

"HER SECRET AT SWANLAKE":

BRILLIANT NEW HARBOR SCHOOL AND
MYSTERY SERIAL BEGINS INSIDE

THE SCHOOLGIRL

No. 283 Vol. 18
NOV. 1935
Nov. 1935

EVERY **2^D**
SATURDAY

Incorporating
"SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN"



THE CLOSING OF A TRAP!

Read about this exciting incident in
the fine long complete Cliff Potts
Secret Society story inside

SECRET SOCIETY AT CLIFF HOUSE: Thrilling Long Complete Story Starring Barbara Redfern & Co.



Pledged TO SAVE THE PLAY

By
HILDA RICHARDS

Rehearsals Forbidden

"NOT too loud!" cautioned Barbara Redfern. "We don't want Edwinna Brookdale jumping on us! None, Juliana, got your script?"

"What do I do?" asked Clara Trevlyn.

"Good enough! Well, Mabel, what shall we read? The first act?"

There was a rattle of papers. In one, the five girls clustered in Study No. 2 in the Fourth Form corridor of Cliff House School, looked towards the golden-haired girl who stood in front of the blank fire.

But Mabel Lynn frowned. Not one of the happy enthusiasm which radiated from the faces of her friends was reflected in her own worried features. For how could she wax enthusiastic about a play which was already as good as banned!

All very well, of course, for Babe to say they would carry on, despite the ban. Very fine it was of the six girls gathered here to have "rushed" their prep and come along.

"Come on, Mabel," urged Clara Trevlyn.

"Yes, rather, you know, you're the jolly old producer!" Janet Jordan chimed in.

"And if," reminded Marjorie Hand-dren, her own sweetly gentle face a little troubled, "I'm to get my piece

off, I haven't much time, you know. Mabel! I've got to leave Cliff House at the end of the week—to help my father with his Christmas arrangements."

Mabel gulped. She knew that, if it increased the worry which so plainly sat upon her brow. Marjorie, as it happened, only appeared in the first act of the play—so that it was really necessary that she should be thoroughly rehearsed before the week went.

"But what," Mabel burst out, "is the use of rehearsing? We can't do a thing without Jimmy Richardson & Co. of Friar-dale School."

"Meaning," Clara Trevlyn retorted, with that tomboyish vigour so characteristic of her, "that we're going to do them and do nothing!"

"But what?"

"Mabel, listen!" Babe interrupted. "I know exactly how you're feeling. We all hope, thanks to the scheming of Edwinna Brookdale and her beastly prefect cousin, Miss Marchant, of Friar-dale School, that Friar-dale is out of bounds to us, and Cliff House out of bounds to Jimmy Richardson. We know, if you like, the play's officially banned, because we and the Friar-dale boys are forbidden to meet—"

Mabel stared at her.

"But," Mabel went on firmly, "that's no reason why we should give in. Edwinna doesn't know, at the moment, that we've spotted her little game. She

doesn't know that we've found out that she and Miss Marchant have deliberately conspired to ruin the play—and think they've succeeded. Unfortunately," Babe resumed, "we can't fancy a thing on so there at the moment. As prefects, they've got all the cards in their hands and not a tittle of evidence against them—"

There was a murmur.

"Well," Babe summed up, "it's up to us. We've determined, somehow, that this play shall be put on at the Court-yard Theatre at the end of the term. We've simply got to get the first act off before Marjorie leaves at the end of the week. In the meantime, we've got to fool Edwinna and her cousin out, and mean in every possible moment we can! I've got another idea, too—but I'll tell you about that later. Now, let's get going!"

"What's, old Spartans! Never say die!" murmured Juliana.

Mabel's face cleared a little. There was no arguing with Babe when she spoke in that quiet, resolute voice—its very tone, somehow, gave confidence and hope.

Yes— And for a second the laborer. So much depended upon this play, for had not her father, famous playwright, Miss Lynn, written it specially at her request? And was not her mother's celebrated friend, the world-famous John Street, recently returned from his immense theatrical engagements in America, due to be present at its production!

STRANGE and dramatic is the scene in the crypt of the old ruined Priory at Friar-dale. By the ghostly light of a single lantern a group of figures, weirdly garbed in hoods and cloaks, converse in whispers.

The Cliff House Secret Society is in session!

"Well, let's start," she said. "Janet, too first."

The paper rustled again. Janet enthusiastically got going, speaking her lines clearly and distinctly, and, in her excitement, raising her voice a little. "Janina's turn next," then Edna—

"All three—"
"Yes."
"Oh, my head! Hide those papers!" Edna cried.

But too late! For even as they whisked the papers out of sight, the door came open. It was a slender girl who came in, a girl who possessed a rather good-looking, if somewhat colorless face, covered by a flowing mass of red hair. Edwina Brookdale herself!

Her gaze swept their faces with a sharp suspicion that was immediately replaced by a smile.

"Hello!" she said affably. "Rather a crowd of you in here? Busy?"

Babe & Co. did not reply. They were no longer deceived by Edwina's show of friendliness.

"Lost your tongues?" Edwina inquired pleasantly.

"Will no reply.
A rather grim look came to replace the affability in Edwina's face. It was an thought, in that moment, the color—

"These girls have something; no longer were they inclined to look upon her as a friend. Her eyes glittered.

"I see!" she said. "Playing some funny game, eh? Well, I can play one, too! Why aren't you doing your part? And what," she added, rapidly, "are those papers you were reading?"

Babe's innocent blue eyes opened wide.

"Oh, Edwina, are you ill?"

"No!"

"Well, you didn't speak to us like that yesterday."

Edwina's lips came together. She steeled herself. But those papers; the few words she had overheard while she had stood outside the door before knocking! Something—she had caught Babe's words only indistinctly—about "reading Edwina and her cousin's part." What a stinging disquieted the girl's heart. What did they mean? What were those girls doing—and plotting?

"I am not ill," she said; "but I don't know why you should suspect Barbara, because I have tried to help you, and I should not regret you when it is necessary. I am a friend, I have my duty to do. This is the first hour. You are not doing properly, you are sitting around reading to each other. Give me those papers, please!"

"But—"
But Edwina, patience gone, took a step forward. She did not snatch Babe's script. She grabbed at Marjorie Handloom's, who happened to be nearest. Up jumped Marjorie with a cry.

"Edwina—"

But Edwina, savagely, had wrenched them away. She swung back. Just one swift look she took at them—and nothing, nothing, she said, was torn from her features. Small, glittering, like a sunbeam. Under the pale skin the red blood rushed in a tide of colorless fury. For she recognized the script at once!

"So!" she cried. "You are so hearing this—reading this—here! I suppose you know," she added gruffly, "that this play was concocted by Miss Fitzroy's orders. Yet here I find you rehearsing it!" She passed. "Maib, give me those other scripts!"

"But—"

"Give them to me!" Edwina barked. "If you do not, I will report the whole thing to Miss Fitzroy immediately!" A silence fell. Instinctively the girls looked towards their leader, Babe—and, perhaps to their amazement, Babe nodded. She herself, indeed, was the first to surrender her script. Clara followed; then Maib; then Janet; then, with a mournful sigh from their corner, Janina Carstairs. Edwina's eyes glittered.

"Thanks!" she said tartly. "I shall," she announced distinctly, "destroy these. And I forbid you—yes, forbid you," she added, "to have anything to do with this play again!"

Then, with the scripts in her hand, Edwina flounced out. A rather dismaying silence she left behind her; perhaps it dawned upon her youthful victims then exactly what they were up against.

Edwina was watching them! Edwina, as a prefect, had the power on her side! What desperately would it interfere with Edwina's secret plans if they progressed with that play, and, backed by Miss Fitzroy's authority, she was determined that it shouldn't progress!

"Well, now what are we going to do?" Clara groaned.

Babe's chin quivered. There was a grim light in her eyes now.

"Well, it's none," she said. "It's obvious what Edwina's game is. She's watching! If she can prevent it, there'll be no play!"

"Yes, but—" Clara broke in impatiently.

"But we're just going to carry on!" Babe announced calmly.

As one they stared towards her.

"And how," Clara Trevlin demanded, "are we going to do that?"

Babe looked steadily towards the

door. Unconsciously she dropped her voice.

"By forming ourselves into a secret society!"

They all jumped as if they had received a sudden electric shock.

"A secret society?"

"That's the idea!" Babe said; "Janet, keep guard on the door. Now, listen!"

And Babe leaned forward intently. "I haven't told you this, but to-morrow morning, at ten, we're meeting Jimmy Richardson & Co. at the record party in Friarstable. Jimmy doesn't know yet about the scheme, but he'll come in. While he and Douglas Gault and Don Harbury and Lister Catererole deal with Miss Marchant at Friarstable, we'll deal with Edwina Brookdale here. I've thought it all out. We'll call ourselves the Society of the Scarlet Star—"

"Oh, my only September lesson!" blurted Clara.

"It's the only way," Babe added—"the only way! And while, as a secret society, we're leading Edwina and Miles Marchant a dance, we'll carry on with rehearsals at the same time. Now, listen again! This is going to be jolly serious—"

"Say on, wise one!" Janina murmured.

"To-morrow is a whole holiday. Ordinarily, we're off to Courtfield to do shopping—which means that each of you will carry a case or bag. In that bag," Babe leaned forth, "we shall take the robes of the society, and masks, with four spare ones for the boys. And—her eyes glauced with fierce determination—"we're going to save the play!"

EDWINA BROOKDALE, the colorless script in her hand, stalked off towards her own study in the Sixth Form corridor.



BABE flung open the door—and there was Bessie Bunter harring the way. "I a-say, where are you going? Is it a head?" Bessie wanted to know. Edna stifled a gasp. Trust Fatima to turn up at an awkward moment!

In spite of her tardy triumph over the drama in Equity No. 1, she still looked shaken, still uncertain. She did not trust Babs & Co. The discovery that they were still, in defiance of all orders, progressing with the play fitted her with the most shrewd alarm. Not Babs & Co., even in the face of this setback, to surrender! Babs & Co. would go on!

She reached her study. In hasty passion, she scurried through the scripts into the wastepaper-basket. In her perturbation, she did not notice as she crossed the latter which rested among the pile of wadded litter on her desk. She noticed nothing. What had they meant—again that watch of conversation casto in terror and torment here—by that? "We'll love Edwina and her cousin out!"

They suspected. Worse, they knew! Edwina's face turned a little gray. She leaned in the window. Despite the coldness of the raw November night, she hung it wide and stood there, drinking in the frosty air, unconscious of the fact that she was wearing her thinnest frock. She found herself thinking of the play—of all that it meant to her. No, no! That must never take place! If it did take place, what would happen?

Something like a cry broke from Edwina.

John Barrett would be at the Courtland Theatre—John Barrett, who, although no one ever guessed it, was her uncle, Habel Lynn would be there; all Cliff Haines, practically to a girl, would be there. Nothing then could save John Barrett from meeting a certain girl in the Fourth Form.

Down went the window with a bang. No, not that—not that! For that girl was John Barrett's own daughter—the little one who had been kidnapped by gipsies years ago, and whom he had since mourned as dead. Once he came face to face with her—who he was so startlingly like his dead wife—he was bound to ask questions. Those questions, inevitably, would reveal to him that the girl was his own daughter!

And then—herself! What! Her own father—the man, in the first place, had been responsible for the abduction of John Barrett's daughter! What a scene then!

Very comfortably had they lived upon John Barrett's money—money that should have gone to his daughter. All those years it had been he who had paid her own and Miles' school fees; he who had raised them from middle-class obscurity to a life of luxury and riches.

That was Edwina's most frightful fear—that John Barrett should meet this girl of the Fourth Form; that he, through her, should discover the treachery of her father. At all and every cost that meeting must be prevented, and the only way to prevent it was to smother up the play.

If there were no play, there would be no show at the Courtland Theatre, in which case John Barrett and his unsuspecting daughter would never meet.

She turned, besting one hand into the palm of the other. It was then, gazing moodily at her desk, that the letter caught her eye—having apparently been placed there by some well-disposed person who had brought it up from the rack in Big Hall.

