

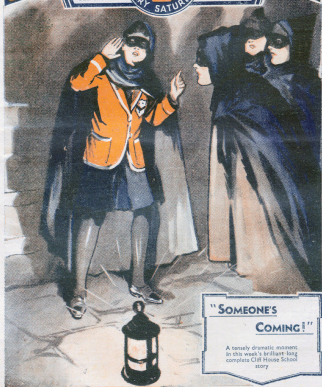
A SECRET SOCIETY AT CLIFF HOUSE: READ ABOUT IT IN THE GRAND LONG COMPLETE STORY WITHIN

# THE SCHOOLGIRL

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EVERY 2<sup>nd</sup> SATURDAY

Incorporating  
"SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN"



"SOMEONE'S  
COMING!"

A tensely dramatic moment  
in this week's brilliant-long  
complete Cliff House School  
story

## THE SOCIETY versus THE SCHEMERS: A Powerful Complete Tale of Exciting Happenings at Cliff House School



# The SIGN of the Scarlet Star

**WATCHED! Spied upon! Ever dogged by the unscrupulous Edwina Brookdale—still Babs & Co. are determined to carry on—to save the play. Secure in their secret organization, the Scarlet Star, they give blow for blow, until—**

### Out of the Window

"WHO goes there?"

"Number 7, with a new member."

There was a moment's silence following these whispered words, and then a girl's voice spoke again:

"Password?"

"Justice."

"Name of new member?"

"Lucy Farraday, of the Fourth Form."

The scene of the low-voiced conversation was the doorway of the old clock-tower in the grounds of historic Cliff House School. Now the heavy, oak door was slowly opened wider and a pale glimmer of light from within played upon the masked features and cloaked figure of the girl who stood inside.

That figure belonged to Barbara Redfern, captain of Cliff House's Fourth Form and the leader of the Secret Society of the Scarlet Star. Carelessly she held the door ajar, peering out at the girl she had challenged. That girl, cloaked and masked as she was herself, held another girl by the arm.

But the second girl, the new member, was neatly shrouded in a mask. Her face, showing as an indistinct hulk of grey in the flickering light of the candle which played upon it from the interior of the room, was grave and uneasy.

"Pass, No. 7," Babs said, and opened

the door wider. "I think," she added, "we are all here now?"

"What?" agreed the unmistakable accents of Justina Carstairs.

The room was crowded. It was not a very big place at the best of times. Five girls and four boys, to say nothing of the lumber stored in it by Mr. Merryweather, the school's gardener, made it uncomfortably full. On the apple barrel in the centre a candle guttered.

"Mabel, I mean No. 3, guard the door!" Babs instructed Mabel Lynn, and Mabel moved to obey at once. "Lucy Farraday, step forward!"

Lucy stepped forward. Her face was rather white.

"You are in the presence," Babs solemnly informed her, "of the Secret Society of the Scarlet Star. You have come here for the purpose of being initiated into our order and to take the vow. Is that so?"

"Y-yes," Lucy agreed nervously.

"It is well! But before our secrets are disclosed to you, you are entitled to know the reason for which this society has been formed and why it is necessary for you to belong to it. I am not going to keep you long. As you may be aware, we have an enemy in the school,

who suspects who we are, and as she is always on the prowl, it is inadvisable for us to be away for any length of time. Now, listen!"

And while Lucy stood attentively silent, Babs ran over the startling events which had taken place at Cliff House recently. She started with the hearing of Mabel Lynn's play which was due to be performed at the Courtfield Theatre at the end of the term.

She described how Edwina Brookdale, a prefect in the Sixth Form, had conspired with her cousin, Miles Marchant—also a prefect, of Friarsdale School—to bring about friction between Friarsdale and Cliff House; how, in spite of the ban, the play was with in the process of rehearsal, and how they sought to carry on rehearsing until, at least, it was perfect.

"Unfortunately," Babs went on, "one of our members, Janet Jordan, who had an important part in the play, has met with an accident. You are requested to join us, Lucy, because you, alone, can do the part she had to give up."

She paused. Lucy licked her lips.

"Before you take the oath," Babs continued, "and see the faces of your fellow members, I must impress upon you the seriousness and the importance of the step you are taking. In all and everything the society must come first! You must swear, an year word of honor, never to divulge a word of its secrets; to obey, without question or hesitation, all orders that may be given to you. Do you agree to do this?"

Just for a moment Lucy hesitated. Then her shoulders sagged.

"Yes."

"Good for you, Lucy—I mean, it is well," Babs asserted herself. "Now hold your right hand above your head. Repeat after me: I, Lucy Farraday,

By

**HILDA RICHARDS**

hereafter to be known as No. 9 in the Secret Society of the Scarlet Star, do hereby—"

The vow, solemnly and seriously, was taken. Lucy did not flinch.

"It is good," Bala pronounced. "Now, just for a moment, each member will announce as that you will know, in future, with whom you are working. I," she announced, "am No. 1." And she lifted her mask for a second, her blue eyes smiling. She let it fall.

"No. 2!"  
On the opposite side of the barrel a hand was lifted. A mask was raised. Lucy experienced a start of surprise as she found herself gazing into the good-looking features of Jimmy Richmond, captain of the Fourth Form at Friar-dale School.

"There are," Bala carefully explained, "two sections of us in this society, one at Friar-dale and one at Cliff House. The boys, as you know, are also acting in the play. The Friar-dale section, headed by Jimmy—er, I mean, No. 2—looks after Miles Marchant, while we here attend to Edwina Brookdale. No. 3!"

The yellow light of the candle shone, for a moment upon the golden curls and the pink and white complexion of Mabel Lenn's face.

"No. 4!"  
"Adrian!" grinned Douglas Coote of Friar-dale and lifted his mask.

"No. 5!"  
"What-no?" Jessica beamed. "Gaze upon my classic features, No. 2. Recog-nize me, without the nerve and nerve!"

"No. 6!" Bala frowned. "No. 6!"  
No. 6 was revealed as another boy—Don Haydn, of Friar-dale School.

"No. 7!" Bala ordered.  
No. 7 turned out to be Clara Twopen, Lucy knew that, at any rate. No. 8 was another boy—Lester Cattermole, half-brother of Jean Cartwright of the Fourth Form at Cliff House, who, at the present moment, was in Hollywood.

No. 9 was, of course, herself. There was also a No. 10, she learned—Mar-jorie Hanscomb, but Marjorie, at the moment, was absent home on special leave, having thoroughly relinquished her part in Act I before she left.

"You are satisfied?" Bala asked. "There remains but one more ceremony. Here!" And she slipped behind the barrel, bringing forth a cloak and a black mask, similar to those which all the other members wore. "Don those!"

Lucy, fingers fumbling a little, com-plied.

"Now! Done in class! All eyes hands! Each grasp the hand of the next. Good! Members—Bala ad-dressed them solemnly—"You know what you have to do. Be conspiring always in your real or crush our enemies and confound their plans. In all things, re-member the Secret Society of the Scarlet Star comes first. We—Maha, quick! Out with that light!"

And, hearts a-beat, they stood, still clasping hands, as the light went out and on the door came a sudden heavy bang!

Bessie Baxter it was—Bessie—dear, fat old Bessie, co-tenant of Study No. 4 in the Fourth Form corridor, with herself and Maha. But Bessie, of course, knew nothing of the secret society. Bessie, of my description, was amiable with Bessie, who, with the best intentions in the world, could not help, in that blundering, well-meaning way of hers, spreading all tidings far and wide.

"Bala," Bessie called again. "I an-sure, you know, what's the game?"  
Not a sound.

There came a fierce, exasperated scowl from Bessie. Then a foot-tip kick was bestowed upon the door. A defiant "Yah!" drifted through the keyhole, and then, with relief, they heard her heavy footsteps moving away.

Bala caught in her breath.

"Must have seen the light," she whis-pered. "Those walls are full of cracks and apertures. But wait a few moments. Give her a chance to get safely away. After that—quiet! Maha and I will attend to the despines."

Very fed-up was Bessie feeling as she departed, clumsily towards the work-shop. The tuckshop was more distasteful any from the clock-tower, and to find Bessie in its vicinity in the dark was unusual, to say the least of it.

The truth of the matter was, however, that Bessie had been planning a private raid upon the apple barrel, which she knew was stored in the clock-tower.

Even that comfort was lost to her now! Still, perhaps, some generous soul in the tuckshop might take pity on her flabbered condition and advance her supplies or so on her long-expected postal order.

She reached the shop; peered in. Then she gazed in disappointment. The shop was empty, save for one girl—a tall senior, wearing a frock that rather recalled her good-looking features, and

whose red hair was tossed in a flaming sweep above them.

Bessie blinked at her uncertainly. She knew that Edwina Brookdale was no friend of Bessie these days, but how it! Edwina had never done her any harm!

"Oh, a hello, Edwina!" she said feebly.

Edwina Brookdale eyed her nar-rowly.

"Come in!" she invited.

"Oh, er—er—er! You don't mean—"

"Here's a ha!" Edwina smiled hospitably, knowing that lock was a certain key to unlock the door of the Baxter confidence. "Try one of those new cream ones—they're topping! But, I say," she added casually, "where's Har-barn? Don't often find you wandering about at this time of night without her?"

Bessie, approving teeth creak lustily into one of Annie Jones' cream hats, smiled.

"Yam! Prizes!" she voted. "Yam!"

"I say, you know, this is jolly decent of you, Edwina. I always said that you weren't such a cat as Bala made out—I mean—of course, I said you were! Oh, er—er—er, that's not it! What I meant—er—to say, you know, is that although I think you're a cat. Bala—Oh, dud-dud! I say, Edwina, w—what did you say?" Bessie blushed up in despair.

Edwina smiled gently.

"You were just telling me—when you last saw Bala."

"Oh, er—er—er! But I didn't see her, you know—only to speak to. The grand thing wouldn't let me in—er—if I couldn't see she was having a secret feed in the clock-tower—I mean—er—er, in the Clarence room—Bessie broke off, awkwardly blinking. "I mean, Edwina, I don't—er—er—er anything about the clock-tower—er—er—er."



EVEN as Edwina stealthily reached the door, it flew open—sending her staggering back. Purplish figures rushed out, to disappear into the shadows. Once more the members of the Scarlet Star had outwitted her.

"Who is it?" whispered Lucy Farn-ley in trembling accents.

"Bessie! Quiet!"

Nevertheless they stood. There came another bang—the door shook, but being locked on the inside, naturally, did not budge. That a voice:

"Oh, naturally, Bala-Bala! You can't cheat me, you know."

"Bessie Baxter!" breathed Bala, with a sigh of relief.

thought of the clock-tower. I mean never again we had a clock-tower. Here, where are you going?" she added, in alarm.

But Edwina did not reply to that. Edwina was already stalking the door-guards after her, closely realizing that somehow she had put her foot in it.

She hurried spitefully towards the door, but by that time Edwina, with fierce strides, was making her way towards the clock-tower. Her grey eyes were glittering furiously as she stalked along. There was an expression of almost savage satisfaction upon her face.

For Edwina's whole efforts, these days, were concentrated upon howling out Babo & Co.—Babo, whom she suspected of leading the secret society which had proved such a thorn in her side; whom she suspected of still pre-arranging the play which he was advertising and scowling had caused to be learned.

Her wrath came quickly to an ending at the clock-tower, the building a faint glimmer of light. So Babo & Co. were in there!

Edwina questioned her steps. There a voice reached her.

"Oh, quick—take this costume!" Edwina could have shouted then. That voice! It was Lucy Farraday's!

Tiptoeing the loop she made forward. For of all the girls there, Lucy Farraday was the one who must meet to her! Lucy was in the play—Lucy was; if ever the play were performed, would bring ruin, disaster, exposure, and disgrace to herself, her father, and her cousin, Miss Marchant!

For if that play took place, then Lucy would appear in it at the Courtfield Theatre, and Lucy then would inevitably meet the man who would be there as an honoured guest. That man, John Strrett, Edwina's own uncle, and—although Lucy was unconscious of the fact at the moment—Lucy's father!

