

Grand Christmas Number

# THE Schoolgirl

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EVERY SATURDAY

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Christmas Dinner  
at Mistletoe  
Manor

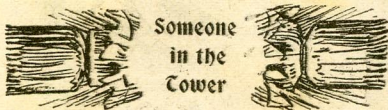
A happy moment in this  
week's fine complete Cliff  
House Christmas story



# Christmas Fun and Christmas Thrills With Babs & Co.,



## Babs & Co's Christmas Quest



Someone  
in the  
tower

By

Hilda Richards

"**I** S-SAY, you girls!" Bessie Bunter blurted breathlessly. "Oh, good gracious," Mabel Lynn cried desperately, "buzz off, Bessie! Now, listen!" And sternly Mabs regarded the grinning faces of the eight girls in front of her, as, for the nineteenth time, she lifted her baton. "Now, girls!" she cried. "Good King Wenceslas!"

"What-ho!" beamed Jemima Carstairs. "Pipe up the Cliff House glee party!"

"But I-look here—" yelled Bessie Bunter.

"And pipe down Bessie!" Clara Trevlyn said merrily. "Do you want to sing, Bessie?"

"Oh, really! Of course, I dud-don't want to sing! I'm out of breath. But I do want—"

"Then that's O.K.," Mabs said briefly. "Now go and sit in the corner and play tiddlywinks. This is Christmas Eve," she added severely, "and to-night we're going to sing carols. Now,

**A** CAPTIVE at Christmas! Such is the cruel fate of the girl whom Babs & Co. have vowed to help, but who now lies a hapless prisoner in the long-forgotten secret chamber of the Silent Tower. No sound of revelry reaches her—no echo of the gaiety and merriment at the manor. And yet all the time Babs & Co. are working eagerly, desperately, on her behalf.

everybody!" She lifted her baton again. "Ready?"

The carolers coughed. Bessie glared through her spectacles. She was obviously bursting with news of first-class importance.

The glee party, wrongly named by irresponsible Jemima, was ready. Bright, smiling, their faces on this Christmas Eve afternoon as they stood grouped in the oak-panelled morning-

room of ancient Mistletoe Manor, where they were spending the Christmas holidays as guests of the irascible old soldier, General Redfern, who was also Barbara's grandfather.

Eight of them there were—all girls from Cliff House School. Barbara Redfern was their leader. Clara Trevlyn, the games captain, came next. Then demure Marjorie Hazeldene, who, in spite of the urgent rehearsal, was still more urgently engaged in trying to finish off a bed-jacket which she was knitting as a present for Mrs. Redfern, Barbara's mother.

There, too, was Jemima, bland, imperturbable, monocle gleaming in her eye; and Marcelle Biquet, whose glowing eyes were shining with the spirit of fun. Their American chum, Leila Carroll, wore a broad smile on her face as she winked at Barbara's younger sister, Doris, who stood next to her. Fay Chandler, Doris' own friend in the Upper Third at Cliff House, was the other member of the party.

At the piano in the panelled morning-room of the manor was seated Effie Stevens, Mrs. Redfern's personal maid. She crashed out the opening bars as Mabs nodded.

"But I sus-say—" hooted Bessie indignantly.



# Who Are On Holiday At Romantic Mistletoe Manor

"Go!" cried Mabs.

"Yes, but—"

"Good King Wenceslas looked out,

On the feast of Stephen."

Eight voices took up the carol.

To be sure there was not that perfect harmony that Mabs was looking for. Jemima, as usual, forgot her words and burbled inspirations of her own which never fitted in with the others, or had any reference to the words being sung. Clara lost a bar through stopping to cough.

Mabs sighed in despair.

"Wow! Stop! It's awful! Now try again! 'Good King Wenceslas—' Babs, you're not paying attention."

Babs started.

"Oh, sorry!"

"You haven't been paying attention ever since we started," Mabs chided her severely. "There's a far-away look in your eyes."

Babs laughed.

"I'm sorry!" she said again.

"But lul-look here!" stuttered Bessie.

"Oh, for goodness' sake stop braying, Fatima!" Clara Trevlyn said. "How can we sing and look at you at the same time? One strain at a time is enough."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, all right," Bessie grunted, subsiding into a sulky silence. "Well, all right; don't listen to me. But dud-don't say I didn't try to warn you, if we're all murdered in our beds to-night!"

Mabs frowned.

"Oh, my hat! What's the chump burbling about?"

"Nothing! Go on," Bessie said. "I wouldn't tell you now that I'd seen a ghost in the Silent Tower, if you asked me."

They blinked. As one they stared towards the fat girl. Babs gave a start.

For, strangely enough, in those words Bessie echoed her own thoughts. For Babs, finding it impossible to concentrate upon the carol, had also been thinking of ghosts—or, at least, of one particular ghost. The ghost of the White Queen, which had been impersonated by an unknown girl whom she and her chums had run to earth a few nights ago.

That girl had been on Babs' mind ever since. Her haunting face, the tragedy in her eyes, the mysterious silence which she had maintained when caught, both intrigued and stirred her.

The girl had escaped. Where she had gone no one knew. Strangely, mysteriously she had come; strangely, mysteriously she had gone, with no one the wiser as to her purpose or her identity.

For the life of her Babs could not get her out of her memory. Many times she had had a peculiar feeling that they had not seen the last of the mystery girl. Babs wanted to see her again. She wanted to hear her story. She wanted, if it were possible, to help her.

"The Silent Tower, Bessie?" she prompted.

"No, blow; I'm not going to tell!" Bessie said poutingly.

"But—no, wait a minute, Bess! What have you seen?"

Bessie gulped. She had the attention she desired now.

"Well, I saw it, you know."

"Saw what?"

"A figure," Bessie explained. "A figure in the turret of the tower. All white it was, waving its arms about. I ran for my lul-life. I mum-mean, of course, I ran right back to t-tell you girls."

Babs frowned, and again the glance she gave the fat one was sharp. The

chums looked at each other, some interested, some grinning their disbelief.

For they knew the Silent Tower in the grounds of Mistletoe Manor—that crumbling erection, which, so General Redfern said, had neither entrance nor exit, and whose smooth walls rose in an uninterrupted cylinder of dreary stone from ground to roof. Only one tiny opening there was in that tower, and that hardly large enough to be called a window.

Legend had it—and there were many legends connected with the fifteenth century manor—that in the days of the family feuds a pitched battle had taken place in those grounds between the Pemburys, the then owners of the Manor House, and their powerful rivals, the Fleetwoods.

The Fleetwoods had been slain almost to a man, after the fiercest and most desperate fight the feudal old manor had ever seen. And the Roger Pembury of those days had buried them all in a common vault, and had erected the tower as an everlasting monument to their memory.

"Oh, but it's rot!" Clara Trevlyn blurted out with characteristic frankness. "Bessie's talking through the back of her neck! How could anyone get into the Silent Tower?"

"All the same, I saw it," Bessie answered obstinately.

"Where?"

"At the window, you know—at least, if you call it a window. It just appeared, waving its arms, and then disappeared."

"I think," Babs stated quietly, "that we ought to look into it."

"But what about the carol singing?"

"We'll do that when we come back."

They stared at her. Babs spoke with unusual determination.

"Oh, all right, then!" Clara shrugged. "I expect it'll be another

wild-goose chase, but anything for a quiet life."

They put on hats and coats, and trailed outside.

Across the grounds Babs led the way. Through the snow-laden shrubbery; past the lake. Then in front of them they saw it—that great, ugly, crumbling monument that covered the bones of long-dead Fleetwoods. There were no doors or windows at ground level, and no aperture of any description until, lifting the eye to the very summit of the tower, which trailed off in a towering spire like that of a church, one caught a glimpse of the opening that appeared so tiny from below. Like a small oblong black hole it looked.

"Well, there it is, I guess," Leila said.

They halted, staring.

"And how you're going to get inside without dynamiting it, is a Christmas conundrum," Clara grumbled. "Wuff! Let's go back! Old Bessie was seeing things as usual. She's just had ghosts on the brain since we nabbed that poor girl. But, I say—"

She broke off, catching her breath with a surprised intake. For something was happening at the aperture. Distinctly they saw a movement now. Spellbound, electrified, they watched. Something white suddenly moved to relieve the blackness of the square. And then, as they all watched, and gasped, a head and shoulders appeared. A white arm was thrust through the opening.

"Oh!" muttered Marjorie. "Babs, what?"

"Look!" thrilled Babs.

Her heart was pulsing now. Somebody was in the tower. That mysterious monument which General Redfern declared was of solid stone, and had never been examined except from the outside,



IN the light of Babs' torch the chums saw a dark cavity in the floor. "It's the secret passage," Babs breathed. "We've found it at last!"



possessed one apartment, at least. With fascinated eyes they watched.

And then—

The arm waved—once, twice, thrice. Then something dropped from the fingers—a piece of paper, which came fluttering down through the rapidly gathering darkness. Abruptly, the arm was snatched back. The vision at the aperture disappeared. In consternation the chums gazed at each other.

"Oh, what was it?" shrilled Fay.

But Babs was already darting forward, head craned back, marking the arrival of that fluttering sheet in the gloom. Like a snowflake it floated down; Babs, putting up a hand, grabbed it.

"Ciel! What is him?" cried Marcelle excitedly.

Babs was already smoothing it out, was peering at it. The paper was a scrap of an old envelope, torn open. The writing, smudged and indistinct, had apparently been executed with the charred end of a match or a tiny twig. It read:

*"To Barbara Redfern,—If ever this reaches you, please try to help me. I am sorry now that I did not tell you all when you caught me the other day, playing ghost. I swear to you, though, that it was the first time I had played ghost. I only did it to trick the real villains, and though you may be mystified, I do ask you to believe my motive was honest. I am now a prisoner in the Silent Tower, having been brought here by means of the secret passage that leads from the old do—"*

And then abruptly the message ended, just as if the writer had been interrupted. There was no name.

"She's a prisoner," Babs breathed. "She didn't escape after all."

"But who's made her a prisoner?" Mabs wanted to know.

"Don't you see?" Babs' eyes were flashing now. "Who, but the people who were playing ghost! And don't you remember," she added, her voice gathering excitement, "that night when the general sent me to bed early because we'd been ghost-hunting without his permission? I told you then, didn't I, that I saw this girl?"

"And two other people—a man and a woman!" Clara cried.

"That's it! The girl was hiding from the man and the woman. It was they," Babs continued, "who had been playing ghost all along. This girl, whoever she is, tried to beat them at their own game. Then we took a hand and ran her to earth."

Blankly they stared at each other.

"Oh, my giddy aunt!" murmured Clara.

"And now she's been grabbed by the other two!" Leila breathed.

