

TALES FOR ALL TASTES

The Schoolgirl

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INCORPORATING
'SCHOOLDAYS'



MIDNIGHT AT THE MANOR

A tensely dramatic moment
in this week's entralling
long complete story of
BARBARA REDFERN & Co.
at Dreer Manor.

A NEW SERIES of Long Complete Cliff House School Stories, Featuring Barbara Redfern & Co.



MIXED UP WITH MYSTERY

By
HILDA RICHARDS

Illustrations by T. Laidler

New Quarters

"HERE we are!" cried Barbara Redfern of the sparkling blue eyes.

"Drere Manor on your right, you merry old cripples!" announced Tomboy Clara Trevlyn breezily.

"Gaze upon it and weep," laughed golden-haired Mabel Lynn. "They don't want us at Cliff House, they've thrown us out of house and home, and here before us we have the future seat of learning of that very distinguished company—the good old Fourth!"

"Hurrah!"

"Shame!"

Mabs' melodramatic little speech was greeted with cheers and groans as the party of some thirty schoolgirls came to a halt outside the gateway of a rather gloomy-looking mansion in the Friar-dale Lane.

"It was 'moving day' for the Fourth Form at Cliff House, that famous girls' school in Kent. For the first time in its long history the Fourth was temporarily to become separated from the rest of the school.

And now the girls had arrived at their new quarters—Drere Manor, situated on the outskirts of Friar-dale village and some three-quarters of a mile away from Cliff House.

DRERE MANOR—fit name for the weird old house which has become the temporary quarters of the Cliff House Fourth Form. Fit setting, too, for the astounding mystery into which the chums find themselves so swiftly plunged, and in which they are destined to play such a vital and dramatic part!

"Oh, I sus-say, Babs, doesn't it look dud-dreary!" stuttered plump Bessie Bunter, an anxious expression on her fat features.

Blue-eyed Barbara, captain of the Fourth Form, laughed merrily.

"Nonsense, Bessie!" she cried reassuringly.

But even Babs had to confess that she was not exactly thrilled as, looking through the bars of the big bronze gateway, she saw the small Tudor mansion which was to be their new home.

Even the bright afternoon sunshine, shining upon its aged, creeper-covered walls, could not dispel the atmosphere of gloom and general neglect which seemed to hang over the house.

Many of the other girls were noticing it, too.

"I think it's a rotten idea coming here," said Freda Ferriers in a disgruntled tone of voice.

"But what else could Primmy do?" asked Babs reasonably.

"She had to find somewhere to accommodate us, and this was the only place going in the vicinity."

The Fourth was divided in its opinion of the move—not that there had been any choice in the matter. Their old quarters at Cliff House had become endangered by the sinking of some of the foundations, and, as there was not sufficient spare room at the school to

accommodate them, new quarters had to be found for them by Miss Primrose, the headmistress, whilst repairs were carried out.

None of the girls had really liked the idea of leaving Cliff House, even if only for a week or two. But whereas girls like Babs and Mabs and Clara were prepared to make the best of it and regard the matter more in the nature of a lark than anything else, others had evidently made up their minds to make the worst of it and grumble.

But any further grumbling was cut short by the arrival of Sarah Harrigan, who, with pretty Miss Charmant, the popular mistress of the Fourth, had accompanied the girls on their walk from Cliff House to Drere Manor. The girls' luggage and belongings had all been sent on in advance.

"No talking there!" snapped Sarah unpleasantly.

The unpopularity of the Sixth Form was not in a good humour. Very rarely, indeed, was she in anything but a bad humour; but now the scowl on her mean face was even more pronounced than usual.

Sarah did not relish leaving her comfortable quarters at Cliff House for new ones in Drere Manor. For Miss Charmant and the prefect were to be in charge of the Fourth during their stay at the old house.

The mistress, however, smiled tolerantly.

"Oh, let the girls chatter, Sarah!"

she murmured softly into the prefect's ear. "As long as they're orderly and not too noisy I don't mind. After all, it's like the first day of new term."

The Charmer, as the Fourth called their idolised mistress, produced a bunch of keys from her handbag and stepped up to the big gates. They swung open with a protesting squeak. "Follow me, girls!" smiled Miss Charmant, and walked briskly up the short, weed-grown drive.

At closer quarters Drere Manor looked more uninviting than it had done from the lane outside. Babs & Co. gazed about them with interest, but without much enthusiasm.

"Goodness," whispered Mabs, "I hope it's a bit more cheerful inside!"

The big oaken front door swung open, and a smiling-faced maid stood there to welcome them. It was Sally, the popular little Cliff House servant, who, with her friend Amy, had been transferred to Drere Manor to attend the wants of the Fourth.

Up the short flight of stone steps trooped the girls, and found themselves in a wide, panelled hall.

Babs looked about her approvingly—the Form captain was an admirer of old-world houses.

"This is all right!" she said enthusiastically.

"Look at the marvellous fireplace over there!" breathed Mabs.

"And that beautiful old chest!" put in gentle Marjorie Hazeldec, Clara Trevlyn's special chum.

"Jolly dark, though," granted Clara. "Wonder if there's any secret passages knocking about. They have them in old places like this, don't they?"

"Rather!" said Janet Jordan. "We'll have to explore later on."

Miss Charmant was smiling at their enthusiasm.

"If you like to look round now, girls, do so by all means. You see," she added, with a little twinkle in her dark blue eyes, "we're not starting lessons until to-morrow!"

"Oh, whoopee!" yelled Leila Carroll, the American junior. "Say, that's sure swell!"

Even the grumblers cheered up then. At least, coming to this gloomy house had its compensations, for had they remained at Cliff House they would be hard at work in the class-room now.

"Come on, kids!" said Babs eagerly. Drere Manor rang and echoed to the tramp of footsteps and girlish voices then.

"Here's the giddy old torture chamber!" laughed Clara, pointing to a door which led off from the hall and on which had been painted the inscription "Class-room."

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Thank you, Clara!" smiled Miss Charmant dryly.

They all flocked in through the doorway, to look around them with pleasurable surprise.

"Well, how perfectly ripping!" exclaimed Babs.

Anything further removed from the usual type of class-room it would have been difficult to imagine. The walls were half-panelled, the upper part distempered a pretty shade of cream. The ceiling was oak-beamed, and at the opened mullioned windows, fluttering gently in the warm breeze, hung dainty muslin curtains.

Rows of desks filled the centre of the room, with Miss Charmant's table backing on to a huge brick fireplace.

"This used to be the library," explained the mistress. "You'll find your desks in the same order as they were at Cliff House. I—"

She broke off suddenly as there came

the thump of heavy footsteps down the hall.

Then into the class-room strode the figure of a man. A man who, it was quite plain to see, was in a towering rage. His rather thin face was red and mottled; his small eyes glittered. The wispy moustache which adorned his upper lip seemed to quiver.

"What's the meaning of this?" he snapped. "What are you people doing in this house?"

Miss Charmant drew herself up, regarding the intruder frigidly.

"I beg your pardon?"

"You heard!" he stormed. "I won't have anyone in this house! Clear out, the lot of you—before I have you thrown out!"

IN UTTER amazement, Babs & Co. and the rest of the Fourth Form stared at the man who had burst into the class-room so unceremoniously.

They could scarcely credit that they had heard aright. Who was this angry stranger to tell them that they had no right in Drere Manor?

One girl in particular, however, was regarding him in open-mouthed surprise.

That girl was Freda Ferriers, the ferret-faced sneak of the Fourth. But, unlike the others, there was a gleam of recognition in her eyes, and the faint gasp which left her lips drew the irate man's attention to her.

The recognition was mutual; but, as if warning her not to betray the fact, he gave a quick shake of his head.

Meanwhile, Miss Charmant, recovering from the shock, addressed the man again.

"I think," she said icily, "you must be making a mistake. Perhaps you will explain who you are, and what you yourself are doing here?"

The man's blustering manner returned again.

"I'll tell you who I am all right!" he said in a bullying voice. "My name's Burgin, and I'm the agent for this property!"

"Then," retorted Miss Charmant, "perhaps it would interest you to know that this house has been rented by Miss Primrose, of Cliff House School. The negotiations," she added emphatically, "were entirely carried out through Mr. Hunter, the owner!"

The agent gave a violent start; the flush on his face became an angrier red.

"Hunter?" he almost snarled. "What the dickens does he mean by poking his nose into my affairs? I'm the agent, and he'd no right to do this without consulting me!"

The mistress's glance was withering.

"I presume," she said stiffly, "that Mr. Hunter is at liberty to dispose of his own property as he wishes. I think that is all there is to be said. Now perhaps you will be good enough to go."

For a moment the agent stood glaring at Miss Charmant, his face working in rage.

"Yes, I'll go!" he barked. "But before long you'll be going, too—just mark my words! I'll see Hunter about this! Think he can go behind my back, does he, doing my business for me while I'm away?"

"Will you please go?" said Miss Charmant, a little wearily.

Without another word, he turned on his heel. But Babs, watching him, saw him flash a quick glance and jerk his head in the direction of Freda Ferriers, who happened to be standing near the door. To Babs' surprise, Freda almost imperceptibly returned the nod.

The man stamped out of the room.

A few moments later, after a furtive glance round, Freda followed.

Babs' brow puckered.

"Seem to know each other!" she murmured. "Funny!"

"What's funny?" demanded Tomboy Clara Trevlyn. "He was jolly rude, if you ask me!"

But the unpleasant interruption soon became forgotten, and for the next half-hour the Fourth Form spent an interesting time inspecting their new quarters. Upstairs and downstairs they raced, exploring every room, every nook and every cranny.

Even the grumblers were becoming enthusiastic now. While the outside of Drere Manor had been disappointing, that the inside was quite charming and comfortable there could be no denying. As far as possible, everything had been arranged to make the girls feel that they were still at Cliff House.

"Well, girls," smiled Babs, "I think we're going to like it here, after all, don't you?"

"Yes, rather!" enthused Clara. "But we haven't had a look round the grounds yet. Who's coming?"

Rather protestingly, Babs, Mabs, and Bessie accompanied Clara out into the grounds. They were not feeling quite so energetic as their Tomboy chum. But Clara was adamant, and it was as they were strolling down the drive that they saw a girl peering in through the gates.

Babs was immediately struck by the wistful expression on her pretty face. Rather timidly, she stood waiting there as Babs & Co. approached.

"Are—are you the girls from Cliff House School?" she asked, a shy smile crossing her features. "I'm so pleased to meet you! You've no idea how glad daddy is now that the house is occupied!"

Babs, swinging open one of the gates, eyed the girl with a new interest.

