

EVERY SCHOOLGIRL'S OWN PAPER

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EVERY 2<sup>ND</sup>  
SATURDAY

Incorporating  
"SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN"

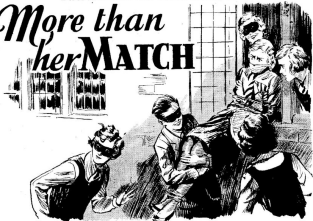


## BESSIE'S BIG MOMENT!

Read how Bessie becomes the  
breadwinner of the house, in the grand  
long complete *Cliff House School*  
story, inside.

In This Brilliant Long Complete Cliff House School Story, Edwina  
Discovers That The Secret Society Is—

# More than her MATCH



THE play must go on! That is the stern vow of Baba & Co.—alias the secret society of The Scarlet Star. But it seemed they were doomed to failure—defeated by the schemes of unscrupulous rivals—until Bessie Bunter, fat duffer of the Fourth, blundered upon a secret.

## The Missing Member

"THEIR afternoon!"  
"Yes!"  
"Where?"  
"Mank's Folly!"

A group of girls stood under the leafless elms that bordered the trim, gravelled drive which swept from the bronze water gates of Cliff House School up to the imposing entrance of the ancient walled inn. These girls were five in number, and belonged without exception to the Fourth Form.

Barbara Hedders, of the laughing, blue eyes and the wavy, chestnut curls, was their leader; Mabel Lynn, her golden-haired lieutenant, was there; too, as was Jessica Cavatine, with the inevitable monocle gleaming in her right eye.

Clara Trevelly, the tomboyish captain of junior school games, was there, too; and Lucy Faraday, the grave-faced, rather serious-looking girl, who had earned her honor-roll nickname of the "Great Missus" of the Form.

"Great Missus" of the Form, Brenda and observed they all looked, but it was apparent from the muttered monotonous in which they spoke that their conversation was not intended for any ears but their own.

It wasn't for that conversation was private. The whole of Cliff House by this time had heard of the secret society of the Scarlet Star, but nobody in Cliff House had the faintest inkling of the real identities of the Scarlet Star,

and certainly none knew when, how, or where its meetings were conducted.

"Jimmy Richness & Co of Friarford School will be there, of course!" Clara asked.

"Yes."  
"And we're going—forward?" inquired Brenda.

"Secret society meeting first, rehearsal afterwards—a dress rehearsal this time," Baba remarked imprudently. "There's a room off the old ruined Minstrel's Gallery with a platform and everything, and we've already got the curtains hidden there. Better stroll off in ones and twos, taking different routes, in case we're followed here—Hic!" she added quickly. "Talk about something else. Here comes Edwina."

As one of the five offered up as one, they cast a glance towards the senior girl who, with an extremely bad-concealed

"Ahem!" said Baba loudly. "As I was saying about Lucy Campbell—"

"Were you?" asked Edwina, coming up.

"Oh!" Baba smiled. "Hallo, Edwina!" she said brightly. "Fancy me not hearing you!"

"You heard me all right!" Edwina sneered. "Don't try to pull the wool over my eyes, Barbara Hedders! What are you girls doing here?"

"Oh, talking!" Baba said airily. "No talk against that, is there, Edwina?"

"No hoo-hoo, please!" Edwina sneered. "What were you talking about?" she asked respectfully.

The five exchanged glances.

"Oh, nothing that would interest you!" Baba said.

"No!" Edwina's eyes glimmered. "I don't believe you!" she declared sharply. "I saw you as I came out of the cloakroom; you weren't talking about Lucy Campbell then. Not, by any chance, discussing your secret society, I suppose?"

Baba's eyes opened immensely wide. "Oh, Edwina, what should we know about the secret society? I thought," Baba smiled airily, "that you knew all about that."

There was a colored checkle from Clara Trevelly. Edwina's mouth dropped. Just for a moment the colour ran up into her cheeks, as she pulled back to memory that incident which had happened a few days ago when she and

By  
**HILDA RICHARDS**

looked her face, had just emerged from the school cloakroom. Edwina Brockleton was their secret enemy. It was to protect themselves and their rehearsal that they had formed the secret society against her.

She looked now, saw them, and quickened her steps.

her cousin, Miles Marchant of Friar-dale School, conspiring as spies in the secret society's midst, had been most directly convicted, and, caught in the robes of the secret society, had been accused of being the secret society themselves.

Not yet, nor far for a long time, would Edwina forget that. Even now Miss Farnshaw regarded her with suspicion. Her Cousin Miles, indeed, as a direct result of that episode, had been ordered to leave his school.

"All right," Edwina said, "go on. You're very clever, all of you. But the game's not won yet" she added victoriously. "I know all about it, even if you think I don't. I'm not such a fool as—"

"I look," Jennina muttered. "Ahem! Did you say this, Edwina?"

"Oh, ha, ha!"

"Fifty lines for you for cheek!" she snapped. "And twenty for each of you others for laughing! I know," she added, showing her teeth. "Don't think I don't! You can go on chattering until you're black in the face! I know, too, despite the fact that Miss Farnshaw learned your play, Mabel Lenn, that you're still rehearsing it in secret! Well, let me catch you at it, that's all!"

"Ah, but we won't!" Jennina murmured.

"Oh?"

"I said what a nice day it is for the time of the year," Jennina bursted; "so bright and breezy and balmy and all that—that!"

She smiled disarmingly, as the prefect frowned at her, passed; and then, perhaps realising that she had lost in that battle of words, shrugged and walked off.

Jennina looked after her and sighed. "Poor old Edwina!" she said sadly. "How are the merry old days! I don't! You know, old Sparrows, it's often crossed my mind that Edwina doesn't like us."

"Go on!" they all giggled.

"And if she had only had a proof to back her suspicions on—!" Mabel considered.

"We should be for it!" Clara Trevlyn finished.

And that, by no coincidence, was the very thought that was in the mind of Edwina Hrookdale as she crossed the quad towards the School House.

Her thoughts were moody and serious as she wound her way into the school. Officially the play had been cancelled, but she had learned from outside sources that the date booked at the Courtfield Theatre for its performance still stood. Proof enough, since, if she required any that Miss Farnshaw's still entering on with it. And if that play was performed, then nothing on earth could prevent the guest of honour—John Barrett—from coming face to face with Lucy Farnshaw, who would be performing on the stage; and then—her face whitened—then ruin, disaster, exposure for herself, her father, and Miles!

She found herself at the door of her study; she flung it open.

And stopped, gasping.

A thin, curling wisp of smoke spiralled up from the armchair; the fire, burning brightly, was giving out an unhealthy heat that made the temperature of the room almost unbearable; a pair of tattered legs were thrust towards that flame; and a hand, on the back of which glowed a gold watch ring, held a cigarette; a face—a boy's face—pale, but pale and pasty, craned round towards her.

"Hallo, Ed!"

"Miles!" Edwina gasped. "But I thought you'd gone home!"

Miles Marchant puffed easily at his cigarette.

"So did a heap of other people. But I've not, you see. Why should I go home, with the end of term so near?" He shrugged. "I'm kicked out of Friar-dale, that's true; but I'm still hanging around, you see—just in case, by a jolly monkey. My secret cousin should need me. At the moment I'm in diggings at the Bathway Tea Room."

"In Friar-dale?"

"Where else?"

Edwina gasped; she hardly knew whether to feel glad or sorry at that information.

"Well, put that cigarette out," she said, "and—"

She stared at the little brown book that she observed now, for the first time, in his hand.

"What's that?"

"A diary," Marchant answered; "just reading when you came in. Didn't know I kept a diary, did you?" he asked lightly. "Bathway Tea, really. Makes amusing reading when you look back. Here, for instance." He opened. "Listen to this:

"Nov. 18th.—Received approval from Ed. Last night Ed learned a substage at Dr. Farnshaw of Friar-dale. Doctor awfully ratty, accused Barbara Redfern of the Fourth Form. Miss Farnshaw and doctor had a row. Result: This morning Friar-dale and Cliff House are out of bounds to each other and the play cancelled."

Edwina's face whitened.

"You don't mean to say you keep a verbatim record of all that stuff?"

"Why not?" Marchant asked easily. "Nobody sees it except me. Might come in useful later, if I ever write my reminiscences of school life—an ambition of mine, by the way. Oh, don't look so

windy!" he added scornfully. "This isn't going to get into anybody else's hands!"

"And if it did"—Edwina glanced at him measuredly—"if it did, you know what it would mean?"

Marchant shrugged.

"Well, what?"

"Exposure at least—for both of us!" Marchant laughed.

"Oh, pipe down!" he scoffed. "Don't be mad a minute! I tell you it won't get into anybody's hands—I'll see to that! Now sit down. I want to talk to you! Any news?"

"No."

"Well, I hear," the boy said. "You don't know who's here, do you? Gipsy Prinks?"

Edwina started, eyes widening in a startled stare.

"Not—"

"The name!" Marchant grinned. "Prinks—the man your father hired to kitchen Lucy Farnshaw ten years ago. But," he added, "she wasn't known as Lucy Farnshaw then. She was known by the name of Sylvia Barrett."

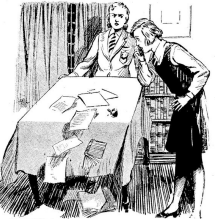
"The girl's face turned white.

"Miles, don't mention names!"

"All right! Well, anyway, he's here. Ran into him this morning while I was sneezing through the window. He's got his wife with him, and a two-horned caravan. Nifty little outfit," he added admiringly. "Prinks wanted to know about everything, of course. You uncle, old John Barrett, and all the rest. He's stopping in the district until Christmas, he tells me. There's a circus, or something happening along then, and he's going to join it. Rather handy—what?" Miles added lightly.

"Handy?"

"Well, there by it, dash it, caravan and all, quite willing, ready, and even



UPENDING the table, Edwina sent papers and books showering to the floor. "There's something for you to do!" she snapped at Lucy. "Clear up that lot!" Not if Edwina knew it should Lucy have time to rehearse her part in the play.

never to help in case we need him. Just in case," Misses snickered, "you don't succeed in smothering up this picture play, we always have Gipsy Finkles to fall back on—us!"

Edwina did so. In shriveling horror she stared at her cousin. She needed no telling when the room resounded again by those words. He was suggesting that, if all else failed, Gipsy Finkles should be hired to kidnap Lucy Farraday once again.

"Oh, no!" she cried.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, we're to be concluded," Arran, you're not really making head-ways, are you? Here you've been for weeks now, and here you're here and you're trying to sock up the play, you've faced yourself up against Barbara Redfern's crowd and Jimmy Hamilton's crowd. Well," he pointed out coolly, as he rose to his feet, "which have proved too great for you. The real cause of the trouble," he added, "isn't, after all, the play. It's Lucy Farraday. Why don't you concentrate on her?"

Edwina blushed.

"What do you mean?"

He grinned.

"Isn't it plain? Make it impossible for Lucy Farraday to get out! Aim at one girl—no half a dozen!" He took up his hat. "I've promised to meet Gipsy Finkles at two o'clock, and I don't want to be late. Thanks! Now don't bother to see me out. I sneaked in by the back way, and I'll find my way out again. Bye-bye!" he added mockingly.

But Edwina did not reply. She hardly noticed, in fact, that he was gone. She stood still, her eyes fixed on the wall, thinking of what he had said—"Concentrate on Lucy Farraday! Never mind Habs & Co. Make it impossible for Lucy Farraday ever to reappear again!"

Could she? Edwina drew a deep breath. She could! She thought she saw a way out of her difficulties at last.

The secret society was again in conference. Habsard and rolled his members stood, answering to Habs' roll call.

"Habs had nearly finished."  
"No. 2?"  
"O.K.," Clara Twyn returned.  
"No. 3?"  
"Adman!" grinned Lister Cattermole.  
"Good! No. 4?"  
A pause.  
"No. 5?" Habs repeated sharply.  
No answer.

A silence fell. Through the slits of their masks eyes glanced uneasily at each other.

Habs, as leader of the secret society of the Scarlet Star, counted her followers quickly. But No. 6, otherwise Lucy Farraday, was not present.