Again there was silence. It was the silence of consternation. Dumbly they gazed up at the old tower, almost lost now in the shadows of the night.

"Oh, dear!" murmured Marjorie distressfully. "Babs, what can we do?"

"We've got to do something!" Babs said. "We can't leave that poor girl shut in there. Obviously we can't get into the tower except by the way she mentions, the old do— What is the old do—"

Blank stares rewarded her.

"A part, perhaps, of another word," Jemima ventured. "old door, for instance?"

"What old door?"

"H'm! Well, as there are about three hundred and ninety-nine in Mistletoe Manor," Jemima said, "rather vague, what? But what about dormitory?"

"Well, what part of the manor do they call a dormitory?" Clara wanted to know. "This isn't Cliff House."

"Well, never mind," Babs said. "I've got an idea. If anyone will know, that one is the general. We will take this note to him."

"And get another wiggling for ghost-hunting?" Clara sniffed.

"I'll risk that. Even the general can't fail to be impressed when he sees this," Babs said. "Come on!"

With the note in her hand, she made back towards the shrubbery. It was almost dark now. The moon, rising in a wrack of cloud that promised stormy weather for the Christmas Day of to-morrow, was peeping fitfully down upon the scene.

Babs, her breath coming with tumultuous excitement now, led the way, speeding past the lake, plunging along the dark path that ran beneath the overshadowing trees of the shrubbery.

"Oh, come on!" she panted. "If we—"

Hardly were the words out of her mouth when—catastrophe! A foot, it seemed, was suddenly thrust in her path from the trees that grew along the side.

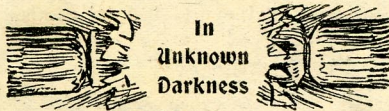
Babs, running, never expected such a surprise, went stumbling blindly forward. As she did so, she felt her hand grabbed, felt the note ruthlessly torn out of it. She turned, too late! Clara, charging in her rear, almost fell on top of her.

"Babs—"

"The note!" shrieked Babs.

"What's the matter with the note?" She sat up.

"It—it's gone!" she panted. "Somebody"—and she pointed a trembling finger towards the dark trees—"somebody tripped me and stole it. After them—quick!"



**B**UT it was hopeless. The unknown thief, whoever he or she was, had got clear away!

For twenty minutes the chums scoured the shrubbery, darting this way and that, but of Babs' assailant there was not the slightest sign.

"Well, and what do we tell the general now?" Clara asked, as, in a rather crestfallen body they gathered on the path. "You know what an old Tartar he is. He'll believe nothing without proof."

"All the same," Babs answered, "he's going to be told! We can't leave that poor girl shut up in there!"

But she had misgivings even as she uttered the words. After the recent tumults, she hardly dared hope that the general would give credence to a story which might start a new series of crises within the manor.

They reached the manor. Brewster, the old butler, let them in. And, almost immediately, the general's booming voice came to them from the body of the hall.

"And I tell you, Bessie Bunter, you're making a mistake. A great, great mistake!" he testily said. "Ghosts! Let me hear no more of this nonsense! And a ghost in the Silent Tower above all! Have you got ghosts on the brain?"

"Nun-no, sir; but I did really see some—"

"All nonsense!" the general snapped.

"A child's imagination. What do you say, Mrs. Lester—hey? Do you believe in ghosts?"

The question was addressed to the frail old lady who sat by the fire, the stick on which she normally hobbled, resting in her lap. A kind, sweet-faced old lady she was, with such a tremulously kindly smile. She shook her head.

"I'm afraid I do not," she said. "I have never met a ghost but once, and that proved to be a rather foolish schoolgirl playing a trick. But I declare, here is dear Barbara!" she added, as Babs, at the head of her chums, came into the hall. "Why, Barbara, my dear, how excited and how flushed you look! I declare I have never seen you look prettier!"

Babs smiled, a little embarrassed, as she turned to her grandfather.

"Grandpa, can I speak to you?"

"No charge! No charge!" the general beamed heartily. "Fire away!"

"It—it's about the Silent Tower!" Babs ventured.

His face lost some of its geniality. "Ho! Have you been seeing ghosts, too?" he asked.

"No; but we've seen something else," Babs said; and while the general, frowning, listened, she told him.

"This," he announced firmly, when Babs had finished, "has got to stop. I'm sorry, Barbara, but I just can't believe it. First Bessie comes and tells me she's seen a ghost in the tower. Then you come and tell me you've seen a girl. I'm not calling either of you fibbers, but I do suggest that your own romantic minds are painting pictures for you to see!"

"But, grandpa—" Babs faltered. "Because, in the first place," the general went on, "nobody has ever been into that tower. To the best of my belief and knowledge that tower is constructed of solid stone."

"But the note!" Babs cried.

"That?" He shrugged disdainfully. "Probably a piece of paper blowing about. You imagined the rest. And who, pray, should trip you up and steal it? You confess, yourselves, that when you searched the shrubbery you found no traces of anyone. What's happened to you," he summed up, "is that you've imagined it all!"

"Now, run away, please. Forget all about it, and let me hear no more of it! Short of high explosive, there's no way in or out of that tower. And I'm not going to bring up the artillery to please you, even if it is Christmas! Your kidnapped girl, like your White Queen, is just a ghost of imagination. Now run off and change for tea. I've something to tell you when you come down again."

"And that," as Babs despairingly put it, "was that!"

Mabs nodded in glum agreement. "Well, what now, forsooth?" Jemima asked, when they were alone.

Babs' eyes gleamed.

"Say no more about it in front of the general," she answered. "But we're not letting this matter rest."

"But what do we do?"

"When I've found out what 'do' refers to, I'll tell you," Babs said. "Meantime, keep your eyes on me."

They dressed then. Very pretty and very charming they all looked, to be sure, when, in their gayest afternoon frocks, they tramped down into the hall once more.

There tea was already in progress, and Babs' parents, Mr. and Mrs. Redfern, had come down from upstairs, where baby brother Reggie had been put to sleep. In a merry, chattering



group, they sat round the old hearth on which the logs merrily spluttered.

Very snug, very festive was the atmosphere in the old raftered hall of Mistletoe Manor, gay with ivy and holly and mistletoe.

On the dais, ablaze with a thousand electric lights, the gigantic Christmas-tree stood. The general, happy to have youngsters about him, was in tiptop form. On each side of the hearth stood two gigantic candles, as yet unlit.

"To-night now, everybody at seven o'clock, I want you all to gather in this hall—servants as well as guests—to take part in the good old Christmas Eve custom of burning the Yule log. While the Yule log burns," the general explained, "there are no distinctions. Servants mix with guests, and the fun is shared by all."

Faces brightened. It sounded a ripping custom, Mabs said. It was an old idea, but the general, having thought of its introduction, looked upon it from that moment as entirely his own. And, like all the general's ideas, it had to be carried out with strict military precision.

"Brewster, you and Perkins will bring in the log," he ordered his two manservants. "My son and myself will help you. Effie will play the piano. And we'll all sing the old carol that goes with the burning of the log. Afterwards we have dinner—servants and guests sitting at the same table, each helping the other. But seven o'clock, mind! Not a minute later! I shall expect you all here!"

"Yes, grandpa!" Babs dimpled. But she was thinking through it all—not of the burning of the Yule log, but of the tragic prisoner of the tower. And all the time she was racking her brains for some meaning for that exasperating "do!"

Dome? Dock? Dog kennel? Dower-house?

Oh, what could it be? What else began with "do"? What else, that is, applicable to the old manor house?

And then suddenly her mind was lit with a blinding flash of inspiration. She sat up with a start.

"Got it!" she cried involuntarily. "Eh?" The general's bushy brows came together. "What have you got, pray?"

"Oh—er—an—idea!" Babs blurted, covered with confusion. "An—idea for a—a game, you know!" But that, strictly speaking, was not exactly true, for the real idea seething through her brain at that moment was summed up in the breath-taking word "Dovecote"—the dovecote of her thoughts being the ancient birds' home which adjoined the Watch Tower, and which had been erected for the first Pembury when the manor was built.

It was now used for storing garden rubbish, mainly, the general having no fondness for keeping birds.

"An idea," she rushed out now, seized with it on the spur of the moment, "for a treasure hunt, grandpa!" He frowned suspiciously.

"And what's that?"

"Well, you see"—and Babs explained—"somebody hides treasure. Then the clues are given out to the treasure hunters, and everybody joins in a grand hunt through the house. Oh, grandpa, can we play it?"

"Well, I see no objection," the general agreed, falling into the trap. "I shan't join in myself, of course. Too old for that sort of thing—hey, Lester?"

"Now, grandpa?" asked Babs eagerly.

"Yes, yes; of course, my dear!"



THERE was a sudden rush of footsteps in the dark passage and Babs found herself surrounded by her chums. Her ordeal in the secret passage was over at last!

And so, to Babs' secret delight, preparations were set afoot. Mr. and Mrs. Redfern were given the task of preparing the clues and hiding the treasure.

She got a whisper round to her chums.

"When you get your clues, meet me in the Watch Tower!"

They looked at her askance. But easy to tell, from those who knew Babs, that there was more in the treasure hunt than now met the eye. They nodded. Clues were given out. One and all opened them, read them, and set off in divers directions. One and all, that is, except Bessie, whom Babs had deliberately left out of her scheme as being likely to be rather a hindrance than a help in a venture of this sort.

Most of the girls made for the rendezvous by roundabout routes in order to avoid suspicion. But Babs herself made straight for the Watch Tower. Marjorie Hazeldene, still carrying the knitting on one arm, joined her a minute later. Then came Doris and Fay. Then Marcelle and Leila, followed by Mabs. And, finally, Jemima and Clara. They blinked when Babs told them of her idea.

"But who ever heard of a secret passage in a dovecote?" Clara remonstrated.

"That's just it!" Babs said. "That's why it's never been found out. Who ever would think of a secret passage in a dovecote? But obviously it must be in some unsuspected place. Anyway, we'll try it out. This way!"

"But my knitting!" Marjorie protested.

"Oh, you and your knitting!" Clara said. "Blessed if I know why you carry it about! Couldn't you have left

it for a minute? Babs, have you got a torch?"

"You bet!"

"Right! Then lead the way!" Babs led the way. The old dovecot—really a sort of tower, a pigeon loft—was built on to the Watch Tower, and directly they came into the open it loomed, ghostly grey, before them. Babs pushed open the door. Silently they all filed in. The door was shut behind them. Babs flashed the torch round.

Sacks, tins, barrels, a heap of leaf-mould met their gaze, surrounded by solid stone walls. It did not look very hopeful, as Leila remarked.