She opened it. It was from her cousin, Miles Marchant of Friarville Woods. Every drop of colour left Edwina's cheeks as she read:

"Hear that Jimmy Richmond & Co. are meeting Barbara Redfern and her

brother somewhere at ten o'clock to-morrow. Suspect they are going to rehearse."



In Secret

"READY, everybody!" asked Barbara Redfern. "You, rather?" "Good. Janet, take a peep out of the window. Is Edwina knocking about?"

Babs nodded. She glanced around at her drama. The scene was Scene No. 4, at nine o'clock the next morning. Edwina was there. So were Clara Trevilly, Marjorie Hasbrouck, Mabel and Janet Jordan.

Each girl gripped a bag; each girl was fully dressed, ready for going out. In those bags reposed the masks and the robes necessary to the first meeting of the projected secret society.

"Now, careful!" warned Babs. "Better not all go out at once. Clara, you and Janet go first. Edwina, you and Marjorie next. Mabel, you and I will bring up the rear. But—warn Edwina! Keep your eyes open!" "Where shall we meet?" Clara asked. "By the bridge in the wood. Go now!"

Clara nodded. She and Janet went off together. Edwina and Marjorie waited until they saw them, through the window, pass through the gates of Cliff House School. Then they, too, left. Babs, watching anxiously, breathed a sigh of relief.

"O.K. They're away!" she said. "Edwina seems to be doing smart. Grab your own, Mabel."

"Whistles!" Mabel breathed. She lifted her eyes. Babs picked up her bag, and Babs threw it open, only to start back; for a fat, bespectacled figure stood there—a figure who, until this moment, they had left entirely out of their calculations—Bessie Hunter! And Bessie glared indignantly.

"Oh, really, Babs—" "Ahem!" said Babs. "You're accused. You're going out!" Bessie accused. "I'm not to do it!"

"Well, I think it's jolly unfriendly," Bessie glowered. "You never said a word to me about going out, you know. I think it's a bit thick the way I've left out of things in this study—and we like a mirror to both of you. Where are you going?"

"Well—ahem!" Babs said again. "I don't," Bessie said lightly, "call that an answer at all. Babs, you're going for a secret treat, you know. Um! And you've got the sack in those bags!" She added accusingly.

Babs gazed at her in despair. "Bessie, we haven't! Do steady, please, there's a dear!"

"No, Bessie. You—yes see," Babs blurted desperately, "this is a—very particular appointment. We shan't be long—an hour, perhaps. And there's something I want you to do for me, old Bess—something you couldn't do if you came out now." Babs added bravely. "You know Audrey Jones at the tobacconist is expecting a consignment of those ripping veal and ham patties this morning—"

Bessie licked her lips. "Well," Babs rubbed on, "I want you to get a dozen, Bessie, and—send a few for yourself, of course. If we

wait until I come back, they'll probably all be gone, and you'd be sorry then, wouldn't you? There's the money." And hastily she put it on the table. "Be sure they're fresh, Bess."

Bessie blinked doubtfully, not quite sure, even so, whether she were missing something. But Babs gave her no time to come to a conclusion. With a quick look at Mabel she scouted through the doorway.

Together they flew down the stairs. No sign of Edwina, thank goodness! They reached the gates.

"O.K.," breathed Babs. One swift glance she cast back. The gate opened clear. Hastily she and Mabel darted across the road, climbed the bank on the opposite side, and vanished into Friarville Woods. It was then that a cautious face peered from behind the door of the cycle-stand which fronted the road.

"I've got 'em!" Edwina Brookdale breathed.

And, with a glimmer in her eyes, she stepped from her hiding-place, and plunged into the woods on the trail of her intended victims.

"Don't look round," Barbara Redfern breathed. "We're being followed."

"Oh, my hat! Who?" "Edwina. She must have got wind somehow."

The faces of the six girls set. Marjorie Hasbrouck looked a little nervous. "But if she took us meeting Jimmy Richmond—"

"She won't," Babs muttered. "Listen! When you come to the fork in the path, take the one that leads to the old ranger's hut."

"But why?"

"You'll see!" Quietly they gazed at their leader. But Babs' face was set. She had half-suspected something like this would happen, and had maintained a wary vigil during the whole of the walk.

They reached the fork to which Babs had referred. Presently there loomed before them the ranger's hut. Quickly Babs turned her head—just in case to see a moving figure go darting among the trees.

"Mabel," she muttered, "you and the others go on. Open the front door of the hut, and leave it open. They make your way towards the Friary." "But you—?" breathed Mabel. "I'll look after the rest. Don't talk. Hurry!"

They glared at her. But there was that in Babs' eyes, in her face, which brooked no argument then. They went off.

Babs stopped. She knew that, behind her, Edwina was watching. She knew, too, that Edwina shan't show herself until she moved away. Babs waited, planning cautiously around her, as though to make sure she was not observed, and stealthily, mysteriously, began to creep forward.

It took her five minutes, by that means, to reach the hut. The door which gave on to the path, as she expected, was open. She stepped into the hut. There was another door on the further side. Babs slipped across to it, turned the rusty key in the rusty lock, and then, extracting it, slipped out on the other side, quickly locking the door behind her, and thus making it impossible for anyone in the hut to escape. That done she dropped in the long lush grass and waited.

Up the path, in the direction of the hut, came creeping and making a cautious figure, but almost double.

Very agitated was Edwina Brookdale, but she was holding grimly to the wall. She came abreast of the door of the ranger's hut, passed for a moment, hesitating, and then, with steady steps, padded towards it. Behind she had Babe grimly scrutinized.

Soundlessly she made for the corner of the wall.

And then she saw Edwina, half in, half out, of the door, crossing forward as she peered. For a moment Babe's blue eyes flashed back by back she crept forward—now, two, three feet. Now! The door was within her reach!

One deep, heavy breath Babe took, then strengthening up, she caught the door. Edwina, in the act of turning, toward the movement, saw the door—too late—hurling towards her, and, with a cry, jumped back—straight into the hut. That was enough. In a moment Babe had slammed the door. In another she had slipped the heavy bar which secured it into its sockets. From inside came a furious yell.

"You little beast! You— Let me out!"

But Babe, breathless and chattering, was racing nimbly away.

"Well, what do you see?" Jimmy Richmond exclaimed loudly.

"All eyes to hear Babe's latest performance!"

Babe laughed. All the same, her eyes lowered. While the boys listened in silence she told them how she had disposed of Edwina, and then went on to recount the secret society. Spectacularly they listened. They knew, of course, what had been happening. They realized their own helplessness to carry on rehearsing with Edwina and Marchant spring and tripping them at every turn. Babe's idea offered the ideal way out!

"Well, what do you think?" Babe asked quietly.

"What do you think?" They looked at each other. Hardly necessary to voice the question. In every eye Babe read enthusiastic approval of her plan. Openly, they could no longer spite the cunning proferer, but acting together, in secret—ah, what possibilities there! The audacity, the thrill, the adventure it promised, captured their imaginations at once.

"And when," Gatorwadd asked, "do we begin this secret society?"

"Now!" Babe answered promptly. "We've come with all the papers. But let's have it clear first. This is my job, in all things, the society has got to depend on me. No half-measures! What sort the society will be any one of us, that thing must be done—yes, even if it means risking capture."

"Spoken like a stout old Briton!" applauded Justina Cantaira. "What ho! Up the Scarlet Starlets! Now, what about a leader, Babe, old Spartan?"

"Well, Jimmy Richmond—"

But Jimmy immediately shook his head.

"No, Babe. Yours is the idea. The best we can do is to make you boss of the outfit. Besides, I'd be no good. I haven't got the brains. Do you feel like that about it, you chaps?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Babe for leader!"

Babe blushed.

"Then—right!" she said. "Here we go! We'll hold our meetings in the cellar. There's an old lantern down there we can use. Come on, fellow members, we're going to start here and now!"

In the gleam of a lantern, which was placed upon the floor, so that it cast a diamond ray to form a yellow halo in



SWIFTLY, silently, Edwina's arms were pinioned by half a dozen cloaked figures. "Make a noise," one of her captors hissed, "and Miss Peirce shall know everything." But Edwina was too scared to cry out.

the ceiling, the masked and hooded figures stood in a circle in the collar of the walls of Peirce's ancient Priory.

The Society of the Scarlet Star was in the process of formation!

In the middle of the circle stood a girl whose figure threw a monstrous shadow on the wall. She had a boy's cap in her hand, and in the cap reposed several screwdriver pieces of paper. She thrust it forward.

"Take one!" she commanded.

Jimmy Richmond thrust his hand into the cap.

"That," Babe solemnly informed him, "is your number in the Society of the Scarlet Star. What is it?"

"Number two."

"By that number will you be known," Babe told him. "Hereafter it is an offense to mention your name in the presence of the society. As leader I am No. 1. I request you all to call me by nothing else. Now, Clara, you! Choose! What is your number?"

"Seven."

"It is well, No. 7. Don, choose!"

And so Babe went on, handing round the cap until the caplet was completed.

Mabe became No. 3; Justina, No. 5; Janet was No. 6; Marjorie became No. 10. Among the boys, Douglas Gustie was No. 4; Don Hagley, No. 8; and Lester Gatorwadd, the last in draw out of the cap, No. 9.

Babe paused.

"So far, so good!" she pronounced in a deep, disquieting voice. "Now, members of the Society of the Scarlet Star, we will take the vow of allegiance. Raise your hands!"

Each arm was solemnly held aloft.

"Now, repeat after me." And Babe drew a deep breath. "As a member of the Society of the Scarlet Star—"

The line was repeated.

"I swear, on my most solemn word of honor—"

"That I will, in all matters, put the society first. That all danger and difficulties will I gladly face, carrying out to the best of my ability each task I am called upon to do."

Clearly, unhesitatingly, nine voices formed the words after her.

"Even," Babe added, "if such a task brings me face to face with the most disastrous consequences. That is all. Join hands."

Solemnly hands were joined and shaken all round. A little silence fell.

"From this moment," Babe announced, "the Society of the Scarlet Star is established. Now, as leader, you shall take your first orders. Numbers 2, 4, 6, and 8!"

The four boys stiffened.

"No. 2, you are hereby appointed deputy leader. Nos. 4, 6, and 8, as you will be working in a different locality from the rest of us, you will take your orders from No. 2. To-morrow night, at six p.m."

Babe went on, "the society will meet for its first full session in the crypt at Cliff House School. The session will be followed by a rehearsal."

"Each member will attend the meeting cloaked and masked to guard against recognition. A member of the Cliff House branch of the society will meet Nos. 2, 4, 6, and 8 at the gap in Lane's Field and conduct these safely to the meeting-place. That member will be one, No. 5!"

"Whither?" inquired No. 5 cheerfully.

"The password," Babe announced, "will be Rebel. Let us disperse."

Disperse they did, rather silently, each one feeling the great weight of the responsibility to which they had bound themselves. There was no going

back now. For good or ill they had huddled together.

At the raised tower they parted: Jimmy Richmond & Co. striking out across the fields. In a rather reflective group the Cliff House girls considered back towards the ranger's hut, where the imprisoned Edwina had been left. Pity passed from the place Babs passed.

"You'd better go on," she said. "I'll sneak back and untangle the door. I don't expect Edwina will find it's unfastened at once—and by the time she does we'll be far enough away. She must know that I shut her up, but I've an idea she won't be in too great a hurry to report that—just in case she has to explain why she was spying on us in the wood. Go on, my girl."

The others went on. Excitedly, already, Babs approached the hut. But before she reached it she knew that something was wrong.

For the door which should have been tightly closed, revealing Edwina's helplessness inside, was now wide open. And when Babs, with a fast-beating heart, peered inside, it was to find the hut completely empty. Edwina, despite their precautions, had escaped!



Warning!

BUT when they reached Cliff House, fully expecting to be confronted by a furious Edwina—

No Edwina was there! And, upon ascending, Edwina was not in to dinner!

