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The Schoolgirl

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Every Saturday

INCORPORATING "SCHOOLDAYS"

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SECONDS OF SUSPENSE

See this week's enthralling
long complete story of
Barbara Redfern & Co. of
Cliff House School

The Cliff House Chums At Drere Manor: An Enthralling Complete Tale, Featuring All Your Favourites



THE MENACE OF THE MANOR

For and Against

"RIDICULOUS!" exclaimed Barbara Redfern, captain of the Fourth Form.

"Rot!" snorted Tomboy Clara Trevlyn, with characteristic vigour. "Rubbish!" supported Mabel Lynn, Babs' best chum.

And the indignant chums looked angrily at Freda Ferriers.

"I tell you the sooner we get out of this place the better!" Freda snapped, her thin, sawlow face flushed, her small, pale grey eyes glittering with an unnatural brightness. "This house is giving me the creeps, and I don't mind admitting I'm frightened!"

"Ridiculous!" exclaimed Barbara again, with more emphasis this time.

But Freda—more commonly known as the "Ferret"—had plenty of support from many of the other girls in the room.

"Freda's right!" said Elsie Effingham uneasily.

"Begorra, and I agree!" came from Bridget O'Toole, who, being Irish, was rather superstitious. "I won't say Drere Manor is haunted, but there've been many peculiar things happening since we came here, and you can't deny it, Babs!"

Blue-eyed Barbara—Babs to all her friends—began to look worried.

She could see that quite a number of the girls were indeed genuinely

By

HILDA RICHARDS

Illustrations by T. Laidler

nervous; and there was no denying Bridget's statement.

Queer things certainly had been happening since the Fourth Form of Cliff House School had taken up quarters at Drere Manor, an old Tudor House on the outskirts of Friardale village.

It was only a temporary arrangement, necessitated by structural alterations to the Fourth Form Rooms at Cliff House; but even after a few days the girls had been reduced to a state of nervous agitation.

"We all ought to refuse to stop here!" put in Freda, seeing Babs' hesitation. "Let's go on strike! Let's write to our fathers!"

THERE is mystery afoot in Drere Manor, the temporary quarters of the Cliff House Fourth Formers. And because it threatens the whole future of a girl whom they have come to like and to admire, Babs & Co. decide that it is up to them to seek its solution.

"Hear, hear!"

"Let's stop talking all this rot!" exclaimed Clara impatiently. "Of course, queer things have happened, but, if you ask me, somebody's deliberately trying to scare us out of the house!"

Freda gave a start at the Tomboy's blunt words. The flush died from her face, leaving it strained and pale, while Babs flashed a quick, warning glance at her chum.

"Then if that's the case," said Freda, quickly recovering her composure, "it's all the more reason why we should get out of here before any of us comes to harm!"

Again there was a chorus of approval from the rank and file. Not usually were they prepared to follow Freda's lead; but the Ferret was right, and Babs, their captain, was wrong in defending Drere Manor.

Babs, however, was gazing at Freda with an intendment which that girl found most disconcerting.

"And what makes you think that harm will befall any of us if we remain here?" she asked steadily.

It was Freda who hesitated now before replying.

"Well—well," she blustered, "look what's happened already. Scares every night, and during the day, too. We haven't had a night's rest since we came to Drere Manor."

"Yes, and I wonder who's been responsible for these scares, Freda?"

Babs said, eyeing the other girl with a level, almost accusing gaze.

"What do you mean, Barbara——"

"Oh, nothing—nothing at all!"

And Babs suddenly stopped, realising that perhaps she had said too much. For Babs had her own suspicions as to who was the author of the disturbances which had so frightened the Cliff House girls.

Freda Ferriers herself had seemed to loom largely in the forefront since the Fourth had taken possession of Dreere Manor. Normally an unpleasant type of girl, who was quite willing to keep in the background, associating with the so-called Smart Set, led by Lydia Crossendale, she had suddenly become the chief agitator among the girls who wished to return to Cliff House.

It seemed to Babs that she had done everything to foster the fears of her Form-fellows.

It was Freda who had acted curiously, suspiciously at times; who had become almost hysterical when describing her terrifying experiences at the hands of the unknown menace which seemed to haunt the old house.

And again, Freda it was who had seemed to know Albert Burgin, the estate agent, who had been so furious to discover that Dreere Manor had been occupied during his absence from Friardale.

All these things had been noted by the observant, shrewd-thinking captain of the Fourth. And Babs was not mistaken.

Perhaps Freda read those suspicions in Babs' eyes. Her mean heart was filled with apprehension. That remark of the captain's had been significant. She knew something of the truth—but how much? Did Babs know, for instance, that Burgin was her uncle? Did she know that he had promised her money if she would help him in his efforts to frighten the girls away from Dreere Manor?

Freda scowled and averted her gaze from Babs' direct stare. Bother that girl for her interfering ways! If it hadn't been for Babs, Dreere Manor would by now have been rid of its unwanted tenants.

She sought to turn the conversation into less dangerous channels.

"You seem to know a lot, Barbara," she sneered. "Well, let me tell you something now. Whoever's causing the trouble must know this house jolly well—must, in fact," she added meaningly, "have lived in it."

"Meaning?" asked Babs quietly.

"Meaning," Freda said deliberately, "that perhaps that friend of yours, Eileen Hunter, is not above suspicion. Her father owns the house; she lived here for years."

Babs, Mabs, and Clara exchanged glances.

"Well, that's an idiotic thing to say, if you like!" Clara exclaimed angrily. "Just as if the owner's daughter would try to get us out of here—when they've been trying to let the place for years. Think of something a bit more intelligent, Freda!"

Freda's crafty face crimsoned. But Babs & Co. were furious that she had dragged Eileen's name into this conversation. As Clara had said, it was utterly ridiculous to accuse Eileen

Hunter of being concerned in the scares.

Only the chums realised just how much it meant to her and her invalid father that Dreere Manor should be occupied once more, after Albert Burgin had deliberately turned away prospective tenants by fostering the belief that the old house was haunted.

The rent they were receiving from Miss Primrose meant everything to them—without it they would be practically destitute.

And Babs & Co., knowing those facts, were furious with Freda for bringing suspicion upon her.

"Well, whoever or whatever it is," Frances Frost said coolly, "I'm sick of this. I agree with Freda. We ought to leave this place."

Freda grinned cunningly.

"Yes, and just as soon as we can get out!" she said. To create an effect, she suddenly looked round the panelled apartment now being used as the Fourth Form Common-room, with pretended nervousness. "Perhaps even now something else terrible might happen. It comes so suddenly——"

She broke off with a shriek.

For even at that moment something did happen—something that, harmless though it was, made the girls literally jump with alarm.

Clang, clang!
Through Dreere Manor echoed the strident notes of a bell.

"Wh-what's that?" gasped Lucy Morgan tremblingly.

Babs laughed.

"Duffers!" she exclaimed. "It's only the bell for dinner. That's what comes of listening to Freda. Now, come on, girls. Pull yourselves together and let's enjoy our grubbins!"

Rather sheepishly the girls trooped out of the Common-room. But Babs looked worried, realising just how much they had been affected by the mysterious happenings at Dreere Manor, and conscious yet again how Freda was working on those fears.

More and more obvious was it becoming that Freda must have a deep motive for acting in this way. But determined as Freda seemed to be to get the girls out of Dreere Manor, Babs & Co. were even more determined to stay there.

For the sake of Eileen Hunter and her invalid father they must stay there.

The usual cheery dinner-time buzz so prevalent back at Cliff House was absent here as the girls took their places at the long table presided over by pretty Miss Charmant, the Fourth's popular mistress.

She, too, looked worried, for Miss Charmant had noticed all the signs of nervous unrest among the girls.

The meal commenced amid a strained atmosphere. Only one girl, indeed, seemed at all anxious to eat. That girl, needless to say, was plump Bessie Bunter.

Bessie was as scared as any of the Fourth Formers. But Bessie could always forget her fears when meal-time came.

She sniffed appreciatively as Sally, the Cliff House maid, entered the old-fashioned dining-room and placed a plate of steaming soup in front of

her. Her little eyes glittered behind her thick round spectacles.

"I sus-say, that looks ripping!" she beamed. "I kik-can just do with that. 'I'm as hungry as a—a——"

"As hungry as a Bunter!" supplied Mabs, who was seated next to her plump chum.

Babs and Clara chuckled, but the remark brought forth no answering smiles from the remainder of the Form.

Spoon poised in her hand, Bessie waited impatiently till the rest were served.

"You may start, girls," smiled Miss Charmant.

Down went Bessie's spoon. Up it came again to her lips. Then——

"Ow-wow-wow! Oh, I'm pip-poisoned! I'm on fire!" she hooted, dropping her spoon with a crash, and clasping a hand over her mouth. "Grooooooh!" she spluttered. "Help, Mabs! Water—water!"

But Mabs, having tasted her own soup, was swallowing copious draughts of water herself. So was everybody in the dining-hall. Even Miss Charmant's pretty face was twisted into a grimace.

"Goodness! Whatever is the matter with the soup?" she gasped. "This is terrible!"

Terrible that soup certainly was. Every plateful tasted as if the pepper-pot had been emptied into it. Every girl felt as if her mouth were on fire.

"Sally!" exclaimed Miss Charmant at last. "Whatever has happened to this soup? Please ask the cook to come and see me."

Away rushed the very startled maid, while the dining-room was filled with the sounds of coughing, choking, and indignant spluttering.

"I say, this is a bit thick!" complained Clara Trevlyn.

"My hat, we'll have to change the cook!" said Peggy Preston.

But Freda Ferriers was grinning inwardly. She had known this was going to happen.

"But is it the cook?" she asked meaningly. "Perhaps it's another stunt to upset us. Everything else has gone wrong, and now they've started tampering with the food. Who says there isn't something queer about Dreere Manor now?"

Miss Charmant heard that remark, and her expression became grave.

"Silence, Freda!" she commanded. "There is no earthly reason why you should suppose such things. I think we had better wait until the cook gives us an explanation."

At that moment there was a stir at the door, and the cook rustled in. But Mrs. Marriot, specially engaged from the village, was not alone. Clashed tightly by the arm, she held a girl of about fifteen years of age—a girl whose pretty oval face was pale and rather scared looking. And Babs, seeing her, started.

"Mrs. Marriot, what has been happening?" questioned Miss Charmant, in surprise.