But that did not deter Babs. Some instinct told her that she was on the right trail. Under her instructions, they tapped the walls the floor. But no hollow sound came. It seemed, indeed, as if they were on a wild-goose chase, until—

"Wait a minute!" Babs breathed.

"I've an idea!"

Clara groaned.

"Oh, my giddy aunt! Another one?"

But Babs did not reply to that. Already she was swarming up the narrow steps which led to the cote itself. She peered in, flashing her torch round the tiny apartments. It was not more than three feet square, and from its roof—fastened to stout iron chains, heavy with rust—depended a roosting perch, made also of iron. There seemed nothing there—nothing at all.

But—And Babs again looked at the chains. They seemed uncommonly strong to support a perch for such frail birds. Thrilled by a sudden inspiration, she reached up.

Her hand caught the perch; she pulled.

Nothing happened. She pulled again.

And then, excitingly, the thing gave a jerk in her hand. The iron chains, as if secured by springs above, gave under her pressure. From below came a stifled cry.

"Babs, Babs! Come down! There's a trap opening in the floor!"

One last jerk. Babs was quivering with excitement now. She knew she had found the secret, cunningly contrived though that secret was.

Breathlessly she careered down the stairs. Her chums, faces filled with wonderment, were grouped round a



square hole which had opened almost under their feet.

"Come on!" Babs gulped. "Follow me!"

She lowered herself into the hole. A dozen steps down led her into a long and surprisingly spacious corridor. Footsteps echoed with eerie hollowness as they wended their way, Babs' torch making grotesque shadows dance upon the walls.

Marjorie shivered.

"Oh dear! I don't like this place!"

"Frightened, old thing?" Clara whispered.

"No, not really, but—"

"Pecker up!" And the Tomboy com-  
fortingly squeezed her arm. "Here, let  
me carry that knitting bag."

But Marjorie shook her head. They  
went on. Endless—endless the passage  
seemed, twisting, coiling, spiralling,  
until they all felt bewildered. At last  
they reached a junction where four pas-  
sages, converging ran off at angles to  
each other. Babs paused.

"Now which?"

"Oh, take the first, I guess!" Leila  
advised.

They took the first. On again.  
Another hundred yards, and again they  
pulled up. At this point three new  
passages led away.

"Well, I sure do hope the battery in  
that torch is all jake!" Leila said.  
"Because I figure we've been on the  
road half an hour, and in another half  
the old general will be pulling his Yule  
log trick. Now, which alley?"

"Take the left," Doris advised.

On and on and on. Would they never  
see sign of an outlet? Babs' torch  
began to grow dimmer. She paused at  
last.

"I suppose," she asked, "nobody's got  
another torch?"

"For once, old Spartan," Jemima  
answered wearily, "thou sup-  
poseth right."

"Then," Babs announced,  
"we're sunk! I reckon this  
torch will last another five  
minutes. And I reckon, too,"  
she added, staring dismally at  
their consternation, "we've  
just been and gone and lost  
ourselves. Any of you re-  
member the way back?"

A general shaking of heads.

"Then I'm afraid—"

And she paused. In a flash  
she had extinguished the  
torch. "Wait!" she whispered  
tensely. "Did you hear that?"

Straining their ears, in a  
blackness so intense that it  
could almost be felt, they  
stood.

"What—"

Then they jumped. They  
all heard it that time. Faint,  
far off, impossible to tell from  
what direction, but there it  
was. A voice—a girl's voice—  
calling.

"She heard us!" breathed  
Mabs.

"Hallo!" called Babs.

The confines of the tunnel threw back  
thunderous echoes.

A pause; then again:

"Help, help, help!"

"Where are you?" bawled Babs.

Again silence, while the echoes rolled  
away; then again faintly:

"I'm here—in the turret-room! You  
can reach—"

And then swiftly, cutting off the  
words, a cry, a stifled scream, followed  
by a bump.

Babs jumped, flashing on her torch.

In the sickly, yellow light of the almost-  
spent battery the caams looked at each  
other with startled faces

WHILE THE owner of that voice—

In the bare, bleak room of the  
Silent Tower she sat upon a wooden  
stool. On the floor in front of her, lit  
dimly by the friendly moon-ray that  
glanced in from the slot-like aperture in  
the wall, rested water and food. An oil-  
stove burned under the slot, and that—  
except for the almost-threadbare clothes  
in which she huddled herself—was all  
the warmth the bleak room afforded.

How long had she been here? How  
long to wait? For the hundredth time,  
how bitterly she regretted the fact that  
she had not blurted out the truth about  
herself when she had the opportunity!  
And yet, how could she have done that  
without involving another person—a  
person who was dearer to her than any  
on earth?

The girl shivered; wistfully her  
thoughts strayed to those jolly girls in  
the manor.

She wondered, with a thrill of faint  
hope—had Barbara got the letter she  
had so tortuously written that afternoon  
with the aid of a spent match held in  
the soot of the flaring stove? If so,  
would Barbara come to look for her?  
And then sadly she shook her head.  
For how could Babs come to rescue her  
from this tomb-like tower when she did  
not know the way in?

In the act of writing the very word  
which would have given Babs that in-  
formation had she been when her  
captors had arrived. No time then to  
finish it. It had had to go as it was.

Wearily she sat, listening with no  
echoing gladness in her heart to the  
faint peal of Christmas bells across the

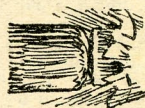
the silence which ensued. Then  
Barbara's voice again.

"Hallo. Hallo. Hallo!"

"Here! shrieked the girl frantically.  
"Here. Oh, help, help, help! I'm here  
in the turret-room. You can reach—"  
And then—

The words died in a gurgle as a hand  
was thrust over her mouth, as she was  
dragged back and pitched heavily to the  
floor. A pair of eyes, glinting through  
the slits of a white mask, glared at her.

"So," a harsh voice rapped. "I've  
caught you again, have I? Get on that  
stool. Now sit down and don't," he  
added with a snarl, "attempt to move  
or open your lips again until those girls  
have gone! I'll stop here and watch  
you until they have!"



Which  
Way  
Out?



"SHOUT again, Babs!"

Once again Barbara Redfern  
lifted her voice, bringing  
deafening echoes from the  
underground passage.

But it was of no use. For twenty  
minutes they had stood there, shouting  
in pairs, shouting in chorus

No answer.

Breathless at last, they desisted.

There was a brief, hurried confer-  
ference. Already they would be late  
for the general's Yule-log ceremony.  
Apart from that, the battery of the  
torch was rapidly burning out, and they  
were confronted by the serious knowl-  
edge that they were lost. All the same,  
Babs was reluctant to let the  
opportunity go.

"We'll have to come back,"  
Mabs said.

"Yes, but how are we to  
find our way?" Marjorie  
objected.

That was a problem. As  
usual they looked to Babs to  
answer it. Babs frowned, her  
eyes on Marjorie. Then sud-  
denly she had an idea.

"I've got it!" she cried.  
"Marjorie, have you got  
plenty of wool there?"

"Why, yes—"

"Then," Babs said, "we'll  
leave a trail! Pay out the  
wool as we go along. Easy  
enough, once we get out, to  
sneak back later on, and find  
this spot by means of the  
wool! Better come back  
again to-night," she added,  
"when everybody's gone to  
bed."

The suggestion was good.  
But then began the appar-  
ently hopeless task of getting  
back to the dove-cote. Babs  
dared not flash on the torch  
more than intermittently, and  
for the most part they travelled along  
in pitch darkness, each girl hanging on  
to the other's coat, Marjorie, in the  
rear, paid out the wool. It was a slow,  
laborious business, with many heated  
and fiercely contested arguments at each  
junction of passages. Leila shivered.

"Heck! It's half-past seven."

"Boneheads and bonfires!" Jemima  
murmured, "won't the general be  
pleased! And here we are, old Spartans,  
as far from getting out of this old  
labyrinth as ever!"

In increasing despair they stumbled  
on.

## "A Very Happy Christmas To You All"

is the wish of

Your Editor

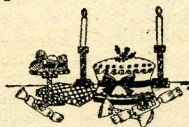
Hilda Richards

Marjorie Stanton

Ida Melbourne

and

Elizabeth Chester



countryside. She shivered a little and  
then suddenly sat up with a jerk.

What was that?

She listened again, breath held, nerves  
jumping. Oh, it couldn't be true, no,  
she was dreaming—

But there the sound came again, be-  
neath her. Voices, girls' voices.

It was Barbara!

The girl's eyes seemed to flame. Some-  
thing that was like a sob of happiness  
came to her lips. A croaking cry of  
gladness came from them.

"Miss Redfern, Miss Redfern. I'm  
here—here—"

She stopped, her heart pounding in



"NOBODY SEEN them yet?" General Redfern almost barked out those words, as he glared at the group which was collected round the blazing log fire in the festively decorated hall of Mistletoe Manor.

But there was little of the festive atmosphere about that place now. Everybody looked ill at ease and nervous.

The clock chimed half-past seven. The general's face seemed to take on a deeper shade of purple as he pulled his watch out of his pocket and ferociously consulted it. Mrs. Lester coughed nervously.

"Oh dear, I wonder where the poor things have got to."

The general glared, but he did not speak.

Again Mrs. Lester coughed, uttering a little groan. Again there was silence—tense, uneasy fidgeting. The log fire at the general's back crackled and spluttered. Then from Mrs. Lester came a gasp.

"General, oh please! Do you mind? I—I'm sorry to add to the upset but—my heart!" She rose. "It—it's the thought of those dear children!"

At once the general started forward. He caught her by the shoulder.

"I'm sorry! Let me help you."

"Oh, general, thank you. I—I hate to spoil the fun!"

"Fun!" the general echoed bitterly.

"Hum, hum! Perhaps," Mr. Lester said anxiously. "General, do you mind if I take her to bed? She is not strong, and—and these disturbances, you know."

The general nodded sympathetically. The old pair, supporting each other, made their way to their room. Silence again, while the general grew redder and redder and his eyes smaller and smaller and more and more glaring. At a quarter to eight Mr. Lester came down, announcing that he had got his wife to bed. At the same moment the nine explorers of the secret passage, dragging their weary limbs through the darkness of an interminable tunnel, gave a cry.

"Babs! Look ahead."

But Babs had looked. Babs had seen. And Babs' heart was leaping with relief. A light, just the tiniest crack.

"A secret panel," she breathed.

She ran the next few steps. The panel was reached. By no means was it the entrance which they sought, but it was an outlet, and life, movement and the manor lay on the other side! With the torch flickering its dying glimmer she breathlessly ran her hand over the panel, while Marjorie, at the end of the line, made the wool fast to a projection on the wall.

"Won't it open?" Clara asked anxiously.