The time came. Several people were asking for Edwina then—among these Miss Primrose herself. Prep hour arrived and with it a wet, chilly night which made everybody glad, for once, to be indoors.

Then bell rang for call-roll. The subject causing the whole school to buzz then was Edwina's mysterious disappearance. Her absence was the mystery of the hour.

Babs' first sense of relief had given place to apprehension.

The open door of that hut had taken on a new, ugly significance. What had happened there that morning? How had it chanced that the outside bar was down—that Edwina had not been heard of since?

With deepening fears, she glanced at the row of windows lined in front of the head's platform as she went into Big Hall.

Sheila Stone, Lady Patricia Northerton, Mary Butler, India Fairbrother, Connie Jackson, and Frances Bawcutt were there—but not Edwina! With anxiety she regarded Miss Primrose at the headmistress's, her face graver than usual, stepped on to her desk. The register was called; orders and duties announced for the morning. Then Miss Primrose said:

"I think you all know by this time that Edwina Beccolale of the Sixth Form is absent. She was seen after breakfast this morning, and since that she has just disappeared. Where she is, what has happened to her, is a complete mystery. Can any girl—"

And then there was a rustle, a cry. The door at the back of the Hall was flung open with a crash, admitting a chill draught which swept through the room.

Everybody jumped. Heads turned to one, and a great gasp went up.

"Edwina!"

"It's Edwina herself!"

Edwina it was! But what a distraught, dishevelled-looking Edwina! White her face; wet, bedraggled her hair. Her clothes—simpler indeed! She tottered as she came in, gasping as if in the last stages of utter exhaustion. Mary Butler, rushing forward, caught her by the arm.

"Oh, steady! What's the matter?"

"—I—"
"Mary, bring her here!" Miss Primrose ordered.

Leaning heavily upon Mary's arm Edwina was propelled through the hall. Wondering, amazed eyes followed her retreating progress. Even Babs & Co. felt a pang of pity for the girl—now realizing in that moment that Edwina, among those realistically than any of them could have acted on the stage, was merely putting it all on! Almost dropping, she stood in front of Miss Primrose at last.

The headmistress looked concerned.

"Why, Edwina, what has happened? Where have you been?"

The whole school hung breathlessly upon her reply. It came.

"I've been shut up! Edwina cried. "I've been locked in a hut in the woods since ten o'clock this morning. And—"

She hung round. The school stood in doubtful silence as she stubbed a vindictive finger at Barbara Rodgers. "And there," she panted, "is the girl who locked me in!"

THE murmurs of amazed voices arose and grew in volume in Big Hall.

Barbara Rodgers was already on the dais—together with her chums, amazed, for they were not going to see their leader suffer all the blame! With passed lips Miss Primrose regarded them, and then, dismissing the school, sat down, there and then to all the while business.

"Barbara, do you deny locking Edwina in the hut?"

Babs looked up.

"Well, no!"

"Why did you lock her in?"

Babs bit her lip. Her five chums suffered.

"Because she was following us," she replied.

"I—"
Edwina began.

"Please, Edwina!" Miss Primrose frowned. "You deny that you were following them, Edwina?"

"I deny it absolutely!" Edwina cried.

"Why should I have been following them? I happened to be in the woods. I saw the door of the hut open, and, naturally enough, I looked in. The next thing—"

"Yes, yes! We have had that!"

Miss Primrose looked a little better.

"Barbara pushed you in, and locked the door. Is that so?"

"Yes, yes!"

"That if this were not intended for some absurd and utterly ridiculous joke, Barbara, you and your friends here were embarked upon some suicidal which made it rather necessary for you to dispose of the Cliff House perfect you found in your vicinity. Is that right?"

Babs did not reply directly to that.

"I'm sorry!" she answered. "I admit I locked Edwina in the hut, but I certainly went back, less than an hour later, to let her out again. I found the door open and Edwina gone. I cannot say any more."

Miss Primrose's lips formed a straight line.

"Then I, too, am sorry, Barbara! I must decline to believe your statement! Perhaps you meant to go back and release Edwina. Obviously, however, you did not."

The six women at the omnibus note in the Head's table.

"I am not minded," she went on, "to look leniently upon such a display of hypocrisy! Barbara, as you are the ringleader in this, you will suffer two hours' detention for the next three nights, and will also have your pocket-money stopped to the end of the term! You, Clara, and you others will be detained for two hours on the succeeding two nights! Edwina, I put you in charge of these detentions! You may go!"

Furious, crestfallen, humiliated, the six went. Good! What price the pre-arranged night rehearsal with Jimmy Richmond & Co. now! That was the wondering thought in all their minds.

No word was spoken as they tramped down the passage, making, as if by common consent, to Study No. 4. There Babs shut the door, locked it, and took down a pen and a bottle of scotch ink. On a plain correspondence card she wrote for a few minutes. Then, gratified, she rose.

Members of the Society of the Scarlet Star," she said, "we have to take action! By the way and by treaty our enemy had attempted to digress out. By the way and by treaty the law made it impossible for us to hold our meeting to-morrow night—or so it appears. But that meeting must be held, and shall be held! She must know before she is any other what she is up against! Here," Babs added, tapping the card, "is the first warning to be given! I call for a volunteer to deliver it!"

"Here!" cried Clara Trevilly.

"No, no!" expostulated Babs.

"No, I speak first!" Babs answered solemnly. "The charge is yours, No. 7. See that you do not fail! At ten o'clock tonight the Cliff House branch of the secret society will meet in Attic No. 2, No. 5!"

"Adum!" beamed Jessica.

"You will be the guardian of the door, respectively, the password is 'Rebel'! Now, here are your instructions." And rapidly these instructions were given. "The meeting is at an end, members."

The members nodded gravely. There was that in their faces as they went out which showed they meant business.

Clara Trevilly, deputed to deliver the first warning of the Scarlet Star, did not, as she others, go back to her study. She went along to the Sixth Form passage, waited until that passage was vacant, and then swiftly slipped the card under Edwina's door.

Edwina, who had just entered, heard the slight rattling sound which it made during its passage, and flung round. In a moment her eyes had fastened upon it. She jumped to the door and flung it open.

But the Sixth Form corridor was empty.

Bitting her lip, Edwina went back into the study. She picked up the card, tracing at the sign with which it was accompanied—a single star drawn in red ink. Then she read the black capitals beneath:

"WARNING!

YOUR ACTIVITIES AND THE ACTIVITIES OF YOUR COUSIN, MISS MARGHANT, ARE KNOWN TO US. CEASE YOUR PERSECUTIONS AT ONCE BY WITHDRAWING, WITHIN THE NEXT TEN MINUTES, THE LYING STORY YOU HAVE TOLD TO MISS PRIMROSE. IGNORE THIS AT YOUR PERIL!"

Edwina blushed. Her face burned red, then white. With burning eyes she read it again, and then her lips were parted. Who was this secret society? Of what nature was it composed? What did they really know about her?

Her eyes flashed. She felt she could answer one question, at least. Plain enough was the fingerprint was—Barbara Redfern's, of course!

Baba was at the head of this secret society? Baba was blushing, that's all!

Well, she'd stop that nonsense before it went any further!

Temperamentally she rose to her feet. Gravelled, she crossed off to the Fourth Form corridor. Without knocking, she flung open the door of Study No. 4, and then scowled blankly as she found the study unoccupied.

Voices reached her from the Common-room. She thought she distinguished among them the tones of Barbara Redfern. Suddenly she strode down the passage, flung the Common-room door open. Her eyes blazed.

Baba was there, surrounded by a knot of girls, all eager to learn of what had happened.

Straight towards her Edwina rushed. Almost stumbling with passion, she held out the card.

"Is this member of your little job, Barbara Redfern?"

Baba blushed at it.

"Oh, I say, what is it? A warning from a secret society?" she asked innocently.

"There was a letter of interest at once. Did you get that under my door?" Edwina persisted.

"No!" said Baba.

"Don't tell lies!"

"Oh, I say!" murmured Lolla Carr.

"Lolla, take my lines!" Edwina snapped. "Barbara Redfern—"

"I did not," Baba said steadily, "get that under your door! I haven't," she added, "been any where near the Sixth Form corridor since I came in! Mabel can bear me out in that, can't you, Mabel?"

Edwina panted. The eyes of the Fourth—angry, glowing—were upon her.

"Very well!" she said. "I don't believe you! I believe you did do it, and, until you choose to come and own up, you can add two hundred lines to your detention! Any more of this nonsense," she threatened, "and I take you to Miss Prinrose!"

She flounced out, leaving a chorus of angry cries behind her. The Fourth looked amazed. Edwina—this! This Edwina, who in the past had so seldom interferred, had always seemed to prefer to mind her own business! A new tyrant had arisen in the Sixth! The Fourth did not like tyrants.

They looked angry. Each wholesale punishment outraged their every sense of justice. But the Fourth was excited, too. For now the Fourth knew that a secret society existed in the school. Babs was bewildered with questions.

But Babs smilingly evaded them. She looked at Clara, who grinned; while Edwina, her ruffled feelings somewhat appeased, went back to her own study. Then she jumped. On the table was another message—again headed by the red star. It could not be Babs this time. She had only just left Babs.

That message said:

"You have failed to heed our warning. Now take the consequences!"

"Bab!" sneered Edwina, and tore it up, flinging it upon the fire.

But, all the same, she felt a little shaken.

Quivering, she sat herself down to work. She still had some papers to do. Suddenly she pulled these towards her, with a terrific effort of concentration, forced herself to the task. But her mind was wavering. Fear, guilty apprehension, seemed suddenly to surround her. There was something grim, sinister in the workings of the society.

"Bab!" Edwina snapped. Roundly she put the secret society out of her mind. Roughly she tackled her work. For half an hour there was silence in the study, broken only by the steady scratch, scratch, of her pen, and the hating intake of her breath.

She did not see, behind her, the door slowly open. She did not see the gleamed hand that stretched out towards the electric switch. But suddenly there was a click. Edwina jumped as the light went out—in startled surprise slipped to her feet—pushing back the chair.

You late!

There was a rash of footsteps across the floor. Edwina had a bewildered glimpse of five hooded figures, their eyes covered by black masks, leaping across the floor. Then her arms were seized. The door closed. The key turned in the lock.

"Make a noise," one of the figures hissed, "and Miss Prinrose shall hear everything!"

Edwina gulped. She had been too surprised to cry out. Now with the cry already on her lips, she froze into silence. Again dread—that dread of discovery, dictated by the guilt of her own conscience, held her.

"Mindful let!" said a gruff voice. Without ceremony Edwina was blindfolded, plumped into her chair. In silence the five figures surrounded her. Two strong arms pressed her own hands to her sides. A handkerchief was passed around her mouth. She was hustled to her feet.

"March!" the gruff voice commanded again.

The door was flung open. In the corridor the light was dim. Edwina, shaking with fury and with fear, realized then that the school had been in bed for the better part of an hour.

These girls, whoever they were, must have got up from their dormitories firmly clutched to the wall, and piloted along up a flight of stairs, along another corridor. Up another flight of stairs. She heard a knock; heard whispered voices.

"Who comes?"

"No. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 10, with prisoner."

"Answered!"

"Rebbed!"

"Pass Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 10, with prisoner! All's well!"

Edwina felt herself pushed forward. The door behind her closed. There were movements. Then suddenly the handbags was removed from her eyes, and in the dim radiance of an electric light, draped with black crepe, she found herself confronting her captors.

Six of them there were, each dressed from head to foot in a long black hood, each wearing masks which completely covered her face. In a circle they surrounded her. One of the figures advanced towards her.

She pointed a finger.

"Edwina Blacklake, you have chosen to disregard the warning we gave you. Listen, now! We know all—all! The masked figure went on impressively. "We know why you are plotting against Mabel Lynn's play—"

Edwina shrunk back.

"We know that your cousin, Miss Marchant, attacked Dr. Fergusson's

case of glass specimens for which Miss Baxter was blamed. We know that the girl who assaulted Dr. Fergusson in his own garden was you!"

Edwina quailed.