For John Strrett was unaware of Lucy's existence. He assumed Lucy to have—had passed by—pipette years ago. Edwina's father had been responsible for that—and ever since Edwina and her father and her cousin had lived in unrestricted luxury on the money that should have been Lucy's by rights.

The one way to prevent their meeting was to smash this play! At the play never took place, then John Strrett would never come to the Courtfield Theatre, and he and his forgotten daughter would never meet.

Edwina reached the door. Voices inside. Babo's voice—Mabo's! She recognized them. She turned. Her hand fell upon the handle. Then, without warning, the door was flung open.

Crash!

Fortunate it was for Edwina that it opened outwards. She had nothing but the warmest glimpse of a crowd of rushing figures before the door's edge, catching her in the chest, sent her spinning. Edwina gave a cry as she found herself rolling backwards. Something—or somebody—tumbled into her, catching her just at the very equilibrium when she sought to maintain equilibrium. Once, with a splutter and a thud, went Edwina. She heard a hoarseish voice:

"Oho, my hat! Boos?"

Figures—dark, shadowy, indistinguishable figures—rushing this way and that!

But Edwina was not beaten yet! She had seen it. There had been legs in that crowd. In spite of the darkness, she had noticed trousersed legs. And two girls had been carrying bundles—of what? The disguise in which the secret society arrayed themselves, perhaps, or costumes to be used in the production of the play.

They shouldn't get away with it. At a run she started for the school-house. Not easily could that crowd get back into the school without being seen.

But Edwina did not know Babo and her plans! As usual they had laid their plans—and laid them well! On the ground near the window of the guest's room had been left open. Through it they bounded hastily, up the back flight of stairs, and so into the Fourth Form corridor. Mabo and Babo, still carrying the bundles, burst into Study No. 4, quickly closed the door behind them.

"Quick—open the bureau, Mabo!" Babo gasped. "Get those disguises inside. She's bound to suspect!"

Mabo nodded. Fervently she fumbled in her cubic pocket for the key. And then she uttered a dismayed cry.

"Oh, my hat!"

"What?" asked Babo apprehensively.

"The key! I—I've lost it! I must have dropped it—and the bureau's locked!"

In consternation Babo stared.

"Then what—?" And jumped. "Mabo, she's coming!" she breathed as heavy footsteps clumped in the passage outside. Wildly, desperately, she started round. Then she gasped. Mabo—quick! Open the window! We'll dump the disguises on the sill. It's our only chance!"

At once Mabo jumped across the room. In a trice she had thrown the window open. Frantically Babo boosted on the handles, frantically dumped there on the sill. Almost before she had withdrawn her arms, Mabo was dragging the window closed.

Babo gave a cry:

"Oh, Mabo—

"Oh, hush!" Mabo hissed.

"But I want to tell—"

But I want to tell—"

But I want to tell—"

But I want to tell—"

But I want to tell—"

But I want to tell—"

But I want to tell—"

But I want to tell—"

But I want to tell—"

But I want to tell—"

But I want to tell—"

But I want to tell—"

But I want to tell—"

But I want to tell—"

But I want to tell—"

But I want to tell—"

this study, and, as a prefect, I've a right to search this study?"

"But you—"

"Stand aside!" Edwina grated, and her eyes fell upon Mabo's bureau.

"Whispered she tapped at the door. "This is locked," she said emphatically.

"Mabo nodded.

"Yes, I've lost the key!"

"Oh, you have, have you?" Edwina's lips wreathed back. "A likely tale! Open it!"

"I tell you I've lost the key!"

Edwina was quivering now.

Fiercely she caught hold of the knob; savagely wrenched and twisted. There was a click, a snap, an indignantly vibrant cry from Mabel Lynn.

"Edwina, you cut, you've broken the lock!"

Edwina panted. She had succeeded her duty there, and she knew it. Mabo could have expected her for that, but she guessed that Mabo would be as anxious as herself to leave Miss Primrose out of the school grounds.

"Accident," she said, and flung the door open. There she scowled.

For the bureau exploded, of course, was blown—up, almost. Only two articles escaped within it. One was Mabo's make-up box, the other a well-thumbed and very much indented book. Edwina, half of her interested prey, vengefully grabbed up the latter, flinging its pages. From Mabo came a cry.

"Edwina! That's mine—"

"Wait a minute!" Edwina said coolly, and held it away from her. "What's this, oh—? What is that? A producer's book! And—her eyes glinted—"a book of the banned play!"

Mabo stared. Babo, flushing, forced her way forward.

"Here, steady on, Edwina. That is Mabo's," she said.

"This," Edwina retorted, "is Mabo's producing copy of a play which has been forbidden by Miss Primrose's orders. As that play is banned, so is everything in connection with it. I shall," she added spitefully, "condemn this!"

Mabo licked her lips. Her face was demure.

"But, Edwina, those notes were all made before the play was banned."

All the same," Edwina maliciously retorted, "now that the play is no longer banned of this can't possibly be of any use to you. I'll keep it, thanks! You can have it back at the end of the term. Meanwhile—she swept her eyes round, making the book under her arm—"I'll look elsewhere for those handles," she said.

And, with a spiteful grin, she stamped out. Mabo, taking one passionate step forward, felt her arm plucked; turned to see Babo shaking her head. The door closed.

Mabo gave vent to a strangled cry.

"Babo, my book! My notes! Babo, don't you realize!"

"I know," Babo mumbled, "but don't worry, Mabo, old thing!" She stopped, frowning. Then, snatching herself at the bureau, she drew towards her a card, dipped the pen in red ink, wrote quickly, and handed the result to Mabo.

"Take that," she said. "Get it to Edwina. Meanwhile, I've got to find out what's happened to the disguises. They dropped off the window-sill."

"Babo!" cried Mabo, in horror.

But Babo did not reply. She hurried downstairs, went through the Hall—now crowded with girls expecting the morning mail—and tripped down the steps.

Along the wall she slid. Then, beneath the window of Study No. 4 she spied them—two heavy black bundles. That goodness; was her first relieved



"Beware!"

"I DON'T," Mabel Lynn said calmly, "know what you're talking about, Edwina!"

"No!" Edwina's eyes flashed.

"And you're going to deny, I suppose, that you were in the clock-tower five minutes ago? What was in those bundles you brought here?"

Babo eyed her scornfully.

"We haven't admitted we brought any bundles here."

"No!" Edwina sneered, "Which means, she interpreted, 'you don't intend to admit it.' Well, all right! We'll settle that matter here and now! Those handles," she declared, "are in

thought, on stooping she gathered them swiftly in her arms.

Now! And anxiously she looked back toward the lighted doorway of Big Hall, now as Louis Cayrol and Marcelle Biquet and Peggy Preston came, laughing, down the steps. Obviously she could not go back that way.

Then she remembered the guests' room. The window of that had not been closed. Hugging her bundles, Babe creaked along the wall towards it, ducking her head as she passed the lighted window of Miss Charnant's study, which had to blink, concealed by the cover of darkness, she fitted on, found the window which she sought, and, dropping her bundles into the room, scrambled over the sill. Breathing a little hoarsely in the darkness, she groped around for her bundles.

Now—where? And then she stiffened. For even as she stopped there sounded a step in the doorway—also left open in the secret society's precipitate flight to its own quarters. Quick as thought Babe dropped herself behind the settee which impeded between her and the door.

The light switched on. Babe blinked in the sudden radiance. Creaking palpitably, she heard Miss Princess's murmuring voice:

"Dear me! How utterly careless of someone! I declare, the window is open!"

And—horror! Miss Princess came striding across the room.

Babe's heart seemed to leap into her throat. Unless something in the nature of a miracle happened, nothing could prevent her from being caught by the headmistress.

**N**othing in the nature of a miracle did happen.

But in the heart-stopping second that elapsed before Miss Princess spotted her, Babe had the presence of mind to kick the bundles of books and make under the settee. Miss Princess almost jumped.

"Barbara, what are you doing here?" Barbara gulped.

"I—I'm sorry, Miss Princess!"

"You know you have no right in this room?"

"Yes, Miss Princess. "I—I'm sorry, Miss Princess. "I—I can only play a game."

That was true, she thought, though the game was rather grimace in its nature than she would have had the headmistress believe.

"And it is in the course of that game, I presume," Miss Princess declared severely, "that you have left the window open, Barbara?"

"Yes, Miss Princess!"

"Well, kindly close it, and remove yourself from this room at the same time. You will also," Miss Princess added severely, "write out 'I must not play games in private rooms' twenty times, Barbara."

"Yes, Miss Princess."

And gladly Babe closed the window obediently, followed Miss Princess, as this good lady swept out of the room.

Now! A narrow squeak, that! But thank goodness Frimpy's suspicions had not been aroused. The disgraceful could be safe in their present hiding-place for the time being, at any rate. Plenty of time to reason their way on.

Back she hurried up the stairs. She was passing the Sixth Floor corridor when she heard her name called.

"Barbara Hedden!" Barbara stopped. Edwina Brookdale,

in a towering temper, was striding towards her.

Edwina had a card in her hand. It was a card which bore a message written in red ink, and surmounted by a scarlet star. Angerily Edwina thrust it before her eyes. Babe blinked as it reached her own hardiwork of ten minutes ago. The card said:

"YOU HAVE STOLEN A BOOK FROM MARIE LYNN. RETURN IT WITHIN TEN MINUTES."



**B**abe crouched low behind the settee. Miss Princess was at the door. If she came across the room there would be not the slightest chance of escape. Fearfully, Babe waited . . .

"Did you put that in my study?" Edwina rapped.

"No."

Edwina stared at her hand. She knew that Babe was not in the habit of telling falsehoods. All the same, it was obvious to her that Babe knew something about this, for only Babe and Marie Lynn had been concerned in the incident to which the card referred.

"Supposing," she grated, "I take you to the headmistress?"

"Well, supposing you do?" Babe challenged.

"Supposing I tell her that you are the ring-leader of the secret society?"

Babe did not flinch.

"But, I wouldn't, if I were you," she added seriously, "because you haven't got an atom of proof that I am, have you? And Frimpy," she added slyly, "might ask a lot of questions."

Edwina gazed at her. She did not miss the threat implied in these words.

She heard the secret society, not so much for what they might do to her, but because she was not certain exactly how much they knew.

"Well," asked Babe, "shall we go to Miss Princess? I'm quite ready," she volunteered boldly, "if you are."

Edwina looked as if she could have struck Babe.

"You don't deny, then, that you belong to this society?"

"I don't deny anything. At the same time," Babe replied levelly, "I don't admit anything. If you like to be suspicious of me—well, that's your business, of course. Shall we go to Miss Princess, Edwina?"

"Babe!" scouted Edwina.

And, with a reluctant toss of her head, she stalked away. Babe smiled smugly, and hurried back to her own study. Babe looked up sharply at her entry.

"Babe, the customer—"

"Hark!" breathed Babe, and told her what happened. "We'll get there in good time. Plenty of time then. Meanwhile—the passed her lip—"Babe, give me the writing-pad."

Again she sat down; again she wrote. She finished, and, the note in her hand, went hurrying to Study No. 2. Clara was in there, getting her books ready for prep. Without a word Babe handed her the note and disappeared.

Clara opened it. It bore the usual

insignia of the Scarlet Star, and it read:

"No. 2. Go at once to the telephone booth at the crossroads. Ring up Edwina Brookdale, pretending you are Marie Marchant of Friesland School. Tell her that she is to meet you outside at once. Hurry back and report. Destroy this."

Without a word Clara dropped the note on the fire, put her hat on, and went out.

**T**wo minutes later Clara entered Study No. 4. Babe, who was with Marie, looked up quickly.

"O.K.," she grinned. "She fell for it. She's gone out to meet Marchant—only Marchant isn't here."

"Then come on!" Babe said.

"Where?"

"To Edwina's study. I wanted to make sure she was out of the way. We're going to get Babe's book back. And in three minutes they had it back. In ten Edwina, quivering with cold and a fury emboldened by the knowledge that once more she had been made a fool of, returned to her study.