"Oh!" Rather but Habs' voice came. "Has anyone know what's happened to her?"

"Nobody here."  
"Well, we can't carry on without her," Habs (eyes rolled worriedly) "if she doesn't turn up, the whole rehearsal is a wash-out. We'll wait."

There was no alternative. They waited, five-ten-fifteen minutes went by. Through the tiny window which overlooked the white cliffs Habs kept an anxious watch.

"Give her another five minutes," Jimmy Richmond advised.

They did. And another ten after that. Still no Lucy. Habs, beneath her mask, bit her lip.

"We just can't carry on!" she said despairingly.

"What's up? Nil desperandum!" Jimmie murmured encouragingly.

Habs' eyes glimmered.

"Well, we'll have to do something," she replied. "Habs, you know the park. Perhaps we can run through it without Lucy! In any case, it will be practice for the rest of us. And Lucy may arrive while we're at it!"

But Lucy did not turn up; and by six o'clock not the rehearsal had been called a success. The mysterious absence of their sham accomplices all, however, was severely rebuffed, indeed, when Habs suggested going back. They arranged to meet on the terrace at the old ranger's hut in Finsbury Woods, and parted.

In rather gloomy silence, worried and uneasy, Habs, Mabs, Clara, and Jimmie wandered their way back to CIG House.

What had happened to Lucy?

They searched the gates of the school. A fat figure, calling out of the truck-shop, passed to blink at them through his large spectacles.

"Oh, very sorry, Habs! I mistake," Bruce Hunter added, in an injured tone, "where have you been? I think it's a bit thick, you know. You've always running off and leaving me at these days. Scorgerson's been asking for you, too, Habs! Edwina's been in the study three times and—"

"How sweet of her!" Jimmie gasped.

"And Lucy Farraday—"

They all suddenly stared at her.

"Edwina?"

"Oh, yes. Oh, yes, really, I shouldn't place at me like that, you girls! Lucy asked me, only five minutes ago, you know, if you had come in yet."

"You mean," Habs breathed, "she's been in the school all the afternoon?"

"Edwina?"

"Edwina?"

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"Edwina?"

number of the secret society, which had proved such a thorn in her side.

"And did it properly?" she snarled.

"You haven't dated the clock again!" Lucy bit her lip. Her face was white.

She was thinking despairingly of Habs, of Mabs, of the secret society, and the first drum rehearsal, which should have taken place this afternoon. Habs & Co. would think she had let them down!

"Edwina—" she gasped.

"Now you can get my tea, ready!" Edwina snarled.

"No—"

"And don't argue!"

Lucy bit her lip. She turned to the cupboard. It was collared—triple! How she wished for a moment, that she had a copper like Habs, Redworth or Diana Harrison-Clark! How she would have liked to smash three tea-things at the bell's foot! For one moment she almost struggled with the temptation. But she didn't! She couldn't! Violence, temptations, were no parts of Lucy Farraday's make-up!

"And look smart!" Edwina glowered.

"Well—she's there!" she snarled as a knock came at the door.

"Ah!" The door opened, and Barbara Redfern came in. One swift look she flung at Lucy, making a signal with her hand. "I came for Lucy," she announced. "She promised to have tea with me, in Study No. 4."

"When you can leave off!" Edwina retorted unrepentantly. "Lucy's here!"

"But surely she's entitled to tea!"

"She's going to have her tea—with me."

Habs went out, her heart contracting as she caught the numb, despairing glance which Lucy flung at her. She went back to Study No. 4.

Edwina grinned.

She took also had the cards in her hands at last now! She wondered why she had not thought of this scheme before.

Altogether, white-faced, Lucy sat down with her tea, every morsel of food seeming to choke her, looking with dread and disgust to the future.

Edwina grinned.

"Like it?" she asked.

"No, I don't!" Lucy retorted.

"Careful!" Edwina scowled. "No check! Remember, I've got the whip hand. You can't do what you like any longer. Now get those things cleared away. I'll come to the cloak-room with you to watch you wash up, then you can come back here and tidy up again!"

Without a word Lucy rose. Her heart filled with bitterness, she washed up. Then came back. Under Edwina's directing orders once again she tidied up.

There was a knock on the door.

"Hiss's signal!" rapped the prefect.

"Hiss's who?"

"Hiss's coming in!" And the door opened to reveal the bright, beaming features of Jimmie Carmichael. "Rather a pretty knock-knock, that?" she added.

"See it?" Jimmie asked, coming in! "Tuck!" Shocking! Just covered along," Jimmie added chaffily. "To remind Lucy it's time for prep!"

"Oh, did you? Then you can get on!" Edwina snarled.

"Thanks for the perch!" Jimmie murmured. "A check, I assure you! But—what about old friend Lucy?"

"Lucy will do her prep in Hiss's!" Jimmie's eyebrows arched.

"Tut! Rather unusual—what!" she demurred. "I mean to say—"

"Well—you get—out!" Edwina grinned, and pushed her into the corridor.

Jimmie sighed. Back she went to Study No. 4, where Habs, Habs, and



### The Darkened Study

"CAN I go now, Edwina?" Lucy Farraday asked anxiously.

"No!"

"But I've done everything."

"No, you haven't. Look at that masterpiece!"

"But I finished that only ten minutes ago," Lucy disputed.

"Then jolly well don't it again!"

Lucy Farraday gulped despairingly. With a sigh that was half a sob, she turned to the gloomy masterpiece of Edwina Carmichael's study again. It was cruel! Unfair! If Edwina, as a prefect, had a right to tag any girl in a junior form, she certainly had no right to treat her as a slave!

Edwina stood by the table, considering eyes on her victim. Never very particular as Edwina. Normally, she never noticed whether her masterpiece was clean or dirty. But she had to feel jobs for Lucy. She had to keep her eyes.

Whenever happened, she was determined that Lucy should not join Barbara Redfern & Co. again.

Her eyes glimmered with the anticipation that invariably warmed her. Sympathetic and cruel at least, it was a pleasure to her to be hating the crushed and almost heart-broken Lucy.

Apart from the joy of making Lucy suffer, there was the glinting satisfaction of knowing that Lucy was a



THERE was a tap at the door, then a voice asked: "Edwina, are you in?" The Secret Society turned. Miss Primrose was outside!

Clara was already seated. They looked at her as, successfully shaking her head, she came in.

"No luck?"

"None at all. Edwina is sticking closer to Lucy than a leoprot to a rock."

"She means, in other words, not to let her out of her sight?"

"That certainly means the idea."

The four exchanged glances. Barbara was suddenly grim. She looked queerly at her chains.

"Anything struck you?" she asked.

"No. What?"

"Then listen to this." And Barbara leaned forward. "Take back your mind a couple of weeks. You remember—when Mabe accidentally overheard a telephone conversation?"

"Yes."

"One of the people who took part in that conversation," Mabe went on, "we know now to be Edwina Brookdale. The other was an unknown man. The man, if you remember, was giving Edwina advice. Mabe, can you remember exactly what he said?"

Mabe could.

"He said," she replied, "You're a perfect. But the only Fourth Form girl. The only way to prevent her from being at the Courtfield Theatre is to tear the play beforehand—"

"So, you see," Mabe broke in, "Edwina, having failed to heat the crowd of us, is concentrating upon me. And that one—"

Thrilled, they stared at her.

"You mean, Lucy Farraday?" Mabe breathed.

"Who else?"

"Oh, my giddy Aunt Repronia!" Clara gasped.

"They gazed in startled amazement at each other.

"Anyway, it's a good worth working on," continued Mabe. "Clara, give me that red ink and card. Mabe—"

"Yes, old thing."

"Please get this to Edwina as soon as I've written it."

And Mabe sat down. She wrote. Without a word, she handed the card to Mabe. Mabe, with a nod, hurried off.

Edwina, in her state, heard the

slither of the card as it was pushed under the door. Quickly she jumped to the door and flung it open. But Mabe by that time had made good her retreat. The passage was empty.

Her eyes glittering, she picked up the card.

The blood drained from her face, and then rushed back again in accelerating colors, as the read—beneath the sign of the Scarlet Star:

**"SEND LUCY FARRADAY BACK TO HER STUDY IMMEDIATELY. OTHERWISE YOU WILL HEAR FROM US!"**

Violently she flung round upon Lucy.

"Do you know anything about this?" she demanded.

Lucy's eyes flickered.

"What should I know about it?" she demanded indignantly.

"The secret society are your pals?"

"That," Lucy replied, "is something you can't prove!"

She glanced at the card, her eyes glimmering, a throb of hope pulsing in her heart.

"In any case," she asked, "don't you think you'd better let me go?"

"And give in to them?" Edwina gripped her teeth. "Not if I know it! And just," she announced emphatically,

"to show them what I think of their silly threats, you can remain here until bed-time now! And just to keep you busy," she added, and quickly and deliberately caught hold of the table, and, with a jerk, flung it against so that all the papers, the ink, and the odds-and-ends it contained showered on the floor in a heap, "here's something for you to do!" she cried vociferously.

"Clear that lot up, for a start!"

Lucy gazed at her, her lips trembling. Even her resistance was giving away now. Every her tongue was beginning to rise. For one instant she stood, quivering, defiant. The next—

The door opened. Lucy's eyes popped. Round the post came a hand, feeling for

the electric switch. Even as Edwina, warned by some sense instinct, turned, the light snapped out. Click!

In a moment the study seemed to be filled with moving figures.

"Make a sound, and it'll be worse for you!" a voice hissed. "Held her, No. 7!"

"Look here—!" hissed Edwina.

"Quiet!"

There was a throb in that curt command. Edwina panted. Strong hands gripped her, forcing her into a chair. Shadowy figures grouped themselves around her.

Edwina's eyes gleamed, for she saw that the secret society were no longer fully disguised. They could hardly have risked disguise, indeed, leaving had so come through the lighted corridors of the school. Even the eyes of each were hidden by a black mask.

"What that does?" a voice remonstrated. "Name, Edwina Brookdale, are you going to resist your penetration of Lucy Farraday?"

"No!" Edwina gasped.

"Will you let her go?"

"No!"

"O.K.!" Then you've asked for it! It's about time that you learned the secret society of the Scarlet Star never waver in aim! No. 1—No. 8, bend her legs and arms to the chair! No. 3, gag her!" And while Edwina struggled frantically, her unavailingly, her captors did their work. "Now," breathed the unknown who had first spoken, "listen to me!"

Bound and gagged as she was, Edwina had no alternative.

"You have asked for this," the voice went on. "As you have refused to release Lucy, we shall now release her ourselves! Until bedtime, you will remain here, with the light out and the door locked upon you! In return, if you attempt any sort of reprisals on Lucy Farraday, we shall deal with you again! And it's no earthly use," the voice remonstrated her, "you trying to make a shilly with Primrose about this.

because Primrose already thinks you're the secret society yourself!"

Edwina gulped.  
"And if you're wise," the speaker went on thoughtfully, "just let stop playing the shady game you're playing now! The ladies who you're lugging Leary Faraday, she knows"—and here a chill thrill of terror struck Edwina's warm heart—"why you want to prevent her from appearing at the Courtland Theatre! Now—"

And then the speaker passed as footsteps waded in the corridor outside—as these footsteps abruptly halted at the other side of the door. There was a tap.

"The secret society stood tense. They again. And then a voice."

"Edwina! Edwina, are you in?"  
"Oh, catch! and dash-damn, it's Primrose!" breathed No. 1.

"Edwina! Edwina! please?"  
And Miss Primrose impatiently rattled the handle of the door.

"Quiet!" breathed Babs.  
Fortunately, she had taken the precaution of turning the key in the lock. Holding these breath, the secret society stood still.

But Edwina's eyes, in the dark, were glittering. If only she had the power to cry out! If only Primrose could come in now, feeling her—a perfect—like this—the victim of these junior girls who, without dignities, had as bravely, as heroically, trapped her in her own study. If only she could cry out—

But the key was secure, she herself held helpless by her hands. Nevertheless, her brain was working, and a sudden desperate idea shot into it. Motion by the others, she threw the whole weight of her body to one side. The chair beneath her heeled over on two legs, remained for a dirty instant poised, and then, as Edwina shifted again, went over altogether.