"To-day, by a trick, you succeeded in getting Barbara Redfern and her friends at the Fourth Form severely punished. That punishment was unfair and unjustified. As this society stands for justice, we order you, here and now, either to go to Miss Prinrose and confess, or in some other way get that punishment annulled! You hear?"

"And if I don't?" Edwina asked.

"Then we shall take further action." Edwina felt baffled. She experienced a new spasm of fear. Was this girl bluffing, or only guessing? Certainly her accusations were completely correct. But how much could she prove, if it came to the point? Surely the six stood surrounding her.

"We await your answer," No. 1 said solemnly.

Edwina lifted her lips. If only she could get away!

"But how can I confess to Miss Prinrose?"

"That," No. 1 told her, "is your business. In any case, you have the alternative. You are in charge of the detention class—are you not? It would be easy enough for you to release those girls."

Another pause. Edwina's mind was working desperately. Six pairs of glittering, eye-glittering, sternly through the holes in the masks—were fastened upon her. She had to speak; she had to answer—

And then—

"Mark!" cried No. 7 suddenly.

And with the cry of the secret society met. For outside there was a footstep. Instinctively they turned as that footstep halted outside the door. And then a voice:

"This is the room, Miss Cherrmast; I think we shall find the same in here." It was Miss Prinrose.



Edwina Suspects

JUST for the briefest fraction of time, panic seized upon the members of the Society of the Scarlet Star.

Miss Prinrose, together with their own Form-mistress, was outside. Miss Prinrose was coming into this room!

But in a flash Babs had waked. Babs, springing towards the door, flinging on a finger towards Edwina, who, eyes that, was opening her lips for a joyful shout.

"Stop her!" she hissed.

The wrong hand of Clara Trevlin fastened forcibly over the lips that would have betrayed them. Just as Miss Prinrose's hand fastened upon the knob of the door outside Babs softly turned the key, at the same time inclining out the lights. In breathless, tense silence they stood. The handle rattled. Edwina made a gasping noise.

Then Miss Prinrose's voice again. "Dear me! How foolish of me! I never thought that the door might be locked. I expect Mrs. Throton has the key. Let's go and get it."

The footsteps retreated.

For a moment more the six stood listening as the steps ascended on the stairs. Then softly Babs' hand pressed the electric switch; the shaded light shone out again. Her face was tense under her mask.

"Quick, get out of here!"

"But Edwina—" Janet muttered.

"Leave her here."

She threw the door open. Edwina started, but Clara held her grimly back. Jennie, on the other side, assisting. For a second Edwina listened. Then she slipped the key out of the lock into her hand.

"Come on!" he said.

She stood aside in the corridor, holding the handle of the door. Mabel, Marjorie, and Janet stopped out. Janet, releasing her hold of Edwina, followed. Clara, with one glance at her captive, slipped into the corridor. Immediately Edwina rose.

"Look here—"

She made a rush. But Babe was a fraction before her. The door shut in her face. The key turned in the lock on the outside. No order was needed then. Fortunately the six flew down the stairs, gained the safety of the Fourth Form dormitory, and tiptoed in.

Quickly they divested and hid their heads under the mattresses, and, since they had taken the precaution to wear their cloaks only over their night attire, they were in bed and apparently fast asleep when the light was suddenly switched on, and Miss Primrose and Miss Chawmont, with Edwina Brackdale, quivering with fury, entered the room.

Sleepy heads started up, sleepy eyes blinked at the three in surprise. Miss Primrose looked round.

"Barbara, you are captain of the Fourth here. You are responsible for the order in this dormitory. A few minutes ago six girls—whether from this, from the Lower Fifth, or the Upper Third, I do not know—had the effrontery to impudently Edwina here in one of the staterooms. Edwina suspects that the girls belonged to this dormitory. In fact, she has hinted to me that you are responsible."

Babe looked hard at Edwina.

"Why should I want to make you a prisoner?" she asked. "You are always scolding me. It seems, of sharing you up somewhere."

Miss Primrose frowned.

"Well, perhaps you will acknowledge, Barbara, that she had good reason, after what happened to her to-day. All the same"—she shook her head—although the suspicion is natural, I must warn you, Edwina, against jumping to hasty conclusions. At the same time," Miss Primrose went on, "I will not allow my protests to be heeded and ignored by juvenile girls. If any girl in this dormitory was a member of the club who impudently Edwina, I command them to own up now!"

There was silence.

"Perhaps," Miss Chawmont ventured, "they were girls from some other Form. Miss Primrose, don't you think we'd better make inquiries elsewhere?"

"Obviously, that was the most sensible suggestion."

Miss Primrose passed. One moment longer she waited, then she switched out the light.

"Very well, I will institute further inquiries elsewhere," she said faintly. "Now, please, no noise. Go to sleep. Good-night!"

She went out and the Fourth settled down again.

Babe, under her own sheet, Babe chuckled softly. But it was a chuckle which had rather a grim note in it.

So far as it went, the Society of the Scarlet Star had won its first battle against Edwina.

But Babe was no fool. Edwina, she knew, suspected her. Edwina, in her hour of discovery, her rage at her

humiliation, would have no stone unturned to unmask her.

Well, let Edwina try!

It was evident, the very next morning, that Edwina was on the warpath.

Long before rising bell Babe was up. There was the answer of the knock and the clanks to attend to. Those cushions, hidden hastily under the mattresses last night, could not be left until rising bell, and so, obviously, had to be smuggled out and hidden before the Form was awake. Half an hour before rising bell, while the first grey glimmers of dawn streaked the sky, Babe was up.

She awoke Mabel. Together the two of them collected the dignities. Together they smuggled them downstairs into Study No. 4, where Mabel hid them under a loose floorboard in the cupboard. Hardly had they finished that task than the door came open. It was Edwina who looked in.

She sneezed.

"You're up early!" she commented suspiciously.

"Why, any rule against it?" Babe asked innocently.

"No objection! What were you doing?"

"Just tidying up," Babe replied.

"What have you got in that cupboard?"

"Oh, nothing."

"No?"

Again Edwina's eyes glimmered. She peeped into the study. Then, before Babe could stop her, she had pulled open the cupboard door, peering inside. A few sticks of wood, a neatly folded newspaper, however, was all that rewarded her vision, the unsmuggled dignities lying snug and hidden underneath the floor-board, which had been replaced. She gave them a hard look and went out.

Babe chuckled.

"Trying to get a clue," she said. "She suspects us, all right. But"—and then her eyes glimmered with mischief. "Oh, we hit, we hit a mine!" she cried.

"We'll have some fun, if she jolly well wants class we'll let her have 'em—in abundance." And she laughed again. "We'll give little Edwina something to think about," she finished softly.

Little Edwina, at that moment, had plenty to think about. She suspected, but she could not be sure. Neither did she feel inclined to scoff at the secret society. Their methods plainly showed that they meant business.

After breakfast she reentered back to Study No. 4 again.

And then she passed. A light flashed in her eyes as she stood outside the door. From inside came plainly the rustle of papers, and Babe resting in a dramatic voice.

"And if they should come with all their legions, what care we?" she declaimed thrillingly. "A plague on your possessions, Nipol! I tell you that one man of my army is good enough to beat ten Frenchmen. How's that, Mabel?"

"Jolly good!" Mabel approved. "Go on, Babe."

Edwina extended her hands. They were rehearsing!

Her hand rested upon the handle of the door. In a moment she had flung it in. Babe, whisking a sheet of papers behind her, stared in utter dismay.

"Oh, dear, Edwina! What a start you gave me!"

"I heard you!" Edwina started. "And this time, Barbara Woodson, you're not getting away with it. I thought I told you that Miss Primrose had bargained that play."

"Well, yes, so she has."

"And yet I catch you rehearsing it?"

"But I wasn't!"

" weren't you?" Edwina's eyes

flamed. "When I heard you with my own ears!" she cried. "Give me that script!"

"But it isn't—"

"Give it to me!" Edwina cried.

Babe backed away, the papers still behind her. There was the sound of steps in the passage, but Edwina did not heed that. She almost panted.

"Barbara, I command you! Give those papers to me at once! If you don't, I shall take them!"

"Dear, dear me!" said a voice.

"What is this! You seem very excited and annoyed, Edwina. What papers are those that you are demanding of Barbara?"

Edwina shrieked. Miss Primrose, her face expressing disapproval, stood in the framework of the door. She looked severely at the prefect.

"I must say, Edwina—"

Edwina ground her teeth.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I was only carrying out your orders, Miss Primrose. I have reason to believe that these girls are rehearsing the play you forbade them to act."

Miss Primrose jumped.

"That is a serious accusation, Edwina."

"But it is true!" Edwina said spitefully. "I heard Barbara reciting her lines just now, and if you require further proof," she added passionately, "make Barbara produce the script which she is concealing behind her back at this moment."

Miss Primrose frowned.

"Barbara, is this true?"

"No, Miss Primrose."

Then, perhaps, just to satisfy Edwina, you will show me what you are hiding."

I wasn't hiding anything, Miss Primrose, Babe said meekly. "I was so taken by surprise that, naturally, I jumped back—because, you see," she added, as she withdrew the rustling sheets from behind her, "I don't want to get this messed up or destroyed. It's got new scribbles for the Cliff House magazine. I was just reading out some of the most dramatic bits to Mabel."

Miss Primrose glanced at her sharply. But she took the MS. She glanced at it. One glance was sufficient. She looked at Edwina, and then she handed it back. Very quiet was her tone as she spoke.

"Thank you, Barbara."

"Edwina," she added, "I am sorry that you should have acted so impulsively, and—I might say—suspiciously. It does rather mean to me," she added, passing her lips, "that you are working yourself up into an unnecessary state of suspicion against this girl. I think you had better come to my study."

Edwina, with a glare at the two cherubic faces in Study No. 4, went off. Red-faced, she returned ten minutes later—just in time to see Clara Trevlyn come sneaking in a furtive manner out of Study No. 4. In a moment Edwina had pressed herself into an alcove in the corridor, holding her breath as she saw what Clara held in her hand. It was a card, and as that card was printed—a red star!

Quite plainly that red star was to be seen, though the rest of the card was covered by Clara's hand. Edwina's eyes glared. She made a jump.

"Clara!" she cried.

Clara started as if she had been shot.

"Oh, Edwina!"

"What have you there?"

"Nothing!"

"No! Edwina's lips curled back.

"I've suspected you!" she cried.

"Now I know. Give me that card!"

"But why should you want this card?" Clara said aggressively. "It's not yours. I'm just taking it along to Babe."

"All the same, hand it over!" Edwina snatched.

Clara sighed. With apparent reluctance, she handed the card up. Edwina snatched it from her. Then her face turned purple.

For the card was certainly decorated by a red star, but it was by no means a communication of the sinister secret society. It was simply a card which was given away with Red Star tea.

"You see," Clara explained innocently. "Babe is collecting these. When she's got three thousand, she'll be able to claim a wireless set. Oh, here— I say, Edwina, you're not going!"

But Edwina was. Humiliated, furious, she flung off down the corridor. Clara checked.

And then, for a time at least, was the last they saw of Edwina. But it was by no means the last Edwina saw of them. For after break, going into her study, another message from the mysterious society lay on her desk. She snatched at it and snatched it up. It was brief and to the point:

"REMEMBER! IF THESE GIRLS ARE DETAINED TO-NIGHT, YOU TAKE THE CONSEQUENCES!"

Strangely Edwina screwed it up; scrawled thereon it on the leaping Hesperus of the study fire. She wouldn't, she wouldn't, she told herself! Why should she give in to a pack of jargon-playing jokers? If only she could be sure— Surely there must be some clue upon which she could lay her hands!

The marks—the robes. If she could find out where those robes hidden—

A sudden idea came to Edwina. Her eyes narrowed. If Baba & Co. were guilty, where had they hidden those things last night? Somewhere, obviously, in the Fourth Form dormitory.

Suppose she went up there? Suppose she had a look round? She'd get to do something—and she couldn't risk, after her experience of this morning,

making a fool of herself again. Up to the Fourth Form dormitory she went—and passed as she opened the door, freezing at a snatch of conversation which caught her ears.