"Can't find the button—or whatever it is that works it," Babs answered

"Let me help!" the Tomboy cried, a trifle impatiently. And, stopping beside Babs, began to run her hands rapidly over the dusty woodwork. She was lucky. There came a rewarding click. The panel slid open.

"Hurrah!" Jemima cheered.

As one they scrambled joyfully into the cosy room on the other side.

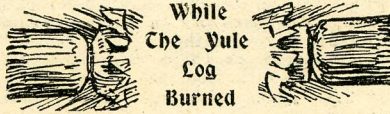
"Gee! A bed-room!" cried Leila. "And, oh heck!"

For while they all stood blinking in the unnatural brilliance of the electric light, a figure had risen from the bed, the figure of an old woman, her eyes dilated, her cheeks pitifully quivering. One petrified, fearstricken glance she flung towards them.

And then—

"Oh, help, help!" she screamed.

And, with that, pitched back on to the pillows in a dead faint!



"H, mum-my hat!"  
 "Mrs. Lester!"  
 "We startled her!"  
 Nine girls in sudden dismay stared at that frail, helpless figure on the bed.  
 Then Babs, the first to recover herself, leapt forward. At the same time

"Oh, grandpa, we're awfully sorry!"  
 "Bah! Go away! Lester, you'd better attend to your wife. Barbara, send your mother up here. I'll attend to you when I get down."  
 Babs glanced helplessly at her chums. They were for it now, with a vengeance! In a crestfallen group they went downstairs. Mrs. Redfern gazed at them quietly.  
 "Barbara?"  
 "Grandpa says, will you go up to Mrs. Lester, mother?"  
 "But what has—"  
 Babs sighed.



SWIFTLY Babs jerked the door open, wondering whom she would see in the corridor at this time of night. And then she recoiled as she found herself looking into the white, startled face of Mr. Lester.

there came a roar from downstairs. While Babs and her chums anxiously clustered round the bed, and Marjorie darted for water, there came a heavy clumping on the stairs. Mabs, meanwhile raised the old lady's shoulders.

Then:

Crash!

The door flung open. General Redfern, a monument of bristling fury, stood framed on the threshold. Behind him peered the scared face of old Mr. Lester. Their eyes almost popped out of their heads as they saw the girls.

"You, Barbara!" the general choked. "Where have you been, hey? What about the order I gave you to be present in the hall at seven o'clock? And, egad, girl! What have you been doing to Mrs. Lester?"

"We—!" Barbara stammered.

"Don't bandy words! Where have you been?"

"Well, we've been—"

"Get downstairs!" the general snorted, as he strode into the room. "Go now! My word, here you are! After messing up all my plans! Jumping into a private bed-room like a set of young jack-in-the-boxes, frightening this poor woman half out of her wits! I suppose you know she's got something the matter with her heart?" he roared.

"Oh, I don't know! We're all in the soup again."

Mrs. Redfern bit her lip. She shook her head as she rose. Without asking more questions she tripped upstairs, while Bessie, blinking, eyed them seriously.

"I sus-say, you know, you won't half get it hot!" she said. "The general's in a fearful wax!"

"You're telling us!" Leila said gloomily.

"Yes, rather!"

"Well, don't!" snapped Clara. "Heads up!" Doris whispered.

"Here comes the army!"

The "army," or, to be more respectful, the general, it was. Down the stairs he came, clumping along the hall. He stopped and glared at the culprits.

"Well," he barked, "what have you to say for yourselves?"

"Please, grandfather, we—we got lost!"

"Lost? Lost where?"

"In a secret passage!"

And then Babs explained. Grimly the general listened. He bit at his moustache.

"And so," was the judgment of which he delivered himself, "you spoil my evening to rush off on a mad



escapade of that nature? Following your kidnapped girl, hey? Getting yourselves lost in secret passages. Scaring old folk out of their wits! A fine confession, I must say! And a fine lot of tommy-rot you allow yourselves to believe! Where did you find the entrance to this secret passage?"

"In—in the dovecote," Barbara faltered.

"Thank you! Brewster, take Perkins with you. Go now! Screw up the door of that dovecote! If I find I can so much as shake it when you've done it, I'll fire both of you!"

"Now, Barbara, please!" He straddled his legs. "I'm very displeased with you all. But"—he paused—"I'm going to forgive you this time, partly because it's Christmas, and partly because Mrs. Lester has asked me not to be too hard on you. But"—and here, most terrifically, he frowned, "let this be an end of it! No more of this romantic nonsense—you hear? I'm warning you for the last time! Let this be an end of it! Now we'll have dinner. The Yule-log ceremony can wait till afterwards."

"So that," as Fay relievedly remarked, "was that."

All considered, Babs & Co. had got out of it very well. But Babs was biting her lip. Babs was far from satisfied. She was still thinking of that poor girl, trapped—where? Impossible, with that knowledge weighing upon her to treat General Redfern's warning with the seriousness he commanded. Somehow, despite him, they had to get her; to rescue her!

Dinner was served. By that time the general had thawed into quite a good humour.

Only Babs could not enjoy the merriment to the full. Her mind was still upon that other girl—cold, lonely, perhaps, shut up in the Silent Tower, a helpless captive at Christmas!

Dinner was cleared away. Bessie, with a sigh of contentment, arose. The chums left their chairs to pull crackers in front of the fire. What squeaks of delight, what merry gurgles there were as they examined the toys which came out of them, and read with hilarious chuckles the mottoes contained in them!

The fun grew, fast and furious. And then, to everybody's unbounded delight, Mrs. Lester, fully dressed, and looking her old self again, suddenly appeared among them, declaring most joyfully, that she just couldn't rest when all this merriment was going on below.

After that came the ceremony of the Yule-log, with the general most tremendously self-important, fussing around. The electric lights, with the exception of the fairy-lights on the Christmas-tree, which were supplied from an independent battery, were plunged out. The servants summoned, and the great candles lighted to fill the long hall with mystic shadows.

Everybody was handed a copy of the old song which was to accompany the ceremony. Effie took her place at the piano.

"Let the log be brought!" the general boomed.

The music crashed out; voices took up the song:

"Come, bring with a noise,  
My merry, merry boys,  
The Christmas-log to the firing—"

And then, from the kitchen, came Brewster, knees knocking, almost concertina-ed under the weight of the most enormous log the girls had ever seen. Brewster staggered at one end of it,

Perkins the other, while underneath, using his back for a support, came Barbara's own father.

It looked, as Clara said, more like the trunk of a tree than a log.

"Now, on with it!" the general roared.

And crash! Down went the log into the hearth, shaking the hall. A blinding shower of sparks leapt up; a vivid flame!

After that Mabs brought her caroling-party into action, beating time with her baton.

"Good King Wenceslas," followed by "Hark the Herald Angels," was sung with full vigour and glee by one and all. Everybody was happy until—

"*Ciel!* What is him?" cried Marcelle Biquet; and, in her excitement, spilt her glass of wine down *Jemima Carstairs'* neck! "Look!"

They looked. Marcelle, with a quivering finger, was pointing high up towards the *Minstrels' Gallery*. There, for a moment, a misty figure, uncannily glowing in the gloom, appeared, only the next moment to melt away mysteriously and silently.

"The ghost!" quavered Bessie Bunter. While Brewster, with a howl, dived for the protection of the kitchen.

"Hey! Hey! Stand still!" the general roared. "If anybody dares to move, they'll answer to me! No more scares! Who shouted 'ghost'?"

"Oh crumbs! I dud-didn't!" stammered Bessie, from behind Babs. "Has it g-gone?"

"Did you see it?"

"Y-yes!"

"*Ciel!* And I see him, too!" Marcelle shrieked.

"And I!" Barbara cried. "Let's go and look!"

"Yes, father, I'm afraid the girls are right this time," Mrs. Redfern chimed in. "I saw it, too!"

The general looked exasperated. "Haven't we finished with that scare yet? Robert, go up and look!" he cried to Babs' father. "Mr. Lester—hi! Where's Lester?"

"Yes, general? Are you calling me?" answered a timid voice, and the old man came shuffling out of the shadows. "Do you want anything?"

"Hey? Egad, I do! Somebody's seen a ghost! Ghost!" the general spluttered. "Somebody's playing tricks again! But, by Jove, I'll teach 'em! Go up and look with my son, will you? No! By gad, I'll come with you! And don't," he barked threateningly at the *Cliff House* juniors, "any of you dare to follow!"

They didn't. Up the stairs stormed the general, Mr. Redfern, and Mr. Lester. Five minutes' investigation, however, was sufficient to convince them that there was nothing to be found. The general, considerably ruffled, came puffing back.

"Bah! Imagination!" he snorted irritably. "Not a thing there! Well, don't stand staring at me! I'm not the ghost, am I? Pesky nuisance!" he muttered, and stared up at the gallery as though it had offered him some personal affront. "I didn't see it."

"But—" Babs began.

"Now, shush! That's an end of the matter!" he declared finally. "Brewster—where is that fellow? Hey!" as Brewster scaredly peered out of the kitchen, armed with his favourite blunderbuss. "What the deuce are you up to, idiot? Put that weapon away, and switch on the lights! Now, everybody. What about a dance?"

"Oh, topping!"

And so dancing became the order of the hour. But Babs, for one, was by

no means happy. The ghost again! Who was playing ghost? And for what purpose? She didn't know. But it was obvious that the same mysterious forces that had caused such upheavals at the manor a few days ago were at work again.

And if, she thought grimly, she could find the unhappy girl imprisoned in the Silent Tower, she would find out what those forces were at the same time.

Well, wasn't this her chance?

The music crashed on. On the polished floor, servants and guests alike mingled in the foxtrot which Effie was playing.

Babs sidled up to Mabs.

"Mabs, let me have this one! I want to talk to you," she whispered.

Together she and Mabs floated on to the floor.

"What is it, old thing?"

"Mabs, listen! I've an idea—about that girl."

Mabs looked at her quickly.

"We can't leave the poor kid, wherever she is," Babs went on; "at the same time we can't risk rousing the old general again. And it's not fair," she added, "to drag you all in on what may be another wild-goose chase!"

Mabs blinked.

"So," Babs went on, "I'm going to do the trick myself. It's no good going to the dovecote. That's screwed up, and, in any case," she added, "I'm not sure that I could find my way from there."

Mabs caught her breath.

"Babs, you're never going to try it on your own?"

"Why not?" Babs answered. "No, don't interrupt! Listen! I've got it all worked out! Remember the wool-trail Marjorie left in the secret passage that leads into the Lesters' room? The old pair are down here. That means their room is empty, so now is my chance. Keep the fun going while I'm away. Now, steer into that alcove, where we won't be seen. Mabs, you understand?"

Mabs bit her lip.