"Sally tells me the soup has been completely spoiled, Miss Charmant," said the cook angrily. "And I reckon I knew who's done it. This girl! I found her hiding in a cupboard in the kitchen!"

And with a push she sent the girl stumbling across to Miss Charmant, while Babs & Co. gasped.
For that girl was—Eileen Hunter!



A Scrap of Paper

MISS CHARMANT blinked incredulously. She rose from her chair and stepped up to Eileen; very queerly she looked at that girl and from her to the cook.

"Mrs. Marriott, what do you mean?" she asked. "This girl is Miss Hunter, whose father owns Drere Manor. You must be making a mistake."

But Mrs. Marriott was in no wise abashed; hands on hips, head thrust forward, she glared at Eileen.

"I don't care who she is, ma'am," she announced truculently, "but I found her hiding in the kitchen right enough; in the cupboard she was. Ask her yourself, ma'am."

The mistress turned to Eileen, while everybody, with the exception of Babs & Co. and Freda Ferriers, eyed her angrily.

But Babs and her chums were as surprised as they were puzzled; and so, too, was Freda. She had known that her uncle was going to creep stealthily into the kitchen by way of a secret passage and tamper with the food.

But she did not know that Eileen would be discovered; and now mingled with her surprise was a feeling of alarm. For that secret passage which Albert Burgin would use led out into a cupboard. Had Eileen seen her uncle? That was what scared Freda. Anxiously she waited for Eileen to speak.

"Is this true, Eileen?" asked Miss Charmant, with a frown.

The girl crimsoned, conscious of all eyes upon her.

"I—I'm afraid it is true that the cook found me in the kitchen, Miss Charmant," she confessed. "But I was doing no harm—really I wasn't. And I certainly didn't spoil your food."

Miss Charmant's frown deepened. "Then may I ask what you were doing in the kitchen at all?"

Eileen did not reply.

"Eileen," said the mistress sharply, "I asked you a question! I am quite aware that your father is the owner of Drere Manor, but that does not give you an excuse to creep and hide about in it when the house is occupied. You must give me an explanation."

Still Eileen hesitated, while the looks in her direction became increasingly suspicious. There was a rising murmur of indignation. After what Freda Ferriers had said in the Common-room, this dramatic development was highly significant.

Was this girl to blame for all the scares? The buzz welled to an angry mutter which had to be quelled by Miss Charmant, while Babs & Co. became more and more puzzled by Eileen's reluctance to explain her presence in the kitchen.

"I—I can only say I was doing no harm, Miss Charmant," she said at last, and her voice faltered then, and she threw a quick, appealing glance at Babs, Mabs, and Clara. "Please believe me! I wish I could explain, but—but—"

Impossible to explain without giving away her secret—a secret which Babs, Mabs, and Clara shared.

For since coming to Drere Manor the

chums had discovered part of a letter, which seemed to prove that Eileen's eccentric grandfather—now dead—had hidden all his money somewhere in the old house.

That piece of paper had been stolen from Babs; the Form captain suspected Freda. But, fortunately, she had memorised its contents, and now the chums had promised to help Eileen by searching for the other and more vital half of the letter.

Eileen, desperately anxious to find it, hoping that its discovery would lead them to the money which was so badly needed by her invalid father, had that morning entered Drere Manor by one of the many secret passages with which the ancient house was honeycombed. And, to her amazement, she had located a hitherto unsuspected secret passage—one which had brought her out into a cupboard in the kitchen.

"Huh!" That was a disbelieving snort from Mrs. Marriott. "Seems jolly suspicious behaviour to me, that's all I can say. She's been tampering with the food. Else why should she be hiding in that there cupboard?"

"You actually found her in the cupboard, Mrs. Marriott?" questioned the mistress. "I see!"—as the cook nodded. "Well, Eileen, since you assure me you were not responsible for tampering with our food, I accept your word. But I must say I find your refusal to give an explanation of your actions somewhat unsatisfactory. However, we will consider the matter closed, and I hope that such a position will not arise again."

Eileen smiled relievedly.

"Thank you, Miss Charmant." And, pausing only to look quickly in the direction of Babs & Co., as though seeking to reassure them that everything was all right, she turned and went out

of the dining-room; the front door closed behind her as she left the house.

Dinner continued without the soup, of course. But it was another incident which served to unsettle the Fourth. More and more were they coming to dislike being at Drere Manor—which suited Freda Ferriers' purpose, but filled Babs & Co. with dismay when they knew how essential it was that they should remain in the house if they were to help Eileen Hunter and her crippled father.

THAT EVENING, when afternoon lessons were over in the oak-beamed classroom, Babs, Mabs, and Clara went along to picturesque Willow Cottage, where the Hunters had lived in Friesland since being forced to leave Drere Manor owing to insufficient resources to run such a large and expensive house.

All three chums had been quick to realise that Eileen was holding something back when being questioned at dinner-time; and, thinking that something might be connected with their quest for the hidden fortune, they were eager to see Eileen and hear her story.

But, arriving at Willow Cottage, Mr. Hunter, wheeling himself to the door in his invalid's chair, informed them that Eileen had not yet returned.

"She's been out since early this morning, and I haven't seen her since," he said, and Babs detected a note of anxiety in his voice. "But won't your girls come in and have some tea?" he invited.

"Thank you, Mr. Hunter, but we shall be having tea when we get back to the manor," Babs smiled. "We saw Eileen at dinner-time, as a matter of fact," she added reassuringly, "but thought we'd just come round for a chat if she



"I FOUND this girl in the kitchen—and she's the one who's been tampering with the food!" cook exclaimed indignantly. Babs & Co. could hardly believe their eyes.

For the girl was Eileen Hunter.

happened to be here. But never mind; we'll see her again shortly, I expect." The chums returned to their quarters, perhaps a little surprised and disappointed that they had not seen Eileen, but giving no thought then to her absence.

In a few hours' time, however, they were to realise the sinister significance of their fruitless journey to Willow Cottage.

Meanwhile, they had tea in their study with Bessie Bunter, Marjorie Hazeldene, and Janet Jordan. It was a spacious room, perhaps three times the size of their old studies back at Cliff House; so the occupants of Study No. 4

"Only it couldn't have been one," objected Clara "because there isn't an electric fan in the whole house."

"That's all we know," said Babs thoughtfully.

"But we didn't see one—"

"It might have been concealed somewhere—in the ceiling, for instance!" And Babs smiled at the sensation her words caused.

"You're joking!" protested Clara. "My hat, how could a giddy fan be concealed in the ceiling? It's not possible to—"

The Form captain leaned forward and regarded her chums seriously.

"Listen! I said I'd got a theory, and

"Can't we go and look for it now?" she asked impulsively.

But the Form captain shook her head. "And have everybody watching you asking us what we're doing? No; we'll have to curb our impatience until to-night, when the Fourth is asleep. It means leaving dorm after lights out, but we'll have to risk that. But I suggest we make some preparations."

"How?"

"Fetch a pair of steps from the garden shed and hide it under one of our beds," said Babs.

Mabs was on her feet now. "Lead on, skipper!" she said. "But we'll have to watch our opportunity or we'll be bombarded with questions."

The three chums slipped out of the study. Fortunately at that time of the evening everybody had congregated in the Common-room. The whole Form, nervous and unsettled, on tenterhooks, thinking neither of the mysterious scares might occur at any time, kept together these days.

Making themselves as unobtrusive as possible, Babs & Co. fetched a short step-ladder from the shed, and succeeded in getting it upstairs to the dormitory without being observed.

Carefully Babs hid it under her bed, hoping the overlapping edges of the quilt would conceal it from the gaze of the other girls when they trooped up to the dormitory later that night.

Hardly able to control their impatience, the chums waited, wondering if their midnight search were to reveal the vital paper which meant so much to Eileen and Mr. Hunter.

"**CAREFUL, CLARA!**" breathed Babs in the softest of whispers.

"Trust me, old thing," whispered back the Tomboy, groping under Babs' bed in the darkness.

"Get that torch, Mabs?"

"Yes, here. Shall I switch it on?"

"No; wait until we get out into the passage!"

Thud!

Clara, cautiously pulling out the ladder from under the bed, banged it against one of the posts.

"Goodness!" Babs groaned inwardly. Trust the clumsy Tomboy to do that! The Form captain would rather have manoeuvred the ladder herself, but Clara had insisted on doing it, and rather than start an argument which would assuredly have awakened the whole Fourth Form, Babs had capitulated.

But Clara, if she went on like this, would arouse everybody, in any case.

"Careful, chump!" Babs urged again in a hissing voice.

It was a quarter to eleven, and the dormitory was in darkness. Not even the light of the moon shone in through the mullioned windows to assist the three chums with its mellow radiance.

The time for action had come at last. Wrapped in warm dressing-gowns as protection against the chilly night air, Babs & Co. were about to begin their search for the missing half of the letter which Eileen Hunter hoped would restore her father's fortunes.

Thud!

"Owp!" It was Clara's head which suffered this time, as she bumped it against the edge of the bed.

"Again Babs' heart seemed to leap into her mouth. She listened, feeling sure that by now someone must have been disturbed. But there was no sound in the hushed silence of the dormitory, save a soft scraping, as Clara pulled the ladder away from the bed. The Fourth still slept peacefully.

With a sigh of relief, Babs took the step-ladder from Clara as that girl

EXCITING!

FRIDAY, the 22nd of May will be a happy day, a joyous day! For on that day there will be published certainly the most exciting number of THE SCHOOLGIRL that has ever been produced.

In addition to the four perfectly marvellous Gifts, full details of which will appear next Saturday, this really super issue will contain a wondrous programme of new stories.

A new Cliff House series (starring Diana Royston-Clarke) . . . a new humorous series (Sunny isn't in it for laughs!) . . . a new mystery serial (thrills!) . . . a new African adventure serial (wait until you know who the characters are!) . . .

And—this really is something to write home about—

A four-page feature entirely devoted to articles on everything that interests really modern schoolgirls.

How's that? **OUT**—on Friday 22nd of May. Don't forget the date. It's important, because THE SCHOOLGIRL has a bad habit of being sold out . . . so it's wise to order early.

and Study No. 7 had combined now that they were at Drere Manor, and a happy party the six friends were.

Tea over, and Marjorie, Bessie, and Janet having gone along to the Common-room, Babs called a conference.

"To-night," she said, "from the depths of the cosy armchair, 'I propose we make another search for the other half of that letter.'"