Barrelly she hung off her coat; unawares she slipped into the chair. And then she started, her eyes straying in the drawer of the desk where she had hidden the book she had confiscated from Mabel Lynn less than half an hour ago. For protruding from the top of that drawer was a card bearing the now familiar sign of the Scarlet Star. It bore one word:

" Beware!"



### School of Suspicion

IN a moment Edwina was on her feet. Almost choking, she plucked the warning card from its resting-place. The secret society again! The secret society—

Babine trembled with rage.

And then, as a sudden thought struck her, she pulled open the drawer of her desk. The nearest glance sufficed to give her the evidence she had expected. The book she had confiscated from Mabel Lynn was gone!

Like a steel trap Edwina's lips came together. For a moment a frightening light shone in her eyes. The Scarlet Star had made good their first warning. Having failed to surrender that book, they had despoiled her from her room, and had taken it in her absence thenceforth.

Right! And reverently Edwina took one stride towards the door, only to pull up again as a new thought struck her.

What?

Temporarily loosed for Study No. 4 she had been. But what good would that do? Mabel Lynn, in possession of the book, was hardly fool enough to have placed it where even a further search would reveal it.

Her eyes flashed. With new interest she looked again at the card in her hand. And then a slow, satisfied, vindictive smile overspread her face.

Quickly she stepped towards her desk again, rummaged among its papers until she found a flat, heavy paper-weight. With the aid of an elastic band, she wrapped the warning card around it. That done, she put on her coat and again went out.

Edwina checked to herself over. She thought she had found a way of retarding the activities of the secret society at last.

She stepped into the Sixth Form corridor. It was deserted. Along the corridor she went, down the short flight of stairs which gave on to the swimming-pool in the rear of the school. Reaching quickly, she made her way round to the front of the school.

Above her, in a wall of blackness, one solitary window was alight with light. From where she stood she could see the head and shoulders of Miss Primrose as she bent over her desk.

Edwina grinned. Now!

She clutched the weighty object in her hand, then arm went back. For a moment the good measuring bar shimmered.

Whizz!

Upwards flew the weighted message.

Crash!

A splinter of glass; the hurried, alarmed scraping back of a chair; a startled exclamation in Miss Primrose's voice.

Edwina, softly chuckling, dashed away.

"NOT FRODO!"

"You!"

"Oh, my hat! What on earth can the secret society have against dear old Primmy?"

"Search me!" exclaimed Peggy Prenton. "I can't think. But, all the same, that's what's happened. Somebody tossed a paper-weight through Primmy's window, and tied to it was a warning of the Scarlet Star!"

The Fourth Form Common-room slowly filled with consternation and indignation. Most of the girls there knew that some sort of secret society was in existence in the school; but so secretive had the activities of that society been that it had almost passed out of everybody's mind.

But this—this was carrying things too far, with a vengeance! To touch Primmy—Primmy, who, despite her discipline, was the dearest and kindest headmistress any school could have!

The news of this latest outrage had come as unexpectedly to Babs & Co., as it had to the rest of the school. The shock of it filled them with a vague sense of alarm. There was no doubt in their minds as to who had been responsible—Edwina Brookdale.

The bell for roll-over rang, breaking up the discussion, which had begun to grow hot in the Fourth Form Common-room. Rather relieved, Babs & Co. joined the procession which tramped into Big Hall—and there a second sensation awaited the school.

For Miss Primrose—very shaken, visibly agitated—was there. She was standing on her desk, and held in her hand a card, written upon it in ink. Impetuously she waited until the rolls were called, her eyes, meanwhile, roving the school with a piercing penetration which showed that she was on the lookout for one girl. An hour as roll-call was finished she started.

Low, trembling with indignation and agitation, her voice rang through the Hall.

"This evening," she announced, "some girl or girls, had the effrontery to throw through my window a paper-weight, attached to which was a card; on this card was printed a red star accompanied by the single word

" Beware!"

Everybody stood sympathetically aghast.

"Apparently," Miss Primrose went on, "this star represents some form of secret society. Who the members of this society are, for what purpose it has been formed, I do not know. I am astonished, however, that I should have been singled out as one of its victims."

A murmur.

"I was at first inclined to regard the matter as a joke," Miss Primrose went on. "As you probably know, I made inquiries, with the object of finding the culprit and punishing her, not for sending me a needless message, but for attacking my window. Apparently, the Head form was becoming more agitated, the matter was not a joke—some minutes ago, entering my study upon my return from dinner—"

Her face worked a little. The school became hushed.

"I found," Miss Primrose went on in a constrained voice, "the most appalling chaos. Someone had visited the room during my absence. My pictures had been torn from the walls; the coal had been distributed near the carpet; the contents of my desk shovelled into the fireplace—" Her face hardened as she stared at the electrified school. "Apart from all this, this highly insulting card was left among the ruins."

She displayed the card so that its text

was turned towards them. It was not possible in that vast Hall for everyone to read it, but Babs got a view. The eyes blazed in fury.

For insult of insults!

"We don't want you at Cliff House. You're too old to look after young girls. Get out!"

Voices muttered an incredulous lip repeated the words. Its final reading was followed by a silence of utter amazement; then a cry went up—swelling, throbbing, quivering on a note of indignation. It was a cry that grew almost to a roar.

"Please!" Miss Primrose held up her hand; she gulped a little, patiently touched by this demonstration of her people's loyalty. "Thank you, girls, but do not make a noise. I am no longer," she added, a steady ring creeping into her voice, "disposed to deal with the culprits leniently. It is obvious that there can be no peace, no order in this school until this ridiculous society is stamped out! I will open all girls belonging to it to stand out now!"

A raising of hands. Each girl now regarded the rest with fierce suspicion. White-faced, sick at heart, Babs & Co. stood, hurring with a secret anger, to which they dared not give expression. At the foot of the desk, ranged there with the other prefects, Edwina flashed a look at her and grinned a triumphant sneer.

Nobody stirred.

The headmistress' face set the list.

"Very well," she said. "Since the mischief-makers are so anxious to come forward, I ask every girl who can identify any one of the members of this secret society to report that girl to me. I do not, as you know," Miss Primrose went on, "condone what you girls call sneaking. At the same time, I really do feel that this is a case which no reasonably minded girl need hesitate to tell all she knows. In the meantime—"

Miss Primrose paused.

"In the meantime," she added, "out of your respect for me, and for the good name of the school, I regard it as every girl's duty to hand out this list of accessories among you. The school may dismiss!"

The school did dismiss—in an uproar of excitement and indignation. Fierce and terrible the anger of Cliff House then. In a flash all feeling had turned against the secret society. The whole school was up in arms. Before dormitory-bell rang that night hatred for the secret society had filled the whole school from end to end. Who were the traitors, the warden, who had dared to treat Primmy in that shocking way!

Babs & Co. were utterly disgraced. Edwina had done her work well—too well!

Before she went to bed that night Edwina rang up her cousin, Miles Marchmont, of Friarcliffe School; she told him all that had happened.

"And if you," she said, "wily adopt the same tactics, you can do for Jimmy Richardson & Co. what I've done for Barbara Redfern. I don't think," she added, "that we shall be worried with the secret society much longer; and if the secret society is stamped out, I've a notion that will put an end to the secret rehearsals at the same time. The whole school is on the ramp here—"

"Good work!" chuckled Miles Marchmont. "And a jolly good idea! Rightly! You leave it to me. I'll make things so jolly warm for Richardson and his crowd that they'll be glad to get expelled."

And apparently Miles Marchant was as good as his word. The next morning, before breakfast, Babe received a message: It was delivered by hand, and brought by one of the boys of Friarhale village. It read:

"Miles Marchant is on the war-path, doing his best to get the whole school against us. Meet me here. Shall we meet in the priory at three p.m., and get in a rehearsal at the same time? Password: 'Good.' Tell the boy 'Yes' or 'No.' All the best."  
—JIMMY B.—

Babe's eyes glistened. She said "Yes" to the boy and hurried back to her own study; there very carefully she burned Jimmy's note. The notes were just drying away, when the door opened and Mabel Loring came in.

Her face was white.

"Oh, Babe, what can we do?" she asked. "It's all over the school. Diana Royton-Clarke is turning a secret society here in the Fourth, Flora Cass is forming one in the Lower Fifth. And —" She stopped as there was a knock at the door. "Who's there?" she called sharply.

"Diana!" came a cheerful voice.

"Diana?"

"Diana—problem of the meet, to you who know your Greek. Also," mockingly volunteered Diana Royton-Clarke, peering into the study, "Executive of the Order of Secret Society Entertainments. Yaiks, Babe! Can we come in?"

Hall a dozen girls crowded behind her.

"We've come as a delegation," Diana announced brightly. "We want you to take the lead, Babe!"

"Lead? Lead what?"

"Lead the old order. The entertainments. It's a new game," Diana explained excitedly. "Invited by me, Editha Brookdale of the Sixth."

Perhaps she wondered at the faint start Babe gave, but if she did, she did not comment. "The Fifth have formed a branch. So have the Upper Fifth, and the Third. The big idea is to get together and lead out this naughty old Head Hand gang who've been terrorizing old Primary and sneering nast on the good name of the old school, and so forth."

Babe eyed her strangely.

"Well, what's the idea?"

"The idea," Diana went on, "is this. Each form has a branch of entertainments, and each girl cheer up on the next. It's pretty obvious of course, that the Secret Society of the Salmon-colored Stars, or whatever they call themselves, must hold meetings. Well, just to find out what articles in those meetings, we're going to organize a system. This is it. Tuesday, for instance, is a half-holiday."

She beamed. Nobody disputed.

"Each girl before she goes out, will report to the committee where she is going, and how long she will be away. If the committee think she's got a clear conscience, she can go. If not—the girl must agree to send other girl, appointed by the committee, going with her. Interfering with the liberty of the subject and all that, but everybody is doing it, to get a hold on the secret society. See?"

Babe did see. So did Mabs. The side-long, hopeless glance she threw at her chain expressed her despair. For a moment it seemed that all their plans crumbled in the dust.

"Don't you think it's a good idea?" Margo Lantham asked.

"Oh, ripping!" Babe agreed.

"Then you'll lead the campaign?"

"Most certainly I'll lead it," Babe at once agreed, and Mabs' eyes widened.

"Thanks for the offer. This study, from henceforth, will be the committee headquarters. Now, wash a minute, let's form the committee itself. You, Diana!"

"Charmed," Diana murmured.

"Margo!"

"Yes," Margo Lantham beamed.

"You, Lolla?"

"I guess I'm yours," Lolla Curvall grinned.

And Lory Farraday and Beatrice Beverley. Now, all of you, ladies. Go round. Find out what girls intend going out this afternoon and tell them to report here after break. The committee will be here at the same time!"

"Good enough!"

The Society for the Secret Society's Entertainment departed. Mabs stared at her chum.

"But what—"

Babe checked.

"Easy," she said. "Now don't ask questions, Mabs. Tell Jimmie and Lory and Clara I want to see them—here. At once. Editha may think this is a brain-wave, but she's not broken in."

Jimmie, Clara, and Lory were brought. And there and then Babe led them into her scheme. At break the committee sat in Study No. 4, and girls who had planned to spend the afternoon out of school hours were brought before them, one by one. Joan Shekton Charman was first.

"And where," Babe interrogated, "are you going?"

"Home to tea with my sister, Miss Valerie Charman," Joan informed her.

"If I—Well, that puts you beyond suspicion," Babe said. Farrington grinned. Next?

Class Trevlyn was next.

"And where are you going?" Babe asked.

Clara hesitated.

"Well, I want to go for a walk."

"Where?"

"How should I know where?"

"If I—Rather mysterious, aren't you?" Diana put in, with a half smile. "I think she ought to be watched, Babe."

Babe frowned. Nobody seeing her in that moment, would have dreamt that all this had been carefully pre-arranged.

"I'm sorry," she said, "but you know the wishes of the Form, Clara. Until this secret society is revealed we are all under suspicion. You can go for your walk—accepted. Lory Farraday, you will accept her."

"Yes," Lory said.

Clara went out, pretending to seivel ferociously. Jimmie was next.

"And where," Babe demanded, "are you going?"

"Oh, Courtfield," Jimmie said slyly.