"Then you're Mr. Hunter's daughter?" she asked, with a friendly smile.

"Yes. My name is Eileen."

Babs smiled sunnily.

"Then we're all very pleased to meet you, Eileen!" she said. "Your father must be very proud to own a beautiful house like this!"

Suddenly the smile died from Eileen's pretty face. A look of tragedy came into her large brown eyes.

"He was proud of it once. But now he—"

She broke off unhappily, and gazed towards the house.

"But what?" Babs took her up gently.

Eileen seemed suddenly distraught. She was silent a moment; then, as if making up her mind, spoke quickly in a low voice.

"There's some—some mystery about the house," she said. "That's why I'm here, really. I came over from home—to try and clear it up. But it's all so baffling—and daddy's helpless. He's a cripple now, you see. I—I felt I must try to do something!"

Her pathetic words went straight to the hearts of the chums. She had told them very little, but it was quite enough to make them realise her unhappiness, her cruel position, especially in view of what had already happened.

In an instant Babs had made up her mind. She took Eileen's hand in her own.

"Eileen," she said gently, "I'm glad you've told us. Because now, that we're staying in the house, we may be able to help you. In fact, we will help you. Now, come along in and have some tea with us!"

Kind words, spoken with that

generous-hearted warmth that so characterized the captain of the Strath. Yet little did Babs realise the strange adventures into which she and her chums were to be plunged as a result of their resolve to aid Eileen Hunter!



Schemers in Secret!

"**F**REDA!" cried Babs, a note of horror in her voice.

Her chair went toppling to the floor as she rushed across to where Freda Ferriers lay so white and still.

"Mabs, get some water. Clara, help me lift her on to the armchair."

As they lifted her Freda's eyes flickered open, the light of fear in their depths.

"Oh!" she panted. "Oh, Babs, don't let it get me!"

"You're all right now, Freda," Babs soothed. "Here, drink this"—as Mabs arrived with the glass of water.

With a hand that trembled Freda took the glass. Gulpingly she drained it; then, with a little shudder, sat up.

"Well," Babs asked gently, "what happened, Freda? What scared you?"

Freda buried her face in her hands. "Oh, didn't you hear it? It was awful!"

"That wailing sound, you mean?" Clara put in.

"Yes—yes, that's it. I was walking along a passage downstairs when it started. It—it seemed to come out of the wall, and—I heard a voice—"

"A voice?" gasped Babs. "Whose voice?"

Freda shuddered again. "I—I don't know. It wasn't anybody's voice; it just seemed to come out of the air."

"Well, what did it say?" demanded Clara brusquely.

"It sounded like a—a warning. Oh,

A CHEERFUL TINKLING of crockery greeted the chums as they entered the large room in Dreere Manor which had been assigned to Babs, Mabs, Bessie, Clara, Marjorie, and Janet.

Marjorie and Janet had been busy preparing tea, and the table was already set.

"Come in and make yourself at home, Eileen!" laughed Babs. "Forward, Janet!" she cried. "Extra crockery for a distinguished visitor!"

There were introductions all round, and soon a merry party was seated around the laden tea-table. Eileen's shyness quickly evaporated in the friendly atmosphere.

"Have you ever lived here?" asked Babs interestedly.

A shadow came into Eileen Hunter's eyes.

"Yes; but two years ago," she replied sadly. "That was when my grandfather was alive, and daddy and I lived here with him. Then grandfather died, and—and—" Her cheeks flushed crimson, and she paused awkwardly. "We couldn't afford to stay here after that, and—and we went to live in the village at Willow Cottage. Daddy put this house up for sale, but somehow the rumour got around that it was haunted, and—"

There was a terrified squeak from the opposite side of the table. Bessie, in the act of conveying a pastry to her mouth, gave a convulsive start as Eileen made that remark. The pastry fell from her trembling fingers. Straight into her cup of tea it dropped with a splash, and there came a louder yell from Clara Trevlyn as the hot liquid splattered over her.

"Why, you clumsy goop!" she yelled wrathfully.

But Bessie was too scared to heed the Tomboy's angry remonstrance.

"Oh dud-dear! Oh gig-goodness!" she stammered. "Dud-did you say haunted, you know?"

Eileen, a little startled by the effect of her words, regarded Bessie anxiously and then smiled.

"Of course, it's all rubbish; just some villagers' tale," she said reassuringly. "I really don't know how the rumour started, because there was never any mention of it when we lived here."

But Bessie was not to be comforted. "Oh, Bib-Babs," she quavered, "what shall we do? I nun-knew this house was full of gig-ghosts—"

"Bessie, don't be a goose!" Babs laughed. "This place is no more haunted than Cliff House. There's nothing to be frightened of—"

But hardly had the words left her lips than from somewhere in Dreere Manor, echoing and throbbing through the house, rose a low, wailing noise that grew louder and louder until it reached its crescendo in a piercing shriek. As abruptly as it had started it died away.

In the study the girls sat transfixed. Bessie's plump face was white; her eyes seemed to be popping from her head.

But before the girls could find their voices there came the thud of running footsteps in the passage outside. With a crash the door flew open.

Freda Ferriers, her thin face contorted into a mask of terror, rushed into the room.

"Save me! Save me!" she cried.

"And then she collapsed to the floor in a dead faint.

I'm sure this house is haunted!" Freda said fearfully. "We should never have come here. We—we won't be safe if we stay here any longer!"

"Rot!" said Clara tersely. "It's not rot!"

The words came fiercely from Freda's lips. Already she seemed to have recovered from her collapse. "If you'd been as near to it as I was, and heard that awful voice as well, you wouldn't say that, Clara Trevlyn."

But the Tomboy was not impressed. "Must have been somebody japing you," she said bluntly. "And I'm jolly well going to find the japer! Come on, all of you—"

But Marjorie Hazeldene laid a restraining hand on Clara's arm. Her face was very white, and obviously she had been badly scared.

Bessie, too, still sitting at the table—from which she had been too frightened to move—was gazing at the door as if expecting some apparition to appear on the threshold.

"Clara, dear, do you think it's safe—?" began Marjorie hesitantly.

The Tomboy laughed scornfully. "Now, Marjorie, don't you start imagining there are silly ghosts in this house!" she chided. "As I said before, somebody's playing a jape on us, and we'll soon find out who it is."

And with that she went striding resolutely out of the room. After a moment's hesitation Babs and Mabs followed her, then Janet Jordan.

But Marjorie and Bessie hung back; while Eileen Hunter, looking very startled, stood there looking from one to the other undecidedly. Freda Ferriers laughed shakily.

"Well, I'm not going," she announced flatly. "Nor will you, Marjorie, if you're got any sense. I tell you this house is haunted."



FURY flamed in the man's eyes as he strode into the group. "I won't have anyone in this house!" he stormed. "Clear out, all of you—before I have you turned out!"

"Oh, but that's impossible!" burst out Eileen desperately. "It can't be haunted!"

Freda glared at the girl.
"Well, naturally you'd say that!" she sneered. "Your father owns this house, doesn't he?"

And with that parting shot she turned on her heel and went quickly out of the room.

And as she went a peculiar gleam came into her small eyes. Momentarily a grin crossed her thin, crafty face, betraying the fact that Freda Ferriers was not as frightened as she had made out to be.

MEANWHILE, BABS and her chums, pushing their way through the crowd of scared Fourth Formers congregated in the corridor, ignoring the anxious questions flung at them, hurried downstairs.

Clara was looking grim; her jaw was overthrust determinedly. But on Babs' pretty face was a troubled expression.

"It's jolly peculiar!" she murmured.
"What do you mean, old thing?" asked Mabs.

Babs shrugged.
"I don't really know. But I've got a hunch that there's something fishy going on, especially after what Eileen told us. In my opinion," Babs added deliberately, "Freda didn't really faint; that was only a bit of play-acting on her part."

The others looked incredulous.
"Babs, what makes you think that?"
"Well, didn't you notice how quickly she recovered?"

Mabs looked startled.
"Yes, she did, when I come to think of it. But—but— Oh, you must be mistaken, Babs! After all, why should she pretend? She wasn't gaining anything by it. And all of us heard that wailing sound."

"Of course," Babs had to admit hesitantly. "But—" Again she shrugged. "Oh, never mind!"

But Babs' thoughts were busy. She was remembering that incident in the class-room when the angry agent and Freda had exchanged glances. Obviously they knew each other. Was there some connection between his veiled threat and this scare which had so startled the Fourth Formers? And was Freda implicated in it?

She had no definite evidence to support those suspicions; but there were certainly one or two little points which puzzled her.

Why had Freda rushed upstairs into the study occupied by Babs and her chums, when her own friends, Lydia Crossendale and Brenda Fallace and Frances Frost, were in a room much nearer the head of the stairs? And again she had been very vague as to what had really happened.

Now the four chums had reached the foot of the stairs, and were standing in the main hall, looking about them intently.

"Where did Freda say she heard that voice?" asked Clara.

"She didn't say," Babs said dryly. "She just said a passage down here—and there must be at least half a dozen of them."

"Well, let's investigate this one first. Though," Janet added, "goodness only knows what we expect to find."

They all felt that. They walked slowly down the hall. It was very dim and shadowy there, and their feet made no sound on the soft carpet. From upstairs came a faint murmuring of voices, which only seemed to add to the eeriness of the atmosphere.

Mabs suddenly shivered.
"Brrr!" she whispered. "I think that haunting business must be getting on my nerves now. I—I feel as if there are eyes watching me."

Babs started. Curious, but she had exactly the same sensation herself. From the unimaginative Tomboy, however, came a derisive snort:

But the next moment even Clara was shaken. For through the dimness of the hall came the sound of footsteps—slow, measured, sinister.

Thump, thump, thump!
Up the hall the footsteps came, never varying in their monotonous tread.

Thump, thump, thump!
On they came. Now they sounded level with the girls. Mabs gave a stifled shriek, and clutched at Babs' arm.

Thump, thump, thump!
Now they were past, and gradually dying away. And yet there was nobody in the hall, save the four girls—not even a shadow had passed them.

With faces strained and white, the chums stood looking at each other, a feeling of indescribable horror welling up within them. Who, or what, had caused those steps?

Freda Ferriers' words came back vividly to their minds: "This house is haunted—"

Then, before they could shake off their numbing horror, before they could think what to do—

Crash!
A splintering, shattering crash—the sound of glass breaking into fragments. Round spun the four girls. And then their eyes almost bulged in horror at what they saw.

A beautiful little occasional table, on which had stood a beautiful cut-glass vase, now lay on its side on the floor, in a sea of shattered glass.