"And where exactly are you going to look for it, Babs?" asked golden-haired Mabs, who had perched herself on a pouffe at her leader's feet. "It's going to be like looking in a haystack for a needle."

"Just what I was thinking," grinned Tomboy Clara. "But trust good old Babs to get a few brain-waves. Trot them out, old thing!"

Babs smiled.

"Well, I don't know about brain-waves," she said, "but I've certainly got a theory I want to put to the test."

Her chums were listening closely.

"You remember the other night when there was that wind scare in the dormitory?" Babs went on eagerly. "The door suddenly flew open, and a rush of wind like a hurricane swept in. Well, what do you think caused it?"

Mabs puckered her brow.

"Well, an electric fan switched full on would create the same effect," she said tentatively.

this is it. If you'll remember, I was by the door when it burst open and the current of air rushed in. Well, I have a distinct recollection of a whirring sound, such as an electric fan would make. And the wind was coming from somewhere above me—I'm positive of it."

"From above you in the dormitory?" questioned Mabs.

"No; from outside in the passage. Which suggests that the fan or whatever caused that merry gale must have been concealed either in the ceiling somewhere or at the top of one of the walls."

"But what's this got to do with finding that letter?" asked Clara in bewilderment.

"Because it's my opinion the letter was torn from its hiding-place by that current of air," explained Babs shrewdly. "We found it under one of the beds, and I'm pretty certain it wasn't there beforehand."

"Goodness!" exclaimed Mabs admiringly. "You're right, old thing."

"And where do you think it was hidden, Babs?" put in Clara eagerly.

"That's what we've got to find out—and, obviously, it must be somewhere near the doorway."

Clara leapt off the edge of the table, where she had perched herself, and grabbed Babs' arm.

straightened up. On tiptoe the three chums crossed over to the door, Mabs leading the way and opening it.

She closed it again, listened for a few moments, and then switched on the torch, shielding its beam with her hand. "Splendid!" said Babs softly.

She would have been considerably dismayed had she known that a figure crouched before the keyhole on the other side of the door in the dormitory.

The figure was that of Freda Ferriers. Through the keyhole Freda was able to see what was happening outside in the passage. She only obtained a limited view, but what she saw in the light of the torch was sufficient to fill her with consternation.

For perhaps five minutes she watched, and then sped silently back to her bed, which was positioned at the far end of the dormitory.

There she pressed against the wall—and suddenly vanished from view as a section of that wall slid open and then shut. Freda had made use of that secret passage more than once since she had come to Drere Manor.

Meanwhile, outside in the corridor, Babs had mounted the steps and was probing about on the ceiling, pressing and pushing against it and the old oak beams which supported it, with one hand, the torch in the other. Below, Mabs and Clara watched tensely.

"My goodness!" gasped Babs suddenly, in a thrilled voice. "Look at this, girls!"

Mabs and Clara were already looking with eyes which had opened wide in surprise and excitement.

For in the ceiling Babs had found a small trapdoor, no more than eighteen inches square. Pushing back the flap, she found herself looking into a black cavity.

"What's up there, Babs?" cried Clara, forgetting to lower her voice.

"Shush!" warned Mabs quickly, but she was every bit as excited as the Tomboy.

Babs shone her torch into the cavity. And part of the Form captain's theory was proved correct then. For there was an electric fan, with wires running upwards through what was obviously the floor of the room above. The mystery of that sudden terrific current of air which had so startled the Fourth Form the other night was now explained.

And then Babs made another discovery—even more thrilling, so thrilling that she almost toppled from her precarious perch at the top of the steps.

"I've found it—I believe I've found it!" she cried, sweeping her torchlight back on to the ceiling.

"Found what?" breathed Mabs.

"The letter! Here—look!"

The torch was shining full on one of the oak beams, and Babs' keen eyes had spotted a piece of paper which was lodged in a tiny crevice between the wood and the ceiling.

"Good old Babs!" chuckled Clara. "Trust her theory to work out right. I say, Babs, buck up and bring it down here!"

Carefully Babs' fingers closed on the piece of paper. As carefully she began to work it loose.

Then, even as she drew it away, the unexpected happened with dramatic suddenness.

A sieved arm shot through the trap in the ceiling with the swiftness of a striking snake.

Clara saw it and yelled. Babs saw it, and for a moment was numbed into inaction.

In that moment a claw-like hand seized the sheet of paper. Babs tried to snatch it away to safety, but her fingers were still nerveless.

"Oh, what a careless, idiotic duffer I



EVEN as Babs was about to grasp the paper a hand came through the open trapdoor and snatched it away. The chums were foiled—in the very second of success.

The arm snaked back through the trap in the ceiling, taking the paper with it!



Where is Eileen?

"STOP him!" yelled Clara. "Oh, don't let him get away with the paper!" cried Mabs frantically.

With a rush Babs' numbed faculties returned. But by then it was too late. The arm of the man who had cheated the chums of their prize vanished through the trap in the ceiling. The flap shut down with a thud, and try as Babs would to open it, a bolt had evidently been shot into place now, barring it.

"Oh, what a careless, idiotic duffer I

am!" exclaimed Babs, furiously angry with herself. She descended the steps and stood by her chums, waiting for them to condemn her.

"Babs, it wasn't your fault!" said Mabs soothingly. "He just took us unawares. Oh, but what a pity—and when we had the letter! Was it the letter, old thing?"

"I don't know," replied Babs miserably. "I didn't have time to study it before it was snatched out of my hand."

"Who was it?" asked Clara indignantly. "Did you see him?"

Babs, looking a picture of glumness, shook her head slowly.

"No— My hat!" Abruptly her expression changed, and she grasped her chums by the arm in a grip which made them wince. "Oh, come on! We're not beaten yet!"

"What—"

"Where—"

"To the room above this ceiling!"

cried Babs, forgetting caution in her excitement now, heedless of the fact that their voices might arouse the occupants of Drere Manor. "That man must be up there, and we might be in time to catch him!"

"Whoops!" exclaimed Clara. "Then let's buck up!"

Leaving the steps where they stood in the passage, Babs & Co. raced along the passage and up the stairs to the landing above. This was the top floor of Drere Manor, where originally the servants had been quartered. Now the rooms were empty and unused.

Swiftly Babs was working out the topography of the two floors, the position of the trap in the ceiling below, and where it would correspond in this upper passage.

"This will be the room!" she decided, pointing to a door.

In a body the chums rushed at it. They did not stand on ceremony. Babs seized the handle and turned it. The door swept open, and into the room beyond charged the girls.

Then they pulled up in mingled disappointment and chagrin.

"Too late!" groaned Babs.

The room was empty. But there were all the signs that its late occupant had had a hasty retreat. Over in one corner a rug had been thrown back, disclosing a small trap set in the floor. It was through this that the man had succeeded in snatching away that paper.

Babs pulled up the trapdoor, but found nothing in the cavity between floor and ceiling below save the electric fan.

"Looks as if we've been dished, diddled, and done!" fumed Clara gloomily. "Wonder who it could have been? Burgin, d'you think?"

Babs had her suspicions, but there was nothing definite to back them up. She commenced a survey of the room. So someone had been occupying this apparently unused room, his presence there unsuspected by anybody at Drere Manor.

Who—and for what purpose? Had Burgin, or whoever it was, learned about the secret of the money which was apparently hidden somewhere in this old Tudor house? Was it this someone who had stolen the first half of that letter from under Babs' pillow, and was now searching for the remaining portion which held the vital information concerning the whereabouts of the lost fortune?

Babs realised it was not making her and her chums' task any easier to have this unknown rival working against them. It made her realise the deadly seriousness of the whole affair; made her more determined to win through for the sake of her friends of Willow Cottage.

"I say, girls, come and have a look at it!"

Babs, rummaging among some papers which had been left untidily on the table in the centre of the room, suddenly seized hold of one and was regarding it with growing dismay. Her blue eyes registered deep apprehension as she showed the small sheet of paper to her chums. For on it was this cryptic message:

"Everything O.K. E. H. where she won't escape, as arranged."

Just those few words, but in them Babs could read an import which filled her with alarm.

"What the dickens does it mean?" muttered Clara, running a hand through her unruly locks.

But Babs was more mentally alert than the Tomboy. Her voice, when she

spoke, echoed the anxiety in that of her leader's.

"Babs! 'E. H.' must stand for Eileen Hunter, and—and— Goodness, does this mean she's a prisoner somewhere?"

Babs' expression was grave.

"Looks like it to me," she said. "And don't forget Mr. Hunter told us this evening that Eileen hadn't returned. I—I think I'll slip along to Willow Cottage to see if Eileen's there. Perhaps we're jumping to conclusions, but I'll never rest until I know the truth. I hope to goodness we're wrong, but—but—"

Again she looked at the message. There was a sinister ring about those words. Babs felt a fear tugging at her heart.

She crossed to the door. "There's no need for you two to break bounds," Babs said worriedly. "I'll soon slip there and back—"

"Rabbits!" broke in Clara. "We're coming with you!"

So back to the dormitory the chums went. Amazingly enough, nobody seemed to have been disturbed by their movements. Babs hid the ladder under her bed again, and then dressed quickly.

Some half an hour later—only a few minutes before midnight was due to chime out from Friardale Church—Babs & Co. were standing at the door of Willow Cottage.

Late as the hour was, a light still burned in the front room.

Babs gave the bell a tug.

"Don't forget—we've called to see Eileen about that piece of paper we found concealed behind the oak beam," whispered Babs. "If Mr. Hunter answered the door we don't want to give him a shock if Eileen is safely back."

It was Mr. Hunter who opened the door. There he sat in his invalid's chair, a pathetically helpless figure. Babs noticed, with something of a shock, that his not unhandsome face was lined with worry as he peered out at his visitors.

"So sorry to disturb you, Mr. Hunter," said the Form captain, "but we've some important news, and if we could see Eileen—"

"Eileen!" There was a sob in the man's voice. "Eileen has vanished—vanished, Barbara! Oh, come in—come in, girls! Something terrible has happened. I've just received an anonymous message, threatening that I—I shall never see my daughter again if I don't turn you Cliff House girls out of Drere Manor and close up the house by Saturday!"

In stunned silence Babs & Co. heard the words.

Eileen kidnapped—and now this ultimatum!