Crash!  
A thud that shook the whole corridor made the startled members of the secret society jump.

"Edwina!" cried Miss Primrose's voice.

"Oh, my hat!"  
"Shush!"

"Edwina, what is going on in here?"  
Miss Primrose called agitatedly, and with a rattle went the door. "Edwina, show my soul. I declare the study is in darkness!" Stella! Stella! Mary! Patricia! Please come here!"

Doors were opening and shutting down the Sixth Form corridor. Senior girls, startled by the sound of the crash on Edwina Brockdale's room, were streaming out to investigate.

"Something has happened!" Miss Primrose said palpitantly. "Something, or somebody, is in that room! I can't get any answer, and I cannot see anything, not even by peering through the keyhole. Stella, will you run off, please, this instant! Bring Piper and Merryweather here. Tell them I wish them to look upon the door."

In utter consternation the secret society stood. They had prepared a trap it seemed, only to ensnare themselves!

Doesn't make a row. We'll take her with us—"

"But what—?"  
"Shush! Don't ask questions now—"

Babs herself sprang to the window. She threw it open. Graily and in silence the secret society worked. Unconsciously Edwina was picked up. Unconsciously she was bundled over the sill and rolled on to the soft turf of the lawn, three feet below.

Just as the steps of Piper the porter and Mr. Merryweather the gardener were heard in the passage outside the study door, the last member of the secret society had unobtrusively through the window and had gently driven it in.

Together they made off swiftly towards the cloisters, taking the longest but lightest Edwina with them. At a safe distance, still in pitch darkness, they halted.

"O.K." breathed Babs out of Edwina's hearing. "Up!s her now. Lesson the world; then she can finish off herself. Then all coast. If the thing she's completely free we shall all be back in the school."

"But Primrose!"  
"Never mind her now. Edwina can do all the explaining, if she dares!"

There was a soft clack. Then for the second time Edwina found herself seated on the cold, hard ground. Happily Babs turned to loosen the bands on her hands. And then, leaving her with two minutes' struggle to get herself free, she laughingly slipped off into the darkness.

Forces and lived with anger, Edwina worked at the cords. One by one she threw them aside.

But now—what?  
What to say to Primrose when she was questioned?

Tell her the truth? Tell her it was the secret society?

Edwina shivered for teeth. Primrose wouldn't swallow that tale. Primrose already thought she was the secret society. Again she had an orifice. Again the secret society had been too clever for her. But she'd got her own back on them. She'd outwit them yet!

Let them wait!  
Edwina did not go immediately into the school. She went into the cloakroom. There she treated herself to a glass of cold orangeade. She sipped it slowly, thinking over her plans.

Now, enough, when questioned by Primrose, to pretend she knew nothing of what had happened in her study. But how Edwina writhed at that! For how dearly she would have loved to tell Primrose the truth!

She sat there for a few more moments, then entered the school, to be recognized at once as Miss Primrose's study.

Edwina shook her head when Miss Primrose questioned her about what had been going on in her study, pretending to be as deeply mystified as the headmistress herself. The aspect of it was that the whole thing was put down to a joke by some girl or girls unknown, and Primrose at once set out on an investigation which, of course, led her nowhere.

But Edwina's eyes were glittering. Edwina wasn't beaten. Secret society or to secret society she meant to maintain her hold on Leary Faraday.

But Leary had her instructions from Babs. She knew that there was to be a rehearsal in the afternoon. She had arranged to meet Babs and Mabe in Emily No. 1 after lessons, when the three of them would go off together. Just to tell Edwina's suspicions she kept away from Babs altogether.

But Edwina's suspicions were not lulled. On the contrary. The very fact that Leary appeared to be avoiding contact with Barbara Hadfern sharpened her vigilance. Common sense told her that if the secret society had made plans, those plans would be carried out after lessons. Just to nip in the bud any plot that may have been maturing, she made it her business to visit Leary's study immediately before was over. Leary, in the act of putting on her hat before the mirror, gave a start when the door opened and Edwina peered in.

"Oh, going out?" the prefect asked pleasantly.

Leary turned pale.  
"I—I was just going to the toilet, if she dares!"

"Don't tell her!" Edwina snapped. "In any case you can take that out of it. I want you to come and get my tea."

"But—"  
"Will you obey?"

Leary gave a despairing sigh. There was nothing for it, it seemed. Dejectedly she took off her coat. Wearily she followed Edwina out. But as she went down the corridor she contrived to rap her knuckles sharply against the panels of Study No. 4 as the door as she passed.

Almost immediately that door opened, and Babs popped out. Quickly she turned back into the room.

"Edwina's got Leary again," she told Mabe, the girl's only other occupant. Mabe's mouth filled with despair.

"Oh, good gracious! What about the rehearsal?"

"Don't worry," Babs advised, and purred, her brows contracted in thought. "Wait here!" she counselled.

"Very bad—"  
But Babs did not reply to that. Already she was hurrying off. Along to the Sixth Form corridor she swept, almost colliding with Myra Brownlow as she dived round the corner. Myra at once jumped back, her eyes rounding in astonishment. Babs peered.

"Oh, my! Myra! In an awful hurry—"

"Where are you going?" Myra asked.

"I was going to see Edwina. She's wanted—out of the phone in the prefects' room. It's a lot, I think. Myra, Myra," she added urgently, "you wouldn't like to go and tell her for me, would you? I simply must dash off!"

Myra Brownlow paused. Babs' heart thumped a little. For all her seniorship, Myra had the reputation of being easy-going, and a duffer. She never could see a joke, and was blindly ignorant on all occasions when her leg was being pulled. She stood Barbara because Babs had once admired her hair, and Myra, vain to a point of foolishness, hangover for the compliment which so rarely came her plaited way, had been a warm corner in her heart for Barbara ever since.

She bowed.  
"Why, yes, certainly!" she agreed. And Myra swept off.

Babs chuckled. Well, that was that! Back she moved to the prefects' room. There she lifted the receiver of the phone from its hook, and left it dangling. Miss Ward's study stood almost opposite, and Miss Ward, as usual at this hour of the day, was making tea in the mistress's room.

Breakingly Babs stepped back into it. Breathlessly watched through the crack in the door as Edwina, a rather anxious look on her face, came leading down the corridor. Babs held her breath as she watched her bounce into the prefects' room, and then, stopping



The Informer



**B**UT Babs, as usual, was equal to the emergency.

In a moment she had acted.

"Quick, the window!" she

cried. "Release Edwina! Now, steady."

from her hiding-place, darted to the door of the professor's room, and turned the key, simultaneously in the lock. There she left the door to Edwina's study.

"Lucy, come!" she cried urgently.

"Quickly—"

"But Edwina—"

"She's out of the way!" Babs chuckled.

In her anxiety she caught the Quiet Mouse by the sleeve. Down the corridor they raced together. Mabel, meantime, had visited Study No. 3, and collected Lucy's belongings. Quickly she and Babs helped her on with her coat.

"Ready!" asked Babs.

"Yes, rather!" Lucy gasped. "But I say, whose's the rehearsal being held?"

"In the Ranger's hat in Friarstable Woods," Babs explained. "But—"

And she jumped. "Shush!" she bade herself. "Who's that?" she called.

But there was no need to ask. For at the same moment the door, which had been ajar, came open. And framed in the doorway, blinking suspiciously, stood the corpulent figure of Essie Hunter!

"LOOK HERE! You're not going out again!" Bessie demanded reprotractively.

"Your mistake—we are!" Babs answered.

"But what about tea?"

"Bless tea!"

"But here! I say—"

But Bessie was left gbervering. There was no time for explanations. Already to their ears came the sound of an angry thumping from the professor's room. In another moment, perhaps, Edwina would be released, and come storming after them. Their one, plainly, was to get out of it, and get out of it as quickly as possible.

Never suspecting that Bessie had heard her answer to Lucy Farraday's question, Babs made a bee-line for the door.

"But look here!" hinted Bessie wrathfully. "I say, you kikkets! Wait till I get my hat and coat!"

But the "cats" had bolted. Bessie glowered.

Down the passage the three of them fled.

Bessie howled.

"Babs—Babs! Babs, old Babs! Babs, run out!"

Babs, Mabel, and Lucy had gone.

Bessie blinked in wrathful dismay. Bessie, as usual, was hard-up. Bessie, as usual, was hungry. Besides, it was bedtime, and Bessie had been relying on Babs and Mabel to supply her with some much-needed refreshments.

She breathed fury.

"The cats!" she said bitterly.

Forlornly she blinked down the corridor. Then she called back into the study. Hopefully she opened the cupboard door, meaningly surveyed its barrenness, and, feeling more and more being that over, closed the door with a slam. Then she jumped round with a start as the door of the study was flung open.

"Oh, my-my-my, my goodness!" she gasped. "Oh, dear-dear! Oh, my-my-my, Edwina, you might remember I've got a week's leave, you know?"

"Where are they?" Edwina started.

"Oh?"

"Where are Lucy Farraday and Barbara Redfern?"

"Well, how should I know?" Bessie indignantly demanded. "The boats have run off and left me!"

Edwina's eyes glowered. Her face

was furrowed. Thunderously she entered the study. Bessie, alarmed by the concentrated look of fury on her face, backed away.

"Where are they?" she roared.

"Oh, my-my-my, Edwina, don't don't look at me like that!" Bessie quavered.

"They didn't tell me where they were going, you know. They didn't even mention they were going to the ranger's hat in Friarstable Woods. In effect," Bessie stammered, taking another step backwards, "they didn't mention the ranger's hat at all, you know. Don't—don't—don't—don't stare any more, Edwina."

Bessie panted.

"So they've gone to the ranger's hat?"



SOMEONE hinted "Come!" But too late. The door swung open and Edwina and Miss Primrose stood revealed. It seemed that nothing could save the Society now.

"Yes—yes," said Bessie. "Oh, my-my-my! I swear, Edwina—"

But Edwina was no longer attending to the pulsating Bessie. She stared at the girl—but stared at her without seeing her, her mind full of a new, tantalizing idea.

Bessie blinked, aware with awful dismay, that she had let the cat out of the bag.

"Edwina?" Bessie quavered.

But Edwina had turned and gone. She! went the door.

At once Edwina hurried to Miss Primrose's study. She knocked. Miss Primrose eyed her coolly as she entered.

"Well, Edwina?"

"I'm sorry to interrupt you, Miss Primrose," Edwina said bravely. "But I had to come. Your present orders are that the girls of this school are not to meet the boys of Friarstable—aren't they?"

"That is so," Miss Primrose agreed. "I have reason to believe," Edwina went on, "that Barbara Redfern and her friends are at this very moment on their way to an appointment with

James Richardson & Co., of Friarstable School. The object of this meeting," Edwina sweetly explained, "is to rehearse the play which you have loaned."

Miss Primrose stared at her.

"I know," Edwina went on, "that you have an idea in your mind, Miss Primrose, that I am actuated by some malicious motives in my dealings with Barbara. I am sorry that I have so far failed to convince you that this is not the case. As the same time," Edwina went on, "I cannot stand by and see your orders deliberately flouted. Miss Primrose, I have a suggestion to make."

Miss Primrose's lips set.

"And that?"

"That," Edwina steadily replied,



"just to satisfy yourself that I am not making up this story—just, in fact, to give you the benefit of the doubt for once, you come with me now to the ranger's hat. If you catch Barbara & Co. in the hat for yourself, then you may alter your opinion of my motives. I think," she added daringly, "that in the least I can ask you to do, Miss Primrose, is justice to myself!"

Miss Primrose still stared.

For a moment she dithered upon the table, mentally discussing all three points. Certainly, Edwina was entitled to be heard. Certainly, she was entitled to her point of view being recognized and investigated.

She rose.

"Very well, we'll go at once!" she said stily.

"Thank you, Miss Primrose," Edwina led a smile of triumph. At last, she thought, she had the secret society trapped. All unsuspecting they would be awaiting in the old woodman's hut to hold their meeting—ready for Edwina and Miss Primrose to pounce.