"Oh, my hat!" breathed Babs. "Who—who pushed that table over?"

Who could have done, when there had been nobody else in the hall?

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FREE GIFTS
FOR ALL
"SCHOOLGIRL"
READERS
DETAILS SOON

=====

"**A**LL CLEAR, uncle!"
It was Freda Ferriers' voice. She stood alone in a passage at the back of Drere Manor, and she seemed to be talking to the wall.

There came a whirring sound. Suddenly a section of that panelled wall began to slide slowly back.

The figure of a man stepped out from the cavity revealed into the passage. He was rather tall and lean; the eyes in his thin face were close set, and a wispy moustache adorned his upper lip. It was Albert Burgin, the estate agent—Freda's uncle!

"Did you work it, Freda?" he asked, in a throaty whisper. "Were they scared?"

Freda chuckled slyly.
"Most of them were, uncle," she grinned. "You did that wailing noise perfectly. It almost scared me for a moment."

"Good!" Burgin nodded. "A few more stunts like that, and they'll be running out of this place as fast as they can—eh? I've just scared four more of your precious friends in the hall."

"Was that the crash I heard a few minutes ago, uncle?" asked Freda.
"Reckon it was." Again he nodded. "I made use of that little sliding panel in the wall, and pushed over the hall table and that vase. Scared them stiff, I bet!"

"That would be Barbara Redfern and those other cats!" muttered Freda viciously. "Serve 'em right! Well, uncle, you can rely on me to help you. When's the next stunt—?"

"Pray don't think I'm intruding!" broke in a mockingly sarcastic voice.

Freda whirled with a thin scream of fear; but Burgin came a hoarse cry of alarm. For standing but a few yards away was a tall, angular form.

"Sun Sarah!" stammered Freda. Sarah Harrigan nodded grimly. Her eyes, behind her pince-nez, glinted as if she were enjoying the situation.
"So," she said, "the ghost is human, after all. How very interesting!" Her tone suddenly changed. "What's the little game, Freda? And you," she added, glaring at Burgin.

Fear of exposure made Freda's cunning wits work swiftly. Sarah had caught her and Uncle Albert red-handed; but Freda knew the nature of the girl with whom she was dealing.

As unscrupulous as she was crafty was Sarah Harrigan. There were many unpleasant characteristics about the Sixth Form prefect which would have shocked Miss Primrose had she known them.

Freda knew that if she played her cards properly, threatened disaster could be averted.

"Sarah," she said quickly, "would you—would you like to earn some money?"

"Here, Freda, not so fast!" snapped Burgin angrily.

Sarah drew herself up haughtily.
"Freda, how dare you!" she exclaimed; but a cunning look shone in her greenish eyes now.

The Fourth Former sneered, however. "Oh, cut that out, Sarah!" she said disrespectfully. "Look here, uncle! Here's someone who will help us; but you'll have to pay her for it," she added meaningly.

"Freda"—the prefect flushed—"be careful what you're saying, or I shall have to report you."

The junior grinned slyly, glanced at her uncle, and winked.

"What do you say to earning five pounds?" Sarah said, asked.

Sarah's tone changed.
"What do you want me to do?" Burgin had sized up the senior now. "Look here!" he chimed in. "For certain reasons of my own, I want everybody out of this house! I've already fixed it up with Freda, and we've decided to work on the haunted-house stuff to get them out. Say nothing about having seen me. Come in with us and help, and there's a five for you as Freda said. Is it a deal?"

Sarah's eyes gleamed cunningly. Yes, she could do with some money. She still owed her dressmaker money for her new spring outfit, and that dressmaker was getting rather insistent lately.

"Make it ten pounds, and you can count on me!"

"Ten pounds?" Burgin scowled.

"Look here, what do you think I am?"

Sarah shrugged.

"All right!" she said indifferently.

"Then perhaps Mr. Hunter will be interested to know what you're doing."

Burgin grabbed her arm.

"All right! You win!" he snapped.

"Ten pounds when everybody's out of this house, and— Gosh! Somebody coming!"

Freda round an angle of the passage some of the sound of voices.

"Barbara Redfern and her mob!"

hissed Freda, going pale. "Uncle,

what are we to do?"

"Back through that panel—quick!"

rapped Sarah. "Both of you! I'll deal with those kids!"

Hastily Freda and her uncle dodged

back through the opening in the wall.

With a click, the panel closed upon the

precious pair, while round the corner of

the passage, Sarah Harrigan stood

confronting four startled girls, barring

their way as they made to pass her.

"Well," she snapped unpleasantly,

"what are you girls doing here?"

Barbara Redfern looked at the prefect

queerly.

"We heard voices round here," she

said, "and, in view of the queer things

which have been going on, we thought

we'd better see who it was."

Babs & Co. were still looking pale

and shaken after their experience in

the main hall. No explanation had

they found to account for those myster-

ious happenings. Shaken though

they were, however, it had only made

them more determined to find an ex-

planation of the startling events which

had taken place since their arrival at

Drere Manor.

That the house was haunted, Babs &

Co., being sensible, level-headed girls,

refused to believe. There must be some

other solution to this baffling problem,

and to the discovery of that solution

they had pledged themselves.

While upstairs fresh consternation

had been caused by the appalling crash

of the falling table, Babs & Co. had

searched the passages. Reaching this

corridor, their keen ears had caught

the murmur of voices. Quickly but

stealthily they had rushed forward, only

to be checked by the unexpected appear-

ance of Sarah Harrigan.

"Don't be ridiculous!" snapped the

prefect now. "There's been nobody

round here! I've just come along that

passage, and I assure you I am not in

the habit of talking to myself."

"But I tell you we heard voices!"

persisted Clara, and made to stride

forward.

Swiftly Sarah shot out an arm.

"Come back, Clara!" she grated.

"Please remember that, though we are

not at Cliff House, I am still a prefect

here! When I give orders, they have

to be obeyed! I forbid you to pass

this spot! The passages beyond here

are out of bounds! You—you are not

going to be allowed to run about this

house just as you wish! Understand

that!"

"But—but," protested Clara indignantly,

"Miss Charmant hasn't said anything

about any passages being out of

bounds!"

Sarah breathed hard.

"But I say it!" she snapped. "Take

fifty lines for daring to argue with a

prefect! And you will write them

immediately! Another word, and I'll

double the imposition!" she added

warningly.

"Oh, that's unfair!" said Mabs hotly.

Sarah glared.

"And you can take fifty lines as well,



THE door burst open and Freda Ferriers almost fell into the room. "Save me—save me!" she panted—and then, before the chums could move, she collapsed to the floor!

Mabel! All of you take fifty lines!" she hooted furiously. "Get back to your study at once and do them!"

Babs sighed.

"Oh, come on!" she said disgustedly.

"No good arguing!"

And she walked away, her chums following.

Sarah watched them go, with a vindictive glitter in her eyes. That had

been a good idea to put the passage

out of bounds, she thought. She'd get

Miss Charmant to agree to it, and she'd

see that none of the girls broke that

rule.

But Sarah, had she only realised it,

had been rather too clever. In making

that hasty decision, she had not acted

with her usual cunning.

In forbidding Babs & Co. to use that

corridor, she had only sown another

seed of suspicion in the Fourth Form

captain's mind—that now both Freda

and Sarah were involved in the queer

happenings which hung like a shadowy

menace over Drere Manor!



Mystery at Midnight

"OH dud-dear! I wish I were back at Cliff House!" wailed Bessie Bunter nervously.

Quite pathetically she

blinked round the long, oak-beamed

room which was the Fourth Form's

dormitory at Drere Manor.

Although the electric light blazed

down from the centre of the ceiling, the

corners of the big room were in deep

shadow, and towards those corners

many uneasy glances were cast as the

girls slowly undressed for bed.

"You're not the only one!" muttered Elsie Effingham. "Goodness, this house gives me the creeps!"

"They ought never to have sent us

here!" put in Freda Ferriers. "Every-

body knows the place is supposed to be

haunted— Who threw that!" she

hooted, as a pillow caught her fairly

and squarely at the side of the head.

"I did!" said Clara Trevlyn grimly.

"And I'll throw one every time you

repeat that silly rubbish!"

"Of course the house isn't haunted,"

Babs said quietly. "There's probably a

very simple explanation for what's hap-

pened."

And for a second the Form captain's

gaze rested deliberately upon the sallow

face of Freda Ferriers.

Freda shifted uncomfortably under

the look.

"I'm scared, and I don't mind admit-

ting it!" she snapped. "And if any-

thing else happens, I'm going to com-

plain to Miss Primrose!"

"Yes! Hear, hear!" assented Lydia

Crossendale.

Grumblingly, uneasily, the girls con-

tinued to undress. In spite of Babs &

Co.'s efforts to reassure the Form,

Freda's cunning words only served to

increase the nervous tension.

Sarah came in to put the lights out.

"I sus-say," bleated Bessie, as she

huddled down under the sheets,

"couldn't we have the lights on all

night?"

A grim smile played round the pre-

fect's mouth.

"Don't be absurd, Bessie! Good-

night, girls! And no nightmares about

ghosts!"

The lights clicked out. Babs bit her

lip as she lay back on the pillow. First

Freda, and then Sarah, both doing

their best to frighten the already

nervous girls.

What was the secret of Drere Manor? The more Babs thought about it, the more she was becoming convinced that an organized plot was afoot to scare the Cliff House girls out of the house.

It had started from the time of the arrival of that agent. He had been furious to discover that Drere Manor was occupied; he had as good as threatened then that he would drive the girls out.

It seemed fairly certain that he must be at the bottom of these attempts to frighten the Fourth Formers—he and Freda, and now apparently Sarah.

Why should he wish that to be so empty again? That it must be for some understandable reason was obvious.

Babs had no particular desire to remain at Drere Manor. Much rather would she have preferred to be back at Cliff House. But her interest was aroused. She wanted to learn the truth—and, as captain of the Fourth Form, she felt it was her duty to save the girls from being scared in this way.

And there was another point which occurred to Babs. If the Cliff House girls were driven out of the house, then once again Drere Manor would become empty—and Eileen Hunter's father, already in very poor circumstances since the death of his father, would lose the rent which was of such help to him.

Babs found herself thinking of Eileen. She had felt curiously attracted towards that very wistful-looking girl. There had been a hint of tragedy, of some secret unhappiness, in her large brown eyes.