WHILE BACK at Drere Manor—

A sickly yellow glow from a storm lantern cast a flickering circle of light on the stone floor of an underground chamber and reflected eerie, dancing shadows on the brick-built walls.

Not many people were there, through the history of Drere Manor, who had known of the existence of this vault built even below the cellars, and entrance to which was gained only through one of the many secret passages with which the old house was honey-combed.

Two figures now stood within the circle of light thrown by the storm lantern. The figures of a man and a girl.

The man was rather tall and lean. In that yellow glow the craftiness of his features was accentuated, although the

wispy moustache which adorned his upper lip became lost under the shadow of his nose.

At that moment Albert Burgin looked sinister, menacing; he looked the crook he really was.

The girl's face, too, was thin and crafty; the cheekbones closed in to form a narrow chin, giving it the appearance of a ferret. That was the nickname she had earned in the Fourth Form of Cliff House School, for the girl was Freda Ferriers.

Freda shivered a little. This was the first time her scheming uncle had brought her down into this cold, depressing vault. And Freda, brave enough when others were being frightened by scares for which she was prepared, and, in some cases, assisting to put those scares into operation, was nervous and cowardly at the core of her mean heart.

"Can't—can't say I like it down here, uncle," she said uneasily now.

Burgin laughed—a mirthless laugh which somehow made Freda shiver again—a laugh which gave her an insight into her uncle's character, vicious and ruthless.

Since meeting Burgin on that first day of her arrival with the Fourth Form at Drere Manor, after not having seen him for an interval of many years, she was beginning to realise more and more how he had changed. Now his dominating manner rather frightened her.

"No? Well, we shan't be down here long. But there's something important I want to tell you—and I thought it would be safer here, with those dratted girls prying about. They already know too much, and it's likely they've found some of the secret passages in the house. But I reckon they'll never find the way down to this place, and—"

He paused abruptly, his eyes glittering coldly as he regarded Freda. "And don't you ever dare breathe a single word about it to a single soul. If you did—"

"Uncle!" gasped Freda, horrified by the note which had crept into his voice.

Again he laughed—shortly, mirthlessly.

"Well, don't, anyway! I'm playing for big stakes, Freda—bigger than you realise—and a single slip of the tongue might cost me everything I have. But, look here, everything depends on getting these pestering girls from your school out of the way! If Drere Manor isn't empty by Saturday, I'm liable to be sunk!"

"The girls are panicky, uncle."

"They've been panicky before, but it hasn't shifted them. Listen, Freda! I told you I'd got a stunt in the offing which couldn't fail. Well, the first part of the stunt's gone off O.K."

Freda's eyes gleamed with interest.

"You mean, Eileen Hunter—?"

"Yes," Burgin nodded. "I've had her kidnapped; and one of my pals did it this morning when she was leaving the house. And I've sent old man Hunter that ultimatum—he doesn't see his daughter again if he doesn't give you kids marching orders!"

Once more that feeling of fright crept over Freda Ferriers.

"Uncle, you wouldn't harm Eileen Hunter?"

The man glanced at her sharply.

"Eh? No, no. I wouldn't harm her," he said, but there was still that ruthlessness in his tone which rather belied the words. "Anyway, if I'm any judge of old man Hunter's character, it'll work. He'd do anything for that kid of his. Now, this is where you come in, Freda."

"What do you want me to do, uncle?"

"I want you to take the Hunter girl

food during the day. She's all on her lonesome at a spot where she'll never be found—until I want her to be found when Hunter does as he's told. Will you do it?"

"Where's she hidden?" asked Freda. "Not very far from here," her uncle replied. "You can reach it easily on your bicycle. I've promised you money, Freda, and I won't forget. Ten pounds, wasn't it? Listen here! If you help me now, I'll make it double, and I'll see that you're never wanting for pocket-money during the term. Your parents needn't know about it—eh? What do you say?"

Freda forgot her fears then; if she were beginning to have any scruples, perhaps inwardly feeling that her uncle was going too far in resorting to such desperate measures as kidnapping, she forgot those, too.

Twenty pounds, and plenty of pocket-money! Then she wouldn't be beholden to Lydia Crossendale—Lydia, who was always rubbing it in that Freda sponged on her. Lydia was rich; but she, too, thought Freda, would be rich!

Her little eyes gleamed avariciously. "I'll do anything for you, uncle!" she said.

"Good!" He nodded with satisfaction. "You'll have the twenty pounds as soon as the stunt comes off!"

"You mean, as soon as Drere Manor is empty and you find the money that's hidden there?"

Burgin laughed inwardly. No harm in Freda thinking that. It would never do for her to know his real reason for wanting Drere Manor empty and deserted. As Burgin had said, he was playing for far bigger stakes than ever Freda was likely to imagine!

The knowledge, brought about by Freda showing him the torn letter which she said she had taken from a girl named Barbara Redfern—that there was money hidden in the old house—was certainly an added interest. Burgin, acting as agent for the Hunter property, had always suspected such a possibility since the death of Charles Hunter, Eileen's grandfather.

But there couldn't be much money—a few thousand pounds at the most. And he was playing for stakes which ran into tens of thousands of pounds!

"Yes, that's it, Freda," he replied glibly.

"And what about that paper you snatched from Barbara Redfern when she was nosying in that trap in the ceiling? Were you smiling with smug satisfaction, 'Lucky I was in time to warn you about that,' she went on. 'Is it the other half of that letter, uncle? Does it give the clue to where the money is hidden?'"

But then Freda's eagerness received a setback.

Burgin scowled.

"No; the paper was blank! And confound those girls! They're a bit too clever! They'll probably guess that I was occupying that room! But I'm not worrying. We're sitting pretty now that Eileen Hunter has been kidnapped! Reckon it's just a question of waiting until to-morrow when her father comes round, and tells your crowd that they've got to clear out!"

"Oh, it's terrible, Mr. Hunter! Poor Eileen!"

Barbara Redfern's voice was husky with anguish.

"But what will you do now?" she asked.

Barbara Redfern, Mabel Lynn, and Clara Trevelyn were seated in the plainly furnished but cosy sitting-room at Willow Cottage. It had gone midnight,

but they had no thought of the time; were heedless of the fact that they should be fast asleep in the dormitory at Drere Manor.

Even had they been feeling tired, the terrible news just imparted to them by Mr. Hunter would have more effectively awakened them than the shock of an icy douche of cold water.

So their worst fears had been realised—only too devastatingly had they been realised! Eileen—kidnapped!

Mr. Hunter's pale eyes were haggard as he regarded the chums from his invalid chair.

"There is only one thing for me to do," he replied shakily. "I shall have to accept the terms of the ultimatum."

"You mean—ask Miss Primrose to take us away from Drere Manor?"

"What else?"

"But—but the money means so much to you both," Babs said, a little awkwardly. "Eileen said you were depending on that income. And there's the money hidden at Drere Manor. We'll find it somehow!"

"Money means nothing to me when the safety of my daughter is at stake, Barbara," Mr. Hunter said quietly.

Babs flushed.

"Oh, of course! I'm sorry!"

"I understand."

He smiled tenderly at the girls whom he had come to like so much—whom,



—TO get up the first time mother calls in the morning rather than to snuggle down again for a further ten minutes. That ten minutes is very nice, but think how sorry you'll be if you have to dash off to school with only the polishing brush rubbed over your shoes and one glove in your hand because you didn't have time to find the other!

—TO finish your homework in the evenings, even if it does mean missing the variety on the wireless. Somehow, in the morning, the variety has been forgotten and sums seem twice as difficult!

—TO visit the dentist when mother suggests you should, and not to put it off for "just another week or so, mother, please." It may mean "drilling" then, and only an inspection now.

—TO sew that button on your blouse even if you are dying to finish your book first. The button may seem quite unimportant in the thrill of the last chapter, and you'll be so sorry the next day when you have to use a pin!

—TO clean those tennis shoes really thoroughly while you're about it. Give them a good scrubbing with an old nail-brush and soapy water first if they're very grubby.

—TO wait until they're thoroughly dry before applying the white—even

even in the few days he had known them, he regarded with an affection which was only surpassed by his love for Eileen.

"You want to help me, and I shall never be able adequately to express my gratitude for the way you girls have befriended me! You've been just splendid! But"—his face, already lined with the suffering of his disability, had become even more haggard during the last few minutes, minutes in which he had aged years—"Eileen must be my first consideration."

"If only we knew where she's been taken!" put in Mabs. "Didn't they say anything about that in the message, Mr. Hunter?"

He shook his head.

"No. The man who spoke to me over the telephone just said that I—I would never see Eileen again if Drere Manor wasn't empty by Saturday; that's the day after to-morrow. He said I must terminate my agreement with your headmistress by to-morrow. It would be known if I had done so, and then I would hear from him again concerning Eileen. That was all."

"You didn't recognise the voice?" asked Babs.

"Was it that brute Burgin?" came angrily from Clara. "He's at the bottom of all this business!"

"It wasn't Burgin, Clara; although I

IT IS WELL WORTH WHILE—

if this is the job you were looking forward to.

—TO take out the laces while you're in the mood, so that the shoes are treated all over alike. And the laces might like washing, too. You'll enjoy your game of tennis all the more for knowing your feet are looking trim.

—TO change out of your school tunic and into an older frock when you come home in the evenings. No fruit salad spots down your rather difficult-to-clean tunic then!

—TO hang all your clothes on hangers instead of dangling them over chairs or just flinging them on the bed. Much fresher they'll look when you come to put them on again—even if it is only an hour or so afterwards.

—TO put shoe trees in your leather shoes. Marvellous how they help to keep the shape—even if they do only cost twopence a pair. And won't mother appreciate it!

—TO mark all your handkerchiefs and gloves with your full name. Nothing's more annoying than losing one glove; and if it's only a handkerchief it's quite likely to be that nice one you treasure so because it's in your "House" colours!

—TO write that important letter in ink, even if there doesn't seem to be any in the sitting-room, and your pen-nib's crossed. Some people really object to letters written in pencil, and you don't want to create a bad impression on a lady or gentleman you've never met, do you?

—TO forget that "ticking-off" you were going to give to the girl who said you were too fond of swanking—especially if you heard it from someone else. Possibly she's forgotten it already, and maybe she only said it because she was jealous of you, anyway!

have no doubt that you are right in thinking he is responsible. He threatened me the other day, when I refused to ask Miss Primrose to take you girls away from the manor."

"Have you told the police?" questioned Babs worriedly.

He shook his head.