For the first time for many days, Edwina felt laggard.



## Fright for a Fat One!

"Hullo!" said Bessie Dexter suddenly.  
And paused.  
Bessie was in the woods of Friarville.

And Bessie was lost.  
In spite of the ill-located Bunter cottage, Bessie was no heroine. In spite of the stirring accounts of the exploits she had hunted during midnight prowls, Bessie, at heart, was dreadfully afraid of the dark. Naturally, will power would not have changed the faintest shudder as Cliff Hoyer, into the eerie dangers and murk of the whispering woods at this time of night.

But Bessie, in her anxiety of the moment, was valiantly endeavoring to forget all these facts. The occasion was by no means a normal one. In her own wandering way, Bessie had given Bink & Co. away to Edwina Brookdale, and Bessie, anxious to redeem that mistake, was on her way to be ransomed but to warn Bink in case—

But, hopefully, Bessie had strayed from the path; darkness and her own dovetailing nerves having combined to make her lose her way.

"Hullo!" said Bessie again, and looked.

In front of her was a clearing. In the middle of that clearing a bright fire crackled. It shone on the wood floor cracked. It shone on the faces of three people, who were seated round the blaze. A tall, gipsy-looking man in a brown coat, a stout, dark-skinned woman, who from time to time stirred something that was cooking in the pot suspended on the tripod above the flames. It revealed, also, the figure of a boy in Friarville clothes, who, seated on an upturned log, was watching something in a little book. The boy was Miles Marchant.

So Bessie stopped. She did not like gipsies. She did not trust Miles Marchant. At the same time, the welcoming fire drew her. She shuddered at the thought of retreating her steps, and having to brave the mysterious terrors of the darkness again.

Then, suddenly, there was a scuffling sound behind her, followed by a terrified animal's scream.

Bessie leapt in terror.  
"What, now?" she yelled. "What was that?"

What "that" was was a mystery. A log, perhaps, accidentally concluding the hunt for his evening meal. Or it may have been a rabbit caught in one of the many poachers' traps that lay everywhere. In any case, the excitement was sufficient to make poor Bessie right out of her never very steady wits.

At the sound of her scream, the gipsy-looking man and his wife glanced up quickly. Marchant, pausing in his writing, raised around. Bessie, having stepped into the radiance of the fire-light, stood fully revealed.

"If it isn't our own Bessie, bounding Bessie!"

He rose, closing his book, and did it with a flourish. At least, that was his intention. Unfortunately, however, Marchant had forgotten that the pocket was buttoned, and the book—it was his diary—instead of dropping into it, fell to the ground.

In three strides he had reached the palpitating Bessie.

Bessie, well-hastening, found herself caught by one fat arm.

"Well, old fat Bess!" Marchant grinned. "How nice of you to drop in on us like this! And what might our Bessie be doing in the woods at this time of night?"

Bessie gasped.  
"Oh, naturally, I like come for a walk, you know."

"Obviously. That was why you were scared, I suppose!"

"I was—wasn't scared!" Bessie retorted indignantly. "I was just trying to see what you were about! I hope you did—didn't think I was frightened?"

"Oh, no!" Marchant said mockingly. "As if!" he added dryly. "A Bessie could ever be frightened! But, wait a minute, Bessie!" he added in alarm. "Don't move! Look at that roaring lion behind you!"

Again Bessie kept about out of her skin.  
"Again, with a terrific howl, she jumped round, blinking, with eyes of terror, into the darkness."

Marchant roared with laughter. From his gipsy features came a chuckle.

"See it?" Marchant shouted.  
Bessie quivered.

"Oh, naturally, I did—didn't believe there was a lion there at all!"

"Ah, ha, ha!"  
"And, I think," Bessie went on, coloring helplessly, as the joke dawned upon her, "that it was because you were trying to make me see! You know jolly well I did not move from a weak head!"

"Not to say a weak head?" Marchant said mockingly.

"Ha, ha, ha!" guffawed Gipsy Priksie.

Bessie choked.  
She was not naturally hot-tempered, but definitely she was piqued now. Her eyes roved round for something she could throw. On the ground, about at her feet, she saw what looked as the best short-sighted thing like a square brown stone. She made one furious dive towards it.

"Hi!" yelled Marchant. "You little beast! If you dare throw—"

But Bessie had the stone in her hand then. Actually she did not intend to throw—only to give Marchant a fright as he had given her. It was not, as she found, to her vague shame, a stone, however. It was something rather—something which yielded to her touch. Still, it would serve.

At that moment, Marchant, who really thought it was a stone, picked a blazing brand from the fire and made a frightening rush.

Bessie passed.  
"Look here, you rotter, don't you dare—"

But Marchant apparently did dare. He was enjoying himself.  
Like a bull in a china shop he charged at Bessie, his flaming stick held like a lance before him.

Bessie, with one wild, alarmed blink, gave back, upon round, then, discomfited, conquering wrath, went bounding into the woods.

The distant laughter of Marchant and his two gipsy friends followed her.

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
But Marchant would have laughed with less triumph, and certainly with less glee, had he realized that the thing which Bessie, still clenching in her angry hand, carried away with her was—

His diary!  
Even the dark wilderness of the woods was preferable, Bessie felt at that moment, to the hostility of Marchant and the gipsy; and so she pressed onward, tripping considerably, but never looking back.



## The Diary of a Schemer

"HERE we are, Miss Friarson! Look! There's a light in the ranger's hut!"

Edwina Brookdale whispered that remark in accents of thrilled triumph.

A light in the ranger's hut there certainly was. And now, as she and the landlady approached, a voice reached their ears—a voice of a girl, though as well disguised as to be unrecognizable.

"And so," it announced, with increasing satisfaction, "Priory thinks that the secret society of the Scarlet Star is Edwina Brookdale herself. That's why, of course, Edwina is afraid to report any doings to the landlady. All the same, the rangers are going on. After to-night we'll be all ready for the production."

In the darkness Edwina's eyes glittered feverishly. A ghastly smile creased her lips.

If she had forced a confession from Barbara Redburn, Bink could hardly have put it into more condemning words than those. Bink had completely given the game away!

"From behind her came a little gasp."  
"Edwina?" Miss Friarson hissed.

"You heard, Miss Friarson?"  
"I most certainly did!"

"Thank you! I hope," Edwina added, not without a touch of malice, "that you are satisfied now, Miss Friarson? You heard what that girl said? Perhaps you see now how you have misjudged me."

In the darkness Miss Friarson's eyes glowered. She was quivering now.

"This way, Miss Friarson!" Edwina whispered.

On tiptoe she led the way towards the door.

"Heady, Miss Friarson!" she whispered softly.

"Most certainly I am! Open that door!"

Edwina tossed. Her whole frame was thrilling with triumph now. Her hand stretched forward.

Crack! The door was flung open.

Miss Friarson rushed with a simultaneous gasp. Nine figures, hidden from head to foot in long dark, hooded cloaks, eyes glancing beneath them in their masks, stared in open-mouthed dismay. A lantern swinging above them threw sickly yellow rays upon the scene. There came a feeble hiss of "Claw!"

Too late, Bink jumped toward the lantern, her intention of plunging out its light foreshadowed, as Edwina tightly leapt forward and caught her by the arm, at the same time tearing her mask from her face.

Miss Friarson, hovering in the doorway, gave an exclamation of horror.

"Barbara! You!"  
"Oh, my giddy aunt!" gasped Clara, in dismay.

Bink stood transfixed and tongue-tied.

"So," Miss Friarson said, "this is the sort of thing which has been going on, is it? So, don't attempt to mercy anyone, Edwina. I thank you for bringing me here. Take off those ridiculous disguises at once!"

There was a gasp.  
"Take them off!" Miss Friarson thundered.

Another gasp. It was followed by a gasp.



But it was all very obviously U P from that moment.

The secret society of the Scarlet Star, as such, was discovered at last! Eldest of looking Edwina and their beloved headmistress sat at the desks and scowling over their protein bodies, there was no escape! They were trapped!

Edwina, it seemed, had won at the strength bout!

Clara gulped.

Her hand went up and reluctantly removed the mask. Miss Primrose's eyes glittered. Still more reluctantly Mabel removed her mask; then Jessica. Lastly, her face gray, Lucy Penderay. Miss Primrose stared at the boys.

"And you?" she commanded.

Jimmy Hutchinson shrugged.

"Well, as we're all in it—"

And so on the four boys unrolled. Miss Primrose stood aghast.

"So, the best as well?" she cried.

"Edwina was right, then? Barbara—"

"Yes, Miss Primrose."

"What is the meaning of this ridiculous masquerade?"

Mabel hit her lips. She gazed apologetically at Edwina.

"You allowed me," Miss Primrose went on in a quivering voice, "to believe that another girl was responsible for all the misdeeds which you, as this secret society, have been really responsible for."

"Oh, no, Miss Primrose?"

"You dare deny—?"

"No, no!" Barbara repeated emphatically. "Our secret society has been named at one person only—and that person Edwina Breaksley. Edwina suspected who we were. Until tonight she tried and failed to level us out. Then she hit upon the idea of insulting you, of doing nasty things in the name of the secret society so that we should get the blame."

"And you think," Edwina sneered, "that Miss Primrose is going to believe that—more?"

Mabel shrugged.

"Whether Miss Primrose believes it or not, those are the facts," she stated.

But that Miss Primrose did not believe was very, very apparent. Her face was not like that.

"After this, Barbara, you cannot expect me to believe any accusation you may bring against Edwina. I am sorry," she added heavily, "that I have made a mistake. Edwina, I am sorry for having misjudged you, and I suppose, at the same time, misjudging your cousin, Miles Marchant. Through your activities," she added, her eyes darting glacial points of light at the culprits, "you have caused strife between Cliff House and Fossilvale. You have grossly offended Dr. Ferguson, of that school; you have piled insult and injury upon myself. Barbara Redfern, I once said that if I ever caught the single-leader of this society, I should cry out 'ho!'"

Mabel's face turned white.

"And unless," Miss Primrose went on severely, "you can convince me, by producing unquestionable proof, that all the crimes of the secret society which have been laid at your door are not your responsibility, that I shall unhesitatingly do, now, please! Pack up these ridiculous disguises and come back to school with me."

Helpless, the secret society stooped to gather their belongings.

Then—

"Here, no-ey, hold on! Oh dud-dud! I say, Babs, are you in that hat?"

"Bessie?" whispered Mabel.

"Because, you know, I've been trying to find you!" Bessie's voice came from a distance off. "But I got a cough by

that beast Marchant and two awful-looking gipsies. And then—" The voice paused. It was followed by a yelp of surprise. "Miss Primrose!"

"Bessie, what are you doing here?" Everybody stared at this new interruption.

And then, her face a picture of bewildered astonishment, Bessie Buxter rolled on to the scene. She blinked in astonished amazement at the constabular occupants of the hut, from them to Miss Primrose, from Miss Primrose to Edwina. A hollow groan left her lips.

"Oh dud-dud, how I like-come to be!"

"Bessie!" Miss Primrose cried. "Oh! Oh crumbs!" Bessie gulped. "In mystery, Babs," she said. "I tried to get here in time, but I lost my way, you know."

"Bessie, will you pay attention to me?" Miss Primrose sterned. "How did you get yourself in that disgraceful condition, girl?"

Disgraceful might not have been the word to describe Bessie's condition at that moment. Pathetic would have been more apt. For Bessie was maddly and dazedly from her headlong flight through the woods.

In her hand she still clamped Miles Marchant's diary.

"Explain!" Miss Primrose thundered.

And so, while everybody listened, Bessie launched into a stammering account of her adventures.

Edwina, who saw her victory being something of its sting, cried out:

"I don't believe it!" she shouted wildly. "She must have known that—that something like this was happening. Miss Primrose, this is another plot to discredit my cousin in your eyes! I don't believe Bessie Buxter has ever seen Miles Marchant."

"Well, if I jolly well have!" roared Bessie. "Yes," she added, "and I can jolly well prove it! Look at that, Miss Primrose!" And she thrust the book into Miss Primrose's hands. "If that isn't Miles Marchant's jolly well tell me where it is," she roared defiantly—"because it's got his name written in the front!"