And in the short note which Eileen had left with Marjorie, after Freda's dramatic collapse in the study, Babs had read an earnest appeal. She could remember the words now:

"Please don't let anything frighten you, as I'm sure your friend must have been the victim of a rather cruel joke. The reputation which Drere Manor has gained is quite unfounded. I think there must be some conspiracy against my father and me, and if you were to leave the house now our position would be desperate. Please forgive me for writing you in this way, but I have a feeling that you will understand—and perhaps help me."

Not Babs to ignore an appeal like that. She would, she decided, go and see Eileen after lessons to-morrow.

Thinking of these things, Babs' eyes gradually closed. Silence, save for the sound of heavy breathing, reigned in the dormitory. Moonbeams streamed in through the windows, lighting up the rows of beds.

But the Fourth Form was not destined to sleep in peace that night.

Babs, always a light sleeper, awoke with a sudden jerk. A creaking sound had come from the direction of the door.

"Who's there?" she called, in a sibilant whisper.

No reply.

Her heart beating fast, the Form captain quickly slipped out of bed. She was crossing over to the door, when—

Thud!

Back the door flew on its hinges, to crash against the rubber stop in the floor.

She tensed. But now a babel of startled voices came from the awakened Form.

"Oh, goodness! What's happening now?"

"What is it? Who's there?"

"Put the light on, someone!"

"Help! Bib-burglars! Pip-police! Fu-fire!" shrieked the voice of Bessie Bunter.

Babs flew to the light switch. She clicked it down, flooded the room with

light. But even as she did so, through the open doorway came such a fierce rush of air that Babs was sent staggering backwards.

With the force of a hurricane, it swept in, whistling and roaring. Scream upon scream rose from the terrified occupants of the dormitory as, in the act of leaping out of beds, that gale-like blast struck them.

Bedclothes fluttered in the air; Bessie, standing like a quivering jelly beside her bed, gave a stifled yelp as her dress, caught in the rush of air, flew up off the chair and wrapped itself about her plump figure.

"Help!" she shrieked. "It's gig-got me! Babs, kirk-come quickly! It's the gig-got!"

But Babs, Clara, and one or two of the braver spirits were fighting their way to the door, almost choking in the breath-robbing force of that miniature hurricane.

As suddenly as it had started, however, the wind stopped, dying away on a peculiar whirring note. The girls, bent nearly double to resist it, suddenly found themselves toppling forward.

"Well, of all the giddy mysteries, this takes the cake!" gasped Clara. "What the dickens could have caused that?" And even the stout-hearted Tomboy was looking a little pale as she rushed out into the passage. "My hat, nobody here. Who—who—"

Rubbing her tousled curls puzzledly, she regarded Babs in amazement.

"This beats the band!" panted Mabs. "This house is getting on my nerves and—"

But now, from inside the dormitory, rose a fresh clamour.

"Freda! Where's Freda Ferriers?" went up a startled cry.

Mabs spun back in the room, casting a quick look over the scared girls.

But of Freda there was certainly no sign. She had completely vanished from the dormitory!

INTO Babs' mind at once leaped a swift suspicion. Had Freda been the cause of that rush of wind which had so disturbed the Fourth?

But almost immediately she knew that such could not be the case. Babs herself remembered seeing Freda in the dormitory when she had switched on the light.

Then where was Freda now? What had happened to this headstrong girl?

"It's this dreadful house!" groaned Eileen Effingham. "Something terrible must have happened to Freda. She said the place was haunted, and she's right! Oh, what shall we do?"

If the Fourth had been scared before, they were now in a panic. Babs knew she would have to take a firm hand, or some of the girls might become hysterical.

"Don't be foolish, Elsie!" she said sternly. "And don't let me hear you say again that the house is haunted. That's all nonsense. I admit that peculiar things have been happening, but I'm sure we shall find a very simple explanation to account for them. And don't worry about Freda. She must have slipped out of the dormitory, that's all. She'll be back in a moment or two."

"Of course she will," supported Clara staunchly.

But Babs had no faith in what she said. The Form captain, had she cared to admit it, was completely baffled by Freda's disappearance. She was positive that from the time she had switched on the light, she had not seen Freda pass out of the dormitory.

Yet there was no other door in the room—no exit except through the window. And Freda could hardly have gone that way, with a fifty foot drop, at least, outside!

There was an uncomfortable silence in the dormitory, with the girls gazing fearfully at each other. It struck Babs as significant that Sarah Harrigan, though she slept only a few doors away in the same passage, did not put in an appearance. She must have heard the disturbance.

Nor did Miss Charmant arrive, but the mistress' absence was understandable. She had a suite of rooms on the first floor of the house, and, quite evidently, she had not heard.

"Babs, what shall we do?" whispered Clara—and even the Tomboy was looking worried now.

Jiggered if I know! Babs had to confess when, looking down on the floor, her keen eyes saw a piece of paper lying under the foot of one of the beds.

Curiously she picked it up and examined it. The paper was longer than it was wide, with one side jagged, as though it had been torn.

"Hallo! What's that?" asked Clara curiously. "Where did that come from? Anything on it, Babs?"

A little gasp came from the Form captain. Eagerly she was examining the scrap of paper now.

"Mabs—Clara! Look at this!" she said.

Quite a number of the girls crowded round. On the paper were some typewritten words; but they made little sense, owing to the fact that it had been torn. Half the message was missing, and the remaining half read:

"re after me.
cy is converted into
I have hidden in
in underground
es Hunter."

"As clear as mud to me!" remarked Clara, running a hand through her ruffled curls.

"But the name—Hunter!" exclaimed Babs excitedly. "At least, I presume that last word is a name, because it has a capital letter. That's the name of the owner of this house. Goodness, I must show this to Eileen!"

"But what's it mean?" asked Mabs blankly. "And where's the rest of it?"

Babs was searching under the bed and on the floor, but she found no trace of the missing part of that message. Then, as she straightened up, frowning with disappointment, the door of the dormitory opened.

Eileen Effingham went up a shout.

Freda Ferriers it was who came in. Her face was very pale, and there was a wild look in her eyes.

"Oh!" she sobbed. "I'm frightened! This terrible house will drive me mad and—"

Babs, still holding the scrap of paper, crossed over to Freda.

"What happened?" she asked.

"Where have you been?"

"I was kidnapped!"

Babs stared at her incredulously.

"Freda, what do you mean—"

"You don't believe me?" cried Freda desperately. "But I was—I was, I tell you. Just as the door crashed open and that peculiar wind started rushing in a hand came out of the wall and grabbed me round the throat and mouth. I tried to scream, but I couldn't. And—and my bed's right over in the corner, and nobody saw what was happening to me."

She shuddered, but as she leaned weakly on Babs' arm, her small eyes were fixed on the scrap of paper in the Form captain's hand.

"Then—then," went on Fred dramatically, "I felt myself being dragged through the wall—"

"Oh?" gasped Clara. "Here, what's that? How could you be dragged through the wall?"

"There, I knew you wouldn't believe me!" sobbed Freda. "You think I'm joking, when I know that there's some hidden menace in this haunted old house—"

"Stick to the facts, Freda!" broke in Babs sharply, and then, becoming aware that the girl's gaze was fixed upon the top paper in her hand, quickly rolled it up. "You were saying," Babs added.

Freda tried to cover up her confusion. "I—I—there was an opening in the wall. Another hand grabbed me and dragged me through into a—a kind of passage. It was pitch dark, and I couldn't see anyone. I felt myself being forced along, and—and the next I knew I found myself in the corridor outside this dormitory!"

To judge from their frightened expressions, quite a number of the girls were impressed by that account. But Babs wasn't. Nor were Clara and Mabs, and a few of the others.

What exactly had happened to Freda, Babs did not profess to know. That reference to a passage behind the wall, if it were to be believed, certainly intrigued her, however.

Secret passages! Why, this was the type of house to be honeycombed with them. And what could be better for the purpose of anyone who wished to scare the occupants of Drewe Manor!

Babs resolved to search for that secret passage, if there were one in the dormitory. But she would do it when Freda was not on the scene.

"Well, Freda's safe"—Babs couldn't help a note of sarcasm which crept into

her tone—"so I vote we all get back to bed again."

"Oh, I'm scared!" muttered Lucy Morgan. "I don't feel safe—"

"Don't you worry, Lucy," said Babs reassuringly. "Now, come on—jump into bed!"

Reluctantly the Fourth Form settled down to sleep again. Babs carefully placed that scrap of paper she had found, with its mystifying jumble of words, under her pillow.

That Freda had seemed very interested in the piece of paper, she was quite aware. Well, it would be safe enough during the night under her pillow, and to-morrow she would show it to Eileen Hunter.

But the following morning, when Babs awoke, she found the paper had gone.

Someone, somehow, had removed it from under her pillow as she slept!



"Ten O'clock!"

"Oh, Barbara, can you remember what was on the paper?"

Eagerly Eileen Hunter asked that question of Barbara Redfern. Babs and Mabs were seated in the cosy, if plainly furnished, little drawing-room of Willow Cottage, in Friardale Village.

Shining eyed, her wistful face flushed excitedly, Eileen sat opposite Babs at the table.

"Yes, Barbara. You don't mind if I call you Barbara, do you? If you can remember those words I feel it might mean a lot to Eileen and me."

The speaker now was Mr. Hunter.

Babs, meeting him for the first time that afternoon, had been charmed by his likeable manner—just as her sympathies had been aroused to discover that Eileen's father was a cripple.

He sat in an invalid's chair by the fireplace. His features were pale and drawn, yet they radiated a cheerful personality in spite of his disability, and his eyes were keen and bright.

Babs found herself liking Eileen more and more every minute she saw her. And now, discovering that Mr. Hunter was a cripple, she could understand the hardships he and his daughter were suffering.

It was after dinner at Drewe Manor, and, being Wednesday and a half-holiday for the Cliff House girls, Babs had taken the opportunity of slipping into Friardale to see Eileen.

Only Mabs had accompanied her, for Clara and Janet had gone over to Cliff House to take part in a tennis tournament, and most of the Fourth had gone with them.

The previous night's scare had been reported to Miss Charmant. The mistress was very startled and puzzled, and not a little worried as she noticed how nervous some of the girls had become.

Miss Charmant, too, had gone to Cliff House that afternoon, promising to acquaint the headmistress with the facts.

And Babs had been telling Eileen and her father about that scrap of paper she had found, and how it had vanished during the night.

"Yes, I think I can remember it—most of it, anyway," smiled Babs. "Have you some paper and a pencil, please?"

The Form captain had a retentive memory, and to the best of her belief she made an exact copy of the incomplete message she had discovered.

(Continued overleaf)

TWO ATTRACTIVE WAYS OF— MAKING A FAVOURITE FROCK FIT

Frocks that have grown too small in the bodice are a problem indeed. But here are two solutions that should appeal to you.