"That if you're in detention, how can we meet the boys at six o'clock?"

The question came from Mabel. It was put to Babe. Both of them had sneaked up to the dormitory to talk undisturbed, and they stood now, unaware of the noisiness of the girl who was their enemy standing by the door.

Babe's reply came: "We'll find a way." They moved. That was enough for Edwina. Holding her breath, she softly closed the door. Her eyes were glittering as she moved away again. Meet the boys! At six o'clock that evening.

There was no doubt in her mind as to the purpose of the boys referred to. Jimmy Richmond & Co. and Baba & Co. were meeting them. She clenched her hands. Well, where were they meeting? And how was she to stop it—not only now but for always?

Already she had them in difficulties—but only for two nights. If only she could get them detained till the end of the term! That would put an effectual stopper on rehearsals!

The secret society had been from her mind now. She was thinking of the rehearsal. More afraid of them was Edwina Brookdale than of the secret society, although she still believed that Baba and Mabel had something to do with that. And then, linking these two together, she paused, struck with a brilliant idea. Supposing she pretended to be secret of the secret society? Supposing that she let Baba & Co. go as the secret society demanded?

They'd go. Unsuspecting, never dreaming, they would fly to the rendezvous to meet their boy friends!

Edwina's lips came together. She thought she saw her way now to trap Baba once and for all, and to make rehearsals—for quite a while, at any rate—utterly impossible!

Edwina smiled—slowly and cunningly. The more she thought about the scheme the more she liked it. Soon, indeed, she permitted herself a chuckle.



She Who Watched

"BARBARA REDFERN"

"Here?"
"Yes, Caroline!"
"Adm!" that got re-

marked cheerfully.

"Clara, Tweedy!"

"Oh, I'm here!"

"Mabel Lynn!"

"Yes."

" Janet Jordan and Marjorie Hazle-don. And that." Edwina Brookdale said, looking over the delegates who had just reported in the Fourth Form class-room, "is enough, I think! Get to your places!"

The six exchanged glances. Babe looked at the clock, though she knew the time. That clock registered half-past five.

"Take your places!" Edwina rapped. "Get out your books! I have," she added unnecessarily, "set you some mathematical problems. They are on the board here."

Aud, grasping the board, she turned it over.

"There are ten problems set," she announced, "and you will work them all out to my entire satisfaction. That, I think, should occupy your two hours fully."

The six maintained stolid silence. "And while," Edwina announced, "you are doing them, I am going out. I have an appointment, and I don't see why I should miss it because of you. Barbara Redfern, you will be responsible during my absence for the good behaviour of this class. You understand?"

"Yes," breathed Babe.

"Right! Then let me see you settle down to work."

With suspicious willingness the six settled down. But Babe's heart was drumming. She had feared for a moment that Edwina had got the better of them, after all. She had feared, despite their warnings, that the delegates would have to be released, and Jimmy Richmond & Co., consequently,



WITH stealthy steps Clara, Jermina, and Marjorie made their way towards the crypt—while from the concealment of a bush Edwina watched them go. "At last!" she was exclaiming. "At last—I've got them!"

disappointed. But this proved that those warnings had had effect. This proved they had scared Edwina. What was to prevent them, once Edwina's back was turned, from spying off?

Edwina passed, frowning round the class. Six indignantly bent heads met her pass, and with a final warning, she went out.

"Babe looked up."

"O.K., kids! We've got her!"

"All right!" breathed Marjorie Haddock.

"We won't! But wait five minutes; she might come back."

They waited, but Edwina, obviously, had no intention of coming back. Babe rose.

"Good enough," she said. "That settles it, I think. Janet, you're to be the waiter. Jimmy & Co. will be at the top in the hedge. Babe, you and I will take the tickets alone. Bring the boys into the old chapel, James. We'll all meet there in ten minutes' time."

Janet nodded. She flew off at once. While Babe and James, and Marjorie, made their way to the crypt. Outside on the lawn a figure crouched behind a laurel-bush; that figure's furtive eyes followed their every movement.

Edwina could have guessed in her job. She had them now! Cautiously she slipped them across in the Classroom, sliding behind one of the raised pillars as she saw them enter the crypt. Her eyes blazed when, two minutes later, Janet appeared, escorting the four boys from Friarville School. Her heart seemed to stick in her throat when Babe and Babe came cautiously tripping forward, each carrying a bulky parcel.

"Comment!" she thought. Edwina. "They're using them in the rehearsal!"

The whole crowd had disappeared into the crypt now. Edwina smiled with peculiarly dry eyes. Now she had them! Her wait! She was going to make it! Her finger pointed to the circumstance. Easy enough to have run off and brought Primmy on the scene. But that would never do, as it happened, for Primmy must certainly want to know why she had left the detention class when she had been in charge of it.

Better, more far-reaching idea than that was required. While she was about it, she wanted to make it impossible for other rehearsals to take place—at least, for a very, very long time. If she could get the Co. going for a fortnight, for instance, that, surely, would throw all their programmes completely out of gear.

She thought. Well, supposing she made it appear that Babe & Co. had broken bounds? Supposing they were missing at all-over! Supposing they would come down heartily on those for that, and they could hardly explain where they had been and what they had been doing without confessing that they had most flagrantly disobeyed her most strict orders.

Edwina checked. That was her cue! That was the task she set herself now to carry out.

Babe and marks were put away. Unaware of the prober above, the rehearsal took place. The first act, of course, going to the amusement of Marjorie's departure, was the one, and only one, they concerned themselves with. Not, however, that there was any great difficulty. Everybody had their lines off, and everybody—inspired, enthusiastic, acted their parts marvelously. At the end of it, Babe professed unbounded delight.

"Topping!" she cried. "One more rehearsal, and we can leave that act until Marjorie comes back! Now, when shall we do it for?"

"To-morrow!" Jimmy Richmond asked.

"O.K.! What time?"

"Well, what price three o'clock in the afternoon? There's no reason why we shouldn't meet again here."

Three o'clock, here, it shall be, then! Richmond agreed heartily.

And so that was arranged. Babe laughed. She felt pleased, contented. Edwina, in spite of all the setbacks she had planned for them, had been completely unnoticed. The rehearsal had been an unqualified success, and, providing they played their cards well, there was no reason why they should not carry on, making others equally successful.

She led the way towards the stairs. And then, reaching the dark passage which gave access to these stairs, she stopped with a jump, at the same time retreating off her torch so abruptly that Jessica, following on her heels, came into her.

"Hi! What—"

"Quiet!" hissed Babe.

"But why—"

"Because," came Babe's stammering reply, "there's a girl sitting at the top of the stairs! And that girl—she gulped—" is Edwina Brookdale!"

In blank consternation, they gazed at her.

EDWINA BROOKDALE it was.

And Edwina, having taken up that position, meant to stick there.

She knew very well that she could be seen from below. That was part of her plan. While she remained, Babe & Co. would hardly dare come up, and by the time she removed herself there would be a hue and cry for them all over the school. For, as it happened, Edwina, taking advantage of the privilege which was accorded to prefects on evening detention duty, was untraced all-over, and need not report herself, indeed, until after lights out in the boys' school.

She smiled slyly as she heard the faint shuffle below, guessing by that that her presence was spotted. Well, let there remain there, she told herself. Let them remain until she chose to move! By the time that happened, they would have been missed from all-over, and missed also from the dormitory.

She shivered. It was cold. Again she listened. No sound now. What were they doing down there, she wondered, in the black, black darkness. A few shabby flakes of dirty snow fell, slipping her face.

She coughed a little. Somewhere in the school a bell rang. That would be her prep. She, surely, she sat on. Then another bell—the bell for supper. Another half an hour, and it would be all-over.

And then—

She gazed. All her waiting, with its attendant discomforts, would have been worth while. Like rats in a trap she had caught Babe & Co.; and not

only Babe, but Jimmy Richmond & Co. Cause for satisfaction in that rehearsal. There'd be no more rehearsals after this—no, anyway, for a jolly long time! Primmy would give the whole crowd for at least a fortnight.

And then suddenly she started, creaking back. Footsteps—coming from the direction of the school! Round the angle of the building the sudden flashing of an electric torch. In a moment Edwina was on her feet, and in the same moment the all-revealing beams of the torch had imprisoned her in its rays. Two figures moved out of the gloom towards her.

Then came an exclamation:

"Edwina, as it is true, then? Have you taken leave of your senses, girl?"

"Senseless!" Edwina stammered, her wits momentarily put to flight.

And desperately, deeply, she blinked into the face of Miss Primrose. From Miss Primrose to the second figure, vaguely made out to be a girl. In the glare she could not see her face.

"What are you doing here?"

"I—I'm watching," she replied.

"Watching?" Miss Primrose looked perfunctorily across as she gazed into the deep-seated darkness of the lonely cloister. "Watching what?"

"I—I'm watching Barbara Reddick," Edwina gasped, realising now that there was nothing for it but to make the best of a bad job. "I think you ought to know, Miss Primrose, that she's in the crypt—yes, and not only Barbara," she went on obediently, "but five other girls, and Richmond and his friends from Friarville School as well!"

Miss Primrose stared.

"Edwina, really? How say you?"

"They're rehearsing the play you forbade."

"Edwina, please!" Miss Primrose's voice froze. "Let us talk with this ridiculous nonsense. Are you dressing, or going mad?"

"But I tell you—"

"And I tell you," Miss Primrose retorted, her voice gathering impatient indignation, "that you are behaving like a revengeful child. Edwina. Half an hour ago I went into the Fourth Form classroom, to discover, to my amazement, that your detention class was still in session, and you yourself absent. That," Miss Primrose went on mildly, "in spite of the fact that it was long past their time for dismissal, I released them, and sent Barbara to bed you."

Edwina felt the ground heaving beneath her feet.

"Barbara came back to report that you were sitting here on the steps—"

"But—but—no, Miss Primrose, it couldn't be—it couldn't! I tell you—"

"Are you sure it was Barbara?"

"Of course," put in the figure of Miss Primrose's side, "she is sure, Edwina! Because, you see—"

And here Barbara herself stepped within the full radius of the light, gazing up at her with gentle, misinterpreted innocence.

"Here I am, Edwina!"

"And Edwina, staring at her, almost fell down."

WAS AN ANNOUNCEMENT, the meeting of the Secret Society of the Boyer Star was in full swing.

It was not a long meeting. Exciting as the happening at Cliff House has been, Jimmy Richmond & Co. had little to report. They were watching Marchant, and Marchant was watching them. By a trick they had got him out of the way to attend the meeting.

"Then that's all right," Babe said. "Warm as it seems as there are developments. Now, everybody—rehearsal!"



The Query

"H. A. H. H. H.!"
Laughter, loud and long, echoed from Study No. 4, in the Fourth Form corridor.
Barbara Reddick & Co. certainly had something to laugh about.

For Babe had just been relating, with a wealth of graphic detail, the discomfiture of Edwina on the step of the crypt—said, loudly, and stately feathered— Perhaps it was unlucky for Edwina that in her vindictive determination to get the better of Babe, once and for all, she had never thought of that ancient secret passage which connected the crypt with the old clock tower. Or perhaps she had never heard of it, for among girls who did know of it, it remained a jealously guarded secret.

But that was how Babe & Co. had found their way back, defeating all the well-laid plans of Edwina at the same time. That is why they laughed.

Edwina, slouching along the corridor, fuming, and red-faced after a very biting interview with Miss Primrose, heard that laughter and scowled.

Now, for the first time, it was directed upon Edwina that in Babe & Co., and the secret society she had met her match. Fear filled her—fear, not so much for the secret society, as for the evidence she was receiving that Babe & Co. meant to carry on with their rebellions to the bitter end.

Not that Edwina had given up hope. She could not afford to give up hope. Her whole future, her every prospect, depended upon her, making it impossible for Jaka Stewart, and one certain girl in the Fourth Form to meet—as they certainly would, if ever that play saw the light of day.