Edwina, as she saw, too late, what that book was, almost recoiled. Desperately she stepped forward.

"Miss Primrose?"

"That—that's not Miles!" Edwina gulped, her face quite white now. "I tell you—"

"Please, Edwina, control yourself," Miss Primrose said curtly. "It is obviously my duty to find out if Bessie is telling the truth."

She flicked open the diary, glanced at it. Then suddenly she gave a violent start.

"What is this?" she cried.

"Miss Primrose—" Edwina pointed. Miss Primrose's eyes opened.

Edwina, please, how dare you!" she flared up, as Edwina made a desperate dash at the diary.

"I—I—"

"Thank you! Stand aside!" Miss Primrose was really angry now. Between these casually glimpsed lines in the diary and Edwina's headstrong agitation she began to read another story.

"Edwina, you will come back to school with me. Bessie, you will come also. Rehearsed, and you other boys, I advise you to get back to your own school. Barbara, you will bring back those things to Cliff House and report to me the moment you arrive."

"Yes, Miss Primrose," Barbara said feebly.

And while the headmistress, with the now-rubbing Edwina at her side, marched off through the woods the

secret society looked at each other in sickly dismay.

"What a bitter, bitter end to all their hopes!"



A Glorious End

**B**UT was it? For when they reported to Miss Primrose's study upon their arrival back at Cliff House what a terrific shock awaited them!

There stood Edwina, shaking and white, looking indeed like a girl who has been thoroughly frightened. And there was Miss Primrose, more stern than ever they had seen her before, sitting so stiffly at her desk, that she looked like a statue carved in marble.

And, next, astonishingly, when they came in, ordering them not to stand in front of her like the crowd of waiters whom they felt themselves to be, but motioning them almost kindly to the chairs ranged round at the wall of her study.

Wonderingly, they obeyed. For a moment Miss Primrose did not speak. Her face was flintlike in its hardness as she fingered the little brown book which Bessie had given her.

Then amazingly she began:

"First," she said, "I owe you an apology, Barbara."

Mabel blinked. Was she dreaming?

"An apology," Miss Primrose went on, "for having doubted your word. I am not going into any lengthy explanations.

This book, which Bessie Buxter so fortuitously discovered, is a diary belonging to Miles Marchant."

The drama stared at Edwina, who had winced.

"In it is information," Miss Primrose went on, "which makes it perfectly and comprehensively clear that the story you told is true. That Edwina, seeking to disgrace your secret society, Barbara, you, in conjunction with her cousin, instigated a series of wrongs both here and at Fossilvale. It is a foolish document, but, as it happens, a most enlightening one in the present circumstances. It tells me, Barbara, that you have been a victim of a deplorable plot. It settles me beyond all doubt that it was Edwina and her cousin who caused friction between ourselves and Fossilvale."

"Oh, we jolly well said!" muttered Clara faintly.

"Apparently," Miss Primrose went on, "the object of Edwina and her cousin was to prevent your play from taking place. Why, the diary does not make clear, like you, I fell a victim to this plot. I very much regret now that I was, perhaps, a little hasty in my denials. However," she resumed, and the cheeks set waiting, wondering what tremendous new disclosure was coming next, "I have done me immediate best to make amends. I have rung up Dr. Ferguson of Fossilvale, and have explained to him what I have found out."

"Yes," murmured Mabel.

"From this moment," Miss Primrose went on, "the two schools are no longer out of bounds. I am relieved, Mabel, that you have progressed with the play. I understand from what I overheard someone say in the canteen's bar, that you would only require one more rehearsal to complete it!"

"Yes, Miss Primrose," Mabel agreed.

"That rehearsed," Miss Primrose decided—and Mabel's heart gave such a bound of joy that she almost cheered aloud—"you shall have to-night in

this school, Richardson and his friends—  
"Oh, don't be coming over at my invitation, accompanied, I hope, by Dr. Ferguson, whom I have invited to supper."

"As for pretentious society"—and she allowed herself a faint smile—"I must order you to disband it at once, Barbara. Now you may go."

Five girls in a dream, rose-faced, eyes sparkling, rose.

"Oh, thank—thank you, Miss Princess?" Babs exclaimed.

Miss Princess smiled.

"Do not thank me! Thank Bessie Hunter. She is the girl who, by an accident, has made the performance of your play possible. Edwina, you will remain here."

But no longer did Babs & Co. go to Edwina. As one they handled out of the study. Only the knowledge that they were still within Primmy's grasp prevented them from shrieking out their glee as they pounded along the corridor.

With a great whoop they swooped down the stairs into Study No. 2. There, as one, they fell upon a considerably abused and amazed Bessie Hunter, grabbed her, and plunged her into the chair and roughly surrounded her.

"Members of the society of the Scarlet Star!" Babs announced in a deep baritone. "Here she is!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But I mean, what does this mean?" Bessie yelled in alarm.

"It means," Babs asserted solemnly, "that we, Bessie Hunter, heretofore known as the society of the Scarlet Star, a significant organization, now disbanded, are your friends for life! It means," Babs went on, while Bessie blinked at her wonderingly, "that we, the aforementioned members of the abandoned society, are going to treat you, here and now, without hesitation and without delay, to the biggest feed you've ever had in your merry life. Fair?"

Babs went on, her eyes sparkling, "that when the play takes place on Saturday next, you will act as the Queen of the Pageant, Bessie, and I'm going to give you that little silk dress of mine you've always asked for."

Bessie poked comically.

"Oh, dear!"

"Now!" Babs cried. "Members! Arise, fair Bessie! Fall in the secret society! Surrender! Oh, yes, two, three! For the tuck-up—march!"

Five minutes later Bessie was enjoying the food of her life! Piled with huge plates of cakes and tarts and other delicacies by an admiring throng, Bessie was in her element.

"I say, two girls, this is jolly decent of you!" she remarked, between large bites at the tempting gastrics. "Jolly good! I always said you weren't a lot of mean cats!"

Certainly there was no happier girl in Cliff House that night, except for Babs & Co.—members of the notable secret society of the Scarlet Star.

meant to fill the school with scoffing. Cliff House and Friends, the school, had planned to set apart, had come together again, and so far from any constraint remaining as a result of the recent rift in the late, their friendship seemed on better, more understanding and happier terms than ever before.

That afternoon Edwina had finally lost her professorship. She had been told by Miss Piverson that if she wished to return to Cliff House after the Christmas vacation, she must first re-apply for admission to the school, meaning that all her seniority was confiscated, that she would enter the school as a new girl without any of an old girl's privileges.

But that didn't matter at the moment, anyway. The galling part of it all was the fact that the play she had written so hard to suppress, was now in full swing once more. Nothing, it seemed, short of the bursting down of the theatre, or an epidemic in the school could prevent its taking place as arranged.

And that meant—

That Lucy Faraday would be there. Lucy Faraday—most dreaded possibility—would once face to face with John Street.

No! No! No!

While the doors remained watched by half the school, was at its height, Edwina went out. She went to her Cousin Mike, who was lodging at the Hawthorn tenements in Friendside. There a bitter and wordy interview ensued, but out of the chaos of the one came a scheme at last. It was a scheme from which Edwina, to be sure, shrunk, but for which, in the desperate circumstances now pressing them, there was no alternative.

If it failed, it would mean—prison!

But it should not fail!

Edwina went back to school. For the next three days little was seen or heard of her.

The school, what with the approach of the Christmas holidays and the play, was in a ferment, and Mike, who had returned his cast to perfection, could hardly believe in when at last the great day dawned, and she and her players set off in a joyfully enthusiastic body for the Grandfield Theatre.

Two hours before the performance was due they arrived; but even then a crowd was beginning to gather, and several Cliff House girls and Friendside boys were in the body of the hall already.

Each girl had a dressing-room to herself, and to each room each girl enthusiastically repaired.

Mike, in the act of helping Juliana Curative make-up, was in the girl's dressing room when a knock came at the door.

"Come in!" she called.

The door opened. Two men in evening dress stood there. Mike gave a gasp of delight as she recognized at one of them.

"Daddy!"

Major Arnold Lynn, bronzed and smiling, it was. He introduced his companions—the tall, burlesque, and openly ribald theatrical manager, John Street.

"Mr. Street," the major explained, "is rather anxious to meet another member of the cast, Mabel—Lucy Faraday! I showed him the half-price photograph of the Ferns you sent me recently. Mr. Street says it reminds him of someone he once knew. By the way," he added, "it may also surprise you to learn that Mr. Street has a rehearsal at Cliff House."

Mike looked interested.

"Who is she?"

"She's a product, in the Sixth Form. Her name's Edwina Brookdale."

Mabel stared at him.

"And she has a cousin—a fellow named Mike Marchant."

"That is so. He is my nephew," John Street told her.

Mabel was conscious of a strange sensation, as though she was at last on the verge of a great discovery, although she could not, for the life of her, define it! John Street—Lucy Faraday! Edwina Brookdale—Mike Marchant! Why was it that Edwina had kept the existence of this important relation a secret?

Mabel asked.

"I say, Mabel, have you seen Lucy?" she began, and at the sight of the two eyes, stopped in confusion. "Oh, I'm awfully sorry!"

"Not a bit! Come in, Barbara!" Major Lynn said heartily. "Haven't you seen her yet? I do declare it's Babs' blinding misadventure—yes, to mention that ever! But what's this about Lucy Faraday?"

"Well, she's not in her dressing-room," said Babs. "I went in to give her a hand with her make-up. She's not even opened her bag! Oh, here's Bessie! I say, Bessie!" she called, as the fat one, looking perfectly dazed in the blue silk frock she was wearing for the occasion, stooped past the door. "Then, have you seen Lucy Faraday?"

"Edwina, yes!" Bessie replied. "I saw her half an hour ago, you know! She was discussing, talking to that awful gippy woman I told you about."

"Gippy?" asked John Street, with a start. "You said gippy?"

"Oh, really, you know! Yes," Bessie eyed him dubiously. "She's the wife of a lovely fellow I met the other night in the woods."

"But what happened to Lucy?" Babs cried impatiently.

"Oh, awfully! I don't—don't know! I had to go off then and fetch my programmes," Bessie said; "but I'll go and try to find her for you."

And good-natured Bessie answered off. In ten minutes she returned. No Lucy was to be found!

A little while there was then. From end to end the theatre was searched. Lucy, however, seemed to have vanished into thin air!

Mabel was almost distracted.

"Mabel, what has happened to her?" she cried. "How the deuce are we going to get her make-up done? It's not like her to run off like that, without even leaving a message!"

"No!" Babs agreed. "But wait a minute."

She went to the curtains, glancing out into the auditorium, which was now filling up, then came back.

"Edwina's not there," she said. "But what's it to do with Edwina!"

"Mabel, listen!" Babs said loudly. "I've a hunch. It may sound pretty wild, but, well—there are still wider things about this business! Listen to this! We know that Edwina, all along the line, has been plotting to get Lucy Faraday out of the play."

"Well, yes."

"We know," Babs went on bravely, "that, for some reason, Lucy's appearance in the theatre this afternoon would have upset all her plans. We know," she continued rapidly, "that the gippy woman who brought that message to Edwina is connected with Mike Marchant, and, therefore, through him, with Edwina!"

Mabel's lips parted.

"Oh, Babs, you don't mean—"

"I mean," Babs replied grimly, "that, having failed by every other means to



Green Marsh



I could also be said that there was not a more miserable girl at Cliff House that night than Edwina Brookdale.

Edwina saw the vain of accepting she had returned for.

Night came. It brought with it the boys of Friendside—just merely Jimmy Richmond & Co., but a whole host also

keep them out of your place, she and Alice have got the power to help them. Make, put on your hat. Tell the stage-manager to hold the curtain until we come back! We're going to the woods!"

And off to the woods they went, strong up, excited, tremblingly anxious. In ten minutes they had reached its outskirts, were plunging up the path that led to the clearing where Gipsy Frinks' caravan had been camped. Then suddenly Make caught hold of her chain, forcing her back into the bushes.