"For what?"

"Just to peer at the merry old shopkeeper, what?"

"If I—Again Babe shook her head.

"You expect," she decided. "You will take Mabs with you."

Jimmie sighed, polished her monocle, and trotted out. Bessie Hunter was next.

"And where are you going?" Babe asked.

"Oh, really, Babe! I'm only going to Kib-Courtfield!"

"What for?"

"Well, nothing, you know!"

Bessie rolled off. The next girl came in. Then the next and the next. By three-thirty all the Form had been interrogated. Half of them, to their indignation, marked with unenvied red ink partners. Thanks to Babe, however, her own party was neatly painted off in such a way as the secret meeting



"WE'VE chosen you, Babe," Diana announced loftily, "to lead the Form against this jolly old secret society!" Babe tried to conceal her apprehension. Whatever happened, these girls must never know that she, Babe, was the leader of that society!

in Friarvale woods was no longer unscathed.

"EVERYBODY HERE?" Babs asked.

"Good enough! We'll get going right away!"

Once again the secret society was assembled in the cellars beneath the priory ruins. The scene was lit by a solitary torch.

Babs addressed them.

"Follow-me, you must be swift. We have the rehearsal to get through after this. No. 2, you have a report to make—"

"I have!" No. 2, alias Jimmy Richmond, said gratefully.

"Say on!"

And Jimmy said on. He described the happenings at Friarvale School. Somebody had sent a card imprinted with the scarlet star to Mr. Lounie, master of the Fourth Form, last night. Having the night somebody had poured ink all over the papers in Mr. Lounie's desk. Then John Barrett, the popular captain of the school, had come down to his study that morning to find his cricket bat and his tennis racket in the fire and charred by the flames. John Barrett, like Mr. Lounie, also discovered a highly insulting message from the secret society.

"The whole school's up in arms," Jimmy concluded. "And that said, Miles Marchant, has started a secret society here."

"The mean thing," Babs nodded, "is happening at Cliff House. We've got to do something!" She stopped. "What was that?" she added, in quick alarm.

"They all stood there, still, frozen. There was no sound, however."

"What was it?" asked Lucy Faraday.

"I don't know. But I thought I heard something—something—" And Babs turned to glance uneasily in the direction of the stairs which led to the upper regions. But there all was in pitch darkness.

"No. 2, did you hear anything?" she asked.

"No," Don Haybury replied truthfully.

"The wind, perhaps," Clara suggested.

"There!" Babs cried. "Again!"

They all heard it that time—a soft, sweeping sound, followed by a subdued chuckle. It came from the well at the bottom of the stairs.

"Quick! Out with the light!" hissed Babs. "There's another show upon the floor. Get out! Get out!" she cried.

"Scatter!" And then turned, as there was a sudden shout from Don Haybury as a light flashed from the gloom beyond.

"Scout!"

"We've spotted!"

Spotted they were. No doubt about that. Either Jimmy Richmond & Co. had not been so careful as the girls or Miles Marchant, exercising an unexpected ingenuity, had trailed them. But now, from the darkness, there came a roar.

"Here they are, chaps!"

"After 'em!"

"Don't let 'em get away!"

A dozen torches flashed.

Into the room poured a crowd of excited boys, headed by Miles Marchant.

Across the room at breakfast speed went the secret society, long robes streaming behind them.

The door on the opposite side of the cellar was flung open with a crash.

Babs, flying with the rest, found a hand grasping her shoulder, turned, desperately flung it off, and dashed on. She passed just for a moment to overturn the old worm-eaten table in the path of her pursuers, heard them, as with a howl, they piled up against it, and flew on.

She reached the door which led upwards.

And there—she tripped.

Her feet, catching in the hem of her trailing robe, flung her forward. Next moment, like a pack of hounds, the Friarvale boys were upon her!

"We've got him!"

"Hurray!"

"Hold him!"

"Sit on him!"

Babs gasped. For a moment despair gripped her. Four or five pairs of willing hands pinned her to the floor.



Furore in Friarvale

"HURRY him up!"

"Tear that mask off his face!"

"No! Wait a jiffy!" came the voice of Miles Marchant. "My lady, I've got a better idea than that, chaps! Suggesting we take him to the school?"

"Well!"

"And supposing, all trussed up, with his nice little mask on and a card hung round his neck telling everybody that he's a member of this silly society, we put him on exhibition?"

"A good place," Marchant added thoughtfully, "would be Dr. Ferguson's chair in Assembly Hall, where all our cases, see, and adjudge! And suppose," Marchant chuckled, "when the whole school has gazed its fill, we fetch old Dr. Ferguson himself to do the unmasking?"

"Great pip!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"Hopping notion!"

Babs trembled almost sick as she heard these suggestions bandied. Only one thing seemed clear; Marchant and these boys did not know she was a girl. They fondly imagined they had caught one of Jimmy Richmond's pals.

Roughly she was heaved to her feet. A rope was passed about her. Then, covered front and rear by a crowd of chattering schoolboys, she was marched up the stairs into the dusk of the woods, her captives chanting a victorious chorus as they propelled her along the road.

It was dark by the time Friarvale School was reached.

"Rak, rak, rak!" shouted Marchant.

"Hi, hi, hi! Give a penny, give a penny! Come and see the gay!"

"My hat!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"What's that?"

Under her mask Babs' face crimsoned. From all sides boys were ringing. She saw curious faces peering into her in the gloom, heard the whispers, the chuckles, the gust of laughter that went round.

Secured by the trailing piece of rope by which triumphant Marchant lugged her up the steps, she was led, blinking, into the bright lights of the big Friarvale Assembly Hall.

What a nightmare it all was!

"Now, halt a jiffy!" Marchant grinned. "Gather round, everybody! Here you see a dangerous specimen of the Scarlet Sausage brought back alive by Miles Marchant & Co.! Hold him

up, boys! Sit him here in the doctor's chair. Now everybody roll up! Come and gaze your fill upon the queerest animal ever captured in the jungle of Friarvale! No charge!"

There were grins. More laughter. Babs, fuming, but helpless, was hoisted up without ceremony, and dumped in Dr. Ferguson's chair. There she remained, gazing with furious eyes at the hundred faces which stared up at her.

Moans and some fellows were telling in. Through the slit of her mask she caught sight of Jimmy Richmond, Don Haybury, Douglas Combs, and Liver Lutterbush. Practically she tried to signal with her eyes. Jimmy slightly, almost imperceptibly, shook his head.

Assembly Hall was rapidly becoming crowded. The news had gone round.

Marchant, enjoying himself as he had seldom enjoyed himself before, thumped the floor of the dais with a pointer, shouting remarks. At last, when it seemed that Assembly Hall could hold no more, and Babs lay, huddled on the point of swooning, he made his announcement:

"Gentlemen, you are all curious to gaze upon the features of this deplorable animal. No longer shall you be kept in suspense! Who is this diabolical ruffian, this japper of our one and only Louisa, the bearer of Barrett's bait? I cannot tell you, gentlemen, because I haven't seen its face. Nor is mine the hand that shall unmask it. That, gentlemen, shall be the pleasant task of our one and only respected pedagogue, Dr. Wallace Ferguson!"

"Hurray!"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Jimmy Richmond. "Don—"

"You, old man!"

"Stand by the lights. Then watch my arm!"

Don Haybury nodded. Jimmy inclined his head towards Combs and Cattermole, motioning them to push to the front of the crowd. Marchant's arm fell upon him.

"And since," he said mockingly, "we have reason to believe that a certain man in this room is more interested in the identity of this curious animal than most, it shall be he who shall bring the headmaster to the scene. Richmond, boys!" he added tersely.

Jimmy passed.

"You want me to fetch the doctor?"

"Yes, if you're not afraid!" Marchant sized.

Jimmy shrugged. Blowing his way through the throng, he made towards the curtained entrance which led to the Head's quarters. The whole school was shouting now, though, to be sure, some of the boys were looking sympathetic. Jimmy, reaching the entrance, pulled the curtain aside, at the same time lifting his arm.

It was a signal!

Babs, as unprepared as all the rest, jumped. For at once the room was plunged into blackness. There was a rush, a howl, a scutter, a sudden clatter of feet scurrying on to the dais. There came a cry from Marchant, a thin, piercing cry, as he crashed to the floor.

"Hi, what rotter hit me!"

In the hall laughter was changed to howls. In a moment pandemonium indescribable reigned.

But Babs thrilled. For she knew that the Friarvale secret society was doing its duty. She heard the thud of footsteps in the darkness, and felt herself free from the chair. A knife flashed as it cut a way through her bonds.

"Quick, old thing! This way!"

"Get him!" came a shriek from Marchant; and from somebody else:

"Turn on the lights!"



But the lights would not be turned on for some time yet. Douglas Counts had seen to that. He had not only extinguished those lights, but he had broken the switch in the case!

Babe felt her arm grabbed. She knew it was Jimmy. Unexpecting, she followed.

Along some sort of corridor they rushed; down a flight of stairs.

"Now, get going," Jimmy paroled. "Here, Babe, give me those tops! You can't run in those!"

"But you—?" gasped Babe.

Jimmy gasped.

"I," he replied, "have yet to catch the headmaster. You heard Marchen's order? I don't think old Fergie'll be too pleased with little Mike when he sees the news he's got the school into, Bee-Bye, Babe!"

And with a quick salute he was gone.

While Babe, following into the darkness, reached the gap in the hedge, thankfully found the ebb-tide of the road beneath her feet, and hurried back to Cliff House School.

"But I've half an idea, which is more than you will ever have. Good-bye!"

She left him then, hurrying back into the school. A half-idea she had, but how to carry that out? She had the good sense to realize that, in the hurried breaking-up of their meeting, the secret society could have had an time to make further plans. That meant, of course, that Babe would be fixing up another meeting! And where, in the first place, were those meetings arranged?

Study No. 4!

If only she could be present in Study No. 4 when that happened!

She would!

She was devising ways and means as she strolled into the school. Look, for once, however, seemed to be favoring her. For hardly had she reached the Fourth Form passage than the door of Study No. 4 opened and its three occu-

ally her eyes sought out the window of Study No. 4, which should at this moment have been agape. Too far away, of course, for her to recognize features, but as she watched she saw the black silhouette of a girl cross to the window, saw the girl carefully watching the street.

Who was it?

But she knew. Indistinguishable though the features were, the outline was unmistakable, covertious—Edwina Brookdale!



CAME resounding thuds as the two plotters were sent hogging into Dr. Ferguson's study. And then—a riotous clangour of bells sounded in the school. The booby-trap had done its work!



"At Eleven To-night"

"O H, you had? You had?" burst out Edwina Brookdale passionately. "Why the dickens did you have to insist on all that ceremony? I suppose," she added with a sneer, "that it hasn't crossed your silly mind that the boy you grabbed might have been a girl?"

Miss Marchen blinked. "Mike was indeed. Mike was also in a very bad temper. You'd had been, hitting the victim of his jape, but it had been no fun settling up with Dr. Ferguson afterwards."

"Well, I never thought about it," Miss selfishly defended.

"No, you wouldn't?" Edwina told her essentially. "Now, listen! I've got an idea! Keep watch on Richardson & Co. They're not quite so clever as Babe & Co., and if you only keep your silly eye and your big nose open, you may get on to something. Meanwhile, keep the society's bad name going. But don't—with a scowl—go and get your self up at the same time. I'll phone you at nine as I've got my nerve."

"What are you going to do?" "Depends!" Edwina said shortly.

And she—Babe, Babe, and Mahe, came strutting into the corridor. Quick as thought, Edwina stepped back behind the angle of the wall.

Unknown and unseen, she watched as the three tramped off down the stairs; then, quickly, Edwina slipped along the corridor, reached Study No. 4, and breathlessly let herself in. She closed the door. Now!

Her eyes darted round the room. Where could she hide?

The cupboard? No! Then she saw the screen near the window. It was tall enough to conceal her, and a door, craftily made hinged on her lips as she creased towards it, taking up her position.

Meanwhile, Babe and Mahe strolled on down to the gates. Benzie was bound for the backshop with a borrowed stalling, and Babe for the telephone-booth at the croquet-grounds.