"By doing so I might endanger Eileen's life," he said. "No; I shall act on my own, and my mind is already made up. I shall tell Miss Primrose to-morrow that she must find somewhere else to accommodate her girls."

And Babs & Co. knew it was the only course he could possibly take. If Burgin—for one and all were convinced that he was the rascal who had kidnapped Eileen—would dare to carry out his threat was a matter for conjecture, but with Eileen's fate in his keeping it was a risk that could not be contemplated.

It was a very silent little party which made its way back to Drere Manor. Babs, Mabs, and Clara were each busy with their own separate thoughts; with perhaps Babs' keen brain the busiest of all.

Desperately she tried to grapple with the crisis which had so unexpectedly arisen. Burgin was undoubtedly master of the situation at the present moment. But was there no way in which the tables could be turned without endangering Eileen?

Drere Manor was reached just as a plan began to outline itself in Babs' mind.

"We'll get back into the house by way of that secret tunnel we found leading from the summerhouse," Babs told her chums, as, passing through the big gate-way, they made their way up the short dale. "And I've got the glimmerings of an idea for finding Eileen. I'll tell you about it as we go."

But she waited until they had reached the big rustic summerhouse at the end of the long garden, and, having swung open the door-like panel cunningly made out of logs to conform with the rest of the rustic work, had passed through into the tunnel beyond.

That tunnel, accidentally discovered by the three chums, was a masterpiece in the art of concealment. It formed part of the wall which surrounded the grounds of Drere Manor.

"Now, come on, Babs, out with this brain-wave of yours!" said Clara eagerly, once they had negotiated the flight of steps which took them down from the tunnel-like interior of the hollow wall and below ground level.

"Well, the idea is this," Babs replied; "that we follow, as far as possible, every movement made by Burgin and Freda. It seems pretty certain that Freda is also involved in this business. My contention is that if we do that, sooner or later either of them is bound to lead us to where Eileen is hidden."

"My hat! That's marvellous!" exclaimed Clara enthusiastically.

"But there are difficulties."

"Such as?" prompted Mabs.

"Well, lessons, for one thing," said Babs; "and Eileen's safety. By which I mean that we mustn't let Burgin or Freda suspect that we're watching them. Personally, I don't think Burgin dare harm Eileen, but there's always the possibility that he is a bigger rogue than we take him for."

And in that moment Babs made two mistakes; she under-estimated the unscrupulousness of Albert Burgin, and she had not troubled to lower her voice when discussing her plan.

Babs' voice carried down the tunnel; it carried to the ears of Burgin himself, and to Freda, who was with him, on her way back to the dormitory.

Swiftly he whispered to Freda; and that girl, with an understanding nod, sped along to the panel which opened out into the hall of Drere Manor, and then raced upstairs on tiptoe to her bed.

GOOD NEWS?



RATHER!

See Pages 2 and 6

Thus, when Babs & Co., having decided to adopt the Form captain's ideas, reached the dormitory, Freda was seemingly fast asleep.

Also, Freda was seemingly talking to herself as she slept.

Babs and her chums, hurriedly undressing, heard her muttered words. The mention of Eileen's name made Babs prick up her ears. The three girls crept over to Freda's bed.

Still she went on talking in her sleep. "Serve her right. Don't like Eileen. All right now. Hidden in cave. Never find her. Old coastguard's hut—" And Freda's lips parted as if, in her dreams, she were chuckling at the plight of Eileen Hunter.

And Babs & Co. were chuckling, too—smiling at each other in the darkness.

From Freda's own lips they had learned the whereabouts of their kidnapped friend.

It seemed too good, too marvellous, to be true.

But it wasn't true!

Freda had been shamming.

And Babs & Co. were soon to walk blindly into the trap which Burgin had prepared for them.



Lurking Peril

"READY, Mabs?"

"Yes, rather!"

"And you, Clara?"

"Ready and waiting, Babs."

"Then off we go!"

And Barbara Redfern, wheeling her bicycle down the drive of Drere Manor, led the way out into Friardale Lane.

It was the following morning—a glorious morning of sunshine, which was becoming brighter with every passing minute. But the sun was still low on the eastern horizon, and far away to

the west the dawn shadows had yet to disperse.

Despite the fact that it had been after one o'clock when the chums finally went to sleep, they had awakened soon after the breaking of dawn.

Now it was barely half-past five as they set out from Drere Manor, bound for the little fishing village of Pegg, all sleepiness driven away by the thoughts that soon they would be searching for their friend who had been kidnapped, hoping—hoping that they would find her, never dreaming that they were being lured on a false trail.

The early morning air was deliciously sweet, invigoratingly keen. But that swift ride to the coast soon had the blood coursing warmly through their veins, soon brought the flush of radiant health to their cheeks.

"Do you remember any caves near the old coastguard's hut?" asked Mabs suddenly.

But adventurous Tomboy Clara was the expert on that subject. There were very few caves along the coast between Pegg and Sarmouth that Clara had not explored since going to Cliff House School.

"There's one that I know of," she volunteered. "You can't get to it from the shore at all; it burrows into the cliff some distance up. And there's only a small opening, although actually the cave itself is large, and goes back a long way. It joins up with a number of others, too. Jolly marvellous, you know!"

Babs' pretty face was set in an unusually serious mould, but she had to laugh.

"Thanks, expert! Talk about an encyclopedia! Anything else?"

"Well, yes!" Clara's grin faded. "It occurs to me that Eileen might be hidden in any one of those caves, and it's going to take us hours to look for her."

"Lucky we've come so early, then," Babs said. "But we're going to search if it takes all day—lessons or no lessons! There'll be trouble, of course; but—"

"Blow trouble!" exclaimed Clara. "We've got to find Eileen! I suggest we take the cliff road, Babs. It's easier climbing down that cliff than up it to the cave!"

So the chums arrived at Pegg by the cliff road, and reaching the derelict coastguard's hut—long since abandoned in favour of a stronger one built farther along the coast—dismounted from their bicycles.

By now the sun was higher in the sky. The sea, blue and tranquil, shimmered in the golden rays. But Babs & Co. hardly paused to admire the beauties of that perfect May morning.

"Off comes my mac!" decided Clara. "It'll only get in the way, and I'm as warm as toast already."

The chums left their bikes and macs hidden in a thick clump of grass which grew near by. Then they went to the edge of the cliff and, looking down, surveyed the descent.

It was not going to be an easy climb. The cliff at this particular spot, while not sheer, was steep and rocky. But Clara had made the descent before, and now she led the way.

Nobody was in sight as, one by one, the chums scrambled over the edge of the cliff and slithered down a narrow channel worn in the powdery rock.

The path became steeper, more precipitous, more difficult; they had to grope for footholds while hanging on insecurely by their hands.

Soon they were hot and dusty, stockings and slips were torn. But doggedly, cautiously they slithered, crawled,

wriggled their way down, scrambling round and over the boulders.

At last they came to an outjutting ledge of rock. Even Clara, athletic and energetic as she was, in the pink of condition as befitted her position of sports captain of the Fourth Form, was out of breath.

"Just have a little breather here!" she panted. "But not far now—just back to this ledge—My hat, what's happening?"

The chums looked upwards. A rumbling roar had sounded from above them.

Then Mabs gave a little scream.

"Look! Those rocks!"

The rumbling grew louder. Pieces of rock began to fall about them. Their faces paled as they saw their terrible danger.

In clambering down the cliff, they had loosened a big boulder which was now hurtling down directly over the spot where they stood, bringing with it other chunks of rock and loose stones, causing a miniature landslide.

"Quick! Dodge!" yelled Babs frantically.

In one fleeting glance round she had seen a gully in the face of the cliff near where they were standing. Babs pushed her horrified chums into that gully, and then the three girls pressed themselves flat against the rock.

All about them now was a thunder of noise, the crash of the boulders as they hurtled down the side of the cliff. The air was full of dust and flying stones. Babs & Co. found their view blotted out by the tumbling mass of rock, deafened, blinded, struck by fragments.

But the main fall of boulders missed them and went crashing down to the shore. The danger was over, and Babs & Co. breathed again.

Shakily, pale of face, they emerged from their place of cover and stood eyeing each other, for the moment unable to speak.

"Phew!" whistled Clara at last.

"That was a narrow squeak!"

"Too narrow to be comfortable!" gulped Babs.

"I didn't think it was going to miss us!" Mabs panted.

It was some few minutes before Babs & Co. had recovered from the shock and were able to continue their descent. But now they went even more cautiously, fearing to disturb the boulders, and so start another landslide.

And then they reached the cave. As Clara had said, its entrance was small—so insignificant as hardly to be noticed from the shore at all.

"We must go carefully!" warned Babs, producing a torch from the pocket of her blazer. "Might be somebody guarding Eileen. Keep your eyes and ears open, girls!"

Bending low, they crawled through the opening, along a small tunnel, and became aware in the darkness of the cave looming vastly before them. They stopped and listened, ears on the alert, eyes straining through the blackness.

Babs switched on the torch.

Now they saw the cave—amazingly large after its small entrance. The beam of the torch flashed round, playing on the uneven walls of solid rock.

"No trace of Eileen here!" whispered Babs, anxiety gnawing at her heart now.

They penetrated deeper into the cave. Mabs and Clara had switched on their torches, and three powerful beams of white light cut through the Stygian blackness, flashing this way and that, searching, searching.

Still no sign of Eileen.

And then—then, for the second time that morning, they heard a

rumbling sound. The chums swung round in alarm, at the same moment switching out their torches.

The blackness of the cave shut down upon them instantly. It was a blackness relieved by the small patch of daylight which showed through the small entrance.



NOW that summer's on the way in real earnest, there is no end to the out-of-doors joys in store for you. Tennis, swimming, walking, and picnicking!

To make the very most of a picnic, you should certainly prepare for it in good time—for looking forward to the great event is almost as enjoyable as the picnic itself.

So, naturally, this means that you mustn't be daunted by the weather, but must be prepared for anything, almost.

This is easy, of course, if the family has a car, for a picnic eaten in such comfort, with the rain pattering all around, is luxury indeed, and almost as enjoyable as if taken out-of-doors.

CHOOSE YOUR SPOT

But if you're going to carry the picnic with you, and take books and so on as well, it's most important to plan your picnic spot more carefully.

The Zoo is an excellent place when weather is doubtful, for here you'll find plenty of cover and dry seats. To picnic at some ruins is another good spot if rain is likely.