"Look!" she whispered.

Make stood still. Down the path came two figures—Edwina Brookdale and Miles Marchant. They passed within three yards of the crouched Edwina Ferness.

"Walk!" Make cautioned.

They walked. The two went on, hurrying towards Courtfield. Tensed, quivering with excitement now, Make and Make left their hidden place, crouching at breakneck speed along the path. They reached the clearing—

And then Make gave a groan of utter despair.

For the caravan belonging to Gipsy Frinks was no longer there. The grass had vanished!

IT COMMEMORATES Mabel Lynn glanced at her chain.

"Babe!"

"Wait a minute!" Babe said. Evidently her gaze was riveted upon. "Look! They can't have gone long! The camp fire's still smoldering." Her expression suddenly changed as she stopped, picking up something from the ground. "Make, whose is that?" she asked, handing her a handkerchief.

"Who, Lucy's?"

"Which proves," Babe breathed, "that Lucy has been here and— Look!" she cried, pointing to heavy wheel-tracks in the grass. "These are fresh, too. The caravan must have crossed off within the last few minutes! Come on!"

"But what are we going—"

"Come on!"

They went on, following the well-defined track. For five—ten minutes they plunged on through the wood; then abruptly Babe, who was leading, halted again, gripping her chain's arm with a force that averted. Twenty yards ahead, making good speed with its two horses, rattled the gipsies' caravan.

And—

Even as they watched, something happened. A lacinae girl's white lace— was raised above the glass panel of the door set in the back of the caravan.

"Lucy Ferness!" breathed Make.

"Oh, Babe, it's she! What are we going to do?"

"Hill off!" Babe said grimly.

"Now, listen, Make! Do as I ask. Go back to Courtfield; fetch the police; bring them through the wood to Green Marsh."

"But, Babe, what—"

"Make, go please!" Babe said urgently. "It's our only chance. If we back go back they'll get away long before we can bring the police here. I'll delay them."

Make threw a rather stared glance at her chain. What was it Babe's mind she did not know, but there was no time to ask questions.

Babe nodded until she had gone; then, plunging off at a tangent through the wood, ran desperately. In a huge susceptible she skinned the track, finally turning it again at the point where it crossed the old railway workings which had belonged to the abandoned quarry. The caravan was in the act of approaching Gipsy Frinks himself as



"LOOK!" Babe whispered, and even as she drew Make into the shelter of a bank, two figures approached. They were Edwina Brookdale and Miles Marchant. What new plan were the couple hatching? Babe wondered.

leading the horses; he stopped as Babe shouted, frantically waving her arms at the same time.

"Mr. Frinks!" she cried.

"Walk!"

"Listen!" Babe cried urgently. "There's not a moment to lose! I've just seen Mr. Marchant, and I've come back to tell you that this road's not safe. The police are on the track!"

"Then what—"

"There's only one chance!" Babe yelled, shouting desperately. "The police aren't in the quarry and of the road yet. There's still a chance to get out that way—and, as it happens, I know a place. Turn your horses!"

The gipsy glared at her.

"How do I know you're telling the truth?" he growled.

"Oh, good gracious! Do you want to get caught?" Babe asked impatiently. "Do as I tell you, and all will be well; fail to do so— And she shook her head significantly. "If you only trust me, I tell you, I can get you out of this. Turn those horses!"

The gipsy's face showed fear now. Obviously he had to take Babe at her word. She seemed to be the right sort; and, anyway, he reflected, if she were the other sort, why hadn't she brought the police with her? He jerked his head.

"Lead on!" he said.

"This way!"

The horses were turned. Babe, her heart thudding wildly, led the way. The track was narrow and narrow; now and again the caravan had to plunge through deep pools. Progress, as a result, was halting and slow; and Gipsy Frinks muttered savage things under his breath.

But at last a clearing showed in front of them—a track bright green, clearing—so flat that it might have been an overgrown tennis court.

That, as Babe knew, was Green Marsh.

"Hurry!" she gasped.

Frinks looked the horses; the rearing animals reared and plunged on. Make, apparently out of breath, dropped behind.

The caravan halted, it lurched. Now the horses were out of the wood, racing for the fresh, green clearing in front of them. There was a crash, a sudden shriek; but the impetus of the rank sent the animals reeling feet into the treacherous marsh before they could pull up.

A shower of black mud cascaded against him; there came a scream from Gipsy Frinks as he found himself sinking. Too late the real nature of that deceptively green stretch of turf clamped on him; too late he realized that the marsh was likely to hold him and his caravan helpless prisoners for hours to come. Fortunate he turned.

"Hi, girl, you—you—" he roared.

But "girl" was meaning like the wind. She knew that Gipsy Frinks would be safe where he was, and her heart was bounding with exultation. There was no real danger. Green Marsh was not more than three feet at its deepest point; but, having got his grip, it would hold an until the police arrived. She puffed.

Even now, although it seemed that Gipsy Frinks was completely exhausted, there was a possibility that Lucy would be rescued too late to appear at the theatre. For not until the police arrived could Babe—single-handed as she was—do anything to help.

So even now, as she ran, her heart was thudding with impatience and anxiety.

Urged, hearing the clatter of horses' hoofs in front of her, she passed, and then she let out a shuddering cry; for those horses were saddled with mounted policemen, and racing in the vanguard was Mabel Lynn.

Lucy was saved!



Meet Sylvia Sirrett

She was—thanks to Barbara Belliers.

There and then, rescued, she was rushed back to the theatre, with a vicar (Gipsy Prinks) and Mrs. Prinks were hurried off to the Courtfield police station.

At the theatre Lucy was rushed into her dressing-room, rubbed through her make-up, and rushed, finally, on to the stage just before the curtain was raised. A breathless hush fell upon the audience; a rattle of programmes, a sigh of anticipation.

Lucy, stepping forward, spoke the first lines.

They were interrupted, however, by a cry.

The cry came from Edwina Brookdale, who, seated in the body of the hall next to her Cousin Milton, was staring at the stage as if she were beholding a ghost.

"Milton, look!" she gasped.

But Milton was looking; he was looking with eyes that were staring out of his sunken face.

"Oh—it's her!"

"Lucy!"

"Something's gone wrong. Oh, my God! Here, come on! Let's get out of this!"

Palpitant, white-faced, Edwina rose, hurriedly she snatched up her bag. What had happened? How had Lucy, who they fondly imagined was miles away by this time, in the custody of Gipsy Prinks and his wife, got on to that stage in time for the commencement of the show?

They were soon to know the answer to that question.

For an, guiltily trembling, they stumbled into the foyer, Detective-Inspector Winter, of the Courtfield Division, accompanied by a sergeant of police, strode up to them. The detective's hand fell upon Edwina's shoulder. The sergeant caught Marchant by the arm.

"We want you," the inspector said grimly, "for complicity in the plot to kidnap Lucy Paraday. Your friends, the Prinks, have made a full confession!"

THE COURTFIELD Theatre echoed in the thunder of applause. Twelve, three (from the curt, was recalled at the end of the first act, and even then the audience pulled for more. One name was on every lip.

"Lucy! Lucy! Lucy Paraday!"

"Hurrah! Hurrah!"

For the fourth time Lucy took her call, smiling, basking, her eyes shining. The curtain fell. She retraced her steps to the wings.

And then stopped. A tall man in evening dress, looking excitedly agitated, leaped her way. Lucy stared at him, for some reason a quick thrill quivering through her heart. Who was this man?

"My name," he said, "is John Sirrett.

Does that convey anything to you?"

Lucy shook her head.

"But you—?" He looked at her; his eyes gleamed. "Lucy, my dear," he said, "do you know, you are so startlingly like my dead wife that I felt—well! But answer me a question. When you were young—about ten—do you remember anything that happened to you?"

Lucy stared at him.

"Well, I lived with gipsies, then. I had been lost, you know. My father found me and claimed me."

"Your father," he told her, "was a

man named Paraday, wasn't he? Long, he was not your father. He was merely the paid agent of a greater villain, a man named Brookdale, whom I will tell you about later. If you see the girl I think you are, you are my own daughter, who was apprehended to me as having been killed. There is one way you can prove it!"

Lucy stared.

"And that?"

"If you have a crescent-shaped birth-mark upon your right shoulder—"

"Which?" Babs happily slipped in, "she has!" And before she dashed and started Miss Moore could do anything at all about it however, she had pulled aside the strap of her dress.

And so at last the great mystery of Edwina Brookdale's penetration of the secret society was cleared up. And so, at last, Lucy Paraday, the erstwhile friend of Miss Moore, the girl who had long looked after at Cliff Home by show hard work and the winning of scholarships, became Sylvia Sirrett.

It was indeed a merry party that gathered that night in Steady No. 4. The study itself looked more like a theatre dressing-room than a secretary's or loaning in one of the largest girls' schools in the country. A plethora of make-up, wigs, and props had overflowed from the theatre and now crowded the room.

All the chairs were close, trying in between bursts of energetic packing and tidying—more of which seemed to make the slightest difference—to obtain a few lines of make and sip of coffee.

Nearly the entire cast of the play was there, jammed together in the most uncomfortable yet jolliest way imaginable. Discussion meetings were held in the doorway and corridor by girls anxious to compare their various chances on their performance.

Everyone was happy, ray-flecked with excitement; everyone talked loudly and subtly, regardless of the fact that their neighbours were much too busy talking themselves to listen.

Babs, spaced into the armchair, with Lucy and Marjorie seated on the arms thereof, snatched happily at a vast slice of cake, and eyed her views of the performance and acting in general—out, again, that across listened. But even Babs, for once, didn't seem to mind that.

Center of attraction, of course, was Lucy. If she was teased once, she was teased a dozen times. Everyone took pleasure in teasing her about her newly inherited riches—in a friendly way, of course. They accused her, in mock disgust, of already putting on airs and graces.

"Doesn't even speak to us?"—as Clara reminded drolly.

(As if Lucy was capable of anything but the most mock and self-effacing behavior!)

Nevertheless, she did manage to rise to the occasion when "Speech" was unanimously demanded by the chime in response to a further toast.

Six words were all she spoke. They were:

"Thank you!" and "Good old Cliff Home!"

And the chime which followed were heard all over the school. Even Miss Priorson, seated afar off in the austere remoteness of her study, heard them and smiled.

## GHOSTS!

THE dance was at its height when—

"Look!" cried Marjorie Hazelstone, in a suddenly shrilled voice.

At once the music stopped; the dance came to an end. Marjorie was pointing with a quivering finger to the dark Minerva's Gallery.

For one moment there was a tense, breathless silence. What was happening up there—what was that white, faintly luminous figure they all saw? Tall, gaunt, it was, glowing with a soft, unearthly light in the gloom. It was dressed from head to foot in white. . . .

"The ghost!" cried Babs.

This is an extract from one of the thrilling incidents in next Saturday's brilliant long complete "Cliff Home Holiday story, which is the first of the grand Christmas series. Don't miss the exciting tale, the title of which is:



As Vivid As A Film Is This Fascinating Morcove Serial, Featuring Betty Barton & Co.



# HER SECRET AT SWANLAKE



recess which the dining panel had disclosed, and Polly followed.

They had been thinking of providing themselves with a light, but now they could not afford the delay it must mean, to run for candles or lanterns.

No sooner had that voice spoken to them, faintly, hollowly, than they had felt bound to grope their way down to the speaker, whoever she might be—  
"Wait!"

"Stop, Polly! Careful!"

That was Betty's warning, as, going in front of her chums, she came to a topmost step in what doubtless was a deep flight, going down between the paneled walls of the ancient building.

Most warily did Betty go down—down, her hands all the while in touch with the rough brickwork and crisscrossing mortar of the walls.

Suddenly she came off a bottom step on to a narrow landing, and she stood still, with Polly bumping into her.

"Best of opening out in front of us here," Betty said, her groping hands avoiding contact with the brickwork.

"Goodness, where are we getting to, Polly? We may be below ground level, after coming down all these steps."

"Twenty. I counted them! But why say—"

"Ah! It divides into two passages here," Betty was suddenly able to tell. "One passage goes off to the right, and the other straight ahead, I suppose? Let's call out again."