ISN'T it disappointing—and annoying—how favourite frocks and blouses simply will grow too small in the bodice?

Ways of making them fit again seem almost impossible, too—for no one likes a renovation to appear obvious!

But I think you'll agree, after looking at the sketch here, that I've really had a brain-wave this time, for the "widening" actually improves the look of the garment, and wouldn't be recognisable as anything but trimming by even your most critical friend.

DON'T DISCARD IT

If it's a very precious frock or blouse that you're just making up your mind is too hopelessly tight, and will have to be given to a small cousin—just show the picture to mother first, and then I'm sure she'll help you carry out the alteration.

First measure carefully down the length of your frock, from the front of



the neck to the hem. Then buy some ribbon this length, plus an extra half yard.

Then grit your teeth—but don't close your eyes!—and cut right down the centre—zi-pp!

Insert your ribbon in this slit, sewing with tiny stitches down each side.

That's done the trick—widened both bodice and skirt—and you'll be able to get your pet frock on again in comfort!

But just to complete the disguise, trim the sleeves as well with the ribbon—just to make the frock look really new and not an old one altered.

There, that's the first idea. The other is for a frock or blouse that's too tight only in the bodice part.

A LACING EFFECT

The obvious way is to let in a piece of matching material once you have cut the slit from neck to waist. But how seldom it is that there are any remnants! And even if there are, they always insist on looking startlingly new compared with the article that's been worn several times, don't they?

So inset a piece of any old material or wide ribbon instead—as long as it isn't purple or pink, of course! But any reasonable oddment will do, for it's not going to show more than a glimpse.

Two and a half yards of narrow ribbon in a favourite colour to match the actual garment is the secret.

Stitch the ribbon from side to side in a lacing effect, across the inset, and finish with a neat little bow at the neckline.

A little matching bow on each sleeve would be a good notion just to make sure that no one recognises what you have been trying to do.

But this isn't really necessary, for this is such a pretty style that I'm certain some of your chums will be copying it—without even guessing that you did it with a purpose!

GRAND GIFTS AND NEW STORIES COMING

Mr. Hunter and Eileen examined it eagerly when Babs had finished. But they were soon frowning in mystification. "By Jove," exclaimed the man at last, "it's a fair puzzle. I'm afraid it's quite useless without the other portion. You have a idea where it might be?"

Babs shook her head. "I'm afraid not," she confessed. "I think it was only by a lucky chance that I found it last night. That rush of air I was telling you about must have dislodged it from somewhere—perhaps it was torn then. But where the other portion is I haven't the foggiest notion—I looked everywhere in the vicinity of the dormitory this morning, and couldn't find a trace. But doesn't that half suggest anything at all to you, Mr. Hunter?"

He smiled a little tragically. "Well, I must admit it does—but, unfortunately, nothing tangible. Barbara," he went on thoughtfully, "I'll tell you the whole story. The bottom words on this paper formed my father's name—I'm pretty certain about that. The word 'Hunter' is complete, and those letters 'es' must have been 'Charles,' which was his Christian name. Presuming he wrote this message, I think we can safely assume that he has hidden something. That something might be money—the 'ey' at the beginning of the second line suggests that."

Babs was listening with eager interest. "Now, it very probably is money, as a matter of fact—the fair-sized fortune which was lost when my father died," continued Mr. Hunter.

"The money which would have been daddy's," put in Eileen quickly.

"Quite so, my dear. What happened to that money has never been discovered. But I do know that my father developed rather eccentric habits just before he died, and it is quite likely that he hid it at Drere Manor, or some other place."

"I spent months searching every inch of the house, but never found the tiniest clue," went on Mr. Hunter sadly. "By that time we were getting into desperate straits financially. My slender resources were going in keeping up the manor, and because of my disability, I was unable to work in the ordinary way. At last we were compelled to leave the manor and live here. I put the house in the hands of an agent named Burgin, whom, apparently, you have already met, Barbara."

Babs nodded. "And didn't he ever get any offers from people wishing to buy or rent Drere Manor?" she asked.

He said not. "Mr. Hunter's voice hardened. "But, quite frankly, I believe he didn't want the manor to pass into other hands. Why, or what his game is, I don't know. But the fact that he is trying to scare you and your friends out of the place suggests that there is a game."

"But, returning to this incomplete letter, and my father's money. I do think that the complete letter would tell us where the money is hidden—if hidden it is."

A determined glint came into Babs' blue eyes.

"Then we must find the complete letter!" she said grimly. "The half which disappeared last night, and the other half. My goodness," she added, as a thought came to her, "I wonder if Burgin, the agent, knows about this

money? Perhaps he's looking for the letter, too. And now that he has found one half—"

"Yes, we must get it back before he finds the other part!" put in Mabs quickly.

Mr. Hunter was silent, his face very troubled. Eileen was gazing entrancedly at the Cliff House chums, as though imploring them to help her and her crippled father.

But Babs had already decided to do that. Before coming to Willow Cottage her mind had been made up on that score; and now, having heard Mr. Hunter's story, realizing what was at stake, her determination to help was intensified.

"We'll do all we can, Mr. Hunter," she promised earnestly. "The Fourth Form will be at Drere Manor for a week or two, and if we don't find this money—well, it won't be for the lack of searching. And don't you worry about the Fourth being scared away, Mr. Hunter!" Babs added a little grimly. "The little trick to frighten us out of Drere Manor isn't going to succeed, and it's going to be the tricksters who get the scare when we bowl them out!"

Across Eileen's sympathetic face flitted such a smile of gratitude that Babs felt a little lump come into her throat.

"You are so kind, Barbara," she said, in a whispering voice. "You don't know how much I appreciate it."

"Yes, indeed," added Mr. Hunter huskily. "A thousand thanks, Barbara—and where I failed, may you succeed. It is awfully sweet of you to help Eileen and me in this way. After all, we're still strangers, and yet I feel as though we've been friends for years. Thank you, my dear girl. And you are sure it will be no bother—will not interfere with your own activities in any way?" he added anxiously.

"Of course not!" Babs assured him, with a light laugh. "If only you knew what a thrill it gives us to go exploring in secret passages! Which reminds me that we shall want your help, Eileen."

"Anything you say, Barbara," said Mr. Hunter's daughter at once.

"Well, do you know the secret of these passages? After all, surely they'll be the places to look for this hidden money—and it's quite obvious that the persons trying to scare us are working their pleasant little stunts from these passages. If you can show us how to get into them—"

Eileen nodded eagerly. "I know how to get into some of them," she said. "Drere Manor is honeycombed with secret passages, built in the walls, and I think I know most of them."

"Splendid!" Babs clapped her hands gaily. "Then could you come with Mabs and myself now? Come and have tea with us again—that is if Mr. Hunter doesn't mind," she added.

And so ten minutes later, when Babs and Mabs took their departure from Willow Cottage, they were accompanied by the eager Eileen, who was delighted at the prospect of having tea again with the Fourth Form chums.

But reaching Drere Manor, a shock awaited the three girls.

Sarah Harrigan met them as they were entering the hall. And Sarah, knowing Eileen for whom she was, ready to do anything which she knew would upset Babs and Mabs and always making it a point to assert her authority

where the chums were concerned, promptly made herself unpleasant.

"You can't bring that girl in here, Barbara," she said rudely.

An angry flush came into Babs' face. "What do you mean, Sarah?" she exclaimed hotly. "Eileen is my friend, and Mabs and I have invited her to tea in our study—"

The prefect scowled. "Don't argue with me!" she snapped. "I say that girl isn't coming in here, and I mean what I say. I'm in charge of the Fourth Form during Miss Charmant's absence, and I expect my orders to be obeyed without question. And one of my orders is that no visitors are allowed."

Babs and Mabs were almost speechless in their surprise and indignation. Eileen gave an agonised little cry, hurt by this insult which was so unfair and unreasonable.

"Sarah, you have no right to act in this way!" protested Babs furiously. "My goodness, of all the cheek!" spluttered Mabs wrathfully.

Sarah Harrigan's eyes glittered. "Be careful what you say!" she warned. "Another word, and I'll give you detention—"

"I'm not going to let you insult my guest like this!" cried Babs recklessly, and then felt Eileen tugging anxiously at her arm.

"Barbara, please don't get yourself into a row on my account," she pleaded.

"Oh, please come away!"

"But—"

"Place!"

And Babs, only keeping her temper in check by the greatest of efforts, allowed herself to be pulled down the steps by Eileen. Not very often did the Form captain lose her temper, but in that moment there was no knowing what she might have done.

"I'm sorry, Eileen," she said, with an effort; "sorry that a Cliff House girl—and a prefect at that—should have treated you so abominably. I apologise on behalf of the school."

There was a hurt look in Eileen's large, brown eyes, but she smiled brightly.

"Forget it, Barbara," she said. "I'm sure I don't know what I've done to upset that girl like that—but never mind. I think I'd better go, Barbara—it will save any further unpleasantness."

Babs, still furiously angry but calmer now, nodded slowly.

"I suppose so. But those secret passages, Eileen—"

"Do you think you could meet me to-night?" asked Eileen. "I'll show you then, if you think it will be safe."

"That's a good idea, Babs," put in Mabs.

"Right!" said the Form captain. "And if Sarah thinks she can stop us she's going to be unlucky. Where shall we see you, Eileen? I expect Clara will be with us."

"In the summer-house at the bottom of the garden. You know where it is?" Babs was smiling now, though the usual sunniness of that smile was still absent, and her blue eyes held a stern light.

"Rather. We can see it from our dormitory. At ten o'clock, say?"

"Yes. Watch out for me through the window. I'll give three short flashes on a torch," suggested Eileen.

And so it was arranged. Eileen left her friends then, while Babs and Mabs strolled arm-in-arm back into the house.



SUDDENLY the Co. found themselves confronted by Sarah. "Keep back!" the prefect snapped. "These passages are out of bounds." Little did the chums guess what was happening round the corner of the corridor!

THREE SHADOWY figures holding fluttering candles, moved slowly along one of the numerous secret passages which formed a network through Drere Manor.

In the passage, beyond the radiance of the candles, it was pitch dark. But outside, the brilliant afternoon sunshine streamed down on a green countryside.

The leading figure, taller than its two companions, came to some steps, passed down them, and emerged into a large underground cellar. The second figure, then the third figure, joined the leader. "Well," said Albert Burgin, placing his candle on an upturned box, what's the news? Are those dratted kids in a blue funk yet? Are they showing any signs of wanting to clear out?"