But if the weather's fine and dry, and shows every indication of remaining so, then, of course, there's no end to the places where you can picnic, and you won't need to take so much luggage, either.

Having chosen your spot, you should make for there as soon as you get off the train or bus. Then you can dump your burdens and go off exploring—and to work up an appetite.

PREPARING A PICNIC IS FUN

Preparing the picnic should be almost as enjoyable as eating it. If you're going with a chum, why not ask her round to your house to help you with it?

Perhaps she'll bring some tomatoes and cucumber and fruit, while you provide the other things.

If you make meat or meat-paste sandwiches, remember that a slice of

But that patch of light was growing smaller, as though it were being obscured by some object. Fear flooded Babs' heart suddenly, unaccountably. She rushed forward, with Mabs and Clara close at her heels.

The rumbling sound continued, and before their eyes the chums saw that patch of light becoming ever smaller. Something was being rolled in front of the entrance to the cave.

"It's a trap!" cried Babs. "Oh, quick—"

But already it was too late. There was no exit from the cave now! The opening had been blocked up by a huge boulder!

The chums flung themselves at it, pushing with the strength of despera-

MAKE THE MOST OF PICNIC DAYS

Long days out of doors are so good for you. They're fun too—especially if you take a picnic with you!

tomato or some lettuce added will keep it beautifully moist and fresh.

Fresh fruit makes an excellent "second course," but if you're feeling in a particularly original mood, you might take jellies with you instead.

Allow these to set either in your picnic cups or in those containers the cream comes in. (You can buy these very, very cheaply if mother doesn't save hers.)

On a very special occasion picnic—perhaps when you're taking the people next door—it's a lovely idea to make a three-course picnic.

How do you like the idea of starting off with some hot soup—or some cold soup if the weather's very hot? A great luxury this sounds, doesn't it?

DELICIOUS LUXURIES

It's just as easy to pack as tea, for all you have to do is to pop the soup into a thermos flask—where it will keep hot or cool, according to its temperature when you do so!

Cream is another luxury that lots of people think is too much trouble to take on a picnic—when actually it isn't at all. And you must admit that bananas with cream can make the most ordinary meal into a banquet, almost.

Four the cream from the carton into a small bottle which has first been thoroughly rinsed with boiling water.

(Here, I must just give you a tip on how to prevent glass and china from cracking when coming in contact with boiling water. Just place a spoon or knife, or even a metal skewer into the article before pouring the water in, and you'll find no disasters will follow.)

Clothes for the picnic need not be taken too seriously. A simple frock, or jersey and skirt, or shorts are quite the best, for you don't want to be worrying over easy-to-crease organdie, or precious silks.

A hat must certainly be included in case the sun turns very hot after your picnic when you're wanting to laze, and a bottle of oil of lavender is a boon indeed in case of insect bites.

tion; but even their combined efforts failed to move that lump of rock.

It had taken two powerful men all their time to roll the boulder into position. It would take at least four schoolgirls to dislodge it—and Babs & Co. were only three.

A mocking laugh came to the ears of the chums, now prisoners in the cave.

"Let us out!" yelled Babs. "You beasts, let us out—"

Again the laugh, and then slithering footsteps. The two men were leaving the Cliff House about their fate.

And Albert Burgin smiled with satisfaction when the news was reported to him—smiled that cruel smile of his which had so alarmed Freda.

"That's settled them dratted, interfering kids for a while!" he said. "Of course, we won't leave them there—but I reckon they'll be so scared when we do release 'em that they'll realise it don't pay to nose into my affairs."

That was the rascally agent's scheme—to scare the chums, to prevent them from putting into action that idea he had overheard them discussing.

Burgin had no wish to be followed, to have his movements, particularly on that day, observed. He was planning something big—something that would have appalled Freda had she known she was mixed up in such a shady business!

While back in the cave Babs & Co. were realising, with dismay, that they had walked into a trap. Realised, too, that they were not likely to find Eileen Hunter in this cavern in which they themselves were now prisoners.

And mingled with the thoughts of their own predicament were their fears for Eileen's safety.

Where, then, had Eileen been hidden?

CONSTERNATION REIGNED in Dreere Manor.

The Fourth Form of Cliff House was in a panic—a panic caused by the extraordinary disappearance of Barbara Redfern, Mabel Lynn, and Clara Trevlyn.

They had been discovered missing from their beds at rising-bell. They had not arrived for breakfast or for lessons.

Then dinner-time—and still no signs of the missing girls. Even plump, hungry Bessie Buuter lost her appetite and could eat no dinner. Nobody ate any dinner.

Bessie, loving Babs and Mabs, her own particular chums, was distraught with anxiety for their safety. Gentle Marjorie Hazeldene, Clara's greatest friend, was in tears.

That something terrible had happened to Babs & Co. the Fourth had no doubts. Hadn't terrible things been happening ever since they had come to Dreere Manor?

And Freda Ferriors, knowing the truth, earning the money which had been promised her by her rascally uncle, played on those fears.

"They must have been kidnapped!" she told the Form. "That's it—they've been kidnapped!"

"But—but why?" asked Lucy Morgan tremulously.

"Why have all these queer things been happening since we came to Dreere Manor?" retorted Freda Ferriors.

"Oh dear!" moaned Marjorie. "I wish I'd never seen this horrible house!"

"Then why do we stay here?" Freda was quick to seize the opening thus offered. "Why don't we protest and demand to be taken away? Who knows, it might be someone else's turn to be kidnapped next—me, or any one of us?"

Freda could not have chosen her words better. If the Fourth had been nervous and jumpy before the disappearance of Babs & Co., now they became panic-stricken.

Even girls like Lydia Crossendale and Rosa Rodworth and Diana Royston-Clark were becoming scared. While they had pooh-hoed the idea that Dreere Manor might be haunted—as many of the others were prepared to believe—they had certainly suspected something "fishy" about the queer happenings in the old house.

Now, however, with three of their Form-fellows vanished without word or explanation, they were beginning to realise that Dreere Manor must be the centre of some mysterious but desperate plot. How else could it be explained?

The possibility that Babs & Co. had been kidnapped was quite feasible. And Rosa and Lydia and Diana, being the daughters of wealthy parents, began to fear that that fate might overtake them.

Kidnapping persons and holding them

"HALLO! HALLO!
DIANA SPEAKING!



YOU'LL SEE ME IN THE LIME-
LIGHT BEFORE LONG!"

to ransom was not unknown, even in England. And so fear stalked through the ranks of the Fourth Form. There was still no sign of the missing girls when afternoon lessons began. But lessons were a farce.

The Fourth was a bundle of nerves. At any moment they expected some fresh disaster to overtake one of their number.

Miss Charmant, distressed and worried more than she cared to admit even to herself, left Dulcia Fairbrother in charge of the class and hurried to her study.

She telephoned Miss Primrose at Cliff House. Once already that morning she had communicated with the headmistress, reporting the absence of Babs & Co. Miss Primrose, thinking that perhaps the chums had broken bounds, refusing to take a more serious view of the matter at that stage, had not been unduly concerned.

But she was alarmed now. "You say Barbara and Mabel and Clara are still absent, Miss Charmant?" she said over the telephone. "This is serious. What can have happened to them?"

"I only wish I knew, Miss Primrose," replied the Fourth Form mistress worriedly. "But the rest of the Fourth are in a state of extreme agitation. They are completely unable to do lessons. The disappearance of these three girls has come as a climax to the many other peculiar things which have been happening here. Quite frankly, Miss Primrose, I'm very sorry we ever came to Dreere Manor. It seems absurd on the face of it, but I must confess that I feel most uncomfortable here. There must be a reason for all these extraordinary happenings."

"Good gracious! What do you mean, Miss Charmant?"

"I mean, Miss Primrose, that somebody—or, I have not the slightest idea—do not want us at Dreere Manor. And, as a result, the girls are being victimised!"

"But—but—oh, that seems impossible!" replied the headmistress sharply.

"Impossible or not, Miss Primrose," persisted the Fourth Form mistress, "the fact remains that three girls have unaccountably disappeared. I do not say anything serious has happened to them—I most sincerely hope not—but it is all very worrying. The morale of the Fourth Form has suffered severely since coming to Dreere Manor, and I earnestly ask you to consider removing us from here—either back to Cliff House or, if that is impossible, to fresh quarters."

"Why, Miss Charmant!" The headmistress was startled by the gravity of her under mistress' tone. "Please give me time to think it over. Naturally, my first concern is for the girls' welfare. But I cannot help feeling you are perhaps exaggerating the situation, Miss Charmant. You will remember that when I came over to Dreere Manor the other day, I myself was a victim of one of these supposed scares, and the culprit proved to be Sarah Harrigan, one of my own prefects. However, in view of what you have said, I shall certainly consider removing the Fourth into new quarters. I will let you know my decision later during the afternoon."

"Thank you, Miss Primrose!"

"In the meantime, please make inquiries regarding Barbara and the other missing girls. I will do the same. You will, of course, report to me immediately they return."

The conversation came to an end, and Miss Charmant hung up the receiver.

She felt a little more assured in mind now. She was glad she had spoken so firmly to the headmistress. And she had hoped with all her heart that Miss Primrose would accede to her request—that the Fourth should leave Dreere Manor.

And Albert Burgin was jubilant—so were the men with him in one of the secret passages of the old house. Burgin had listened in to that conversation between the mistresses by tapping the telephone wires. His scheming was having effect at last. He reckoned it would not be long now before Dreere Manor was empty and deserted—which it had got to be if he were to carry out the daring project he was even then planning.

THREE BEAMS of light cut through the darkness.

"My hat! Here's another cave, Babs! And Clara Trevlyn's voice echoed hollowly.

"Goodness! But they're never ending. That was Mabel Lynn. To the point is—where are they leading to?"

Barbara Redfern sounded worried; and she was worried.

The three chums were somewhere in the depths of the cliff—prisoners still.

Finding it impossible to remove the huge boulder which had entrapped them in that first cave, they had penetrated deeper and deeper into what had proved to be a series of subterranean vaults.

Never a trace of Eileen Hunter had they found, and by now it was too late to fear that, wherever her captors had taken her, she was not hidden in these caves. Already, it seemed, they had been exploring for miles, and it was not feasible that she would be

imprisoned so far away from the cave entrance.

Cave after cave they had passed through, and now yet another loomed ahead of them in the glow of the three torches.