Babe waited outside, while Babe stepped into the box. She surveyed a little. Unconsciously her eyes were drawn across the school grounds towards the darkened facade of the school. Scores of lights shone in the windows. She saw girls scurrying about, could even make out when doors were opening and shutting.

And then—

Babe suddenly caught her breath. In the darkness she stifled. Mechanic-

ally the phone-booth door opened. Babe came out.

"That's all right," she said, "I've been on to Jimmy. We meet to-night in the crypt—midnight! Got the word round?"

"Babe," broke in Mahe, "look—the what!"

Babe looked. She started. "Edwina," she said. "She's spying!" She glanced quickly at her arm. Her lips compressed. "So," she muttered softly, "Edwina is hiding herself, is she? She wants to know what we're going to talk about?"

"You think?" breathed Mahe.

Babe grunted. "It's pretty obvious, isn't it? She thinks we'll be talking about the secret society—or the robbery. And if we do—what then? She'll just try to haul us out?"

She chuckled softly. "Edwina's burning ambition, at the moment, is to catch us in the act. Well, come on!"

"Oh, my hat! What are we going to do now?"

"You'll see! Just take your cue from me," Babe advised.

They hurried into the school, Babe's eyes alight with mischief. They reached Study No. 4.

"O.K., here we are," Babe breathed. "Now we've got old Benzie out of the

way we can talk! Keep your eyes on that door, Mahe. You know what a bewitching Edwina Brookdale is!"

Mahe considered a guffaw. Was it her imagination, or did she see the screen by the window visibly agitate?

"Edwina's always on the prowl,"

Babe went on. "Can't be too careful! I wanted to talk to you about the meeting tonight, Mahe. It means breaking down, of course." Babe added, her eyes thoughtfully upon the screen.

"Yes," Mahe broadcast.

"We're meeting in the laboratory,"

Babe went on. "Nobody will ever dream of looking for us there. Every clock in the hall, and everybody will come distracted, of course."

"But get the word round to the others," she added, "and in time like the present."

"Yes, rather," agreed Mahe.

"Then let's go!"

They went, shuddering to themselves. But behind the screen they left an Edwina whose cheeks were stained crimson with excitement, who was trembling now at the prospect that opened before her.

At eleven? In the laboratory?

She had them!

But—and here Edwina's eyes narrowed a little, as she thought—what was her best course now? How to make the fullest use of this information?

It wasn't just sufficient to catch the society in the act of holding a harmless meeting. She wanted to know what was going to be discussed, what was going to be planned at that meeting! She wanted to make sure, once and for all, of crushing the secret society, of making further rehearsal impossible.

She saw her cue now.

Supposing—supposing she turned up to that meeting as a member of the secret society? Supposing she turned up as a spy?

In the hood and mask which her cousin had described to her she would surely be missed. Edwina broadcast sharply, her eyes afloat, as she stepped forward behind the screen.

She tiptoed out of the study.

To get the disguise wasn't hard. There were plenty of theatrical props in the school, and it was from none prepared, of course, that the secret society's own disguises had come. Up the stairs she crept. She reached the attic, and there, in the Fourth Form locker, she found what she sought. Tucking it in a bundle beneath her arm, she tiptoed down the stairs.

Five minutes later Jessica Carleton reported to Barbara Seaborn.

"Aha! The plot thickens like jelly in a polygrapher!" she said. "First, following your instructions, old No. 1."

"Yes!" Babe asked.

"I waited in the old corridor. When Edwina crept out of the study—yep!—old death Jimmy was on her heels. First, she went upstairs; then she fished from our locker a disguise."

Babe's eyes sparkled.

"Oh, my goodness! Good for you, Jimmy! Now, listen! The whole school is still mad on the secret society here. To-night they shall have a haul! Put it around that we've got wind of the secret society's plans. Let it be known that they've arranged a meeting for to-night at eleven—"

"Yes!" Ha, ha, ha!" pealed Mahe.

"I mean," Babe inserted grudgingly, "we're going to play Edwina at her own game!"

And so for the rest of that evening mysterious messages passed round the Fourth concerning the Secret Society of the Scarlet Star.



## Spies In Their Midst

"H H H!"

"Watch!"

"Somebody's coming!"

Two girls, hidden behind a tall cupboard that stood on the landing at the entrance to the Cliff House laboratory, held their breaths.

The two were the secret society leaders. But Babe & Co. were not among them. Babe, wisely avoiding possible complications, in view of the chance at midnight, had suggested the secret society to remain on-look. The two who grudgingly awaited the arrival of Edwina Brookdale obtained an accurate observation of the real secret society. They were headed by Diana Rogston-Clarke.

But in the depository Babe & Co. were listening.

Outside, the clock chimed the hour of eleven. It was followed by a death-like silence. Then suddenly from the region of the laboratory—

"Alack!"

"We've got her!" shouted a voice.

"Hurray!"

A scuffle! Something went over with a thud. There was the sound of a heavy body being dragged on the floor, accompanied by a furious splutter in Edwina's tones.

Then Diana's voice:

"Good enough! Hold her down, kids! Now tear the mask off her face!"

"I tell you," shrieked Edwina.

"No, no! Marcelle Biquet, you little beast!"

"The protest broke off with a splutter.

There was a moment of death-like silence.

Babe & Co. looked at each other gravely.

Then suddenly another voice:

"Good gracious! What in all this! Edwina! Edwina—you, in that ridiculous garb!"

"Oh, my hat! Primmy!" Babe muttered.

"Diana, what is this?"

"It's Edwina!" Diana replied. "She's the secret society!"

"Edwina!"

"I tell you," Edwina choked—"I tell you, it's all set!"

"Thank you! Do not shout, Edwina! I mean remind you that you are behaving in a most unbecoming and reprehensible way! You girls will go to bed! Edwina, you will come in my study!"

Babe snatched a laugh.

These were movement's voices.

Diana & Co., flushed and triumphant, came clattering back. Edwina went off, shaking and furious, realising once again that she had fallen into a trap.

"Of course, Primmy wanted to know all about it."

Once again Edwina found herself in a sticky muck. How could she confess that she had deliberately bubbled herself in Barbara's study and eavesdropped like any little sneak?

Babe and Mahe, as usual, had the laugh. Obviously, they had been playing a joke on her. Obviously, it was clear, that was the explanation they would give the headmistress. She preferred to deal with Babe & Co. herself.

But, in the meantime, Miss Primrose dealt with her. Edwina, red-eared and furious, left her after a night extremely sad and intended concentration, which lasted exactly ten minutes.

And, thanks to the society of extermination which Edwina herself had

organised to her own discomfiture, the secret society—for that night, at least—was left in peace. Secretly at midnight they met. Secret and undisturbed, they went through their rehearsal, and unsuspectingly and unwatched crept back to bed, after agreeing to meet again the next night at Friarisle School. While Edwina, quivering in bed under the lash of all these things which Miss Primrose had said, bit her lip.

"Well, she'd be even with them! She'd smash them yet!"

It was then that it suddenly occurred to her that the wall of Study No. 4 backed on to the unattended Study No. 5 in the Lower Fifth corridor.

At three o'clock in the morning Edwina rose. She armed herself with a ginnet and called forth. Half an hour later she came back, parking the ginnet beneath her bed.

All next day Edwina kept a watchful vigil in the empty study, her ear glued to the hole she had made in the wall. It was not until after tea, however, that her vigil was rewarded.

That was when Clara came into Study No. 4.

"Tonight?" the Tomboy asked.

"Yes."

"O.K.! I just want to make sure of arrangements. We're having the meeting at Friarisle, aren't we?"

"Yes. In the gym there. Twelve o'clock is the time."

"Good enough. I take it we make our way out of the school one by one, as usual, meeting at the school? What's the password?"

"Redstone."

"They'll have a drink at Friarisle."

Edwina tensed. She rose. Oh she went then to the telephone. Fervently, impatiently, she asked for Miles Marchant. It was Ralph Lawrence who took the call. He came back in a few moments.

"I'm sorry, but Marchant can't be found. Can I give him a message?"

"Yes, please. Ask him to ring me. Say Ed. He'll know."

"Right-o!" Lawrence assented and rang off, wondering whose that blighter Marchant had got to.

But blighter Marchant at that moment was enjoying himself. Marchant was putting another nail in pickle for the secret society. That morning Dr. Ferguson had received a message from the secret society—pressed, of course, by Marchant's own hand.

That afternoon Dr. Ferguson had gone over to Lantham to see Professor Goodell, his old friend, and was not expected to return until the small hours of the morning, both he and the professor being exceptionally fond of bridge. Against his return Miles, who loved to dabble in things which did not concern him, was preparing an aerial trap.

For Miles was in Dr. Ferguson's study at that moment. Between the posts of the door stretched a thin line of electric flex, stretched some feet and almost invisible, connected cunningly to both the harpular and the fire alarm of Friarisle School. Marchant checked as he arrived it.

"Old Fergie'll think an earthquake's struck him when he comes in," he said.

Old Fergie would. Old Fergie indeed, would think more than an earthquake had struck him. Crash and upheal he would go over that unseen wire, and such a din and bedlam there! Half the school would think it was being rolled, and the other half would think it was a fox. Between them all, what a riot, what a shindy! What a lark!

A lark indeed! But it was more than a lark which inspired Marchant to that mischief. Now, his handiwork complete, he carefully put the stored card he had prepared on the doctor's desk, stuffed his tools in his pockets, and retreating out the lights went out. He was on the point of vanishing into his study when the voice of Ralph Lawrence hailed him.

"Hi, Marchant! Somebody's been asking for you on the phone. Somebody named Ed!"

"Thanks," drawled Marchant. He went to the box, got through Edwina's voice, impatient, feverish, came over the phone.

"Now listen," she said. "I've got an idea! We're both going to the meeting as spies. Get Jimmy Richmond or one of the others out of the way and take his place, see?"

"My hat, rather! And you?"

"I'll get hold of Clara. She's nearest my height!"

"O.K.," chuckled Miles.

And so the plot was hatched, and this time the secret society knew nothing about it. Certainly Clara suspected nothing when she first slipped over the window sill at half past eleven last night, she found herself caught by the arm. And tugging toward the grim, vindictive face of Edwina staring into hers.

"So," the professor smiled, "breaking heads are you? Come to my study, Clara was wisely dismayed.

"But—"

"Come to my study," Edwina replied irritably.

So Clara, afraid to stand arguing there in case one of the others should unwarily appear on the scene, suffered herself to be led off, Edwina took her to her study, pushed her into a chair.

"Now," she said, "you're to stop three until I fetch Miss Fergusson!"

"Oh, my giddy aunt! Edwina."

But Edwina had gone out, leaving the key in the lock on the outside of the door as she did so.

The first part of the game was in her hands!

Could she play it out now until the end?

**"A WORD, ALLOW ME..."**

My Dear Readers.—Here it will be Christmas present time. In fact, I dare say you sensible ones have already started saving up—or even doing your shopping early. So would that I were here to suggest what.

If you're at a loss as to what to give a school chum, what about one of the four presents which are listed on page 14 of this issue?

If your friend is a **SCHOOLING** reader and an admirer of the **GIF** House series, she'd absolutely read in **THE SCHOOL FRIEND ANNUAL**, which contains a host of grand stories, many of them featuring the various characters of famous **GIF** House.

If her interest runs back to the old days—

"Now, what would you like for Christmas?" Why not suggest **THE SCHOOL-GIRLS' OWN ANNUAL**. It is a book to treasure among your best loved possessions, for between its covers is a collection of the finest possible stories, beautifully illustrated.

Full details of these two **ANNUALS**, and of **THE GOLDEN ANNUAL**, and **THE FIGHTING BOYS' AND GIRLS' STORES**, appear on page 11 of this issue.

**YOUR EDITOR.**

She passed, looking round at the masked faces which circled her.

The scene was the gym at Friarfield School. It was a vivid scene. There was no light except the moonlight which streamed in from the skylight overhead and in it the crowd and masked figures stood impassively and shapeless.