Freda Ferriers grinned. "Most of them are, uncle," she replied. "They're dreading going to bed to-night after what happened yesterday. But—the grin faded—I believe that cat Barbara Redfern and her beastly friends are getting a bit suspicious."

"What's that?" Burgin looked startled. "What do you mean—suspicious of our game?"

"Well, suspicious that we're trying to scare everybody out of this house," Freda informed her uncle worriedly. "They're not easily frightened like the others, and if they were to catch us—"

"They mustn't catch us!" snapped Burgin. "You!" he added, addressing the third figure. "Did you carry out my orders?"

Sarah Harrigan scowled and nodded. "Yes. I soon got rid of that Eileen Hunter kid," she said. "But it was a little bit awkward, and if the matter is reported to one of the mistresses—"

"Never mind!" Burgin breathed relievedly. "I don't want that Hunter girl here, and it doesn't suit my plans

that she should be friendly with the others—especially after what Freda has just said. If they're beginning to suspect things, they'll realise there are secret passages in this place—and Eileen Hunter is sure to know how to get into them. We must keep her out of the way."

"Leave it to us, uncle," Freda said. "By the way, was that piece of paper I found of any value? It seemed to interest Barbara Redfern."

An excited light came into Burgin's small eyes.

"Well, yes and no." He saw Sarah Harrigan's gaze fixed upon him curiously, and paused abruptly. "But that affair is of no importance at the moment," he went on. "What I'm more concerned about is the fact that this house has got to be empty by the end of this week. You understand? By hook or by crook we've got to get these kids out of the way. We'll get busy again to-night. Listen, how's this for a stunt?"

The low murmur of his voice echoed eerily in that underground cellar of Drere Manor, as he outlined a scheme to Freda Ferriers and Sarah Harrigan.

"What time does the fun start?" asked Sarah, when Burgin had finished. "Ten o'clock!" was the low-voiced reply.



The Flash in the Darkness

"**WHAT'S** the time, Babs?" "Five minutes to go, Clara!"

"Goodness, it feels as if we've been here years!" "Not long now, Mabs!"

Babs, Mabs, and Clara were standing

at the window of their study. Nearly an hour ago the Fourth Form had gone up to the dormitory, the three chums with them.

No scare had disturbed the peace as yet, and the girls, uneasy as they were, had soon dropped off to sleep. All save Babs and her two chums.

A quarter of an hour before ten o'clock, when the dormitory was silent, they had donned dressing-gowns and jumpers over their pyjamas, put on walking shoes, and tiptoed down to their study.

Babs had decided on this precaution. They could have watched from the dormitory window for Eileen Hunter's signal from the summer-house; but as their study was directly beneath the Fourth Form sleeping quarters, and it overlooked the grounds, it was obviously safer to watch from the privacy of their own room.

Babs & Co. had crept downstairs, little suspecting that they were not the only absentees from the Fourth Form dormitory. Freda Ferriers, too, had gone off on some mission. At the far end of the long room, her bed in dark shadows beyond the radiance of the moonbeams, she had opened a panel in the wall and slipped through, unobserved even by Babs & Co., lying in bed waiting until it was time for them to move.

"Look!" said Clara suddenly. "There it is!"

From the summer-house at the end of the garden, bathed in the silvery light of the moon, the chums saw a white flash.

"Eileen's early—" began Babs, and then stopped in surprise.

Only that one flash came from the summer-house; yet Eileen had distinctly said that she would flash her torch three times.

"Perhaps her torch has gone wrong,"

suggested Mabs. "But it must be Eileen; it's nearly ten o'clock, after all."

Babs hesitated a moment longer, still gazing intently through the window. But the flash was not repeated.

"Come on, Babs!" said Clara impatiently. "We don't want to keep her waiting!"

The Form captain nodded, and led the way out of the study.

"Not a sound if we can help it!" she breathed warningly. "Don't forget Primmy's staying here to-night, and there will be ructions if she catches us out of the dormitory!"

"Primmy—or Miss Penelope Primrose, the kindly headmistress of Cliff House—had returned with Miss Charming to Drewe Manor that afternoon."

Concerned by the Fourth Form mistress's reports that curious things were happening in the old house, the headmistress had decided to sleep there for the night. Very probably she was still up, waiting to see if the mysterious events of the previous day were repeated.

The chums reached the staircase and tiptoed down into the hall. Fortunately, they could see their way without having to use the torches which each girl carried. The pale glow of the moon, shining in through the windows, suffused the old mansion with a dim light.

"We won't risk unbarring the front door," whispered Babs. "We'll slip out at the back."

"Sarah's put those passages out of bounds," pointed out Mabs, with a soft chuckle.

"Blow Sarah!" snorted Tomboy Clara.

"Shush!" The chums crept along to the rear of the house. Silence everywhere, and inky black shadows in the nooks and crannies where the moonlight failed to reach.

They were approaching the angle of a passage, when suddenly Babs stiffened and came to a halt. Her breathing was fast, the three chums stared at a faint radiance which had appeared from around the corner of the corridor.

And thrown upon the opposite wall was the shadow of a figure. They heard soft, shuffling footsteps. Someone was coming towards them, hidden from sight by the angle of the passage.

Into each of the chums' minds leaped the one thought—more mysterious happenings were afoot. The approaching figure must be one of the persons who were scheming to frighten the Cliff House girls away from Drewe Manor. Here was an opportunity to catch the schemer, to learn their identity.

Clara's eyes gleamed excitedly.

"Come on, Babs!" The Tomboy thought she whispered that, but in intense silence of the house her words carried clearly.

From the other passage there came a startled gasp; the swift padding of footsteps.

Babs, realising that the incautious Tomboy had betrayed their presence, rushed forward and round the corner.

But too late!

The chums had a glimpse of a shadowy, unrecognisable figure, holding a candle, standing by the wall. Then, even as Babs & Co. plunged down the passage, the figure literally vanished into that wall. There was a whirr, a click.

"My hat! A secret passage!" exclaimed Babs.

She ran her hands quickly up and down the panelled wall at the spot where the unknown figure had disappeared, but nothing happened. The

means of opening that sliding panel eluded her.

"Well, we know for certain there is a passage behind this wall!" Babs said, in a thrilled voice. "Let's find Eileen. Perhaps she knows its secret!"

Reaching the door of the rear of the house, they hurried out into the grounds. Down the path they sped towards the summer-house, the bright radiance of the moon revealing it clearly against the tall brick wall which stood immediately behind it.

And in their excitement, not one of

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GRAND GIFTS

● =====

AND

NEW STORIES

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COMING SHORTLY

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the chums saw the girl who watched them from the concealment of a thick clump of bushes. That girl was Sarah Harrigan.

Babs & Co. reached the summer-house. "Eileen!" exclaimed Babs softly.

But it took them only a matter of seconds to realise that Eileen Hunter was not there.

"Let's look inside," suggested Clara. "Perhaps she's fallen asleep."

They ran into the big summer-house, artistically built of logs, and switched on their torches. No Eileen!

A sudden fear tugged at Babs' heart. "Well, of all the giddy mysteries!" exclaimed Clara. "We saw her give the signal—"

"But was it Eileen?" asked Babs worriedly. "Don't forget there was only one flash, and she'd arranged to give three."

Mabs clutched her leader's arm. "You—you mean it was someone else?"

"Either that or someone interrupted her—perhaps captured her!" said Babs, her anxiety increasing.

Clara swung round to run out into the grounds again. The long, tasselled cord of her dressing-gown caught in the wood at the back of the summer-house.

"Oh blow!" exclaimed Clara impatiently, and tugged.

Whereupon an amazing thing happened.

The cord did not come away, but pulled back a section of the woodwork. Like a door swinging back on its hinges, a panel opened. In stupefied wonder, the chums watched.

Tremblingly Babs shone her torch on the aperture thus revealed. Then, in a blinding flash of thrilled inspiration, the junior captain realised the significance of what Clara had so dramatically disclosed.

"The wall behind this summer-house!" she said vibrantly. "It must be hollow! It—it's a secret passage!"

NO DOUBT about that staggering discovery, as Babs & Co. quickly learned.

Stepping through the opening at the back of the summer-house, shining the

torches in front of them, they saw that the interior of the wall was indeed hollow.

Here was an unsuspected tunnel with, a few yards farther on, steps leading down below ground level.

"Carry on, Babs!" said Clara. "We must see where this leads!"

"And—and if Eileen were captured, we might find her down here!" That was Babs' first thought, anxiety for her friend's absence submerging even the excitement of this discovery. "Close up the entrance, Mabs, but leave it slightly ajar, in case it locks, and we can't get out again, if necessary."

Then, with Babs leading the way, the chums passed on down the tunnel, down the steps until they reached the bottom. The tunnel, so narrow that they had to move in single file, stretched before them. They knew they were right under the ground level now.

For fifteen minutes by Babs' wrist-watch they pressed on cautiously. Then more steps. The junior captain shone her torch up them.

"They go up to ground level again, I should say," she decided.

At the top of the steps the narrow passage still continued to burrow its tortuous way. The chums went on, keyed up to a pitch of high excitement now.

Suddenly Babs' torch showed her a gap in the brickwork at one side of the tunnel. Here there was wood—and some intricate mechanism.

"Look!" breathed Babs. "There's an exit here, or I'll eat my hat!"

She saw a switch, moved it with trembling fingers, and instantly they heard a soft whirring sound; saw the panel of wood begin to slide back.

Babs doused her torch, the others following suit. Cautiously she peered through the opening into the darkness beyond, and then uttered an amazed gasp.

"We're back in Drewe Manor!" she exclaimed. "Well, I'm jiggered! This is the main hall!"

There was the big, open fireplace and the antique chest Marjorie Hazeldene had so admired. Stepping out of the tunnel, Babs & Co. indeed found themselves in the big, lofty hall of Drewe Manor, looking very eerie now in the darkness.

And at that moment, even as they emerged from the secret passage—

The silence was broken in startling, horrifying fashion by a chorus of terrified screams, coming from somewhere in the upper regions of the old mansion.

Stiff and rigid, as if turned to stone, the three Cliff House girls stood listening. Then Babs flashed a dismayed glance at her chums.

"That was Marjorie's voice—and Bessie's! Something's happening up in the dormitory! Oh, come on!"

The chums rushed forward, and up the stairs leading to the dormitory. In that moment of anxiety they did not see the figure which came running from the other end of the hall—did not hear Miss Charming's voice calling them:

"Barbara! Clara! Mabel!"

But Babs & Co. pelted on, unaware that the Fourth Form mistress had seen them and was running swiftly in their wake.

They reached the dormitory, while the screams grew louder and more terrified. They heard another sound—a fluttering as of madly beating wings.