"Oh, Babs, I don't like it!"

"Nonsense! I'll be all right. And, Mabs, I can't rest until I know that girl's safe. Wish me luck!"

She flashed a smile. Then, before Mabs could say or do anything, she had darted away. Heart beating, she went to her own room. There she found a new battery for her torch, slipped it in, and tiptoed up the corridor to the Lesters' room. She pushed the door open, flashing on the light. Now—the panel.

She found it, exploring the woodwork with her fingers. A few minutes' fumbling, and then suddenly the panel slid open. Quickly she stepped through it; quickly she closed it, flashing her torch on the walls. Now, where was the wool?

For a moment her heart failed her.

Then, with a cry, she pounced upon it. The end, having fallen from the projection, was lying on the floor. Running it through her fingers, she strode on.

It was dark and eerily silent. Once or twice she stopped, looking nervously back. A mouse started up beneath her feet. Everything was so silent, so completely cut off. She braced herself.

On she went, trailing the wool. She reached the first of the junctions. On the wool led her. Five more minutes, and she found herself at the second junction. And then she gave a gasp. For here the wool trail ended.

What had happened to it?

Despair filled Babs for the moment.



She dropped the end she was holding; in sudden concern went forward.

For twenty yards she explored the first passage, looking on the floor. Then she returned and entered the second one, still with no result. The third one also failed to betray a trace of the guide which would have helped her. Consternation filled her.

Who had been here? Who had cut the wool trail? Somebody must have done it!

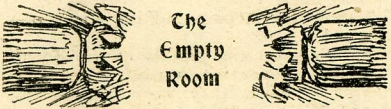
She stood and frowned. And then suddenly she started. By instinct she put out her torch.

What was that?

A strange, uncanny, shuffling sound. Babs stood rigid.

Then, along the passage she saw a movement. Something, ghostly gleaming in the darkness, was approaching her—something arrayed in a shimmering white dress which glowed uncannily in the gloom, and on whose head glittered a gleaming white crown.

For a moment Babs felt a thrill of fear. For a moment she stood frozen with terror. For she realised now that she was face to face with the White Queen, the ghost of the manor!



**B**UT only for a single moment did Babs lose her nerve. For next, reacting with characteristic quickness, she could have laughed.

Except that to laugh at that moment would have been dangerous.

Instinctively she stepped back into the darkness of the next tunnel. With bated breath, heart thudding, she watched.

Slowly, deliberately, the shuffling figure came on. Now it was near her. Babs held her breath, pressing back. In its hand was a bag—a very old gladstone bag, though what it contained Babs could not at that moment guess.

At the junction the figure paused—so near that Babs, reaching out, could have touched its dress with her hand. Then it went on.

"Oh, my hat!" breathed Babs.

She was quivering now with excitement. She had forgotten the wool trail. As the figure went ambling off up the passage, glowing eerily in the darkness, she tripped after it.

Once it stopped, once it looked back. But Babs, knowing that she was unseen in the blackness, stood still. On it went, walking with sure-footed knowledge through the maze.

At last it paused, feeling over the wall. Babs' eyes rounded as she saw the apparently solid wall swing inwards. The figure disappeared. She raced on.

She reached the entrance. Above her the gleaming figure climbed. It was ascending a precipitous flight of stone stairs now, which Babs realised, with a quick thrill, must lead to the room in the turret. How fast her heart beat then! What a rush of hot colour came to her cheeks! At last she was on the track of the missing mystery girl.

She watched, crouched breathlessly at the foot of the steps. At the very top of the stairs the ghost halted. The glowing aurora which surrounded him shone on bare stone walls, as solid and impenetrable, apparently, as the ramparts of a fortress. But even as she watched a magic thing happened.

She saw him stoop, saw his hand press against the stone wall—then a section of the wall swung inwards.

Babs held her breath. She had no doubt as to where she was now—in the heart of the Silent Tower! And this was the way to the secret turret-room!

She must see what was happening.

Three, four, five, six, seven stairs she climbed. Then again she flattened herself as from above came voices—a man's voice—the voice of the phantom

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—muffled as it spoke through the folds of the phosphorescent mask—a girl's voice broken—pleading.

"Oh, please—please let me go!"

A pause.

"Then give me the chart."

Chart! Chart! Babs sat up with a jerk. What new puzzle was this?

"I tell you I haven't got the chart," the girl cried despairingly.

There came a growl from the man.

"Then if you haven't got it, you know where it is!" he snarled. "And until you agree to tell me, you can stop here."

Babs' fists clenched tightly. How dare this merciless rascal treat that helpless girl in this callous fashion!

Oh, great goodness, what could she do? If only her father were her—or Clara, or Mabs! Three, four more steps she climbed. She was nearly at the top now. Another step—another—and then suddenly, in the square aperture which led into the secret apartment, the ghost appeared.

Too late, Babs shrank back.

For in that moment he had seen her. He started. Babs heard the rasping breath he gave as he gathered himself for a spring. Then, with a leap that brought him down ten stairs, he had reached her. Desperately Babs reeled back, one hand instinctively going up to defend herself. The next moment:

"Oh, help—help!" she screamed.

Too late, she tried to right herself, too late clawed at the wall. Her foot slipped on the edge of the stairs. Backwards she fell, outwards she was flung. And bump, bump, thud—down the stairs she went. Dazed, breathless, bruised, bewildered, she floundered helplessly to the bottom of the flight, the ghost chasing after her. She saw his eyes as for a moment he looked down at her. Then:

"I say—I say—!" Babs cried.

But the phantom was flying like the wind down the secret corridor.

"Come back!" Babs shouted. "Come back—"

The next word was a groan as dizzily she tried to rise, only to fall back. Something had happened to her—one leg, bent beneath her, was numb.

The phantom had vanished. She was alone, helpless in the depths of the manor's secret labyrinth!

**N**INE O'CLOCK!  
Ten o'clock!

Eleven o'clock!  
Mabel Lynn's face was strained and anxious. Nearly three hours had Babs been absent! What had happened to her?

"Clara, I—I'll have to tell him!" she whispered.

Clara Trevlyn nodded gloomily. There seemed nothing for it but to make a clean breast of the whole escapade to the general.

"I—I'll go now," Mabs said.

She rose. The general, talking in the inglenook to Mr. Lester, looked up at her approach. He frowned at the sight of her white, strained features.

"Why, Mabel, my girl, you don't look a bit like Christmas," he said.

"What's the matter—tired?"

"No, general—it's Babs."

"Barbara? Why, what's happened to her? But, egad, now I come to think of it, I haven't seen her for the last hour or so."

"That's just it," Mabs gulped.

"Eh?"

And then, desperately, Mabs told him. Mr. Lester shook his head; the general, to her grateful amazement, however, did not fly into a rage. He looked at her sharply.

"I see," he said "Babs went off on this wild goose chase herself. Well—," he rose. "We've got to look into it, and that without delay. You say the panel is in Mr. Lester's room?"

"Yes."

"Do you mind, Mr. Lester?"

"Well," the old man hesitated. "My wife has gone to bed!"

"You don't object, man! Barbara may be in danger!"

"Oh, no," said Mr. Lester hastily.

"But excuse me, then! She may be startled if you go up now. I'll go up and tell her first."

The general nodded. His face was set now. In a crisis he showed himself the sort of man he was—none of his blundering or blustering now. Babs was missing! Babs might be in danger! Whether she had acted rightly or wrongly was beside the point. The fact was enough. The exploit itself, her reason for defying his orders, could wait until later. He called for torches—for a pickaxe.

"My son, Mr. Redfern, will come with me, you, too, I think, Mabel, and you, Clara. No!" as Leila opened her mouth. "That will be enough. Brewster—torches, quickly! Take one, each of you. Robert, take the pickaxe. Clara, just in case anything has happened, you carry this first-aid box. Now, ready?"

They were. Impatiently they set off. Upstairs they went; through the panel of Mr. Lester's room they disappeared. Down the passage they tramped, calling as they went. At the first junction the general paused.

"One minute!" he said. "I heard something."

Faintly from the corridor on their right came a voice.

"Oh, help!"

"Babs!" Clara hooted joyfully.

Babs it was. Babs painfully crawling along the floor, gasping with agony at every step. In the darkness of the corridor she had massaged her leg. That, at least, had yielded to treatment, but her ankle still hurt fiendishly. Now she groaned as she saw lights ahead, as she heard footsteps running towards her. The next moment the general was bending over her.

"Barbara, my child! What has happened?"

"Oh, dear! My ankle!" Babs cried.



"Let's have a look at it," the general said.

Amazing how cool, how unruffled he could be in a moment of action. Here was a new aspect of General Redfern! While Clara peeled off the stocking and Mabs opened the first-aid box, the general examined the injury. Bruised, swollen, angry, the ankle looked.

"H'm! Not too bad," he said. "You've displaced a bone, if I'm not mistaken. Now wait a minute. I learnt a bit about bone setting in the army. I think I can manage this. Shut your eyes, Barbara."

Babs shut her eyes. She could have screamed the next moment. If a red-hot dagger had passed through her ankle the hurt could not have been worse. Shooting arrows of pain seemed to pass upwards from her ankle, right through her frame, numbing her brain, her body. The general looked at her anxiously.

"Can you bear it?" he asked—"it's going to hurt a bit more."

"All—all right!" gasped Babs through clenched teeth. "Go—on!"

The general bent over her ankle once more, his skilled hands moving firmly—fingers pressing—massaging.

Then a last terrible wrench—followed by a strange but wonderful comfort.

"Better, Barbara?"

"Oh—oh, yes—no! I don't know," Babs stammered, almost crying.

"Stand up. Try it."

She stood up, assisted by the white-faced Mabs and the anxious Clara. To her joyful relief she could bear her weight on her ankle. Though it still felt stiff and numb, all traces of pain had vanished.

"Oh, my goodness, grandpa, you old miracle worker!" she cried in delight.

"It doesn't hurt?"

"No," Babs announced joyfully.

"Good! That's done the trick!" the general announced. "All right, you needn't worry, I'll put a bandage on it, just for support." And he did. "But now, young lady," he added sternly, "kindly explain yourself. Hey? What do you mean by giving everybody in Mistletoe Manor the scare of their lives? And how did you come to hurt your ankle?"

And then, seeing that there was nothing else for it, Babs, gasping, explained.

The general looked grim.

"Well, as I've said before, I don't believe it," he said obstinately. "But still, as we're here, I'll give you the benefit of the doubt. Can you find your way back to the secret stairway?"

"Yes, I think so," Babs cried.

"Very well. Let's go!"

And they went. Instinct took Babs in the right direction. The ghost, in its precipitate flight, had forgotten to close the entrance at the bottom of the stairway, and the general jumped when he saw the long flight leading upwards.