"You know," Babs went on, "for what purpose you have been called to this meeting. Our mission, Edwina Wooddale of **GIF** House and Miss Marchant of Friarfield School, are working against us. By sneaky and by tricky they are endeavoring to earn for it a bad name—"

"Hear, hear," murmured the voice of No. 5—Miss Marchant himself—and through the slit of his mask his eyes glimmered at Edwina who stood opposite to him.

"Already," Babs went on with a glance towards him, "they have started up feeling against us in both schools in each school."—And then she stopped, giving the faintest of sudden starts—

"In each school," she went on loudly, "there is now a campaign against us!"

"Shame!" said No. 2 again.

Once again Babs' eyes fell upon him. Perhaps it was fortunate for Miss Marchant that he could not see her face. For into that face concealed beneath its mask, had darted sudden, sharp suspicion. Into Babs' eyes shot a gleam.

It was not Marchant's voice which had warned her that a spy stood in their midst, however.

For Marchant wore a ring upon his little finger. It was a gold signet ring. Babs knew that ring and paid for a moment, a betraying ray of moonlight, causing it to glint, had drawn her eyes towards it. From that moment she knew.

Neither by word nor gesture, however, did she give away the discovery she had made. But her mind was racing as she continued to chant on.

"Members, we must act," she said.

"We must act this very night! One of these enemies, Miss Marchant, is here, in this school." She saw his eyes go to Edwina's face, saw the quick, negative shake of the head which Edwina gave in reply.

And again an electric thrill ran through her.

For No. 7, whom she had fondly imagined to be Clara, was not Clara!

And again it was a small point which gave that fact away. A point which Edwina, confident in her disguise, had allowed herself to overlook. She had forgotten that Clara took an overcoat in show, a point about which Clara was apt to get very touchy at times. She had forgotten that her own small, dainty feet would never bear comparison with the Tambo's.

Babs coughed.

"We must act," she said. "I have a plan. This plan we shall carry out forthwith. The boy Marchant must be brought before the council and tried by the Student Star, No. 7!"

"No, 7?"

"No, 3!"

"Yes!" Miles replied.

"You are selected for duty. Never mind what. You know the law of the society, that you obey your leader without question, No. 3!"

"I'm here," Babs said.

"No, 1!"

"Present!" Lister Catherine called cheerfully.

"You, 1st!" Babs went on, "will come with me." She had her idea now and was wondering desperately if she could carry it through. "I will go first," she added. "Now, 2 and 7 you will follow me. The rest of you will bring up the rear. But first, wait!"

She passed as though struck by a sudden thought. "Now, 3 and 5 you will come with me now to see if the coast is clear!"

The secret society gazed at her dumbly.

"But what, foremost—" began Jeanina.

"Remember the rule. No questions," Babs rapped sharply.

She nodded as she slipped towards the door, followed by Miles and Lister Catherine. She had her scheme set and decided now and her eyes were bright as she slipped along the dark corridor outside.

Half-way down she stopped.

"Now listen," she said quickly. "Nos. 2 and 7 are Edwina and Marchant. We don't ask questions. Listen, I believe that Doctor Fergusson's study is empty, isn't it?"

"Yes," Catherine agreed.

"He won't be back for some time?"

"No!"

"Right! Then this is the plan! And Babs' eyes glimmered. "Listen, you go along to Dr. Fergusson's study now. Pull the door open wide, and leave it open. Take the key, and bring it back to me. Now listen again! When we're all out, later on, I shall halt by the doorway, pretending 'Hi!' if you and thing 'Whoa!' cry 'Hi!' if you and Miss Marchant and Miles into the study. I'll close the door and lock it on the outside."

Catherine sped off, chuckling. It was then two minutes he was back again, dropping the key into Babs' hand.

"Good work!" Babs beamed. "Now let's get back to the gym!"

They went back.

"O.K.," Babs said briefly. "The coast is clear. Now fall in, everybody! And remember—do nothing unless you get orders from me! I lead the way. Nos. 2 and 7 following. Ready!"

**A**T FERGUSON'S she found Miles, already dressed in the robes of the secret society. He was waiting for her in the shadow of the school pavilion. She glanced at him quickly.

"Everything all right?"

"O.K.," grinned Miles.

"And Richmond?"

"I've got him shut up in the cupboard downstairs!"

"Then, good,"—Edwina's lips came together—"Now careful," she warned.

"This year see from me! This time—"

She did not finish. But there was a grim, purposeful, revengeful light in her eyes. This time there should be no bungling, no mistakes. Edwina felt at last she had the secret society at her mercy!



Penalty for Plotters

**"MEMBERS,"** Barbara Redfern said in the deep, disguised voice she used when addressing the secret society, "are we all here?"

"Yes, rather!"

In the darkness Edwina and Marchant exchanged a grim glance.

"Lead on!" Edwina muttered.

Bala led on. Down the dark corridor she slipped—down the stairs into the headmaster's passage. All was blackly dark, but, fortunately, Bala knew her way about. She felt, rather than saw, the open door of Dr. Fergusson's room as she drew abreast of it.

"Now!"

Three steps past the door she halted abruptly.

"Hiss!" she cried warningly.

The waiting was not altogether unavailing. For at that instant she did hear something—a step farther along the corridor. But Bala and Lister, faithful to instructions, paid no heed. They had their orders, and they acted.

While Edwina and Bala crouched there, tense, two dark figures, detaching themselves from the rest of the procession, silently and without warning, flew at them. Two pairs of hands were viciously laid upon them, and these hands pushed as one. There came a cry from Marchant, a strangled gasp from Edwina, as they found themselves, utterly unprepared and caught completely of their balance, whirling through the doorway.

What happened? Even Bala turned pale. For in a moment the night air was made hideous with sound. Crash! went Marchant over his own carefully prepared wire. Flung! went Edwina, as she sprang on top of him. Thud! went the door as Bala dashed it into place, neatly catching the key at the same time. And clang, clang, clang—clatter, crash, crash went balls and guns—pealing, clanging, reverberating in hollow-like din that shut the whole of the sleeping school out of its beds!

Deafening!

From the other end of the corridor, a voice:

"Great goodness! What is all—"

"Dr. Fergusson!" gasped Bala.

"Scram! Get back to Cliff House! Oh, no, but! Listen!"

But nobody was listening. They were flying, better shelter, through a school

that was positively vibrating to the clamour and clangour of bells and gongs, leaving their common prisoners in the private room of Frintdale's headmaster!

Bala was the first to reach the end of the corridor, and she drew up to fumble busily with the brass knob of the glass door; the others panted up to her while she was still thrusting and prodding at it.

"Quickly, Bala!" Bala urged.

"They'll be after us! The boys have managed to get back to their studios, but we shall be caught if you're not quick!"

There was a note of panic in her voice as she joined Bala in her frantic efforts.

"The honest thing's locked, or jammed—or something!" Bala gasped.

"It's no good; we'll have to get out another way!"

But that meant running the risk of coming face to face with masters—even Dr. Fergusson himself!

"We—no can't go back!" Lucy Faraday put in timidly.

"Get to work it," decided Bala in a grim tone. "Come on!"

The whole party, realising there was nothing else for it, broke into a run, crowding into the side of the corridor so as to remain in the deepest shadow until the last minute.

Bala, leading the way, retired an open door on her right.

"This way! Follow!" she hissed; and even as a crowd of boys and masters were hurrying into the corridor, the Cliff House girls slipped silently into the room.

Bala waited until the last girl was in, then softly shut the door; she stood with her back to it, determined to keep out any possible pursuer until the last moment.

"Through the window!" she urged.

"Hurry!"

But there proved to be no glory of these. All the investigation was centred about Dr. Fergusson's study, where the two observers were quickly discovered. No one had seen the girls in the darkness.

Bala was the last to slip aside the ill and hard on the smooth turf of Dr.

Fergusson's private lawn; she drew about the window behind her.

"Now, run like the wind!" she instructed briefly.

RETURNING ROOMS.

While the secret society, slipping back through the night towards Cliff House School, were making good their retreat, Edwina and her cousin were having the most unhappy time of their lives.

For Dr. Fergusson was furious, of course. In the doctor's mind there was no room for doubt that he had caught the secret society re-embodied. In vain Marchant pleaded—in vain protested—in vain tried to explain!

The doctor glared.

"You say," he backed, "you had nothing to do with this society—that it was they who prepared that booby trap for my discomfiture! That you and this girl—your cousin—were merely playing the part of spies!"

"Yes," gasped Marchant.

"Then," the doctor snarled grimly, "we'll prove it! Harriet!—Go the school captain's—search his study!"

Marchant turned white. For he knew, in advance, what would be found there. There, in the bureau, were the secret star cards which he had laboriously prepared for future use. There also was the box, the lock with which he had erected the booby trap. Found they were, sure enough. Dr. Fergusson's lips set like a trap.

"It is obvious, Marchant," he said, "that all you have told me is a pack of lies! Were you not a prefect, I would undoubtedly expel you. As it is—his eyes glaucous—" you will be deprived of your prefectship, and you will leave this school tomorrow—suspended for the rest of the term! As for you, young lady, I will take you back to Cliff House myself!"

He did. Almost fainting, feeling the bottom had dropped completely out of her world, the bewildered Edwina was escorted back.

There, a roused Miss Pringleton listened with horror to the story as told by Frintdale's Head. Again Edwina had no proof. Although she had been in actual contact with the secret society, not a single name had been mentioned, and Bala & Co., having renamed Clara, were by that time safely in bed.

Miss Pringleton listened to her desperately filtering explanations with a grim frown.

"I think," she said billy, "that the doctor has conclusively proved his case. It seems quite obvious that you and your cousin were acting in concert to terrify both schools by means of this secret society. I shall not," she added sternly, "excuse you from the prefectship at the moment, because I am short of prefects. But I shall certainly make it my business to send a special report to your father; and next term, I can promise you, you will not see a prefect no longer. And if," she added warningly, "I hear any more of the secret society in the meantime, I shall seriously think of sending you home altogether! I hope," she added, "you have learned your lesson!"

Edwina's face was pale with fear.

For what would she do now, with her hands virtually tied behind her back! How to prevent the play taking place and making sure that Lucy Faraday never met the man who was her father? Edwina was hunted. She saw rain loosing large in front of her, but she wasn't beaten yet. She dared not give up—couldn't!

No! Rather face expulsion first!

AND OF THIS WAS THE RESULT.

IN *Deception, hand-down* as the title, Edwina Brookdale resorts to one final plan by which she hopes to make it impossible for the Fourth Form play to be produced. On this scheme she relies everything, knowing full well that if it fails her friends at Cliff House will be threatened.

In next Saturday's *SCHOOLGIRL* you will read of the renewed conflict between Edwina Brookdale and the Fourth Form drama—a conflict which leads up to a dramatic climax. Do not miss this magnificent long complete Secret Society story, specially written by HILDA RICHARDSON. It is entitled:—



YOU CAN BEGIN THIS NEW SERIAL TO-DAY: It Stars Betty Barton & Co. of Morcove School



# HER SECRET AT SWANLAKE

By MARJORIE STANTON



#### FOR NEW READERS.

PAM WILLOUGHBY of Morcove School has become a day-lab in order that she may have time to do as best she can.

CLAIRE FERRAND—a girl who, after living all her life on a sheep station in Australia, has come into a fortune. With the money she is able to settle down in England, she is to stay with the Willeoughbys at their stately home—Swanlake.

VIVIANNE DE VILLE, having heard of Claire's fortune, wishes to take her place. She meets Claire and tells a plausible story to the effect that the fortune is wanted by the police. She represents herself as an amateur detective and offers to take Claire in the car, west of Swanlake until she can clear her name. Claire consents, and Vivianne arrives at Swanlake to be welcomed as the real Claire Ferrand.

BETTY BARTON, who, with some of her classmates, comes to visit Pam in all cases suspicious of Vivianne. These suspicions are reinforced when Vivianne changes her name at the present opening of a cupboard in a room in the east wing. Obviously she has hidden Claire in the cupboard! A boy is found, however, and the cupboard is opened.

(Now read on.)

