth clambered up on to another cart, which with canvas and wood had been painted to represent the cloisters of old Cliffe Abbey.

At ten minutes to two the procession started on its way. At two o'clock it reached the market square, where it linked up with the rest of the cavalcade.

And then began the triumphal march through gaily decorated streets, lined with cheering crowds. Bands blared. The pageant, illustrating Courtfield through the ages, slowly wended its way through the town.

"Oh, doesn't that ship look real?"

"And doesn't that girl look beautiful!"

"A marvellous tableau! The best in the pageant!"

Mabs flushed as she heard those shouted comments. Mabs, as the one responsible for arranging the junior tableau, thrilled with pleasure. And the performers hugged themselves with delight.

At intervals through the streets they

saw groups of cheering Cliff House girls.

There was dear Bessie Bunter, eating a bar of chocolate which she held in one hand, waving frantically with the other hand. Leila Carroll, the American junior, dodged past a policeman and took a film of the tableau with her small cine-camera.

Slowly the procession circled the town and then made its way towards Braggott Manor. The rolling parklands of the millionaire's big estate loomed up, with the big, imposing mansion showing through the trees.

In through the gateway, with the big bronze gates thrown open. Up the drive, and then a halt.

Mabs thrilled. She was in the grounds of Braggott Manor at last! No lodge-keeper to stop her; nobody to refuse her admittance into the manor. And soon—soon she would be having a dramatic meeting with Mr. Braggott!

They all swarmed down from the "ship," eagerly anticipating the lavish tea which the millionaire was providing for all the performers.

Mabs and Avril were joined by a distinguished-looking gentleman in doublet and breeches and silken hose, with a slim rapier dangling from his waist. His part of an Elizabethan courtier suited him perfectly.

"Here I am, Miss Redfern," he said, with a smile. "You'll see Mr. Braggott by himself, of course?"

"Oh, yes," replied Mabs at once. "We don't want everybody to know. Perhaps you'd better ask to see him, Mr. Davy, if you don't mind. He might refuse me, and when he sees Avril here—"

"I understand," said Mr. Davy. "It is rather unfortunate that an incident of this kind should occur on such a day as this, but the matter must be cleared up."

They went into the house together. In the spacious hall they saw Mr. Braggott himself. The millionaire looked quite genial, and there was a smile on his podgy features.

Mr. Davy hurried forward. "Excuse me, Mr. Braggott, but may I have a word with you?" he asked politely. "It's very important, I assure you—"

"I don't know who you are," said the

millionaire with unaccustomed bluntness, "but you're welcome—everybody's welcome. You want to see me, eh? Think I can spare a few minutes. Come in here."

He led the way into the library. Mabs and Avril followed. It was then that Mr. Braggott saw them. In an instant his geniality vanished; the old unpleasant scowl came back to his face.

"What are you doing here?" he snapped, glaring at Avril. "Confound it, I won't have you here! Get out—get out, I say!"

But Avril was already in the room. And Mabs' heart leaped as she saw that two other persons were already in the library. Two girls, they were—Pearl Braggott and Florence Ellison.

"Impudence!" Mr. Braggott was saying angrily. "I'm not having thieves in this house—"

"Pardon me, Mr. Braggott," interrupted Mr. Davy calmly, "but I think I can prove to your satisfaction that this girl is not the thief you think her to be."

"What do you mean—beeh?" snapped Mr. Braggott. "What do you know about this? I tell you that girl is a thief. She stole my watch—"

"I hardly think so, Mr. Braggott," returned the other. "Perhaps you will be interested to know that I am a pawnbroker, with a business in Lantham. Your watch was brought to me, and I loaned a considerable amount of money on it to a girl who is in this room!"

"What?" The millionaire's eyes were gleaming fiercely. "Look here—"

"And there is the girl!" The pawnbroker flung out a hand, pointing to Pearl Braggott!

And then it was that Pearl, realising the game was up, weepingly confessed.

Mr. Braggott seemed to be fighting to keep himself under control.

"I think you had better go to your room, Pearl," he said at last. "I will see you later."

Wretchedly Pearl walked away. Mr. Braggott turned to Avril.

"I—I am sorry that I blamed you for something my own daughter did," he said slowly, with difficulty. "I apologise for calling you a thief. Very obviously I have done you a grave injustice. If—if you care to come back into my employ, the position of junior secretary is still open to you. I am indeed sorry that this has happened!"

And so Avril's name was cleared!

AND HERE our story really ends. Perhaps all that remains to be told is of the glorious tea which everybody taking part in the Courtfield Pageant enjoyed at Braggott Manor.

The millionaire, recovering from the shock of his daughter's duplicity, personally escorted Mabs and Avril into the long, crowded banquetting-hall.

And there Mr. Braggott made a short speech of welcome to all the guests.

"In conclusion," he said, "I would like to propose a toast—a toast to the girl who was, in my opinion, the pride of the pageant—Barbara Redfern, of Cliffe House School!"

Cheers—and more cheers—and yet more cheers!

"Oh, Barbara, I'm so happy!" sighed Avril. "How ever can I thank you for all you've done for me?"

Mabs smiled.

"I shouldn't try," she said. "There's nothing to thank me for. Your name's been cleared, and as for me—well, I'm going to tuck into this simply delicious tea!"

And she did!

THE END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

NEXT WEEK

In next week's issue of THE SCHOOLGIRL, on sale on Thursday, there will be the first of a new series of long complete Cliff House School stories, featuring Marjorie Hazeldene and—someone you have met before! But he's changed his name. He comes to Cliffe House in disguise—and Marjorie is at first the only one who shares his dramatic secret. Who is he? Do not miss next week's enthralling tale by Hilda Richards, the title of which is:

"THE SECRET THEY SHARED"