Babs flung open the door, and had a vision of two glaring eyes bearing down upon her. Abruptly they disappeared, but the fluttering of wings continued.

"My giddy aunt! What—what was that?" came Clara's badly shaken voice.

Babs groped for the light switch; found it and pressed. Nothing happened. The light did not come on. Babs flashed on her torch and swept its beam round the dormitory.

She saw girls sitting up in bed, petrified with terror. Others had huddled down under the bedclothes. A sob came from Marjorie Hazeldene.

And then a shape flew into the beam of Babs' torch. Again she had a vision of those glaring eyes.

"It's an owl!" she gasped. "Oh, my goodness!"

Girls around the dormitory the owl fluttered wildly, as scared at being imprisoned in the confines of this room as the girls were at seeing it there.

"Chase it out of the window!" cried Clara frantically.

"It's all right, girls!" shouted Babs. "Only an owl! Nothing to be scared of!"

And Babs & Co., intent on endeavouring to force the frightened owl out of one of the windows by flapping sheets as it flew near them, did not see Freda Ferriers return to the dormitory through the panel in the wall at the back of her bed.

Freda was grinning triumphantly. It was she who, being told by her uncle that an owl was nesting in the chimney which led up from the fireplace in the dormitory, had managed to force it down into the room. She and her rascally uncle had known the terrifying effect it would have on the girls. And it was Freda who had switched off the light from the fuse-box.

"It's going!" yelled Clara from the direction of a window, and again flapped her sheet. "My hat—Ow!"

The enraged owl had made a peck at the Tomboy's face. Then, with a last frantic screech, it flew through the open window and was lost to sight.

While at the same moment Miss Charmant burst in through the doorway of the dormitory.

"Girls, what is happening here? Why, good gracious! What has happened to the light? Barbara, is that you with the torch? What were you and Clara and Mabel doing downstairs in the hall?"

OUTSIDE. In the grounds of Drewe Manor, another frightening scene had been enacted.

And the victim of this one was—Miss Primrose, the headmistress of Cliff House!

Concerned by the events that had been reported to her by Miss Charmant as being taken place at the mansion, Miss Primrose had gone for a late stroll round the garden, keeping a wary eye open for any untoward incident.

And certainly many had happened.

Miss Primrose had been surprised and angry to see Barbara Redfern, Mabel Lynn, and Clara Trevlyn emerge from the house and run down the path. Leaving dormitory after lights-out was a serious offence, and the headmistress had determined that they should be punished severely.

She had made to follow the chums, but lost sight of them through the trees and bushes which abounded in the grounds of Drewe Manor. By the time Miss Primrose reached the summerhouse Babs & Co. were then exploring the underground tunnel.

Meanwhile, a pair of startled eyes had been following the headmistress' movements. Sarah Harrigan, after watching Babs & Co. disappear from view at the end of the garden, was stealthily making her way back towards the house, when she almost bumped into Miss Primrose. Quickly the dismayed prefect scuttled

into cover—and it was then that a reckless, but spiteful, idea occurred to her.

Sarah, desperately in need of money, was only too willing to fall in with Albert Burgin's schemes to earn the ten pounds he had promised her. Unscrupulous and cunning, she was prepared to go to any lengths to carry out his instructions that the Cliff House girls must be scared out that object, she thought now, than to scare the headmistress herself?

How better to obtain that object, she thought now, than to scare the headmistress herself?

But how, without risking her own safety in any way?

Frantically Sarah racked her brains as she watched the headmistress coming towards her, and then the idea came to her.

Hidden behind some thick bushes, she was invisible to Miss Primrose. As the headmistress drew nearer, Sarah gave a low, unearthly moan, which echoed queerly in the still night air.

Miss Primrose stopped abruptly, her cheeks turning a little pale.

"Bless my soul!" she gasped.

Again Sarah uttered that wailing sound, but this time she whipped off the thin silk, lacy scarf which she always wore beneath her coat; she

flapped it in the air so that it was caught by the gentle breeze.

Miss Primrose, already startled by the curious sounds, was quite alarmed at this wispy, shapeless thing which seemed to float in midair.

"Good gracious! What is it?" she whispered to herself shakily.

Had Sarah been content with that she would have succeeded in her mission; but the prefect, in her eagerness to create a still more frightening effect, was not finished yet.

Again she flapped the flimsy scarf, this time intending it to brush against the headmistress' face and then quickly draw it away, but Sarah was not quick enough. Recovering from her first shock, Miss Primrose's senses were now alert.

As that filmy object fluttered against her face she conquered her quick stab of fear, and, like a flash, thrust out a hand, grasping the scarf.

Sarah, preparing to pull it away, gasped—and that gasp was heard by Miss Primrose. The headmistress' eyes glinted.

"Who is that? What does this mean?"

She made a stride forward. But



NOW SUMMER'S ON THE WAY

Your schoolgirl good looks present many a tiny problem in the warm weather, don't they? But it's cheering to know there's a solution for each.

DOES the prospect of summer conjure up visions of sun-burned backs, tennies when the school court is "bagable," and lovely cold lemonade through straws?

Or does it suggest peeling shoulders, millions of freckles, and sticky hands that simply won't hold a racket?

SUNBURN

First, we'll solve the sun-bathing problem.

START gently. I know this sounds rather like another of those time-worn phrases such as "schooldays are the happiest" and "children should be seen and not heard"—but it really is serious advice. Just a three-minute exposure to the sun on a grilling day is sufficient. That is, if you really want to have a tan that looks as if it has come from the South of France!

WEAR a hat while sun-bathing, if you value your hair. The sun in moderation is definitely good for it, but when intense, it has just the same effect as if you were to scorch it all over.

TREAT the backs of your legs as well as the fronts. I know it's lovely to watch the brown coming, but remember other people will judge your tan by a back-view.

A WET BATHING-SUIT is meant for the water and not for sitting about in to get dry. However hot the sun, there's a definite risk of catching an unbecomingly cold if you sit for many moments with water clinging to you.

FRECKLES

Next the freckle problem. FIRST, you who have a fascinating

colony of these over your nose and on your forehead, should remember that many people adore them. Film stars boast about them, and novelists write chapters on those their heroines have. So decide that they suit you, and make the most of them.

PROMINENT or odd freckles may not be welcome, however. And while I don't promise to spirit them away, you can make them dimmer. A dab of lemon juice applied every night and every morning to the freckle will make it less noticeable. But, since lemon juice is drying to the skin, don't forget to add a touch of cold cream there in odd moments.

HANDS

Sticky hands can make a schoolgirl really unhappy, so this problem, too, must be solved.

HOLD your wrists under the cold tap and allow the water to run over them for several minutes. This is much more refreshing than dipping the hands right into the cold water—which only seems to make them glow the warmer.

A DAB of eau-de-Cologne stroked into the palms of your hands when you want them to keep specially nice and fresh is another idea for "cooltch." It need only be cheap eau-de-Cologne, but it will impart a delightfully fresh fragrance to you, for all that.

A DUSTING of boracic powder over the palms of your hands before you set off for a stiff tennis match, or a stiff exam., when you fear the pen will slip, is a delight that should certainly win you the match—or the prize.

Sarah, in a panic of fear at this disaster, was already some yards away, frantically crawling on hands and knees from bush to bush. Again she heard Miss Primrose's voice.

"Stop! Who is that girl?"

Even in her terror Sarah breathed a sigh of relief as she realized that the headmistress had not recognized her. Recklessly abandoning all concealment then, knowing that she would not be identified, the prefect sprang to her feet and rushed towards the back of the house.

"Thank goodness she knew the secret of that hidden passage where she had seen Freda Ferriers talking to her uncle! From there she would soon be able to reach her room.

Sarah rushed on, and in a moment was swallowed up in the darkness.



HOME-MADE CLOTHES CAN BE SO SMART

mother if you may use her cutting-out shears.

TACK your frock together next, and if you simply can't resist trying it on to see how it's going to look, do so, very gently, by all means. This will give you a very good idea of fit and so on, and while you won't want your frock too tight, don't hesitate to have it "fitting." Nothing gives a home-made garment away so much as that "blousy" look.

FRENCH seams are the ones for the actual making of your frock. Which means, of course, sewing on the RIGHT side first, then on the wrong.

MACHINE-STITCHING is quite correct for these, and naturally, much quicker. But see that the tension is looser for a silk frock than for a cotton one, won't you? Otherwise you may find the stitching will pull and pucker the material.

THE WAIST of the frock will very likely need some handsewing, so make sure that the fullness is in the right places and that the skirt "sits" nicely. But you can always machine this afterwards for extra strength.

THE HEM of the skirt must be done by hand. (This is the sure way to distinguish between a cheap and a good frock.) Two inches is a good depth for most skirt hems, but three is not too many, especially as it allows for letting down.

THEY which are not wanted on the hem. In fact, the more invisible your stitches, the smarter, and each should be at least an eighth of an inch away from the other. As you don't want "cats' teeth" showing even on the wrong side of your frock, run your needle under the fold of the hem between each stitch.

COLLARS and CUFFS generally look best when sewn on with a run and fell seam—and you know how to do these, don't you?

A FINAL PRESSING will give that shop-look to your home-made frock. Press all seams on the wrong side, then turn, and press the right side, paying special attention to collars and cuffs.

If your frock is silk or artificial silk, however, it will look better for a complete pressing on the wrong side. This will give the right side that fashionably dull surface which looks so expensive.

furly. "Perhaps you will also explain, Barbara, what you three were doing in the garden!"

The headmistress paused, breathing deeply, holding up her hand imperiously, as Babs made to speak.

"Silence, girl!" she thundered. "Miss Charmant"—she turned to the mistress—"a few minutes ago I was the victim of a cowardly and disgraceful attempt to frighten me—and one of these three girls was responsible!"

Three horrified gasps came simultaneously from Babs, Mabs, and Clara.

"Oh, Miss Primrose—" burst out Babs.

"Silence! Do you deny being out in the garden, when I saw you with my own eyes?" rapped the headmistress. "Nnn-uu," faltered Babs. "But—" "And do you deny that one of you was hiding behind a bush, uttering stupid, moaning noises and fluttering this in my face?"

Miss Primrose held up an object in her hand; the flimsy lace scarf dangled from her fingers in full view of the whole Form.

Babs & Co. looked at it wonderingly.

"But, Miss Primrose," said the junior captain desperately, "that doesn't belong to any of us. I admit we were in the garden, but—but—"

She broke off abruptly, biting her lip. How could she explain why they were there; that they had discovered that secret tunnel leading from the summer-house?