#### Was Betty Mistaken?

PAM WILLOUGHBY now that a key had been found to work the lock, drew open the cupboard door.

"What's inside?"

That was the excited question which Betty Barton very nearly voiced, directly she, like the rest of the girls, could see into the cupboard.

For Betty, from merely wondering why the girl should know as Claire Ferrand had been acting so strangely, had begun to wonder if she had something hidden—in the cupboard!

"But what a moment!"

That, again, was a cry which Betty had difficulty in withholding, now that it could be seen how crumpled the cap-coat was with old garments, some faded rags, and faded letters that had addressed stately Swanlake in the long ago.

It had flashed upon Betty's allowed mind that the girl who had come to live

at Swanlake must at least have hidden something here within the last few minutes. Or why—why, during those last few minutes, had she doled so unceremoniously in this unadorned east wing of the great country house?

Why had she done that, the moment there was talk downstairs of a general coming up to this very room, to cast out things suitable for amateur theatricals!

But Betty was a firm believer in "better to be safe than sorry." Hence her voicing no word, after all, that would have proclaimed her suspicions against a girl in Claire Ferrand's position.

It was not as if Claire were somebody of doubtful character, upon whom Pam's parents had taken pity.

Claire Ferrand was to live down here, simply because the larger handling her affairs in London had not known quite what to do with her, just come from Australia, so she was to obtain the vast fortune to which she had been found to be entitled.

And yet—

"I can't help thinking!" ran Betty's mind, whilst Polly and other chances of hers gaily met about scampering out the cupboard's contents.

More useful fields, in the way of staff for "dressing-up"! That was all the opening of the cupboard had meant to making Polly Linton, spunking Bummy Tverton, impish Nannan, and the rest of Betty's Morcove class.

To them "the play's the thing"—that little playlet which they were to put into rehearsal, as a means of helping Harcourt's great gala week.

So it was Betty only, who, keeping out of the "scrum" now raging in front of the cupboard, paid attention to the girl whom she so vaguely, and yet so obstinately, suspected.

Perfectly at ease now, this tall, pretty girl of seventeen, who had been raised to middle riches. She was not taking any notice of Betty, but was simply laughing at the way "Morcove" was making a kind of rag fair of this remote room in the east wing.

"Talk about Petticoat Lane on a Saturday night!" she giggled. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Betty moved round to her in the rounded room.

"Why, what do you know about Petticoat Lane?" was Betty's mild question.

But Betty's mind was suddenly aflutter with suspicion. How should this apparently pretty Claire, from Australia, know anything of the London marketplace! She was looking a little flustered again, too, and more than a little annoyed.

"Oh—Petticoat Lane?" came the dewy answer. "I read a magazine article once—in Australia—about London. And this reminds me of what it said—girls and women pulling old clothes about on the barrows, and trying to second-hand hats. Polly Linton," she added, with a chuckle, "you do look—oh, so funny!"

"You look about me!" was dusky Nannan's calling attention, y'all, as she struck an attitude. "Behold! My size I look—gorgeous!"

"Very nice—for the Chamber of Harrows." Bummy gave her opinion of Nannan, in garments belonging to the Queen Anne period. "Still, girls! If Pam thinks we may make what use we like of anything—dressing here and there—"

"And taking in a good deal," cried Polly, knocking out the very full skirt she was wearing. "How?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, of course," Pam solemnly smiled, closing the rustled-up cupboard, "we must hold some working-parties over here; all part of the fun!"

"Rather! Come over after school one day, for a busy box with the dresses, and another day for a rehearsal," Betty nodded. "Oh, dear, how I wish we could stay on a bit longer now! But I suppose we must be off back to Morcove. Say, Pam, shall we leave all this stuff about, and make use of this room for our newworking-parties?"

"Oh, but," demurred the girl they knew as Claire Ferrand, before Pam could answer, "won't it be rather cold up here?"

"Child!" Betty scolded on her. "Why? The central heating has been

brought into this wing of the house. The pipes are on now."

"Oh, all right," smiled the girl who had come into a fortune. "Perhaps I don't so really keep warm, being from Australia. Anyhow, I'd like to get back to that lovely fire, down in the hall."

Yet, as Betty noticed, the girl lunged about, waiting to go down with all of them, when she might very well have preceded them by a few minutes.

It took those Marroccos, who had dressed themselves up for fun, some five minutes to arrive to a room, and more or less tidy, state.

Clustering with enthusiasm about the intruded "guest" for the gala week, at last they all made their way back to that part of the huge mansion which was in present-day use.

Down in the grand entrance-hall there was a fire, standing all in talk, and Betty noticed that Claire Ferrand did seem to be glad to have a fire fire to look at. Nor did the girl offer to leave that warm hearth when the moment had come for a Swanlake one to take on board all those who had to return to Morocco.

Pam was out on the lamp-lit gravel, to try an affectionate "Night, all!" as the Ferns captain and the rest crowded into the roomy Rover. But Claire Ferrand had said her good-night to them all at the threshold.

The outer door of the hall was standing open, for Pam in a moment or two would be running indoors again.

Amidst all the joviality of the departure, Betty was looking from one of the side windows back into the hall. And did it surprise her to see Claire Ferrand leave the cozy fireplace to go running upstairs again?

No, Betty had even expected the girl to do just that, as one who, with the chance offered, needed to do something in secret—in the west wing!

### Borrowed Plumes

**B**EASTLYFELLY witness, all those who

So the girl who was posing as Claire Ferrand needed to herself as she went upstairs upstairs, whilst Pam Willoughby was still out of doors, crying a hint: "Night, all! See you at school in the morning!"

To the east wing hurried this same Claire Ferrand, whose true identity was that of Virginia Mazzo—a dangerous girl!

Only nineteen, and yet for a year she had lived by her wits.

Her motto: "Every girl for herself"—that was Virginia Mazzo at nineteen, with no idea of ever working honestly for a living.

A weekly wage, when by trickery and audacity there was always some coup or other to be brought off! No, thank you! Ah, and what a wonderful coup it could be for her this time! Only it was to be hoped there could be no more career for her as had as the one just now.

These girls, suddenly determined to get the locked cupboard open, when a few minutes previously she had got the real Claire Ferrand to hide inside it, and had afterwards pocketed the key!

Something like a scare, that; and yet, after all, there had been no Claire for the girls to discover when they had opened the cupboard. In the name of mystery, then, what had become of the girl?

It was Virginia Mazzo's eagerness to find out the answer to that question

which accounted for her fitting back like this to the east wing.

Starting into the room that had been left in such a hazy state, she first closed the door, then strode to the now unlocked cupboard.

She whipped its door wide open and stared, bewildered, into the half-dark, empty interior.

How—how had the real Claire got away when she had been under lock and key? For the girl really had vanished. It was no case of her having secretly remained hidden, under piles of stuff which the girls had not troubled to turn over.

Suddenly it flashed into Virginia's mind. A house as old as Swanlake—it might well contain a secret cupboard or other room, connected with this cupboard! But, of course, she must be very cautious, though!

Steadily indeed was her stepping right inside the waddy cupboard, so as to avoid the back wall of it with her knuckles. There was a peering halloo from about her profile as she stepped.

"Claire!" she voiced, and listened eagerly for a muffled response. "Claire Ferrand! Where are you, Claire?"

Suddenly there was a faint click—as of a curtain catch being set in operation—behind one of the old oak of the cupboard's lining. Then Virginia knew. "She's coming out!"

But how about Pam, who must have come indoors by now?

Virginia Mazzo, a girl to think of everything, started out of the cupboard and across the room to its closed door.

She opened it just wide enough to be able to listen. To her intense relief, she could just hear Pam Willoughby at the door downstairs. The girl was asking for a Barrocade member—Barrocade Castle, most likely, to have a talk about the gala. So it was all right!

Virginia closed the room door, turned round—and there was the real Claire Ferrand, ready to come away from the cupboard, but hesitating, her excited eyes asking:

"Is it safe?"

"O.K.," chuckled Virginia. "And we've a minute or two, anyhow. But Claire! What a scare for both of us at the very start! What a bit of luck, isn't it?"

"The sliding door at the back of the cupboard! As a matter of fact," laughed the real Claire Ferrand, "I had opened it, and gone beyond it, before all these girls came swarming in, as you wanted me they were going to do. You hauled me so violently into the cupboard, I hit against the wall at the back. And then—what with being in the dark, and all amongst old clothes that were hanging from pegs—"

"You worked the panel's catch by accident? Oh, I understand now," Virginia uttered. "Very funny! But how splendid it will be, though—somehow for you to hide right away from—"

"Oh, thank you," the real Claire had playfully objected, "but I hope it's not going to come to that. You'd have to find me a torch, anyhow."

"My dear, haven't I said you shall have everything! That's going to be easy. By the way, you might get me your keys, so that I can get you things of your own from the luggage. I've handled Pam Willoughby all right," pursued an only Virginia.

"She's only a misadventurer, but she's a sport, I can tell. Knows how to mind her own business. But, for your sake,

I've got to be very careful, and so I mustn't hang about now."

"Well, here are my keys,"

"Thanks," Virginia whispered, and the tiny bunch of keys changed hands. "Now I must go down, or Pam may come looking for me. How lovely and warm the central heating keeps this room! And presently I'll look in again, with some food."

"It's still to be this room for me, then?"

"Oh, yes—for to-night, at any rate," Virginia Mazzo coolly soothed, drawing off to the door. "Quite safe—quite cozy, too! And all the time there is that secret place behind the cupboard—in case."

With a beaming smile, she made the sign "Thank!" with an upturned finger at the same time opening the door to pass out.

Claire Ferrand had been going to speak, and instead she had to give only a sigh. Such a sigh! Hearing it, the coming girl who was hoping her could tell that fresh possessions would have to be used when next they did hold a secret convention. Already Claire Ferrand was troubled with grave doubts.

"But I've got her willing to stay here for the present, anyhow,"

Virginia Mazzo exulted to herself, as she went away on impulse from the east wing. "Any talk of wanting to come out of hiding, and she may soon find herself where she can't come out, whether she wants to or not! See—where under lock and key," ran the malicious young schemer's mind, "and no chance of her ever being heard!"

Back in the main bed-room corridor, as to which she cared—er, rather, the real Claire's room—opened, she met Pam, who had come upstairs after telephoning.

"Now I must get unpacked," the unsuspected friend sweetly smiled. "You'll be going to school in the morning, I take it?"

"Yes. So you'll be all by yourself until I get back at tea-time. Hope you won't be dull, Claire."

"Oh, I shall have plenty to do. Say, Pam, about that play-acting stunt for the gala week. Don't you think it would be better, after all, if you girls rehearsed at the school?"

Pam's face beamed with joy.

"You mean, Claire, with you not in the play?"

"Oh, I want to be in it—terribly! Terribly keen! But I just thought—some a pity to tag your chance over here so frequently."

"They're not going to find it any fun," Pam laughed. "Not with a cue to fetch them each time and run them back again. Besides, Claire, it's the whole idea—for plenty of my chance to be often at Swanlake whilst you're staying home. Should make it so nice for you."

And, with a friendly "see you presently" and Morocco's "little lady of Swanlake" passed into her own room, leaving the sham Claire Ferrand to go to hers.

The French room! One of the finest guest-chambers in the whole wonderful house! And here were all the real Claire's belongings, that had been fetched from the station to-day.

Well might Virginia Mazzo give a wide grin as she used the bunch of keys to unlock some of the more important trunks belonging to the girl whom she meant to force.

Some were cabin trunks, and all of them still bore the blue labels for the recent voyage from Australia. "Wanted

on "Voyage"—by the girl who, having come into such a vast fortune, had travelled luxuriously. And now—

Fond of fancy, and as roved as a girl could be, Victoria Mason retained that exalted spirit whilst accepting such lovely, costly things, to put them by in chests of drawers and wardrobes. A set of hairbrushes and combs to match, in gold and tortoiseshell mounts, she at once turned upon her own glossy hair.

Then, as she laid the things upon the dressing-table, she stood looking at herself in the mirror.

The face reflected there—who had the real Claire Ferrand was in a position, chosen here at Swanlake, to say that it was not the face of the girl who had come into the fortune?