If she could only catch one of them, she thought—just one! But in vain for the rest of that evening she hung about the Fourth Form corridor. In vain, was up with the next morning to rummage her wardrobe.

Leaving none. In the faint hope of making trouble for one or the other of the Co., she poked her head into the Fourth Form classroom just before Miss Chatterbox arrived.

And then for a moment, it seemed, luck did relent and smile upon Edwina.

For she was just in time to see a note slipped into Janet Jordan's hand, which Janet hastily hid in her exercise-book.

"Janet!" she rapped at once.

Janet jumped.

Instinctively her hand went to the exercise-book. But she was too late. Edwina, conspicuously striding forward, caught it, grabbed it up. Out of it fell a card. It contained just the briefest of messages.

"Don't forget—4 p.m."

"What does this refer to?" she demanded.

Janet shut her lips.

"Who gave it to you?" Edwina harked, glaring round.

Janet shook her head.

Edwina paused, glittering her eyes round the faces of the class. The card, obviously referred to an appointment. Another rehearsal, perhaps. Well, she'd stop there. But here comes the play by routine that Janet had got this secret important part. She glanced that without Janet the rehearsal could not take place. Her lips set.

"Then, since you refuse to answer questions," she said, "you will repeat to me every half-hour after break."

The dismay which flled Janet's face at that told Edwina that she had struck a shrewd blow. Indeed, dismay flled all the seat.

At break there was a lousy meeting of the secret society in the attic.

"She suspects," Bala breathed, "She jolly well knows that if we don't have Janet, we can't rehearse. What Janet reports to her, she'll think we



A SCREAM left Janet's lips as she found herself suddenly on the edge of the quarry. Wildly she flung herself back—but too late. Edwina saw her plunge into the depths.

are all of us in her power—under her thumb!"

"The cat!" stormed Clara. "What shall we do—"

"Just a tick, Clara! I want to think it out." And Bala eyes glowered.

"No, B!" she called.

Janet stiffened.

"Yes!"

"You have taken the vow," Bala told her seriously, speaking now as leader of the society. "Are you still prepared to go through with your part?"

"I am."

"Are you willing to sacrifice yourself in the interests of the society, and of the play?"

Janet passed before replying. Then: "I am!" she said firmly.

"Good!" Bala drew a deep breath. "Then this is what you must do. As it happens," Bala went on, "the rehearsal can go on without you in the costume as we shall have to use you. We have a jolly fine understudy in Lucy Faraday, and she must be asked to play the part for this afternoon. Janet, you will report to Edwina at five o'clock, and so on for every half-hour—"

Janet nodded, ready to obey.

"But at half-past two you will not report," Bala went on with emphasis. "You won't do so, deliberately Edwina will be suspicious then and come to look for you. Watch out for her. When you see her lead her a chase. She'll think you are off to join us. See?"

"I see," Janet said and smiled.

"Get her away from the school," Bala went on. "We learn from past experience that she'll follow. That will get her out of the way and leave us free to carry on with the rehearsal, and we'll carry on with it for as long as you can keep Edwina engaged."

Enthusiastically Janet nodded.

The meeting broke up then. Janet went off to make her first report.

At half past one, just as dinner was over, she reported again.

At two o'clock she brought out Edwina, and mockingly announced once more.

At two-thirty Edwina was gently waiting again for her in her study. She glanced at the clock.

Five minutes ticked by. No Janet! Ten! Still no Janet! Edwina's lips compressed. So the girl was defying her orders was she? She meant, in spite of everything to join her friends! Edwina's lips twisted into a maliciously satisfied smile. Suddenly she rose, stamping off towards the Fourth Form corridor.

Then, rushing into the corridor, she passed Janet.

For the door of Study No. 7, in which Janet belonged, was opening. As she stopped, Janet herself appeared. She was dressed ready for going out. The very mouth and earliness of her manner showed that she was up to something which she had no right to be. Edwina frowned back.

Janet was off to the secret rehearsal! Her heart beat sharply now. What a chance for her! This time there should be no mistake, no bungling. Janet,

unwillingly, should lead her to the sweet vindication. And then—

When Janet moved away Edwina moved, too. Janet, as if unaware that she was being followed, had already hurried. When she drove she raced, Edwina following at a discreet distance along the road plunging into the woods. Edwina's heart cracked. But careful, careful now.

Janet hurried on. Now and again Edwina lost sight of her but always catching footprints in the undergrowth led her on. Through the woods she faithfully trailed, emerging on the friendly side, and there sighting her quarry again as she struck across country in the direction of the old quarry. Edwina chuckled. Plenty of cover was afforded by the ditch. Carefully she kept to it.

But where was Janet going? Bill Janet kept on. The potential Duke seemed would be in full swing now. Dick was beginning to fall, shored in by a smiling girl which changed in the lower levels. To herself Janet grinned. How beautifully had Edwina fallen into her trap! She wondered if it had her down upon the perfect yet that she was being made the victim of another gigantic pig pull.

She raised a swift glance round. And then—

Then it was that misadventure took a hand. Then that fortune, so far smiling upon her efforts, turned her sudden frown. In the mist which veiled about her knees Janet, unaware of the dangerous nature of the ground she trod, took her one more unnecessary step forward. The late she saw the disaster which threatened, too late stopped back from the empty air, falling which she had placed her feet, realising with a thrill of horror that she had reached the edge of the old quarry.

Forward she pitched, outward she fell. She saw, dimly, the ground rushing up to sweep her—

When Edwina, frightened out of her skin, reached her, Janet Jordan lay unconscious at the bottom of the quarry, one foot twisted beneath her.

THE PERFORMER had been a success. They had accomplished all that they had set out to achieve. Lucy Farraday, in Janet's part, was all that could be desired. Marjorie, word and gesture perfect, and incapable of improvement, was fully rehearsed at last. Act One was quite complete. Marjorie could go away with an easy mind; leaving the rest of the cast to carry on.

It was a happy, jubilant Babs & Co. who, bidding good-bye to Jennie Binkwood and his chaperon, tripped lightly back to the schoolhouse after that rehearsal, a rehearsal, thanks to Janet, which had run smoothly from first to last without hitch or interruption. But it was a very startled and utterly dumfounded Babs & Co. who heard the dismaying news.

Janet, their chaperon, had fallen into the old quarry. Edwina Brookdale had found her and brought her back to school. Janet had broken one of the small bones in her foot and would not be able to walk, much less act, for weeks to come!

Compassion and horror blotted out their happiness as the cast is blotted out by shock.

Off at once they rushed to the school sanatorium, whither Janet had been taken. There, peeped between snow-white pillows, they found her. There they listened to her story. Janet smiled wearily.

"Babs, I—I'm sorry!"

Babs gulped.

"Old thing?"

"But it was for the sake of the play."

"I—I did trick her, didn't I, Babs?"

Babs could not reply.

"Babs," Janet spoke after a long pause. "Was Lucy all right in my part?"

Babs nodded.

"And—did you'll give it to her? Because, you know"—with a twistedly-rueful smile—"I—I shan't be able to act now."

Babs bit her lip. She rose, glancing at her chaperon. Rightly she inclined her head and they marched out as Janet with a sigh closed her eyes. In the corridor they came face to face with Edwina who passed them with a supercilious nod and laid down.

But as Babs & Co. went off down the corridor she smiled, a slow, cunning smile. Her nose heart was thumping with exultation. Happiness, relief, hope once again filled her. What Babs & Co. had done without Janet that afternoon she did not know. Nor, now, did she care. For once it seemed the fate had been on her side. That accident, so dreadfully unlucky from poor Janet's point of view, was just about the best thing that could have happened from her own.

For she knew now that Marjorie was leaving school at the end of the week. She knew that Janet had had the essential part and acting in any shape or form would be impossible for her until the end of the term. What her own schooling had failed to do, fate had had luck had achieved for her!

The play, inevitably, was squashed. Impossible now for further rehearsals to take place.

So Edwina was happy and triumphant. In her gloe she went to the schoolhouse. In glowing triumph was connected with her father.

"It's all right," she told him. "I've done it. The play won't take place."

"You're sure?"

"Positive. I've made it just impos-

sible."
"Thank goodness." A relieved sigh came to her ears. "Good work, Edwina. I'll send you an extra remittance with my next letter."

With a laugh Edwina hung up. Back she went towards her own study, passed as a new thought came to her and, changing direction, made her way to the phone-box again, this time to ascertain Miller with her success. But at the door she paused. Another girl was in there, speaking into the receiver, Babs!

Edwina stood stock still.
"No, Jimmy; it's all right," Babs was saying. "Yes, of course the play is still on! Janet's crooked, but we've got a ripping understudy in Lucy Farraday, and Lucy has agreed to fill Janet's part—"

Edwina pumped; then stood like a girl turned to stone.

Lucy Farraday!
Lucy was in the play! Lucy, above all people!

Edwina's face turned ashen.

For Lucy Farraday was the very girl who had inspired her every attempt to smash the play.

Lucy was the girl she had lived in mortal dread of John Street meeting if ever the play took place. For Lucy was, in reality, John Street's own daughter, the child her father had caused to be kidnapped and reported dead so many years ago!

Scared she had been of Lucy attending the play even as one of the audience, but with Lucy on the stage, Lucy in the leading role, what could prevent John Street from recognizing her now!

THE END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.



is the intriguing title of the brilliant, long complete Cliff House Secret Society story which

HILDA RICHARDS

has written for the next issue of

THE SCHOOLGIRL.

It tells in vivid fashion how the Society—under the daring leadership of Babs—combat Edwina's scheming plans to smash the play which she chafes at so resolved to produce.

It is packed with exciting and unusual incidents and all your favourites of the Fourth Form are in the limelight.

Do not miss this grand treat in **THE SCHOOLGIRL** next Saturday. Order your favourite paper right away.

STARTS TO-DAY: Betty Barton & Co. In a Great New Serial of Mystery at Morcove and Swanlake



Strange Meeting

HER SECRET AT SWANLAKE

By **MARJORIE STANTON**



"At last! So now—the next few minutes should decide everything!"

She was whispering the words to herself—the girl who, for a full hour, had been laughing about in this lonely spot.

"And now I know why I missed her on the train," she muttered, watching the brisk approach of another girl who had suddenly come into view round a bend in the narrow lane. "She's done the last bit of the journey by bus. Hysteria, that!"

And Vittoria Marro gazed a wide grin. At the same time, she glanced round to make sure that nobody, except the other girl for whom she had laid in wait, was in sight.

Vittoria Marro's reason, for wanting not a word to see her in talk with that other girl, was her own guilty secret.

But there was no one about, and so she had no hesitation in emerging from her hiding-place and advancing to meet—her intended victim!

"Ah—yes," she smiled remark with which, a few seconds later, she caught the bristly walking girl to stand still, looking pleasantly surprised. "Are you Claire Ferrand?"

"Yes, I am. But you—are you someone from Swanlake, come to meet me?"

"No, I'm nothing to do with Swanlake."

"You're not? Then who—I mean to say, in that case, I don't understand!"

Claire Vittoria Marro, who had all the nerve in the world, gave a smile.

"It's important you should know who I am—before you go on to Swanlake," Vittoria said slyly. "And that's why I've so glad to have caught you like this. I wanted to get a word with you as I passed, where you broke your journey."

"Oh, I'm sorry! I had to wait an hour, so I went out into the city to see the cathedral and all that. And then I missed the branch line train that was to take me to the station for Swan-

lake. But I got a moon-catch that put me down at some cross-roads, only a mile from here."

"I see. But how very funny!" laughed Vittoria Marro. "You, a girl who has just come into a huge fortune—to turn up at Swanlake on foot!"

Claire Ferrand laughed against herself.

"I know—it does seem rather absurd. I can imagine that lawyer, up in London, who arranged everything so nicely, being furious! But as long as the Willoughbys aren't annoyed, I don't mind."

"You've been fettered over from Australia, on account of the fortune—and it's been arranged for you to stay for a bit at Swanlake?"