But what Mabs and Clara did not seem to realise—and Babs did—was the possibility of their becoming lost in this vast stretch of rocky caverns.

Only one faint hope had driven Babs on, otherwise she would never have penetrated so deep into the labyrinth. As far as she could work it out, at first the caves had definitely swung round at an angle, which meant, if Babs had not mistaken her bearings, that they ran practically parallel with the seashore.

And the Forn captain was hoping desperately that there might be another exit to the series of caverns farther along the coast.

So the chums pressed on. The silence seemed to weigh down on them—a dreadful silence that was as awe-inspiring as Nature's work in forming this remarkable labyrinth at the time of some volcanic upheaval thousands of years ago.

It was cold, too, but the chums did not notice that in the extremity of their predicament—in the bitterness of their feelings as they realised that Freda Ferriers, one of their own school fellows, must have deliberately led them into this trap—perhaps not giving thought to the possible consequences, but at least luring them falsely to the cave.

Suddenly Babs stopped, sniffing the air.

"My hat! It's getting fresher!" she exclaimed excitedly.

Mabs and Clara noticed it, too. At times the atmosphere had been dank to a degree that made them cough. Now it was definitely becoming sweeter, and Babs could feel a slight current of air blowing into her face.

"Then that means we must be getting near an opening in the cliff!" said Clara eagerly. "Come on! Let's hustle, as Lea would say. My giddy aunt, I've had enough of caves to last me a lifetime!"

Now the chums moved forward more swiftly. Babs glanced at her wrist-watch, and saw that it was past noon. They had been prisoners in the caves for more than five hours.

Five hours wasted when they had wanted to search for Eileen—when time meant everything. Perhaps already Mr. Hunter, fearful for his daughter's safety, had acceded to Burgin's demands.

"Oh, look—look!" It was Mabs, her voice thrilling with joy.

Ahead of them now the chums saw an opening in the darkness of the cave—saw the blue sky and sea merging beyond. Freedom lay before them. Babs' faint hope had been justified. The caves, cutting right through the interior of the cliff, had another entrance farther along the shore.

The chums broke into a run now, and two minutes later they were dashing out on to the shingled beach.

"Cheers!" shouted Clara. "We'll show that brute Burgin what Cliff House girls can do! What now, Babs?"

"Better get back to Drere Manor," said Babs. "There'll be an awful rumpus. We've missed lessons; achieved nothing, and goodness knows what will happen! Let's see! Where are we?"

"Why, there's Monk's Folly!" exclaimed Mabs.

Monk's Folly, the old ruined tower

which the Cliff House chums knew so well, stood outlined at the top of the cliff a little farther on. Situated nearer Sarmouth than Pegg, the chums now realised just how far they had come through the caves to reach this spot.

"Come on!" cried Babs. "We'll take the path to the top of the cliff, catch a bus along to Pegg, and pick up our bikes, and then fly back to Drere Manor."

But even as the Forn captain began running along the beach she stopped again. A figure had emerged from Monk's Folly—the figure of a girl, wearing a Cliff House blazer and hat.

"Freda!" exclaimed Babs. She stared in astonishment. She knew she had made no mistake. Freda Ferriers it was who had emerged from Monk's Folly. But what had Freda been doing in the ruined tower? Why—

The answer came to Babs in a flash. It made her catch her breath; made her blue eyes sparkle as the sea sparkled in the sunshine.

Could it be possible that Eileen Hunter was a prisoner in Monk's Folly?



At Monk's Folly

BABS' thoughts raced in the few moments that she watched Freda Ferriers hurrying away from the old tower and then disappearing from view beyond the cliff.

Monk's Folly was an ideal place in which to hide a prisoner. Once a castle, it had gradually fallen into

ruins, until only the tower was left standing. But beneath the ground, still in a good state of preservation, were dungeons, some of them only reached by secret passages which many of the Cliff House girls, during frequent explorations, had discovered.

Very few people ever entered the tower. Villagers regarded it as a place of evil omen, and avoided it. Holiday-makers would not be likely to find their way down into the secret dungeons.

And Freda, already concerned in the mystery of Drere Manor, which had resulted in the kidnapping of Eileen Hunter, had just visited Monk's Folly.

To Babs' mind it seemed that here was a connecting link. Eileen Hunter might or might not be hidden there, but to make a search of the place was the obvious thing to do.

Mabs and Clara were regarding her in puzzlement. They could see that their leader was excited.

"What's the excitement, Babs?" asked Clara. "And, I say, that was Freda. What the dickens has she been doing in Monk's Folly?"

"Oh, don't you see?" cried Babs. "Eileen might be hidden there! Quickly, we must make a search—and let's hope we find her this time!"

And Babs raced towards the path which led up the cliff. It took her chums about two seconds to grasp what the captain had said, and then they, too, were rushing up the beach.

Up to the top of the cliff they scrambled, their breath coming in tortured gasps. Another rush to Monk's Folly. Then they were inside, running down the stone steps which led below.

"She'll be in the dungeons, if she's anywhere!" Babs panted. "Eileen! Eileen!"

Mabs and Clara took up the shout.



EILEEN'S father was distraught. "I tell you, she has vanished!" he panted. "Gone—kidnapped!" In stunned silence, Babs & Co. heard his words. So this was the plotters' latest move!

"Eileen! Are you here?"

They did not hear any reply.

Reaching a stone-flagged passage, Babs pressed her foot on one of the slabs of stone flush with the wall, and a section of the floor swung downwards on creaking hinges, to reveal a steep flight of steps. This was the way down to the deeper dungeons of the ruined castle.

"Eileen!" shouted Babs again, switching on her torch.

And this time there came a reply—faint, but unmistakably in the voice of their missing friend.

"Barbara!"

They traced the voice to a dungeon at the farther end of the passage. It was the work of moments to lift the bar which protected the iron-studded oak door. They burst into the dungeon—and there was Eileen Hunter, rushing towards them.

"Oh, thank goodness you've come!" She almost wept in her excitement.

"What marvellous friends you are!"

The dungeon was illuminated by a storm lantern. Eileen had not been badly treated, for there was a chair and a box to act as a table. There had been books for her to read, and Freda had brought her some food, she explained.

"But what's it all mean?" she asked. "Why was I kidnapped? Freda said something about an ultimatum—"

Swiftly Babs told her the facts of the situation.

"Dear, dear daddy!" murmured Eileen huskily. "Thinking of me like that when he knows he simply can't afford to have the manor empty—and when we're certain that his father's fortune must be hidden there somewhere. Babs, do you think we're too late to stop him?"

Babs smiled.

"We must let him know somehow that you're safe, Eileen," she said. "He was going to see Miss Primrose this morning, but perhaps he'll wait a while, hoping you'll turn up. Let's

hurry back to Friardale, but first we'll telephone your father."

And so, with Eileen happily safe and unharmed, they all hurried away from Monk's Folly. On Sarmouth promenade they found a telephone-box; but when Eileen phoned through to Willow Cottage there was no reply.

Then Babs phoned to Cliff House, but Stella Stone, answering her, said that Miss Primrose had set out for Dreere Manor.

"Oh, goodness!" groaned Babs. "Well, it's us for Dreere Manor at full speed ahead, and may we be in time to stop your father meeting Primmy, Eileen!"

And, by a stroke of luck they were. For, after a hectic race on buses—there was no time to return to Pegg and fetch their bicycles—they had almost reached Dreere Manor when, wonder of wonders, they saw Mr. Hunter, wheeling himself along the pavement in his invalid-chair.

"Daddy!" cried Eileen joyously.

Mr. Hunter could hardly believe his eyes when he saw his daughter. They were moist as he gathered his daughter in his arms.

"Oh, Eileen—Eileen! Are you all right, child?"

"Yes, daddy. But—but have you seen Miss Primrose yet?"

"No. I was told that I should find her at Dreere Manor, and I was just going along to see her now. But, of course, this alters everything. You're safe, and Burgin's little scheme has come unstuck. Eileen, was it Burgin who kidnapped you?"

"I never saw, Daddy. I was leaving Dreere Manor this morning, and walking down the drive, when someone sprang out of the bushes and caught me from behind. Something was fastened over my head, and then—well, I don't know what happened. But I found myself a prisoner at Monk's Folly, and I still should be if Barbara and her friends hadn't rescued me."

Mr. Hunter smiled, his eyes swimming with gratitude.

"Are not these wonderful girls, Eileen?" he asked huskily. "They seem to be our mascots—and saviours!"

"Wait until we find that money, Mr. Hunter!" grinned Clara.

"And you will, too, if I know anything of you," said the man. "And when you do—well, we'll have a slap-up celebration. But come, Eileen. Let us go home—"

"And let us return to be lined, gated, detained, and goodness knows what," chuckled Babs. "See you later, Eileen!"

And the chums bade good-bye to their friends, and walked on to Dreere Manor—there to find many shocks awaiting them.

"BARBARA, I am very displeased with you."

That was Miss Charmant—and never before had Babs & Co. known their pretty mistress to be so angry.

There had been a tremendous sensation when the chums walked into Dreere Manor. Afternoon lessons had been abandoned by Miss Charmant's orders—she had seen that the girls would never attend to them, and that work, in the circumstances, was out of the question.

Over the House and the Fourth Form had hung an atmosphere of nervous tension, as though everybody were waiting for something dreadful to happen.

And then the missing chums had arrived. They had found themselves bombarded with questions, abruptly interrupted as Miss Charmant hurried over to them. Sympathetic and anxious the mistress had been at first. But anxiety had quickly vanished when she heard the story they had to tell her.

In the privacy of her study, the Charmer regarded the chums sternly. Babs & Co. were startled at the sensation their absence had caused—and the situation was made all the more difficult because they dared not tell their beloved mistress the full truth.

Out of fairness to Eileen and her father they could not explain matters fully. Nor did Babs wish to implicate Freda Ferriers, trickster though that girl was. To have told Miss Charmant about Freda's part in the affair would have earned heavy punishment for the Ferrets.

Babs was very distressed as she saw how upset the mistress was.

"I'm sorry, Miss Charmant," she said unhapily. "But we did not mean to miss lessons. We—we just went down to Pegg early this morning before rising-bell to—explore the caves there, you know. We fully intended to be back in time for class. And then we—lost ourselves in the caves—"

"I see!" Miss Charmant's voice was still grim. "While your Form-fellows and I were worried about your absence, fearing that you had fallen into some danger, you were just exploring caves. Perhaps you don't realise the anxiety your foolish breaking of bounds has caused all of us. There have already been too many peculiar happenings in this place which have upset the girls, and yet you three must needs add to their fears by this escapade."