To do so would be playing into Freda Ferriers' hands, whom she suspected of conspiring with Mr. Burgin, the agent, to scare the Fourth away from Drere Manor. And there was another reason—Eileen Hunter!

Somewhere in this old house Mr. Hunter and his daughter believed to be hidden the money which would restore them to their former prosperity.

And—here Babs had no evidence to support her suspicions—was it not likely that Burgin, having knowledge of the lost fortune, was also seeking it? That surely accounted for his attempts to get the Cliff House girls out of Drere Manor. It would never do for him to know that she and her chums had found that tunnel.

Miss Primrose's voice broke in upon her thoughts.

"Well, Barbara?" she said icily. "I am waiting."

But Babs could only shake her head.

"I'm sorry, Miss Primrose; but I cannot explain. But really we didn't play that trick upon you. We wouldn't do such a thing—" Babs broke off lamely under the headmistress' scornful stare.

"That will do, Barbara. I think you have said enough. Clara, and you, Mabel. Have you anything to say?"

Clara shuffled her feet; Mabs went red.

But both of them shook their heads. If Babs refused to say anything, then they, too, would refuse.

"In that case," said Miss Primrose inflexibly, "I shall punish all three of you. For breaking bounds after lights-out, you will each take five hundred lines. As regards the other incident, I shall delay punishment until tomorrow morning. Perhaps by then the guilty girl among you will have had decency to confess. If not, then all of you will suffer! Now get into bed!"

She waited grimly while Babs & Co. obeyed.

"I hope the whole Form will now settle down to sleep peacefully for the remainder of the night," Miss Primrose said. "I am very disturbed by the

series of unusual things which have been happening since you came into this house. The idea of Drere Manor being haunted by some supernatural agency is, of course, absurd. But after my own experience to-night, I can quite understand how worried and nervous you are becoming."

She looked grimly from Babs to Mabs, and then to Clara.

"It is quite obvious to me that some person is deliberately trying to frighten you. It must stop! The culprit must be discovered and punished!"

Again the headmistress gazed at the chums, and, with a sinking feeling of dismay, Babs realised that Miss Primrose's glance had accusation in its depths. She and her chums were under suspicion.

"I trust you will not be further disturbed to-night. Come, Miss Charmant! Good-night, girls!"

The two mistresses left the dormitory, Miss Primrose switching out the light.

For a few moments there was silence in the room. Then from Lydia Crossendale's bed came a sound that grew louder and louder.

His-s-s!

Babs' face flamed in the darkness. From Clara Trevlyn came an angry cry:

"Who did that?"

"I did," said Lydia Crossendale. "So our own dear little Form captain and her playmates have been scaring us!"

"Lydia, it's not true!" retorted Babs. "Primmy thinks so," retorted the Snob of the Fourth. "And I must say it looks suspicious. Weren't you and your precious friends downstairs in the hall when that table crashed over yesterday? And you were the only one up when there was that rush of wind in this room last night. You were by the door when it flew open."

Babs, sitting up in bed, started. Yes, to anyone ready to believe that she and her chums were guilty of those scares, the evidence against them, while not conclusive, was certainly significant.

"And now you have to scare our most respected headmistress," continued Lydia, in tones of virtuous indignation.

"Shame!" supported Frances Frost.

"You mean a thing, Lydia!" exclaimed Clara angrily.

Babs heard the Tomboy scrambling out of bed.

"Don't, Clara!" she pleaded. "We're in trouble enough already without adding to it."

At the end of the darkened dormitory Freda Ferriers lay listening, an unpleasant scowl on her face.

Things were going wrong from her point of view. If the Fourth thought that Babs & Co. were guilty, they would lose their dread of Drere Manor. Freda did not know why her uncle was so desperately anxious that the old house should be empty. But he had offered her money to help him in achieving that object, and she meant to earn it.

Freda guessed that Sarah had been responsible for the attempt to scare Miss Primrose, though such a move had not been planned. It had been a good idea, but obviously it had failed.

Lying there in the darkness, Freda determined that she would find a way of making the Fourth leave Drere Manor. They were still nervous and uneasy. She would play on their fears.



FREDA jumped to her feet. "I refuse to do any more lessons in this house," she cried. "I tell you, it's haunted!"

their movements, Miss Primrose came down heavily upon them.

Babs was suspended from the Form captaincy. Clara was deprived of her position as sports captain. And Mabs was gated for a month.

It was a bitter blow for the chums. The only consolation was that Miss Primrose, still suspicious that they had played a part in the various incidents which had so scared the Fourth, decided that the girls should remain at Drere Manor while alterations were being carried out at Cliff House.

But Freda Ferriers, hearing that, became busy. For once Freda championed Babs & Co. and declared that they had been the victims of an injustice.

Drere Manor was haunted, she said, or if it was not haunted, queer things had happened in the old house, and would go on happening.

Many of the weaker-willed girls listened to her, and were influenced. That morning, before lessons, there was a growing agitation among the Form that they should protest, and ask to be taken away from Drere Manor.

Matters came to a head in the classroom.

Sarah Harrigan was in charge of the Fourth, Miss Charmant being in conference with Miss Primrose, before that lady returned to Cliff House.

"Take out your books!" snapped Sarah, in that unpleasant way of hers. Freda rose to her feet.

"I'm sorry, Sarah," she said; "but I, for one, refuse to do any more lessons in this place!"

Sarah had known that was coming, but she pretended to appear angry.

"How dare you, Freda! Sit down and take out your books at once!"

Freda made no effort to obey the command.

"I refuse!" she said again. "And if

the rest of the girls have any sense, they'll follow my example and go on strike. Drere Manor is haunted, and unless Miss Primrose takes us away from here, I shall ask my father to send me to another school."

"Good old Freda!" supported Frances Frost. "It's a disgrace that we should have to stay here! My nerves are on edge. I—I shall go mad if I stay here any longer!"

"It's true, Sarah!" put in Elsie Eflingham.

"Hear, hear!" Freda's sallow face flushed with triumph.

"You see how the Form feels about it, Sarah!" she asked. "If you won't see Miss Primrose about it, I will! We'll form a deputation and tell her that if we're not taken away from here we shall leave the school altogether!"

Sarah frowned.

"Very well——" she began, and swung round as the door of the classroom opened.

Miss Primrose entered—and with her was Eileen Hunter.

Babs, dismayed by Freda's surprising action, knowing that her efforts to help Eileen and her father would be seriously jeopardised if Miss Primrose were forced to remove the Fourth from Drere Manor, stared amazedly at the appearance of her friend.

What was Eileen doing here? And why was the headmistress looking so terribly grim?

Miss Primrose turned to Eileen. "All the girls are assembled here," she said. "Can you point out the culprit?"

Eileen flashed a quick smile at Babs, and then raised her arm, to point dramatically at Sarah Harrigan.

"That is the girl who attempted to frighten you, Miss Primrose," she said distinctly.

The prefect turned white.

THE FOLLOWING morning Babs & Co. learned their fate. Because they still refused to say anything of

"It's not true!" she panted. "Miss Primrose—"

"Silence!" rapped the headmistress sternly. "Miss Hunter tells me she happened to be in the garden last night and saw you play that absurd trick on me. Also," she went on, her voice becoming even more grim, "I have seen Stella Stone this morning, and she has identified that scarf as belonging to you. Sarah, I am ashamed of you! Not only because of your action, but because you were going to allow three innocent girls to suffer!"

She faced the class.

"Barbara, Mabel, Clara! I am very glad that Miss Hunter has been able to tell me the truth. Your punishment, of course, will be rescinded, and I can only say how sorry I am that you should have been accused!"

And that morning when, after lessons, Babs & Co. saw Eileen at Willow Cottage, they learned how Eileen, seeing both Sarah and Miss Primrose in the grounds of Dreere Manor, had been unable to keep her appointment the previous evening at the summer-house.

She had seen Sarah try to frighten the headmistress. She had heard Miss Primrose murmuring aloud her suspicions of Babs & Co. Realising that

her Cliff House friends might be accused and punished, she had that morning visited Miss Primrose and told her the truth.

Sarah was sent back to Cliff House in disgrace, and Dulcica Fairbrother, the popular sports captain, took her place in charge of the Fourth at Dreere Manor.

And there was a marked change in the attitude of the Fourth after Sarah's exposure. Their fears became forgotten.

The Fourth Form stayed on at Dreere Manor. But Freda and her uncle vowed that not yet were they beaten. For some mysterious reason of his own, Albert Burgin was desperate that the house should be vacant by the end of that week. There and then the two schemers were frantically racking their brains for a means of forcing the Cliff House girls out of Dreere Manor.

While Babs & Co. were even more determined that they would succeed in their efforts to help Eileen and her father.

Hidden somewhere in the house was a fortune, and for the sake of their new friends they intended to locate it, come what might!

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

TENNIS "POINTS"



THE most important contribution to your popularity on the tennis courts is your behaviour towards your partner and your opponents—in fact, what is known as "tennis etiquette."

Don't say: "Do you mind if I have the left court? I always play left." But give your partner first choice. After all, if you both like the same side you can always take it in turns to have it.

And, of course, you won't argue over the score. If you're not very clever at remembering it yourself, give way to those who can.

Don't fidget with your hair or your belt all the time, or keep pulling your stockings up. These are most irritating habits to watch, especially for the people looking on.

Be careful to say "Well played" after a particularly good shot, whether it is your opponent's or your partner's, but don't feel it necessary to make remarks about every shot that is played. Nothing is more annoying than the girl who persists in keeping up a "running commentary" all through the game.

And, biggest *don't* of all—*Don't* poach! If you think your partner is not capable of taking a shot, at least pay her the compliment of pretending you do.

If she is not such a good player as you are, it will make her self-conscious and awkward if she feels that you have to take all the shots for the good of the game, and she will play twice as badly.

If you are not a very good "net" player, play at the back of the court when your partner is serving. Otherwise, you will valiantly try to take shots that are out of reach and hit the net, or lose the point in some other way, and your partner will feel justifiably annoyed after all her hard work in serving!

Another thing that it is just as well to bear in mind is the question of shoes. Nearly everyone, of course, wears flat-soled canvas shoes, but some people need more support and wear shoes with solid rubber heels.

These are not really harmful to the grass court, but people are apt to be fussy about things like this, and so it is a good idea to ask your hostess if she objects to hard heels on her well-rolled lawn!

Always help to collect the balls at the end of the set, and be the first to volunteer to sit out the next one if there are other people waiting to play.

Above all, remember to be charming to everyone and not to criticise the other players, and I'm sure you will be asked to lots of parties this summer.



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