"That's right—with the Willoughbys. Terribly nice people, the lawyer told me, and they must be, to have offered to have me—a complete stranger. Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby are abroad, it seems, but there'll be their daughter, Pam, Fanny," Claire Ferrand gaily rattled on, "the Willoughbys have been so nice, they've even arranged for Pam to be a day girl at Morcove, instead of boarding there, so that I can see lots of her and not be dull."

"Sounds grand! And—oh dear!" Vittoria Marro changed to a deploring sigh. "If only—"

"What, what?" jerked Claire, her pretty brows going up.

"Listen! Last night, you dined with that lawyer at the Monopole Hotel, in London?"

"Yes, I did. He wanted to give me a treat—and so it was. After living on an Australian sheep station up to a couple of months ago, London is marvellous! But what has my dining at the Monopole to do with—all this?"

"I was at the Monopole, last night, at the next table to yours, but that doesn't mean that you ought to recognize me now. As a matter of fact, I was in disguise."

"In disguise?"

"Nothing unusual for a girl, either. You see, I happen to be a girl detective. I found I had a sort of flair for it, some time back, and ever since I've made it my hobby. Why I like it so; there's not only all the excitement, the thrill of tackling a problem, but some-

times it enables one to save an innocent person from being sent to prison. As you may see—"

"What?" gasped the other girl. "I may be—sent to prison? I, Claire Ferrand?"

"For the theft of a most valuable pearl necklace, in the cloak-room at the Monopole, last night," Vittoria Marro rejoined, with a suitably grave nod.

"The necklace was undoubtedly stolen from its owner whilst she was in the cloak-room. You were there at the time and so, just as it happened, was I. You went away a few moments before the alarm was given, but I was still there, and—I'm terribly sorry, but I heard you being spoken of—described—as the girl who must have taken the necklace."

"But—but it's absurd!" burst out Claire Ferrand, with the furious stamp of a spirited girl. "Somebody! I had absolutely nothing to do with it. And if they're thinking of taking proceedings, why, I shall simply tell that lawyer of mine to—"

"Ah, it isn't as easy as all that—not on the evidence," came Vittoria's respectful interjection. "What you will do, if you're wise, is to leave everything to me. I can save you—provided you keep out of the hands of the police. They have a fairly good description of you, and the hotel people may help them to find out lots more, you understand. They may trace you to Swanlake."

"Let them! I don't care. I'm not afraid."

"Oh, if you will talk like that—though it does you credit, of course—then I'm afraid you must put up with the consequences. Notion, for a girl who has just come into a fortune, to have to go to prison. But—"

"But what would you have me do, then, if I leave the case in your hands?"

"You must go into hiding. Only for a little while—"

"Go into hiding!" Claire echoed. "That seems strange advice. Surely the worst thing an innocent person can do is to hide from the police!"

"I guessed you'd say that. Of course, after the best way is to face things out; but in this case—"

Clear enough to assume such a proud and impressive manner, Vivienne Murre now had Claire Ferrard reduced to silence. That girl, although still frankly amazed, could only nod to Vivienne to continue.

"It's asking you to put great faith in me as a stranger," the self-styled "detective" placidly remarked. "I can only say that, thanks to being on the scene last night, I have a line to work upon. Yet if I go to the police and put my ideas before them, they'll only laugh at me. I have had a good deal of that before now. Never mind what I may say, they'll still be out to get you!"

Claire Ferrard frowned. "Anyway," she broke out, "for you to be able to handle the affair your way, you should be necessary for me to watch! That's what I don't see."

"There's no time now for proper explanation, but I could convince you later on, easily. For my purpose, you must not be at Swanlake for the police to turn up and arrest you. I'm the one to be at Swanlake."

"Yes!"

"Yes—Vivienne Murre, the girl detective, at whose the police laugh. There is a great deal I shall be able to do from Swanlake."

Suddenly Claire Ferrard burst out laughing.

"But it's ridiculous—oh, impossible! If I watch, what will Pam Wiloughby think? Her parents are abroad, and on that don't matter. But Pam herself!"

"Easy, my dear!" Vivienne smiled in return. "I've just been saying I must be at Swanlake as Vivienne Murre. All she means is that I must obtain Pam Wiloughby's permission to stay abroad, for reasons connected with your non-arrival."

Claire spoke after a moment's silence: "Please don't be offended if I say it all seems thinking about! But let's walk on, and then you can explain better. I mean to say, this idea of hiding, it seems so—so fantastic!"

"Right-ho, then, we'll go along to Swanlake together; only we mustn't let ourselves be seen, in case—Vivienne Murre smiled gravely—"you are, it's the cat, guided by me."

"I'm not likely to be, I warn you!"

But she was.

The tongue that had so much to say to her during the next ten minutes was the tongue of a girl who, at moments, was living very successfully by her wits.

Vivienne Murre easily and convincingly lulled the suspicions of her latest dupes by the time they were in sight of stately Swanlake.

From a wood on the edge of the vast private park they first saw the mansion itself—the ancestral home of the Wiloughbys, and one of the show places of the West Country.

"Look at the size of the place!" Vivienne Murre whispered. "It should be easy enough to find a hiding-place here. Wait a moment, Claire Ferrard, and I'll go on and see what I can do."

Half an hour later she came dragging back to her intended victim.

"Come on, for I've found the very place!" she triumphantly whispered. "An upstairs room in an old wing of the house, where I'm sure no one ever goes."

And to that long-dimmed room they came presently, unknown to any of the Swanlake servants. Vivienne had done everything with such cleverness, Claire no longer marveled at the girl's fondness for "anxious detour" work.

"I mustn't hang about," Vivienne said, under her breath. "But, of course, I'll be looking in on you frequently, and I'll easily keep you supplied with— Oh, I can hear a car!" she broke off. "Two cars, coming up the drive. For the present, then—"

Claire nodded, and next moment Vivienne Murre was outside the room, drawing the door shut behind her quite silently.

"For the present," she echoed her last words to the unresponsive door. "But when you are, there you stay. Claire Ferrard, until I've feathered my nest—of your expense!"

The Girl from Australia

THE two cars which had been heard as they came whining up the winding drive, stopped within a few yards of each other in front of Swanlake's columned porch.

Out of the first car jumped tall Pam Wiloughby, lit as usual with great delight as she saw some of her best chums of Moscow School hurrying out of the second motor. She ran towards them, laughing the comment:

"Very nearly, girls, you turned up without my being at home to greet you! Sorry, but when I explain you'll understand."

"But Pam, dear, what about that girl from Australia, then?" demanded Betty Barton, the Form's popular captain. "Hasn't she turned up yet?"

"That's just it—she hasn't," was the wiled answer with which Pam intimated all her chums. "Here I've taken the day off from school, simply to be on hand to welcome Claire Ferrard—"

"And we girls have all come over from Moscow on purpose to meet her!" cried madcap Polly Lester. "Great excitement; guessing in class this afternoon, because half past three looked like never coming—"

"And now—swanella!" shrieked that jolly girl, Nanceo Nakara. "Behave! I suppose, we can't have tea until we find out how you are!"

"Oh, yes, we can," Pam serenely smiled, walking her chums to the porch. "I don't know when Claire will turn up now. I don't know what's happened. All her luggage came along by the right train, and so Claire with it! I've just back from a second run to Barrow Junction—well for nothing!"

"Goodness, what a blessing!"

"Butas you must wait your tea as usual as we do, Pam!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

They could see at least some of Claire Ferrard's luggage, where it had been stowed aside in Swanlake's wonderful entrance-hall. But what Pam's chums were more inclined by notice was the lovely line of logs blazing upon the old-fashioned hearth, and certain signs that tea would be served three-quarters. Chairs and small tables were all set in readiness, and cake-trays held platters whose contents were enough to make Nanceo's mouth water.

"I thought we might have tea here, girls—"

"Rather!" cried some, while Nanceo yelled: "Gorja! As for elegant Pam's food, that comfort-lover of the Study No. 12 chummers, she promptly dropped the book into a deep spiderweb with the signed remark:

"Most welcoming, but Jove! Chawing!"

"And while I was waiting about at Barrow Junction for trains to come in," Pam chattered on, during the disbanding of outdoor things, "I thought I might as well look in at Barrowdale Castle. Just

as well I did! Listen! You know the town is to have a gala week, in aid of local charities? Lord and Lady Landy, at the castle, are doing all they can to make the thing go with a bang. And now, this afternoon, I've been asked to—"

Terr-r-ring! Pam's vivacious voice was interrupted by a sharp ring at the porch-bell Terr-r-ring, ring!

"Oh!" cried an electrified batch of Moscowites. "There she is! Pam dear—"

"Yes, well," was the Swanlake girl's characteristic manner; and she crossed quickly to the outer door. Indeed Pam crowded Betty and the rest, eager for a first sight of one about whose great stroke of fortune they had been hearing so much of late. Claire Ferrard, come from the other side of the world, to enjoy a life of sudden riches!

Pam drew the hall-door wide open, and at the sight of the well-groomed girl who was waiting to be admitted, she said most cordially:

"So there you are, at last!"

"Yes," the fresh arrival sweetly smiled, "I'm Claire Ferrard."

But she was not.

She was Vivienne Murre, daintily peering at the girl who, but a few minutes since, had gone into hiding!

"Do come in and meet my chums," Pam cried. "You look a bit tired! And you've turned up on foot!"

"Oh, I'm fine, thanks, but I'm terribly sorry if I've put you about!" pleaded the impostor, whilst treating all the girls to ingratiating smiles. "I had to break my journey at Exeter, and, well! It ended in my missing the branch-line train to Barrowdale. Then they said I'd better come on by motor-bus. I've only had a mile to walk; and oh, I have enjoyed my afternoon! Quite thrilling!"

She laughed, giving herself an air as she went to the fireplace and held her hands to the blaze. For just a moment or two those who were alone, the Moscow girls very warmly exchanging congratulatory glances. "First impressions always reliable!" Betty, a particularly shrewd girl, could tell that Polly and others were thinking:

"How pretty! But not a bit like the expected her to be, coming from Australia!"

Then tea was brought in by a couple of parlourmaids, and Pam's acquitting the supposed Claire with the who's who of the party resulted in a great host of happy talk.

At last, "Claire Ferrard" was either having herself talked about, or was being encouraged to talk about herself. If some of her pretence to eager questions were a bit offhand, that, however, was, was perhaps to her credit. The chums would not have liked her to be able to think of nothing else but her own great stroke of fortune.

About her life in Australia up to a few months ago she was definitely reticent; but perhaps that was because it had been such a hard, dark life, now best forgotten.

Betty and Polly could easily imagine that being the reason why she so often tried to change the conversation. But it was Betty who noticed with slight surprise her reference once to a sheep ranch in New Zealand, in Australia, they always spoke of a sheep station!

But there was that gala week topic to come up for discussion by the time second cups were going round. Then Claire Ferrard's personal affairs dropped out of the talk, to stay out.

She herself, learning that the men was for Pam and her claims to get up some stunts for the girls, showed the greatest concern.

"I can take part, can I?" she eagerly pleaded, after hearing various suggestions proposed and "carried over" with the usual unanimity of Betty & Co. "I mean to say, as I shall be here at Swanlake, and you talk of rehearsing here—"

"Of course, Claire!"
A bit of amateur acting it was to be, Polly undertaking to write a musical sketch, with songs that Madge Milder would put to music.

Papayntsy was wanted, and colour, too, local colour for preference. So the playlet was to deal with the older times in Harrodscombe, calling for plenty of dressing-up—

"And what about dresses, costumes?" the stern Claire came back into all the chatter; "we needn't spare any expense! I can get a cheque out of my lawyer chap in London: I'll write to him to send me twenty pounds, straight away—"

"Oh, you don't want to do that, Claire," laughed Pam. "We needn't buy, needn't even hire. I could take you all upstairs now to a room in the east wing where heaps of things can be rented out that will, I'm sure, just do."

"Oh, fine!" clapped Betty and the other girls.

But the sham Claire Ferrand—her heart was missing a beat. The east wing! That must be where she had the real Claire hidden away. Great good news, if all those girls were agreeing there, they might blunder upon the girl. And if they did that—good-bye then to all one's hopes of at least a slice of the fortune!