Joyfully, then, Babs led the way. She remembered what she had seen the ghost do. She reached the top, looked round, and there, on the wall, espied a little knob, which looked, indeed, as if it was just a piece of bulging mortar. She touched it; pressed it.

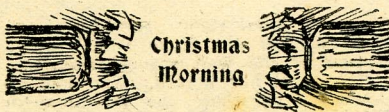
A section of the wall swung away.

"There!" Babs cried triumphantly.

"What did I tell you? The girl's in there, a prisoner! Clara, bring the torch quickly! I say, where are you? Where are you?" she cried eagerly, as she stepped forward, flashing her torch around.

And then she stopped, blinking in dismay. For of the mystery girl there was no sign!

She had vanished!



W HERE was she? Where had she gone?

Babs & Co. would have given a great deal to know that.

The general himself would have given a great deal, too. Even he was impressed now. Pooh-pooh the ghost he might, but he could hardly persist, in the face of this discovery, that there was no means of getting in and out of the Silent Tower.

All the same, he obstinately refused to give way on every point. That the girl was up to no good was flatly obvious, he declared. Seeing she was no longer in the room, she obviously had the means of getting in and out of it at will.

That, unfortunately, strengthened his conviction that the unknown girl was still the mysterious ghost of the gallery.

But Babs knew otherwise. Instinct told her that something unforeseen had happened.

And in that Babs was right, for something very unforeseen had happened. The girl prisoner of the Silent Tower had escaped, and was, at that moment, blindly groping her way in chilly, inky darkness through a bewildering maze of secret passages.

Even now, cold, weak, and suffering as she was, she wondered at the miracle of her escape. Stumbling dazedly as she was, with no knowledge, no idea, of what was to be the end of her adventure, she marvelled that she had not thought of it all before.

Years of acquaintance with Mistletoe Manor told that the old place was honeycombed with secret passages. Many old ones, and many new ones, had she found during her own pleasantly exciting explorations in the past. And always she had discovered that when one secret entrance led into any chamber, there was a corresponding exit which led out of it. She had found that exit just after the mysterious phantom in the phosphorous mask had left her.

But now?

Where was she? In a strange new part of the manor. On, on, she had blundered, fighting for breath, and at times, in her extreme despair, stopping to shout.

The narrow walls flung back her voice in a thunder of frightening noise, making her poor head reel. Still, she was out of that villain's clutches! She was free! One objective, and one only, she had now. That was to find Babs, to tell her all and everything, and throw herself on her mercy.

Reeling and faint, arms outstretched in the darkness, she tottered on.

DONG!

Sonorously the hour struck from the great grandfather clock in the hall of Mistletoe Manor.

One o'clock!

It was Christmas Day!

Mistletoe Manor lay peaceful and sleeping. Outside, the snow was falling. A whispering wind, which had sprung up just before midnight, was sighing under the old eaves, and the snow made a faint, fluffy, fluttering noise as it pattered against the panes.

In bed, by Barbara Redfern's side, Bessie Bunter snored peacefully and happily, dreaming, perchance, of the

gargantuan Christmas dinner which awaited her on the morrow. But Babs, contrary to her usual custom, lay wide awake.

For Babs again was thinking. Not of the Christmas dinner, and the joys the new-born day was to bring forth, but of that tragic, white-faced girl whom she had last seen in the garb of the White Queen, and who she had last heard on Christmas Eve in the secret room in the turret of the old tower.

Babs bit her lip. If only, she thought, she could get in touch with her! If only she could find her! She thought of the note; the girl there had promised to explain if she could see her; had said—

Babs sat up with a start.

A sound—footsteps—in the passage outside! Someone was creeping about—at this time of night!

Was it the mystery girl?

Babs' heart beat fast. In a moment she had slipped out of bed. Quickly she donned her dressing-gown and slippers, and, padding towards the door, listened. Outside, the wind sighed eerily. Somewhere an owl hooted a mournful greeting to the new Christmas Day, and the fluttering snow tapped with fairy fingers against the window-pane.

But—hark!

Those footsteps shuffling nearer—nearer!

Babs caught the handle of the door; she waited, nerving herself. Nearer—nearer! Now they were outside the door. With a sudden pull she tugged the door inwards, at the same moment pulling down the switch so that the electric light shone full on the prowler of the passage.

There came a low exclamation.

And Babs jumped; for the face which looked into hers was not that of the girl or the ghost; it was the white, startled face of Mr. Lester.

"Oh," she stammered. "I—I thought I heard someone!"

"My dear, what a start you gave me!" he said shakily.

"But—but you are out of bed!" Babs pointed out. "Ah, it is two o'clock!"

He smiled. In a moment he seemed to have recovered his composure.

"I was going downstairs," he explained. "You see, Barbara, I have left my wife's Christmas present down there. As you can guess, I like that to be the first sight to greet her on Christmas morning."

Babs bit her lip in confusion.

"Of course," she whispered. "Well, good-night—and Merry Christmas!"

She returned to bed and composed herself to sleep, but the girl was still on her mind. How could she sleep, knowing that she was spending such an unhappy Christmas? Fitfully she dozed. By fits and starts she fell asleep at last, only to awaken when a heavy thumping sounded on the door, and voices of Mabs, Clara, Jemima, Leila, Marcelle, Doris, and Fay were raised in joyful chorus outside.

"The mistletoe hung in the castle hall,  
The holly bough hung on the old oak wall—"

And then the door opened, and the eight girls—singing in solemn chorus, and each carrying a parcel in her hand—surrounded the bed.

"Oh crumbs! I sus-say, you know."

"Shush, Bessie! Let them finish!" Babs dimpled.

She sat still, smiling; and then suddenly her eyes lit upon something that had been placed on the foot of her bed—a letter in an unknown handwriting, addressed to herself.





**TERRIFIC** was the battle that raged in the snow—and for the moment the mystery of the missing girl was forgotten by the chums. Little did they know how near she was to them, all the time.

She picked it up. The carol came to an end. Clara grinned.

"Well, you old slacker, don't you know what time it is? If it wasn't Christmas morning we'd yank you out and frogmarch you in the snow! Still, Merry Christmas, old lazybones! And Merry Christmas to you, old plum pudding!"

"Merry Christmas!" smiled Babs, unconsciously slitting open the envelope.

"Merry Christmas, Bessie!"

"Oh, a Merry Christmas, you know! I sus-say, is that my Christmas present you've got there, Jimmy?"

"It are! It am!" Jemima solemnly asserted. "One for Babsie, too. Although I must say," Jemima added thoughtfully, "that our old Babsie is hardly looking as bright as a berry on a holly-bush on this festive morn. What's the matter, Babs?"

"Me? Oh, nothing!" Babs said.

"Oh rabbits! Come on, out with it!" Mabs teased.

Babs sighed.

"Well— Oh, I don't know! I've been thinking of that poor girl. You know, I can't help feeling that—that—well, it's just too beastly, having such a ripping time ourselves, and knowing that someone else is so unhappy—on Christmas Day, above all others! If only," Babs added wistfully, "I could feel sure that she was all right, I wouldn't have a care in the world, but—"

Idly she drew out the letter. The chums looked just a little serious—a little self-conscious, too.

"Well, I guess I don't see what we can do," Leila sighed. "She—" She stopped, as there came a sudden exclamation from Babs. "Say, what's bitten you?"

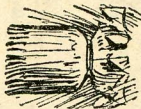
"It's from her!" Babs cried excitedly. "Who?"

"The girl! Listen!" And Babs, suddenly thrilling, her face radiant with happiness, smoothed out the note. "She must have slipped this into my room during the night. Listen!"

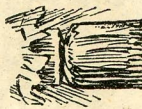
And eagerly, wonderingly, they all crowded round their leader as she read:

*"Dear Miss Redfern,—Please forgive my intrusion into your bed-room. I would wake you up, but you have already done so much for me that I should hate to disturb you. I just want you to know, however, that I have escaped from the manor, and I do not want you to worry about me any more. I am going into Derby to-day. There is a certain "something" there I must do. To-morrow, however, I will return and explain all. Meantime, a Happy Christmas to you and all your jolly friends.*

"JOAN."



While Others feasted



"SO that,"—as Leila Jarroll remarked with tremendously relieved satisfaction—"is that!"

No need, after that letter, to worry any more. The girl was gone—free once more. She was coming back on the morrow. They could all enjoy themselves without feeling that she was in danger—in peril.

And to enjoy themselves they proceeded; even though Babs did secretly wish that the unknown had told her more in that letter and that she had signed her full name—never suspecting for a moment that the letter was bogus,

and that the mystery girl was still in the manor itself.

What happy excitement as the chums exchanged Christmas presents with each other! And in the middle of that who should come in but Mr. and Mrs. Redfern and the general, all beaming and glowing and hearty on this festive morning, and all—like the chums—laden down with special presents.

An hour they all spent in Babs' bedroom, laughing, talking, chattering; with Clara blowing hideous noises on a saxophone, a present from her brother Jack, in Nigeria.

Then breakfast—such a convivial meal—with the general beaming hearty hospitality from the head of the table; with old Mr. and Mrs. Lester seated on either side of him, smiling gently and indulgently at the hearty boisterousness of the girls.

Outside, it was snowing gently; and when, the meal over, Clara suggested a snowfight, there was an immediate whoop of delight from all—except Bessie Bunter, who valiantly declared the suggestion rotten.

Outside they went. A right merry battle there was in the snow, just outside the old tower, with General Redfern and the old people standing there applauding heartily, Effie and Mr. and Mrs. Redfern joining in. Another pair of eyes watched that battle, too.

The eyes of the mystery girl! How she had done it, by what route she had travelled, she did not know, but by some miracle Joan had eventually found her way to the secret entrance in the cellar of the old Well Tower. Easy enough had it been to get in; but there was no way out, except by the secret entrance, with its seeming miles of tortuous passages in chilly darkness; for the Well Tower, by the orders of the general, had been securely locked and



sealed. All outer exits and entrances were impassable.

A tiny grating, high up near the ceiling, gave just the merest glimpse of the grounds. Mounted on a box, Joan stood and watched the merry snowfight. Once, twice, she shouted, hoping to attract Babs' attention, but the boisterous squeals and shrieks of the snow-fighters drowned every utterance of her tremulous voice.

If only—oh, if only she could attract Babs' attention!

But Babs, imagining her away in Derby, was no longer thinking of the mystery girl. The grating was too small, too tiny even to thrust a hand through. In despair, alternating with hope, she watched.

If only Babs would look this way!

But Babs didn't. A groan of despair came from the girl's lips as Babs & Co., victoriously routing their opponents, were pelting them with hearty gusto as they retreated, and the battle was surging across the grounds—out of earshot, out of sight.