Pam Willoughby—she was not to know. Those other Morocco girls—there also had been completely taken in.

The only person to fear, as one who had had to do with the real Claire over here in the Old Country, was that lawyer handling her affairs. But he was a busy man in London.

Victoria Mason turned away from the mirror to do the rest of the unpacking. She opened an attaché-case, and there were some long letters from the lawyer that should be read.

Harder still, there was a dainty little diary which the real Claire appeared to have kept from the day she sailed from Australia—all in her own handwriting. No one would be able to imitate the writing.

46 "Pammy reads, Claire!"

That was Pam's admiring remark, as she saw "Claire Ferrand" coming down to the hall just before seven o'clock.

"Oh, it's one I wore on the boat, Pam! Say, will this letter go off tonight?"

Pam nodded towards a hall table where letters for the post were always placed.

"In a few minutes, Claire. One of the maids will take it. But you shouldn't have stayed up in your room to write. There's a nice fire in the library."

"Oh, this didn't take me a moment!" lied Victoria Mason, carelessly dropping the letter to the table. "Only to see my lawyer in London, saying I got here all right, and to ask him for a cheque."

"A cheque!"

"Yes. Fifty pounds or so. I know the idea is not to go to expense over that gale wreck deal. All the same, Pam, there's all that money of mine, and I don't see why I shouldn't have as much as I like to ask for."

Pam smiled.

"But, Claire, fifty pounds! The lawyer will think you're going it!"

"He can think what he likes, well likes!" shrugged the other. "Claire Ferrand."

"It's my fortune—nobody else's! And I don't mean to be kept waiting!"

"That's funny, Betty! I was thinking of doing something that would surprise you!"

"Why, what's your idea, then, Polly?"

"You're first, Betty?"

"Then here it is: Storrowood isn't far from Swanlake. So after we've played Storrowood—"

"And beaten them?" was Polly's confident remark. "Yes!"

"I'm thinking of getting someone from going in to tea with the rest of our team. I mean to get a Storrowood girl to loan me her lake, Polly, so I can run to Swanlake. Easy to beat in time for the Morocco tea."

"But that," Polly said, excitedly hopping down from her perch, "is just my idea, too, Betty. I also want to pay a surprise visit to Swanlake."

"You do! Why?"

"Betty, that Ferrand girl! I don't know why it is, and as I haven't said anything to you or the others so far. But—"

"Polly!" gasped Betty. "Because that's just how I've been feeling about Claire Ferrand, only I haven't liked to say so! When we were all at Swanlake last Monday, she certainly made herself awfully nice to us. Pam, of course, thinks her a peeping girl!"

"I know," Polly grinned. "And yet—"

"And yet—you got a sort of an idea, didn't you? Something at momentary, oh, it's all so hard to describe! But—"

"I only know this, Betty, but it's a thing I'm certain about. Claire Ferrand isn't really loved about that gale wreck of ours. She doesn't want to go over to Swanlake every few days. Now, Betty, Pam is one of the dearest girls in the world; so if there is any fancy between going on—"

"The sooner we end it, the better! Well, Polly, if ever you want to get someone to the tea when you are in doubt about, take 'em off your guard—oh! That's what I thought."

"And that's why I thought of paying a surprise visit to Swanlake this afternoon, Betty."

"Same here!"

They laughed together then, in delight at this fresh example of how their minds in others worked along the same line.

They could go on talking, for none of their study-mates or other classes were whisking upon the scene. Moreover, for one, was doing "duty" in the classroom, whilst the rest—except for Maday, who had most likely rushed to the morning-school—had gone out to the field.

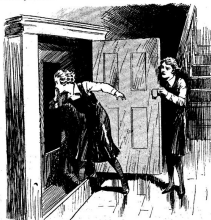
As for Pam, the Swanlake car was at this moment whisking her home about the morning's attendance at school—she was not in the Form's team for this afternoon's away match at Storrowood.

The latter, it had seemed to good-natured Pam, was a fine opportunity for her to commiserate Claire Ferrand. So Pam had subordinated her passion for games to a desire to entertain life at home for Claire.

Not easy had it been for Form captain Betty to find a substitute for Pam in the hockey team. But Storrowood, as it happened, were not formidable rivals—unlike those other friendly rivals of Morocco, the Barncombe House girls.

When the time came, it was in high hopes of a win that Betty set off with her team in the school's private motor-bus, and by half-past three that afternoon, there really had been a fine win for Morocco—three goals to nil!

Then Betty and Polly could spend away upon cycles that had been most readily loaned to them, whilst their



BETTY and Polly gave gasps of amazement as the panel slid slowly back. Then Betty stopped forward and called insistently into the blackness: "Is—Is anyone there?" A silence, and then—a voice replied!

The Voice

TWELVE o'clock, Wednesday—and all Morocco School just dismissed for the day.

A "hallor," this afternoon, and for Betty and her class of Study No. 12 it meant an "away" match at Storrowood School.

Books under arms, down the Form corridor ran Betty, in which into Study No. 12 and had only Polly there. The reading, sitting upon the table-edge, legs a-dangle, was chewing a crisp apple.

"Betty dear, after the match this afternoon, I'm going to do something that'll surprise you."

follow-players went trooping into the Swanlake schoolhouse for tea.

Full pelt went captain and madcap along several miles of lonely road to Swanlake, and at four o'clock they were down from their machines at the outlandish porch of the stately Wiltonly mansion.

Feddling up that private carriage—was a heath avenue that was one of the glories of Swanlake—Betty and Polly had looked about to see if Pam and Claire were sitting over the wide grasslands.

But there had been no sight of them. Away upon some faint, perhaps. Or had they just gone indoors, this being tea-time?

"You understand, Polly?" was Betty's last whisper, as she sang. "If they are both out, then we'll make it a chance to draw into talk the maid who opens the door. It's quite likely, if Claire isn't well that Pam thinks her to be, the maids may have—"

"Hallo! Waiting Pam?"

The porch door had been opened by Claire herself.

"Afternoon, Claire," said Betty. "You alone, then?"

"He—yes. But Pam will be in presently. We've had a walk, but I left her on the way back—she wanted to look in at one of the cottages. I was upstairs—see you turning up—so I ran down."

She had yet to stand aside to let them enter.

"If you'd like to go to meet Pam, I can tell you the way—"

"Oh, I think we might wait for her," Betty smiled.

"Then I'll—leave you in the drawing-room. Sorry," Claire a trifle pained, "only I must just run upstairs again. I'll be down in a minute. A lovely fire for you!"

But Betty and Polly, swayed into the drawing-room, made no rush to the welcoming hearth. Instead, the Monroe pair stood at a pause, like thin, exchanging excited, consulting looks.

Go up quietly after Claire—at once? Surely their unexpected arrival had put her into a guilty state of flutter—and why, why? Hadn't they, as Claire of Pam, a right to find out?

Betty's eyes said: "Yes!" and Polly's: "Come on, then—quick!" And next second the drawing-room door was being silently opened.

Out they slipped, with the beruffled floor of the green hall to take, in silence, their thyming to the richly-carpeted staircase.

Claire they could hear, loudly whistling a tune, as she passed off the stairs on a floor above.

Then the whistling broke off, and there was complete silence, so that the chams wondered if the girl, after being purposely noisy up till then, was now herself going—on tiptoe!

A few stairs they anxiously ascended, and then—

Flap! Something ahead-like closed over both girls, rendering them helpless for the moment under its clinging folds.

Almost it was as if a deflated balloon had flopped upon them, and there was Polly's tremulous "Bottom!" at the hindrance.

But Betty—she emitted not a word until there had been a quick casting-off of what proved to be a large sideswain quilt. Then, looking up to some landing business, over which the quilt must have fallen.

"She did that," was the Monroe captain's deep whomp, "to hinder us!"

"Clear!" Polly breathed dolefully.

"A quilt, snatched from her own bed! But how—in any way our going out? I don't understand, though! She must have thought it worth while to delay us even for only a few seconds! What difference could a few moments make!"

Betty did not answer. She gathered that they had both better keep quite still—to listen.

If they were to pick up any sound at all, they expected it to be only the closing of Claire's door, she having except to her room to shut herself in there.

But, to their staggering amazement as they listened, there came down to them the slight noise made by one door being closed as softly as possible, and then—the closing of a second door.

BETTY and Polly turned to each other on the staircase, looking thrilled—astounded.

The one girl, by a dilation of her eyes, was showing as much as the other a sudden increased mistrust of Claire Ferrand.

"Out of one room up there into another, just then?" Polly tensely whispered. "She's gone into her own room now, and that's quite all right, of course. But, Betty, what made her first stop to come other room?"

Betty was frowning in a hard-thinking way as she whispered back:

"I just don't know! How can I say? But there is something, Polly; something she is up to, unaccounted, secret. Well!"

"Good, an idea! Haven't got somebody visiting her, has she?" the madcap wildly demanded. "And nobody is to know?"

"Yes, why—why shouldn't Pam, anyway, be allowed to know? Pam has every right to know!" Betty muttered.

"Hush, Polly! What I think we'd better do, I don't feel we should wait for Pam to come in. Let's go up quietly, after all. We know where Claire is now. Perhaps, if we keep dead quiet, we shall hear sounds that mean—somebody else!"

AND now they were upstairs in the bed-room corridor—passing outside the closed door of that room which they knew to be Claire Ferrand's.

Not a sound had they made, and not a sound could they hear, to tell them that the girl was in her room.

Suddenly Betty did a bold thing. She carried the knob of the door and looked in.

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Not there! After all, they had been deceived just now by the soft closing of this bed-room door. The girl whom they now definitely suspected of some trickery or other, had only pretended to withdraw to her bed-room. What had become of her then? In the whole great house—where was she?

"The east wing," Betty whispered in Polly's ear. "That room we were in the other day. Let's try there."

But the room, when they got to it, was deserted, and it was as if no one had been there since that hour when all the old dresses and other fabrics were posted out. The faded materials still lay heaped about, just as they had been left at that time.

Polly, who was a bad hand at not meeting with results, frowned heavily. Here was an exasperated look which said: "Oh, come away!" Betty, however, gave a call: "Oh, no!" and—strode to the cupboard.

It was unlocked—again, just as it had been left by them all, last Monday. She drew the door wide open, and stepped right inside, to start peering about. By the time Polly had joined her in the cupboard, Betty was knocking the oak wall at the back.

"I'm just wondering, Polly, if some vanishing trick could have been played on us last Monday, thanks to a secret panel! After all, think how old Susan Lake is! And they were no flock of rubicundoes, in the old days. Private enter had to be smuggled into hiding, and—"

"Good, do that again, Betty!" struck in Polly, after another of her chams' teasing yaps. "Hullo!"

"You're right; it is! Oh, there must be a space, not brickwork, behind all this oak. Why, by pressing, you can quite shake the woodwork! Polly," came the gasp of increased excitement next moment. "A silver! Look!"

By pushing sideways as she pressed, Betty had caused a large section of the cupboard's back lining to move in some groove. It had slid away to the left, leaving an opening big enough to let them through into a groping-dark room.

"My goodness!" Polly parted. "And has Claire Ferrand gone in there since she came upstairs? Oh, Betty, go on, and I'll follow—quick!"

"Not so fast, dear! It's pitch dark, and we don't know what there may be. I mean—stairs, or even a straight-down shaft. Can't we get matches—a candle? But, hark!" Betty checked her chams, who was going to rush away to obtain a light. "A sound just then! There is—there is somebody!"

"Then it's Claire!" gasped Polly. "Call out to her, shall we? May as well, she must have heard us."

"Who's down there?" Betty voiced into the darkness beyond the secret doorway. "Claire, are you there? Claire Ferrand—where?"

And faintly, hesitantly, came the demanded answer:

"Yes, I'm Claire Ferrand—why?"

But it was not the voice of the girl they knew as Claire Ferrand!

THE real Claire Ferrand? Have Betty and Polly already chanced upon the secret of Vivienne Murray's plotting? Or will that scheming girl had some means of preventing them finding out the truth? You must see on account from next Saturday's instalment of this dramatic serial!