She set down her cup and saucer and got up.

"Say Pam, may I just slip up to my room? There's a trunk I want to get open, to get at something. Don't any of you go away until I come back, will you?"

The request was too lightly noticed for it to give offence. Besides, the chance took it as another sign of Claire Ferrand's eccentricism for the stunt.

She sped away, and although there were some incoherent remarks about the nice type of girl she seemed to be, again the chatter switched back to that other topic.

"I can imagine what a grand choice of things is away there'll be upstairs in that room!" Betty said to Pam.

"Things your granny used to wear, and her gossamer before her!"

"Yes, weather, hat, dove, charming!" chimed in Paula. "See me, girls, in a loupéé skirt, what? And my hair in ringlets!"

Marie-Louise Madge had gone to the dressing-room and was already improvising on the grand piano. The few here she was heard to play were so suggestive of a "Merrie England" theme that her chance ran in to her, clapping.

"That's the stuff, Madge! An opening chorus in that!"

"But, Pam," disapproved over-impatient Polly, "can't we go up to the east wing? We shall soon have to be off back to Morocco, worst luck!"

"Yes, but Claire did sort of ask us to wait for her," Pam demurred. "I should hate to appear rude to her. We might wait just a few minutes. I've given her the parrot-room, you girls know it; does it ring?"

"I've slept there!" Benny sparkled, as they all drifted back to the hall. "The parrot-room, because there's such

wonderful tapestry; peacocks on a terrace."

"Claire might have taken this parrot-room, whilst she was about it," Betty lightly remarked. "But I know her room, as I'll take it up for her. She may need it, a bag she would leave with her on the journey."

The other pieces of luggage were very heavy, as they, too, might have been portered upstairs by various good-natured Moroccan.

As it was, Betty went aloft all by herself, sending once again the stately dignity of Pam's home as she came off the picture-long staircase and turned into a panelled bed-room corridor.

Just as she entered the corridor, it seemed to her that someone was slipping round a corner at the far end.

At the moment she supposed it must have been one of the maids, although the girlish figure, viewed from here, had not appeared to be in uniform. But when Betty, having tapped at the door of the parrot-room, received no answer, she was seized with the sudden belief that it had been Claire Ferrand, just then. And she wondered why.

Not liking to go on with the bag uninvited, she sat it down outside the closed door. And then, in the act of returning downstairs, she hesitated.

If it really had been Claire, sitting about the house like that, rather strange!

What could Claire's motive be for such furtive behaviour, for such apparent secrecy?

Back to Betty's mind flew a recollection of Claire's evasive answers to the dame's interested questions about Australia. And to Betty, always so shrewd, so quick to sense anything unusual about a person, Claire's strange attitude since her arrival at Swanlake seemed mysterious!

And in that moment the captain of

the Fourth resolved to keep her eyes open.

What to do now, though? Wait for Claire to come back? Oh, considering one had been feeling a bit puzzled about her during tea, how about going to look for her?

Betty decided to do that, and an inability to find the girl anywhere close to the parrot-room only increased the predicament.

Still looking for Claire Ferrand, the Marquis upstairs soon found herself in the seldom-used east wing, and she was going to leave out laughing at the idea of Claire being here, when—

"What's that?" Betty breathed to herself, greatly startled.

She was positive she had heard an exquisite whisper; a girl's voice that might have been Claire's. Something about a cupboard!

Next second, Betty was slipping round into a dingy narrow passage, serving-rooms, from one of which the whisper must have come.

Now was she kept in doubt as to which room door to make for. A footfall sounded—a cautious footfall. She threw open the door and walked in, and there was the girl who had so curiously turned up at tea-time ready to give a little frustrated laugh.

"Hallo, Betty! So you've found your way here, as well! The east wing—and isn't it thrilling!"

"Yes, but I thought you spoke of coming back to all of us downstairs!" Betty returned, her suspicion of this other girl strengthening every moment. "I came up, because I thought I'd bring up a bag for you. What's the idea?"

Victoria Marro, impostor, stood as back-seller.

"What do you mean? What's the idea?"

"Well, instead of waiting for Pam to show you the way—"



[I]n the gloom of the corridor Betty had a sudden glimpse of a figure darting furtively into the shadows. Could it be—Claire Ferrand? And, if so, what was she doing here?

"Oh, will Pam think anything of that, when Swanlake's to be my home, and the whole place is so fascinating!—I just did like seeing the view, before dark, from a window on this side of the house, that's all!"

Betty received this in silence. The girl had not been at the window when she—Betty—walked in. She had been moving away from a cupboard! "Pam's big confession, then!" Betty duly remarked, looking at its closed oak doors. "I wonder if this is the room where we're to rearrange our those old frocks and things?"

The false Claire Ferrand gave the cupboard a careless glance. Then she stopped to it and tried the door.

"But it's locked," she said airily; "and no key in the lock. Hello," she said, after rapping with her knuckles. "Empty?"

"Yes, think so?"
"Yes, I do!"

There was just time for that distinctly tasty answer to call up a look in Betty's face which implied: "Well, I don't!"

Then, both girls leaved broken voices, the sound of many feet, and Pam was here, with a merry nod at her heels.

A Key to Open the Cupboard

"Oh, Pam dear," Betty eagerly began, "we both—"

"Quite all right! This is the room!"

"Hurray!" cheered the skittish ones.

"Where do we begin then, Pam?"

"Those two old desecrators, for a start; don't wait for me," Swanlake's schoolgirl daughter smiled. "Just lift up their lids, and I'm sure you'll come upon loads of useful stuff. Then there's this cupboard—"

"Yes, there's the cupboard!" Betty agreed, watching the girl with whom she had begun to have "words" just now.

"But it's locked," the sham Claire Ferrand airily remarked. "And no key."

"Yes; well," Pam said, "somebody must have the key."

Betty nodded.

"Just what I was going to say—somebody's got the key!"

Although Betty was addressing Pam now, she was still looking at the girl who had been first to get to this lumber-room.

Pam, enjoying the sight of Polly and others in great excitement over the turning-out of the drawers, drew off to the door.

"If I go down, and inquire about the key for that cupboard," she spoke over a shoulder. "If by any chance nobody knows anything about it, then—well, I can bring up dozens of keys, to try them in the lock?"

"That's it!" laughed Betty, looking as hard as ever at the girl they all

know as Claire Ferrand. The Morocco captain was on the lookout for any change of countenance; and she felt that she took place at this moment.

Claire Ferrand had turned rather pale. Perhaps that was due only to annoyance with her—Betty; and perhaps not.

But although Betty, by this time, was much inclined to go on studying "Claire Ferrand" very closely, it was by no means easy for her to do that. They rather crowded together, and this congestion became all the more acute when all the contents of the door-closets had been heaped upon the floor.

Soon it was like a riot in the lumber-room, for the coming upon materials that would be "just the thing" kept many voices at full pitch. And suddenly Madcap Polly took it into her head to try on a most ample Paris dress, with such comic effect that some of her chums convulsed with laughter.

As for Betty, she collapsed into an old, stung armchair to get over her nervousness. And then—Strangled! She noticed instantly the upholstery of the chair was worn, as if somebody had been sitting there for a good while, just before she herself and the rest of the girls came in.

Warm—but why? From what cause? She could not help wondering. The radiator was on, but, of course, the heating could not have warmed up an upholstered chair like this. Someone must have been sitting here. Just fancy—the room being what it was!

Claire Ferrand, resorting to this out-of-the-way room, for some purpose of her own? But again—why should she—what purpose could she have? Even if, say, she liked to smoke in a cigarette, she could do that in her own bedroom. Besides, there had been no scent of cigarette smoke when they all swarmed in.

But this curious affair of the worn chair could not go on punishing Betty. Now Betty and Naamie had put on discovered apparel of a kind as amusing as it was ritzed. A delicious lot of impromptu acting by all three dressed-up girls was out short by the sudden return of Pam.

She came in, not with simply the one key for the cupboard, but jangling a couple of big bunches of keys.

"Hat!" cried Polly dramatically. "Enter the gaudier! Oh, air—!" And she flung herself imploringly before laughing Pam Willoughby, clanking at the hem of her dress as though attracted. "Please—please have mercy on my cherished lover!"

She herself was well attired in a sweeping gown over which she invariably tripped whenever she moved. A vast hat almost obliterated by a magnificently sweeping plume, adorned her head, although she had the utmost difficulty in keeping it from dropping over her eyes.

"You tyrant must die!" Pam exclaimed, playing up to Polly's fun, although she was almost too overcome by laughter to speak clearly. "Do not seek to avert his fate, woman—on you may bring it upon yourself also!" And she jangled her keys threateningly in Polly's face.

Polly staggered back, giving innumerable yells of which Pang the planned hat over her eyes again.

"Have you no mercy?" she implored.

"I have my duty to do!" declaimed Pam, drawing herself up with a wonderful assumption of dignity.

"Then," Polly explained in ringing tones, "know that I shall perish with him!"

She stretched Naamie—stretched vaguely as a police-girl aimed at side—and flung her arms about her.

"My love!" she sobbed in tones of anguish. "We can expect no mercy from you hard-hearted wretch! We must die together!"

"Be careful!" shrieked Naamie, staggering. "You squawk as life out of me!"

"I care not what Pam may have in store!" wailed on Polly in dramatic tones, unheeding of Naamie's struggles. "If only we can be together!"

And Pam promptly answered the challenge! Naamie tripped over her sword and collapsed. Polly on top of her in a wildly struggling heap.

Order was eventually restored, and Pam explained about the keys.

"I've told, downstairs, that the key should have been in the cupboard lock."

"Strange, then, that it wasn't!" Betty said quietly.

Another glance at Claire Ferrand, and another sign of stress.

"But we're going to see," Pam severely continued, "if one of those keys will fit. We must get that cupboard open, girls."

"Oh, we simply must!" Betty agreed.

"And what a nice lot of keys there are to try!"

She tried the girl who was posing as Claire Ferrand—they could meet each other's eyes now, unaided by others. Pam was selecting a first key of likely looking size, and the other girls were watching her. It seemed to Betty that the older girl was now looking most composed, saying by her disdainful expression: "I don't know what amuses you!"

But Betty was smiling—couldn't help doing so. If, for some reason or other, this girl from Australia hadn't wanted the cupboard to be opened—well, it would not be long before everyone knew why. They'd open it.

"No good," Pam said, after trying that first key.

"Oh, better!" fumed impatient Polly. "I expect the things in there, if only we could get hold of them, are even better than what was in the chest."

Pam rattled another key into the lock.

"Yes," Bunny followed up Polly's remark. "The old things in the chest were all crummed down together. In the cupboard, they'll be hanging up, neat tidy. No luck, Pam?"

"No."

"Bottom!" Several of them laughed.

"But keep on."

She did so, trying a third key, a fourth, a fifth, and sixth. Still failed.

And then suddenly, after slipping the seventh key into the lock, she kept it there, working it about hopefully.

"This is better!" Pam cried. "Yes, Pam, it's going to do the trick. There—on the bump of the lock kept back—done it!"

"Hurray!" cheered the skittish ones.

"Now to see!"

"Yes," Betty echoed; "now—to see!"

MUSIC CROSSWORD

(Solution)

ACROSS

1. Pedal; 6. B; 7. Leith;
8. Ate; 9. Nero; 11. LMC;
13. One; 14. Dash; 15. Cow;
16. Dream; 17. St.; 18. Tense.

DOWN

1. Piano; 2. Et; 3. Alto;
4. Leo; 5. Berns; 6. Are;
10. Entry; 11. Law; 12. Choir;
14. Dame; 15. Cat; 17. So.

AND when the cupboard is opened—what will be revealed? You will know when you read next Saturday's exciting chapters of this brilliant new Morocco mystery serial—chapters that are packed with dramatic developments, and in which all your Morocco favorites appear. Make sure of reading next Saturday's installment by ordering your SCHOOLGIRL at once.