"She paused while the chums shuffled uncomfortably, crimson and dismayed. It hurt them to receive such a lecture from the mistress they loved—who, had she known the truth, had they dared tell her the truth—would have been the first to understand. But they could not; they must suffer this reprimand—for Eileen's sake.



BUTTONS SO BOLD

Buttons can be decorative as well as useful these days. And the plainest buttons at that, too!

Sounds almost impossible, doesn't it? But if you look very closely at the picture here, I think you'll soon tumble to the way it's done—especially when I explain just to make quite, quite sure.

Take the three buttons, and through each thread a length of coloured wool or thick embroidery silk.

OTHER USES, TOO!

Stick this through both or the four holes of the button, and pull the ends of the wool or cotton to the front of it. There tie it in a droopy little bow.

Now sew the buttons to your frock in the ordinary way, concealing your stitches underneath the wool decoration.

You'd never believe it was so simple, would you? And don't forget that this is a notion you can use on coats as well as hats, for it's a trimming that's so simple, it's suitable for any garment!

If you have a frock that's perfectly sweet, but would be all the sweeter for a little originality in trimming, I've got the very idea for you.

Three buttons is the secret. Ah, you say, but I don't want to go to the shop and spend my precious pocket-money just on ornamental buttons—not with all the ice-cream about and holidays to save up for!

SO VERY SIMPLE!

Well, you needn't! Just three of the plainest buttons are required, whether from father's old pyjamas, sister's blouse, mother's old tweed skirt, or your own discarded coat.



AN ominous rumbling caused the chums to wheel in sudden terror. And they saw a great boulder being rolled in front of the cave mouth. Their only way of exit was cut off.

"We—we're awfully sorry, Miss Charmant—" blurted out Clara, not knowing quite what else to say.

"Of course you are—now!" said Miss Charmant. "You have been foolish and thoughtless—I am bitterly disappointed in all three of you—"

She broke off as there came a tap at the door. Dulcia Fairbrother, the Sixth Form prefect, who was assisting Miss Charmant in her duties at Drere Manor, entered. Dulcia was looking grave.

"Miss Charmant," she said agitatedly, "Freda Ferriers is missing now!"

"Dulcia!"

"At least, she's overdue in returning. Miss Charmant," Dulcia went on. "I gave her a special pass during dinner, but she said she would be returning by half-past one. It is now half-past three, and there is no sign of Freda."

Babs stared at the prefect in amazement.

"But we saw Freda at Pegg—it would then be soon after twelve," the Form captain volunteered.

"Goodness gracious!" Miss Charmant was both alarmed and angry. "What is coming over the girls of the Fourth Form? First these three are absent, and now Freda is overdue. I think there must be some unlucky omen about this house. Thank you for reporting the matter, Dulcia. I suppose there is no reason to become alarmed yet—but, really, matters are becoming most nerve-racking. I only hope I have succeeded in convincing Miss Primrose to take us away from Drere Manor!"

Dulcia withdrew from the room. Babs & Co. followed her dismally a few minutes later, after Miss Charmant had said that they would be detained for the next month, and giving them each five hundred lines to write.

But the chums were not thinking of their punishment as they walked slowly up the stairs to their study. What had happened to Freda? Why had she not returned to Drere Manor?

And Miss Charmant had said that the headmistress was considering the advisability of taking the Fourth Form away from the house. That was a disturbing thought.

How could they help Eileen and her

father if they were no longer at Drere Manor?

How could they search for the money which would mean so much to their friends and which there was little doubt now must be hidden somewhere in the building?

"Goodness, what a blow!" muttered Babs. "If we leave here, Burgin will have the run of the place—he'll be able to step in before us and find the money!"

Clara and Mabs saw that, too. Thinking that Burgin was also after the fortune which had been hidden by Eileen's grandfather, they were convinced that that was his reason for wanting the Cliff House girls to leave Drere Manor.

Little did they suspect his real motive—far more sinister and tremendous than the desire to obtain that money!

The trio reached their study, went in, and found a visitor awaiting them—none other than Eileen Hunter! She jumped up excitedly from her chair as the chums entered.

"Why, Eileen," exclaimed Babs, surprised to see her friend, "I thought you'd gone home!"

"Babs, I did, but—" Eileen's cheeks crimsoned with excitement, her large brown eyes were dancing pools. "I've made a wonderful discovery! Just listen to this!"

All wondering eagerness, Babs & Co. listened while Eileen rushed on in a thrilled voice.

"Daddy has sacked Burgin as his agent. He had the letter with him when we met him. I took it along to Burgin's office while daddy waited outside; he couldn't get up the steps, you know, being in his chair."

"Burgin sacked?" Babs sounded just a little wondering. "But—but what's this discovery?"

Eileen laughed.

"Listen! I'm coming to that now. When I got outside his office I heard him talking on the telephone, so naturally I waited, and I heard him mention Drere Manor."

Babs began to look interested now.

"Yes, go on! What did he say?"

"He said—" Eileen almost stuttered in her eagerness—"that if he played his cards well, the kids—that's you," she put in, with a little laugh—"would be gone by to-night. He's arranged to meet someone at midnight in the underground room, he said; and, Babs, he went on to say that they'd get together the plans, and they'd get the stuff out to-night."

The chums whistled.

"My giddy aunt!" exclaimed Clara, and there was a dismayed expression on her face. "Then that—that means—"

"That they've found the other half of the letter written by your grandfather," said Mabs.

Babs groaned.

"Oh, Eileen, there must be a plan of the hiding place attached to that other half and Burgin's got it. And he said they'd get the stuff out to-night? Goodness! That means he's either found the money already, or is going to search for it to-night."

Eileen, however, laughed excitedly.

But, Babs, don't you see? We'll be here; we'll lie in wait for Burgin and follow him down to the underground room."

"My hat! Yes!" Babs' blue eyes were blazing now. "And you mean he'll lead us straight to where the money is hidden?"

"Yes, that's it! Barbara, you will help? And you, Clara? And Mabel?"

"Rather!" came a chorus.

"I'll meet you at the gates at half-past eleven, before Burgin arrives, and went on Eileen: "then we'll hide and wait for him. Will that be all right? Can you manage it without getting into trouble?"

"Trouble or not, we're coming!" said Clara grimly.

"We'll be there!" said Babs and Mabs together.

And Eileen, flashing them a grateful smile, went, while Babs & Co. eagerly discussed their plans for outwitting Burgin.

But then came the shock—the crushing blow which threatened to shatter all their hopes.

Miss Primrose arrived at Drere Manor, and after she had been closeted with Miss Charman for half an hour every girl in the Fourth Form was summoned into the Common-room.

There Miss Primrose addressed them, and her words struck dismay into the hearts of the chums.

For in a few terse words she announced that the Fourth would return to Cliff House that evening. She felt bound to take this step owing to the report she had received from Miss Charman that the girls were not comfortable at Drere Manor.

Though the reconstruction of the Fourth Form quarters was not yet finished at Cliff House, the Fourth would be accommodated with other Forms temporarily. It would be inconvenient and cramped, but, in the circumstances, this could not be avoided.

The girls were to pack their things and be ready to depart immediately after tea.

The Fourth were jubilant. The announcement was greeted with cheers—except by Babs & Co.

Babs was almost frantic. Leaving Drere Manor when, that night, it had seemed that success would be in their grasp—when Burgin would be defeated, and the money which meant so much to Eileen and her father would be found.

In blank dismay the Co. looked at each other. What now for their fine hopes and promises?

Eileen was relying on them, and they could not let her down—they would not let her down!

But it meant breaking bounds from Cliff House, when already they were under sentence of detention. Discovery would result in instant expulsion, but the risk must be taken for the sake of Eileen and her father!

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

FAILURE—OR SUCCESS?

WHAT a blow it is to the chums' hopes of aiding Eileen! In the very moment when success seems within their grasp they are ordered to return to Cliff House.

But Babs and Co. are not the ones to let such difficulties daunt them, when so much is at stake, and in next Saturday's vivid long complete mystery and adventure story you will read how they tackle the problem of finding the fortune and bowling out the rascally Burgin.

On no account miss this grand tale, in which Babs, Mabs, and Clara all play such dramatic parts. It is entitled:

"THE FOURTH FORM

FORTUNE HUNTERS"

By HILDA RICHARDS

● Wonderful Free Gifts are coming. See THE SCHOOLGIRL next Saturday for full details.

TWO NOVELTY NOTIONS



YOU don't need to save up for a birthday or any other extra-special occasion before you can afford to give this little present, because it costs simply nothing!

It is a milk clock that can be placed outside with the milk bottles to inform the milkman just how much milk to leave, without mother having to leave notes when she goes shopping.

To begin with cut a circle of cardboard about the size of a large saucer. A discarded cork dinner mat can be used instead of cardboard if you like. Choose a brightly coloured paint from your paintbox, and write clearly the word "None" in the top centre, followed by $\frac{1}{2}$ pint, 1 pint, $\frac{1}{2}$ pints, until you reach 3 pints, leaving an equal space between each figure. Paint in the amount first, with the word "pint" underneath, so that it is quite clear.

Give your clock a gaily coloured border of paint, then cut one slim hand, paint the edge to match the border, and when it is dry fix it with a paper-pin to the centre of the clock so that it pivots easily.

Now write the words "Please leave" just above the hand, and put a drawing-pin at the top—and your gift is ready for mother.

ORANGE BASKETS

The bright yellow skin of a large Jaffa orange will make the sweetest little basket for salad or sweets.

Cut away the upper portion of the peel very neatly, leaving a broad centre strip to represent a handle. Then very carefully remove the fruit and as much of the pith as you can without breaking your dainty basket. With a pair of sharp scissors cut the top edge of the basket into wavy points, and then it is ready for filling.

If you use the basket for green salad, just arrange a few fresh green leaves of lettuce around the edge, with sliced tomato and hard-boiled egg resting on a bed of watercress.

But if you want it for sweets, then fill it with chopped orange jelly, sprinkled with nuts, and dotted here and there with a few bright scarlet tinned cherries.

And if your baskets are for any extra-special occasion, do stand them on wavy paper d'orlies, and tie little bunches of ribbon in the centre of their handles.