"And, still at a guess in their groping about, they voiced more surely."

"Claire Ferrand! Where are you?"

"Hallo, there?" a quite cheery voice instantly responded, from close at hand in the black darkness. "Coming, girls!"

Polly gasped.

"My hat! I'm just about (answered by all this!)"

But Betty, with the astuteness which made her such an excellent Ferns expert

joined by a girl who instantly checked curiously:

"I say, fancy you two coming after me! Here on earth did you even get to know where those was a secret passage like this! As for me—I hope Pam won't be annoyed. I'm afraid I've been having a bit of a game."

And she laughed, just like a girl owing up to an innocent escapade.

Betty and Polly could not laugh. On the other hand, they felt no inclination to betray their grave suspicions.

This girl, who had now joined them in the secret passage, was the Claire Ferrand, who, a short time since, had admitted them at Swanlake porch, showing them to the drawing-room where they could await the absent Pam. Yes, she was that girl, and she was now as all agitated. Just as cool and as vivacious as ever!

But—was she that girl who had first answered in the darkness, saying:

"I'm Claire?"

That was what Betty and Polly still had to consider.

"We must all go up together, at once!" the much older girl rattled on.

"Why, Pam may have got locked by now, and be wondering!"

"There certainly is," Polly said dryly, "a good deal to make a girl wonder."

"Oh! What do you mean?" came the retort, in a suddenly sooted tone.

"Blaming me, you, that I had no right to go prying about in—"

"We're not hinting anything," Betty exclaimed, at the same time reaching Polly in the darkness to keep a guard upon her tongue. "Anyway, let's get out of here, and let Pam know. I expect she'll be by now."

One behind the other, they started to retrace up the very steep and narrow flight of steps, the older girl leaving nothing more to say for the present. Here occurred to be with the silence of one who is feeling offended.

Yet, when they all came out, by way of the old hanging cupboard, into the lumber-room, Betty and Polly found their companions waiting.

FOR NEW READERS

**PAM WILLOUGHBY** of Morcove School has become a star girl in order that she may have time to go to London for

**CLAIRE FERRAND**—a girl who, after being at her life on a steep climb in Australia, has come into a fortune. Told she is able to solve clues to Swinlake she is to stay with the Willoughbys at their stately home—Swanlake.

**VIVIANE MITCHELL** in the heart of Claire's costume, advises to make her story. She meets Claire and tells a plausible story to the effect that the latter is wanted by the police. She represents herself as an amateur detective and offers to help Claire in the last. When at Swinlake and she can clear her name. Claire consents and Viviane arrives at Swinlake to be welcomed at the real Claire Ferrand. But

**BETTY BARTON**, one of Pam's Morcove friends, is at some suspicion of Viviane. She and her sister, Polly Martin, visit Swinlake one afternoon when Pam is out. The false Claire behaves strangely. Betty and Polly discover a secret panel which a voice calls—strange voice which they have not heard before!

(See read on)

A Mystery Still

**NOT** a moment to waste!  
That was the thought in the mind of both Betty Barton and Polly Linton.

Somebody had answered from the darkness of that secret passage, the entrance to which had been the chance sensational discovery of half a minute ago.

"Yes, I'm Claire Ferrand," the girlish voice had responded. To Betty, it was not the voice of the girl they knew as Claire Ferrand, and such an oddity—why, it was in exact accord with just what they had begun to suspect!

Now it looked as if the great old beam of Swinlake was indeed harbouring someone else besides the nineteen-year-old girl who had lately come into a fortune. Someone else, for a reason that had yet to be discovered, had said, just then: "I'm Claire!"

Nudging her equally excited chum, Betty stepped into the groping-dark

By MARJORIE STANTON

tain at Morcove School, preferred to look for tongue. Flapping sounds were coming from the passage which branched off, from here, to the right.

They were unmistakably the words made by someone advancing as quickly as possible in such darkness, and five seconds later both Morcovians were

"Of course—we I shall tell Pam—it was rather bad form of me to go prowling about the house. But, here is Pam."

She, the schoolgirl who was so admired by Betty and Polly, next moment walked into the bedroom. Pam's brows were lifted in a "What's all this?" manner, otherwise, the was her usual serene self.

"Two miles at the porch," she smiled at her schoolmates, "so I guessed! You guessed that, to pop over here from Stromwood, after the match?"

"We did," Betty nodded.

"Who was?"

"Morrice," smiled Betty. "But about all that, Pam, dear, later. I say, have you ever known"—taking her by the arm to lead her to the cupboard, the back panel of which was still open—"that there's this way in, here?"

"Oh," Pam stated, "that's interesting! Quite a find; the first that's been made for I don't know how many years."

It occurred to Betty and Polly that Claire Fernald was feeling intensely pleased because Pam, although the daughter of the house, was not greatly excited about the marvelous discovery.

"Pam, dearest, it's up to me to explain—and, I suppose, ask you to forgive me.—Fact is— Ha, ha, ha!" An audible laugh interrupted that stinging voice. "What amuses me, Pam, is the only way you take it!"

"Oh, we've always known there were secret passages," Pam answered for her confusion. "I don't know if this one is connected with the rest. It's going to be awfully interesting to find out, of course. But—how like!"

"But that'll make it too late to explore!" turned impatient Polly.

"How do you mean too late?" "This is where it's awkward, Pam," interrupted Betty. "Polly and I got here on borrowed bikes from Stromwood. We wasn't hung about, if we do, we shall keep the rest of the Morrice team waiting for us at Stromwood. We're all due to go back in the Morrice bus at a certain time."

"I get you," nodded Pam. "Still, you've got time for a cog. Like a dash on your way down?"

As their groping about in the secret passage had left Betty and Polly with rather grimed hands, they were glad to accept the offer. So Pam took them to her own lovely bedroom.

She did not stay with them, for the girl they knew as Claire Fernald was waiting to "explain" to Pam at once. While they washed, Betty and Polly could hear a very vivacious voice telling all the explanation, and a very plausible one it was. In the nearby bed-room which had been allotted to Claire Fernald, Pam was being told that there had been the intention to have a luncheon bit of fun at Morrice's expense.

"Fast is, Pam, dear," the captain and her chess could hear the other girl remark on. "I discovered the sliding panel in this passage—when you were away at school. And I made up my mind—silly of me, perhaps—to say nothing about it for the present, but to get into the passage next time you had some of your chess over here. You know; just to work a sort of heated house effect!"

Polly, drying her hands, nestled to Betty:

"I s'pose that pam is going down with Pam? But we'll have to speak to her about Claire. She—"

"Yes; but don't start a scene-to-day," Betty softly entreated. "If we got to

high words downstairs, it'll be a waste of precious time. I'm hoping we can hurry over too, and get Pam to come up with us again to explore."

"You think there really was another girl down there in the darkness?" "I'd rather be absolutely convinced, Polly. And the only way to prove it is by searching—but same other time, but after tea."

To their great delight, Pam was all for exploring directly there had been a lasty drinking-glass of welcome cups of tea at the drawing-room beside. There could be a first inspection, anyway, she rejoined, before Betty and Polly would simply have to be off. To save time, she'd run over to find an electric torch.

Claire, left alone with the two girls, smiled.

"The first time I called back to you, in the dark, it gave you a 'oom!' she differed. "But why? You know very well you two were not of playing hide-and-seek with me!"

"It didn't sound like your voice."

"Oh, didn't it! But of course," the younger laughed, "my voice would sound different in a place like that. Besides, I was rather putting on a—"

"She broke off; but, even if she had said the rest, Betty and Polly would have paid no heed. Pam was suddenly back.

"These borrowed bikes, girls—they're gone!"

"What?"

"I went out by the front door, meaning to go round to the garage, where I'd be sure to find a good month. Then I noticed," Pam pointed, "both bikes—gone!"

Under consideration left Betty and Polly speechless, and it was the girl they knew as Claire Fernald who spoke next—quite calmly.

"Really?" she said, returning her eager eye to the tray. "But how extraordinary! And what ever will you do! Start to walk back, I suppose—at once!"

## Eerie Prelude

POLLY LINTON turned irritably as that remark was made about "walking back."

"Are you anxious to get rid of us?" she flared out.

"My—dear—girl! Now, why are you so?"

"Well, then—" hot-headed Polly was racking on; but again Betty interrupted.

"Polly means that she and I won't be able to take part in the exploring, and, of course, that's silly," was Betty's excuse for her cousin's outburst. "But, Pam, dear, about those bikes—can they really be stolen?"

"Oh, surely not!" frowned Pam. "But even if they've only been hidden by someone, for a joke, it makes it just as annoying. I mean, it may take to half an hour to find them. So a really doesn't look as if you'll be able to go into the secret passage again to-day."

"Who would hide the bikes for a joke?" wondered the much older girl, while Betty and Polly looked at each other in bitter disappointment. "Oh, here a couple of tramps—wanderers, as we call them in Australia—"

"Oh, I don't think so!" Pam disagreed. "I'm just wondering whether a couple of Grainger boys have done it—for a lark. Grainger School isn't far from here, and sometimes the lads cut across the park—"

"If I thought Jack and his pals were in this—" Polly issued a shriek. "Oh, but the thing is to find the bikes, not stand talking!"

And she rushed away, followed by the others.

For a quarter of an hour they hunted about in shrubbery paths and other likely places; but there was no coming upon the missing machines. Meanwhile, Pam had noticed that there was no Swanlake car available to run her two chums to Stromwood. Her parents' chauffeur had taken the car into town.

Where back, too, Pam's own bike was at Morrice School!

"So we'll simply have to get away at once, on foot," Betty glantly resigned herself at last. "Bound to be late, as it is. Polly, there'll be a row!"

A row there was, as Pam, in due course, got to know, being rung up about seven o'clock by a very irate Morrice headmistress.

Nor did anything that Pam could say ease the phlegm apoplectic authority's wrath. When the call was finished, she went back to the girl she was comforting, and told her:

"That, Claire, was Miss Seaverfield, Edy's terrible angry with Betty and Polly for having put everybody else about. The hockey team has only just got back to Morrice, from Stromwood. Any more of it, Miss Seaverfield says, and she'll have a slap put to my chums coming over to Swanlake."

"Polly" was the lake-hearted comment of this girl who was only posing as Claire Fernald.

Even as she spoke so regretfully, she was making up her mind that there must be some of it—some more! The national rival of Betty and all the rest of Pam's school chums feared the greatest danger which she, Victoria Munroe, had to face.

"It was a mean trick," Pam observed, "to take those bikes! Who ever did it? I'd like to know who it was!"

"I dare say you would!" was ardent Victoria Munroe's private thought.

The trick, played by her with such successful secrecy, had served her even better than she had hoped. At the time she had reckoned it would prevent Betty and Polly from hanging about at Swanlake—and as it had. Since then, there had been the row at Morrice School, and that was all to the good.

She drifted to the piano. "We didn't find it very thrilling down that secret passage, did we, Claire? Both branch passages came to a blank end."

"And what shall you do about it all?" inquired the sham Claire, with a studied carelessness that matched Pam's genuine anxiety. "Have the sliding panel screwed up until your people get back from abroad?"

"Oh, I don't think so—no." Pam was starting to play a prelude of Bachmannoff's.

"My chums, next time they're near here—and that will be to-morrow, after school—must have a chance to go into the passages."

"I see. What's the plan, Pam, dear?"

"That 'buried alive' thing—"

"What?"

"It's supposed," Pam smiled, playing on at the piano, "to describe somebody buried alive. If you listen, Claire, you notice how the music—however it tries to get away—is anchored to one note. It gives you the sort of 'can't get out' effect—"

"Oh, I don't know that I care to listen to such stuff as that!"  
 Pam's hands instantly dropped away from the keys. There was a sudden silence in the great dining-room.  
 She was staring across at the girl she knew as Claire Ferrard, who only stared at the listening boys, holding her hands towards them as if she felt guilty!

**Whist Swanlake Sleeps!**

**L**ATE that night, when she was sure that Pam and everyone else at Swanlake had long since dropped off to sleep, Vivienne Mauro came creeping out of her bedroom.