AND ALL unsuspecting of the lonely, chilled, half-starved girl in the Well Tower, the festivities at Mistletoe Manor went on.

After the snowfight there was church; such a sweet little service in the tiny chapel two miles away. Vigorous and hungry, the chums came back with hearty appetites for a jolly lunch. After that there were games and more games, and then stories round the fire during tea. A party of villagers came up from the village to pay Christmas respects to the lord of the manor, and there and then a merry jig became the order of the hour.

Night fell. Came eight o'clock and—Christmas dinner. And what a dinner! In festive mood, and crowned with ridiculous paper hats, they all sat round the table while the general jovially carved the boar's head, and Mr. Redfern the most enormous, plumpest, and most delicious turkey they had ever seen.

Chattering, laughing, the clatter of knife against plate made merry, festive music.

And then the pudding, which Bessie, beaming, brought in and proudly placed on the table, while the lights were put out, spirit was poured over it, and it was set alight.

And after dinner, when crackers were pulled, the ceremony of stripping the tree! With the old general, wrapped in a voluminous, red Father Christmas gown—which he tripped over repeatedly—came whooping into the hall, dragging a sled behind him.

And then—

"Oh!"

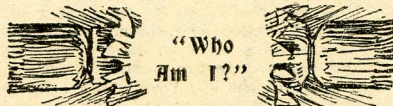
A simultaneous cry rang out; for, without warning, the lights went—phut!

"The lights!"

"Who turned out the lights?"

And from Brewster, who had run to the switch:

"There's—there's something gone wrong, sir!" he told the general. "The switch won't work! I think the lights have fused!"



"Who Am I?"

THEY had! And, as a result of their fusing, a girl lay, white and senseless, on the floor of the cellar in the Well Tower.

It had been Joan's last hope. The mystery girl, at the end of her tether, weary from waiting, listening and shouting, had hit upon the final desperate idea of drawing attention to herself by tampering with the lights. She had not meant to plunge the whole house into darkness, however.

Her one idea had been to tap the wire, hoping that that would cause an inquiry, and result in her being revealed.

But Joan had under-estimated her own strength. Weakly she had dragged the box into position beneath the switches and climbed on to it. She found that, by standing on tiptoe, she could just reach the wires, but she had not reckoned with the sudden attack of faintness which had assailed her as she reached up. Too late, she had felt herself falling; too late, grabbed at the wire for support. The wire came away in her hand. There was a hiss, a flash. She had a momentary sensation of being kicked into space, and then blackness.

It was still unconscious that Babs & Co. found her ten minutes later.

"LOOK! SHE'S coming to!" "Now we shall know the truth!"

"Shush! Her eyes are opening!"

In a tense group, the Cliff House group surrounded the settee on which the white-faced refugee of the cellar had been placed.

There was a stir of quick interest. The general glowered fiercely. Old Mr. and Mrs. Lester looked at each other. Mrs. Redfern bit her lip.

"Joan—" Babs whispered tremulously.

"I—I— Where am I?" the girl whispered.

"You're with us in Mistletoe Manor. You remember—"

"Remember?" The girl stared. A frown appeared between her brows. Then blankly she shook her head. "I—I don't remember!" she said. "Who am I?"

Everybody stared in blank consternation.

The general blew out his checks.

"Look here—"

"Grandpa, no! Wait a minute!" Babs cried quickly. She stared penetratingly at the girl. "You must know your own name?" she said.

"But I do not! I—I don't remember anything!" the girl gulped. She looked wildly round. For a moment her vacant

eyes fastened upon the old couple; she started, catching her breath. She pressed a hand to her throbbing head. "I do not know!" she muttered. "I do not know. This place—it is strange to me! I do not know you! I can't remember anything—anything!" Her voice rose to a shrill, troubled treble. "It's blank—blank—blank!"

And with that she fell back exhausted against the head of the settee.

"H'M! PERKINS, send for a doctor!" the general said. "Something serious has happened to her! Barbara, you'd better take off her things. Brewster, make the Blue Room ready! We'll put her there."

There was confusion, bustle, in Mistletoe Manor. The little stranger, who could have explained all the mystery, had, it seemed, been discovered too late. While she lay there Babs unfastened her clothes; Clara took off her shoes. In the midst of that task the Tomboy gave a cry:

"Babs!"

"Yes, old thing?" Babs asked distractedly.

"I say, look at this!"

"What?"

"I found it," Clara cried, "in one of her shoes!"

She was holding up a strip. A thin strip of parchment it was. Babs went over to her, looked at it; then, quickly taking it, looked again. A sentence burned itself into her mind—that pronouncement she had overheard the white phantom uttering to the prisoner of the Silent Tower:

"Tell me where the chart is!"

"THAT CHART," Babs announced, half an hour later, "is at the bottom of this mystery! It's the chart that's been the cause of everything which has happened at Mistletoe Manor these last few days! Joan has lost her memory. Joan is ill, and at the moment incapable of helping herself. But, you girls, we're going to help her!"

She looked determinedly at the faces of her followers.

"But how?" Leila asked.

"By helping me to find out what this chart means—by discovering the secret it tells about. We haven't got Joan to help us, but for her sake will do it ourselves! Are you agreed?"

Hardly necessary to ask that question. The answer was plain in every face.

Unknown to them, however, two other people were discussing the same question at the same moment.

They stood in a room near the Watch Tower—a man and a woman. Their expressions were fierce.

"Well, as it happens, it turned out well," the man was saying. "If she had remembered, we should have both been on our way to gaol by now! But everything's all right. The doctor says she won't recover her memory unless something like a miracle happens. That means we need not worry about her any more. Our business—"

The woman's eyes glittered.

"To get the chart!"

The man's lips came together like a steel trap.

"To get that chart!" he repeated. "Yes! That chart shall bring up both the life we need! Wealth! A new start! We'll stop at nothing—nothing until it's in our hands!" His eyes, narrow and cruel, hardened. "It's our wits, Meg, against a crowd of school-girls! I don't think," he prophesied softly, "that we have much to worry about!"



ONE CLUE TO GUIDE THEM

—an old parchment chart with a strange diagram and a clumsy rhyme. What does it mean? What precious secret does it hold?

BABS & CO. MEAN TO FIND OUT!

You will read of their adventures when tackling this romantic mystery in the grand long complete story written by Hilda Richards, which appears in next week's

SCHOOLGIRL

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.



# OUT OF SCHOOL HOURS



soon as the letter is opened—before you've read a single word. Rather the effect of a Christmas card and letter combined.

## Save That Calendar

You're almost certain to have one or two calendars given to your family.

If you have a calendar that you're particularly fond of, and can't bear parting with, you might turn it into a novel match-lighter.

It's very simple. Just tear off the calendar part, and over this stick a piece of emery paper. Then leave it hanging up by the kitchen gas-stove, or near father's chair.

It makes such a handy—and pretty—gadget for striking matches on. (And may

save the sole of father's shoe, or the surrounds of the grate, where young people seem to enjoy striking matches!)

My Christmas presents are all completed now, so all I have to do is sit down and wait for Christmas.



**H**ALLO, GIRLS!—I feel so important this week—writing two letters to you! This is my more frivolous one—containing foolishness as well as serious advice and even war-r-nings!

The other is my special one—special to the season of the year, and conveying my very sincere greetings to you all.

But for all that, I must still wish you a merry Christmas in this letter, for I'm sure you agree with me that this can't possibly be done too often.

I know I'm never bored by good wishes (nor by compliments!)—and the more frequent they are the more I love them.

Now for that war-r-ning. We'll get it over in good time, rather on the principle that you eat your spinach first, and leave the batter pudding till last—if you loathe spinach and adore batter pudding as I do. (Specially if it's a corner piece!)

All of this is rather appropriate, for this warning concerns food. I know you're going to over-eat this Christmas—we all shall. I fully intend doing so, so I shall heed the warning myself, too!

## A Christmas Cure

It's this. If you do feel just a little "full" after your bumper Christmas dinner, and can't help wishing you had more room for the Christmas cake at tea-time, which comes too excitingly close to the dinner, try my cure.

It's a very pleasant one. Buy yourself a packet of serious peppermints among the other good things. Suck two of these after lunch and you'll feel fighting fit again.

If you sip a glass of hot water at the same time the cure will be so complete you'll almost feel ready to start even dinner again!

No more warnings—not at this glorious Christmas-time.

## Flower-fixing

But next a pretty-making idea. Of course, you're going to wear an ornament in your hair this Christmas. Try it on

Christmas evening if you like. Everyone's in such a good mood then, that even the family dog will be forgiven if he steals a snooze on the bed! So certainly your hair-trimming will be smiled upon.

But how to fix these things in

your hair? Ah, that's caught you! But cheer up; it used to puzzle me—until I nosed out the secret. And herewith I pass it on to you.

A bow is easy, of course. You just tie this under, or over, your hair, according to whether you're the regal, or the Alice-in-Wonderland type.

But flowers. You can't just jab these on your hair and walk about for the rest of the evening with your head erect as if you're learning to be a mannequin. They've got to be fixed somehow.

Well, and this is how you do it. You take the posy of flowers and sew it on to a hair-grip.

Then just jab the clip into your hair, wherever you fancy it, and the flowers go with it.

Another way of doing it is to sew the flowers, very lightly, to one of those setting combs. (They cost four for threepence, I believe.) When this is pushed into the hair it is quite invisible, and only the flowers show.

If neither flowers nor bows of velvet and ribbon appeal to you, you might try a posy of feathers. Not those long ones that have probably come from a pheasant, or you'll look rather like a Red Indian or the Last of the Mohicans. But those fluffy feathers, that pretend they've come from ospreys and birds of paradise—only they haven't!

There are quiet moments even at Christmas, when I'm sure you could amuse yourself quite merrily by making lots of cheerful little tassels out of all the oddments of wool that are lying around from knitted Christmas presents.

Make as many of these as you like—for I have a cute use for them that you should like.

Sew them on your beret, scarf and gloves. The result will be very new and attractive, and just right for your Christmas morning walk!

\* \* \*

Have you seen that lovely Christmas notepaper that is on sale this year? (At least, this is the first year that I've noticed it in the shops.) I think it's a perfect brainwave for those Christmas letters to people who don't have presents.

My mother, as I told you, just adores writing her Christmas letters, and when I introduced this paper to her she was thrilled, for it conveys greetings just as



## Real-Looking Fur

A coat trimmed with real fur is indeed a luxury, isn't it? But fur-cloth looks just as costly. I was thrilled when I discovered you could buy it at sixpence for nine inches.

So if you're feeling rich, and your winter coat doesn't look it, what about trimming it with strips of fur-cloth.