In dressing-gown and floppy slippers, already too crepe to the next wing. A switched-on torch helped crafty Vivienne Mauro to make out the slightest sound as she traversed various narrow corridors, leading away from that part of the vast hotel in that present-day use to the music room wing. By now, too, she knew her way about the place so well, her progress could be very swift.

This time the old ladies-room was not her objective. She went to a door higher up in the east wing, where there were only stairs, that had been out of use for this last fifty years.

The bitter night wind whirled about the ancient gables, but it was warm, even up here, just under the tiles. Some of the piping connected with the central heating system ran here and there amongst the old oak flooring and the plaster walls, for in one attic tank had been placed, so as to give a good "fall" of water.

To this particular attic Vivienne came, at dead of night, hearing a musical drip-drip of water oozing out as she slowly turned the knob of the door and went in.

Then, inside the tank-room, with the torch switched off, she heard the muffled breathing of someone fast asleep.

She thumbed on the tiny hall again, and closed its strong ray upon a girl whose head was only a few inches blanketed, spread upon the floor close by the hot-water tank.

"Claire! Oh!" Vivienne Mauro whispered towards the soundly-sleeping girl. "Claire Ferrard, wake up!"

I'm very certain that this other girl opened her eyes, to find them being dazzled by the glare of the torch, she held all her wits about her.

"Oh, have I got to get out of home?" she murmured, and was at once up from her makeshift bed. "Another noise?"

"No, it's all right!" Vivienne quickly answered. "But I just couldn't wait until daylight for a word with you. All that happened down there in those secret passages. It has left me so worried—about you!"

"But they didn't get to know about me, after all?"

"Yes, you were very well they had a good chance of doing so. And all because you were silly enough to answer when those girls called out. Why did you answer? That," Vivienne Mauro sighed pityingly, "is what I want to know."

"Well, I—I wondered if—that is—I will can't think why they called down at they did!" Claire Ferrard, are you there? You see," she answered, "they were calling me by name! And get you are the only person who is supposed to know that I'm under the roof!"

"What did you think at the time, Claire?" insisted Vivienne, a little sternly. "If I'm to go on doing my best for you, then there must be perfect

readiness of both sides. You could tell it wasn't I calling down to you. Why, then, did you answer?"

"I could only suppose, at the time, that it had become known that I was in hiding somewhere about the place, and they wanted to find me to let me know. There was no word, after all, to—"

impressing her peevish listener, and she continued in a deep whisper, "I'm lucky for you, Claire Ferrard, there were thousands of passages down there in the darkness!"

"Looking for you that I could run back along one passage to meet those two girls and get them to turn back, while you were in the other passage! This



"CLAIRE—Claire Ferrard!" came Vivienne's hushed voice; "wake up! I've something important to tell you!"

"For your being in hiding? Then you must have imagined that I had been harassing you, and that luckily the whole thing had been found out in time."

"You were!" Claire Ferrard candidly asked. "Yes, I admit—"

"Thank you!" Vivienne said bitterly. Then, like the cunning girl she was, she smiled feigningly. "Oh, well, only natural, I suppose! It isn't the first time that detective work of mine has brought me inside from the very persons who really owed me gratitude. My methods, I know, are—"

"Well, you will understand, Vivienne," her niece gently submitted, "I needed a good deal of convincing at the start."

"You did, and I certainly don't feel inclined to go to the trouble of convincing you all over again! No," Vivienne spoke an airily, "if you have lost faith in me—well, just end it all as soon as you like. Show yourself to Pam Willoughby in the morning, let it be known that Claire Ferrard is at Swanlake, after all; and then see how soon the police turn up again!"

That last word startled Claire Ferrard. She raised it, again.

"Again?"  
 "Oh, yes; they were here to-day, inspiring, supposing that you might be hiding around in such a place as this. And now, perhaps, you understand why those girls called out for Claire Ferrard after they had found the secret passage!"

See now how the plausible story was

attire may not be a comfortable place for you to be spending the night in, but not so bad as a prison cell!"

"Very well, I'm sorry," said Claire Ferrard's earnest manner. "But how long am I to go on like this? While I'm in hiding, are you getting any farther with—"

"With evidence that will clear you of that terrible charge? Yes, I am! No time to tell you now. How can I, when I should be in bed? I have to be up first thing in the morning, to be away all day—hard at work on the case! I make no promises, but perhaps—perhaps I shall get back to Swanlake tomorrow evening, to be able to tell you that you've saved!"

"In that case—until tomorrow evening, anyhow!"

Claire Ferrard again resigned herself to life in hiding.

"You have everything you want, haven't you?" Vivienne whispered. "Very well, then. Bye, for now, and wish me luck!"

She used the torch again for a moment or two, whilst passing from the attic, switching it off once more as soon as she was outside, drawing the door shut.

No key to turn upon her victim this time! But Vivienne Mauro was thinking, as she slipped back to her own luxurious bed-room, the best night since.

Yes, it might have to be that, in the end, for the real Claire Ferrard, a prisoner, under lock and key, somewhere as remote that even her cries to be let out could not be heard.

"Her Secret at Swanlake"

A prisoner, she, while one still gazed there to bring off the coup by which a fortune could be won!

Victorine Goes To Morocco!

**B**UT there were still these girls to be reckoned with over at Morocco School.

Was she—Victorine Manno—in accord as well in the shipping of Claire Fernand, only to be found out over all the trickery—by mere schoolgirls?

It would not have been Victorine Manno to go to sleep that night before she had made her plans. A mind intensely fertile in coming ideas soon told her the way to go to work; and next day the mountain water lying behind Madame Morocco had someone waiting in secret for a chance to creep into the school.

Victorine Manno it was, taking great care to keep out of sight, at a corner-green spot, from which she could keep an eye upon the school.

At last "Claire Fernand"—in reality Victorine Manno—heard the Form being rung in to afternoon school. She was close enough to the Morocco house to catch glimpses of changing batches of girls emerging off the field. These were none but high-spirited girls, girls of laughter, high the air of exultation settled upon the whole place.

The rumour had come for Victorine to act. She took advantage steps that were to end, she hoped, in her sneaking into the very heart of the school.

Scholars and mistresses alike were in class. As for being seen by any of the servants, she reckoned herself clever enough to cope with that risk.

Nor did her usual morning fall her now. By half-past ten she was in the unsuspected precinct of Study No. 12, making it her secret task to create confusion of a very special kind.

Part of her special plan was to make it appear as if confusion were the result of a "play stunt" was responsible for such disastrous disorder.

Fortunately Victorine Manno found out on which side of the study table Polly Linton worked. From the table-drawer on that side the mistress took out many typewritten sheets that comprised the

first half of the play which Polly was writing, and in a moment these sheets were scattered about on the table.

Victorine glanced to herself when this had been done. So far, good! Now to make sure that the headmistress herself would see the study in such a chaotic state.

For a few minutes longer Victorine remained in Study No. 12, carefully pouring a letter in a disguised, school-girl hand.

Then, taking the finished note with her, she fitted

The headmistress, as usual, was talking the Sixth Form for the afternoon. Miss Somersfield, having got all the copies checked upon work that would keep them busy with pen and paper, was free to glance about the class-rooms.

And what, to her amazement, did she suddenly spy lying where it must have been recently pocket under the closed door? A folded scrap of paper!

Swiftly she went over to the door, picked up the note, and read:

Is it fair that a Form captain and her chosen should give all their time to affairs of their own outside the school?

If her headmistress will go at once to Study No. 12 she will see what is meant by

AN INDIGNANT SCHOOL.

But An anonymous note! And Miss Somersfield had no liking for such communications. Her rule was to consign them to the wastepaper-basket, not giving them another thought. But this particular note—it was not anonymous! It seemed to be some girl's mistaken way of ventilating a real grievance.

The Six. Form could be left at its work; and so Morocco's headmistress did go up at once to Study No. 12.

Repeat, Betty and Polly were "trotted out" of class on a sudden summons to appear before Miss Somersfield in their own study.

Wondering what on earth it meant, they went up and found her ready to make a directing gesture as the angrily began:

"Look at the state of this study! And you, Betty, the Form captain! Polly, what do you mean by leaving this litter

of papers about, and the ink vessel and not wiped up! It's disgraceful!"

"But—"  
"I'm glad my attention has been called to such a scandalous state of things! These are sheets of typewritten, I observe; the play that some of you have obtained my permission to rehearse at Swanlake. But I never meant it to lead to this. Now I see there will have to be an alteration."

"But, Miss Somersfield," they both protested hotly, "the study was not in this state when we—"

"What? Is it worse than useless for you to talk like that! Everything goes to show me that you were in a great hurry, a bad state of excitement, up to the last moment before school."

"Were you working on the play alone up to the moment for going into class this afternoon?"

"Yes, I was."

"Very well then, that settles! Not another word from either of you!" commanded Miss Somersfield, in a rare state of anger. "But after this, no more going over to Swanlake—that is all!"

And, with that for her last word, Miss Somersfield walked out, leaving Betty and Polly agape at each other. It was like headmistress Polly to be the first to speak.

"We've got to go over to Swanlake. Why should we suffer for what some nasty, jealous girl in the Form has obviously done?"

"Or is it, Betty solemnly suggested—"Is it the work of that very girl over at Swanlake?"

Polly gasped again.

"Claire Fernand herself!"

"Yes," Betty added, "Claire Fernand, doing all she can to keep us away from Swanlake!"

ANOTHER thrilling instalment of

this great school and mystery serial will be published in the next issue of THE SCHOOLGIRL, in which there will also appear the opening chapters of a grand new RIVIERA SERIAL, entitled: "MISS MYSTERY OF CARNIVAL LAND." Order your SCHOOLGIRL right away.

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BETWEEN OURSELVES

MY DEAR READERS—I've just got back from the Riviera. Not only, of course. The fact is, I've just finished reading an instalment of Elizabeth Cleaver's grand new ROMANCOUS serial:

"MISS MYSTERY" OF CARNIVAL LAND.

and for the time being I was completely transported, as on a magic carpet, to the land of sunshine and flowers—the gay and captivating French Riviera.

Surely the Riviera is the home of romance! What more could one ask than this glorious coast, with its hidden-land of snow-capped mountains, its

sunny bays and azure sea; its palatial promenade and baroque buildings, dawning white in the sunshine!

Beauty everywhere—beauty and colour and gaiety in this playground of the world!

What a scene for a story, you might say!

Well, that story has been written—especially for you—by Elizabeth Cleaver, who knows the Riviera as well as she knows London.

With this gay scene as her setting, this favourite author has created a story that is going to thrill you from beginning to end—a story of mystery and adventure.

It begins in next Saturday's ROMANCOUS, and it's a story that's going to be the talk of the town!

Don't be one of the unlucky ones, and miss these brilliant opening chapters next week. Promise yourself a treat, and order your SCHOOLGIRL to-day—then all you've got to do is to look forward to reading "MISS MYSTERY" OF CARNIVAL LAND.

There are other good things in store for you next week, too. First of all, then, the GIP HONORARY story. This is the first of a brilliant

CHRISTMAS HOLIDAY series, in which you will find all your favourite Form favourites on holiday in romantic Mistletoe Manor, where there is—

A ghost!  
Don't miss next week's grand long complete story, the title of which is:

"WHEN THE WHITE QUEEN WALKED"

A long instalment of "HER SECRET AT SWANLAKE," and a sparkling complete story starring Happy-Go-Lucky Lady complete the fiction in next week's issue. But there are also Paul's four pages—and I warn you she's getting very Christmasy!

YOUR EDITOR.

**SOLUTION TO CROSSWORD**  
on Page 14

ACROSS—1, Header; 3, Elton; 5, Royal; 10, At; 13, 55; 15, 14; 16, 14; 17, U.S.A.; 18, 10; 19, 40; 22, Answer; 23, Barbara.

DOWN—2, She; 4, One; 6, Egg; 8, Her; 9, Tell; 7, Blank; 11, To; 21, 14; 24, 14; 25, 14; 26, 14; 27, 14; 28, 14; 29, 14; 30, 14; 31, 14; 32, 14.