Some round the lapels, cuffs and pockets—and even down the front—would be sweet. To complete the picture, a pom-pom of fur-cloth on your beret would be the very last word in richness!

## For the Family

Father is having the gaudiest pair of golf hose. I refused to knit a plain pair, for they're so dull to make. These were quite exciting—apart from turning the heel—especially the turn-over top. I also made him some of those ornamental garters to go with them.

He's sure to have a round of golf on Christmas Day, for his club has a special Christmas morning competition, so I hope he wears these stockings and they bring him luck.

Brother Vernon has had a pull-over knitted for him by his devoted sister (me!) It's such a size, I'm certain I blunted my best knitting needles over this!

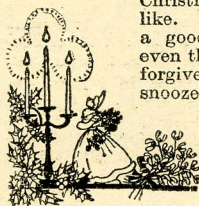
I think he'll like it, for it is in his old school colours—and you know what young fellows are about their old schools. Far worse than girls!

I've bought mother an early morning tea-set, which is rather sweet, and matches her bed-covers and wall-paper. Our r'Olive is always complaining about the breakfast cups being used for early tea, so I thought this would help solve the problem. The set consists of a teapot, jug, basin, and two cups and saucers, all to match.

Small brother Heath was rather a problem. He wouldn't appreciate a "made" present, so I bought him a box of paints. As a matter of fact, he's quite good at painting and loves making a mess, so this should please him.

For two best girl-friends I've bought stockings and an evening handbag.

Much Christmas love, from your friend,  
PATRICIA.





**R**IGHT from, roughly, five o'clock on Christmas morning, until really shockingly late on Christmas night, the great day should be one long, glorious party for you. I expect you'll sleep very soundly on Christmas Eve—out of sheer excitement—and wake feeling full of thrills.

If you can put off the exploring of your stocking until the other young members of your family are awake, it's a grand idea to do so. Then you can all crawl about on the bed together and shriek and delve and compare treasures to your heart's content.

I always help young Heath with his, every year. Then together we make a frightful din with some of his noise-making instruments, bawling carols outside mother's and father's door.

This wakes them more effectively than anything I know. So in we go and have tea—and Heath his water—with them, and wish Happy Christmases and gloat over stocking-contents and kiss and say "thank you."

I then do as much tidying-up upstairs as I can—in record-breaking time, I can promise you! (For our r'Olive has Christmas afternoon and evening off, you see, and we like her to get away as soon as she can.)

Breakfast is always grand fun. We have the same menu every year. Grapefruit followed by sausages, bacon and mushrooms. (No sausage for Heath.)

### Breakfast Surprises

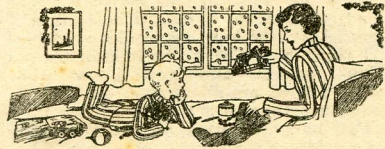
But we're all so busy unpacking presents and getting in a glorious mix-up that the mushrooms get cold, and the bacon is often forgotten entirely.

Mother and I put the finishing touches to the breakfast table. When all the family's personal presents have been laid round—and any that have not been opened from the day before, mother and I do our trick.

This year we're tying coloured ribbon—threepence a ball—to each present, and are going to trail this all over the room, leaving the five ends over each chair.

Then the family is allowed into breakfast, and must track this ribbon all round the room—under chairs, round table legs and so on, until it ends at the presents themselves.

After breakfast we all go and hand Olive her presents (having wished her the compliments of the season before!). She's very happy, and we all wait while she opens them. Then she gives Heath one, which is very sweet of her I think—for she simply adores that small nuisance.



### Revealing The Tree

The next ceremony after breakfast is for all of us—Olive as well—to troop into the drawing-room. There, the Christmas-tree is revealed. We have thick velvet curtains that go right across our bay window.

All the lights are out—and with a dramatic flourish mother opens wide these curtains to reveal the glittering and lighted tree. (Any bigger presents are given then—which are too hefty for the breakfast table.)

Heath plays in there for a little while, while mother and I help Olive. Father and Vernon stay with him without even



a protesting murmur! That's what Christmas does for you.

After the clearing up, we all go to the drawing-room and await the postman.

More present and card opening! The cards are arranged on the mantelpiece—as they have been ever since I can remember. And any small presents still to be given are tied on to the Christmas tree. These in our family are always small things, and are known as "Tree Presents."

Another half an hour we all devote to



telephoning our friends and relations who live near, wishing them all the good things they wish themselves.

Any unexpected presents or cards are replied to by those cheery greetings telegrams, which you can send over the phone, of course.

That done, the Christmas walk comes next. We all go on this, though father will probably leave us half-way this year for a game on the links.

Then home again. We shall very likely have grannie and godmother to dinner, so they will probably have arrived by then.

They're shooed into the drawing-room with Heath, while mother and I retire again. This time to the dining-room, where we arrange the grand table decorations for the Gargantuan Christmas Dinner.

### Table Decorations

This year we're having a large slice of cottonwool laid out, and smothered over with silver frost. On this we arrange little model fir trees, little Father Christmases, robins on logs, reindeer and crackers.

This leaves the rest of the table free for plates and all the rest of it.

Dinner's rather late, I'm afraid, by this time. But when we do sit down at last, it has all been well worth it. The decorations are admired—for these are our surprise. Then we all have the most glorious tuck in!

It's over at last. Olive goes off to her people, Heath goes to his cot for a nap, for by this time he's almost worn out with excitement.

All the family helps with the washing-up, clad in the most ridiculous paper hats and costumes from crackers. Even large brother Vernon is allowed to "put away," while father tidies the dining-room.

Then tea is prepared. This is not a big meal in our family, but is arranged on a

**PAT'S  
GRAND  
XMAS PARTY**

**My Christmas**

**M**Y DEARS,—This is my extra-special very tiny but very sincere, and is just

**A Merry, Merry**

Whether you are at home, surrounded by well, or are away with friends to whom you're—I hope it will be the happiest time you have

May your stockings be bulging, your presents for, and may every moment of the day be cr

May you look your dainty and pretty best, charming ways make you lots of new friends ones!

Again—

A Happy, Happy Christmas to you all, my

trolley, ready to be wheeled into the drawing-room when we're ready.

Into the drawing-room then, for a restful afternoon.

Young Heath comes down to tea—and eats as if he's never even had a huge dinner. That's what his snooze does to him.

Then comes the chance to dress up in one's prettiest and silkiest frock—which might have got spoiled if it had been worn for dinner!

Quite a gang comes to help us celebrate in the evening, and it is soon after their arrival that the next great event is staged—the stripping of the Christmas-tree! Father does this, clad suitably in many whiskers and red garments.

There's at least one present for everyone, and more for some.

Grannie has several; so does Heath's godmother. All the kiddies have one too, and then come the crackers again.

More cracker pulling and then old favourite games, in which we all join and love as if we'd never played them before.

All the furniture is pushed back, and Blind Man's Buff puts us all in a good mood.

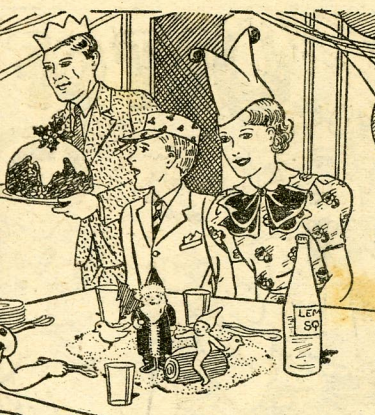
After this comes Oranges and Lemons, or Strawberries and Cream. It makes a change, you'll find, if you play this, to make one side Strawberries and the other Cream. The kiddies think it's great.

Carols round the fire make a little rest, in which everyone joins in. Then we usually have a fund of stories to tell and riddles to ask.

These are always good fun, and if the youngest members of the family get a little bored, they can always play with the toys.



Share in the Fun of Her Grand Christmas Party—Her Very Own Party for



# PAT'S GRAND XMAS PARTY



## My Christmas Letter

**M**Y DEARS,—This is my extra-special Christmas letter to you. It's very tiny but very sincere, and is just to wish you all

### A Merry, Merry Christmas

Whether you are at home, surrounded by your families that love you so well, or are away with friends to whom you're very dear, or among strangers—I hope it will be the happiest time you have ever known.

May your stockings be bulging, your presents just those that you've longed for, and may every moment of the day be crowded with happiness.

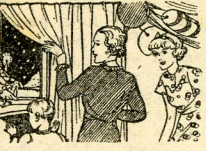
May you look your dainty and pretty best all the time, and may your charming ways make you lots of new friends—and even dearer to your old ones!

Again—

A Happy, Happy Christmas to you all, my dears!

*Patricia*

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Here are some riddles for you that I'm sure will make you very popular if you try them out on your chums and the family.

I don't suppose they'll be able to guess them all—but that doesn't matter, you can soon spring the answers yourself!

Here's one that's sure to puzzle even your brightest-brained friend:

*Why is an unfastened gate like a moth fluttering round a candle?*

Answer: Because if it keeps on its hinges it swings. (Keeps on it sings its wings! See?)

*Who is it that drives away customers yet manages to keep them?*

The answer is—a taxicab driver.

Now try this one: *If a man carrying several lamps drops one, what does he become?*

Careful! Give it up? Well, he becomes a lamp-lighter!

*Why are stamps in a sheet like distant relatives?*

Because they're slightly connected, of course!

What about this one for the family? *What is the difference between a bird and a plumber?*

Well, one pipes lays and the other lays pipes. Quite bright, don't you think?

See if you can answer this one. *What four letters spell an ambassador's title?*

X L N C (Excellency) of course!

And now, when does a man become four-handed? (This is quite an easy one, really.)

Give it up? When he doubles his fists!

*Why is the letter E like London?*



# PAT'S GRAND CHRISTMAS PARTY



## Christmas Letter

My extra-special Christmas letter to you. It's sincere, and is just to wish you all

## Merry Christmas

surrounded by your families that love you so much to whom you're very dear, or among strangers at the best time you have ever known.

Opening your presents just those that you've longed for of the day be crowded with happiness.

Happy and pretty best all the time, and may your Christmas be full of new friends—and even dearer to your old

Love to you all, my dears!

*Patricia*

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*And now, when does a man become four-handed? (This is quite an easy one, really.)*

Give it up? When he doubles his fists!

*Why is the letter E like London?*

Because it is the capital of England. After the sit-down riddles, you'll probably feel like some more rough-and-tumble games.

### Games and Catches

"Tossing the Cushion" is always fun. You all sit in a circle on the floor for this. One of mother's cushions (not her best one) is pressed into service. Then one of you starts up the gramophone. The cushion is thrown from one person to the other, and then the music suddenly stops. The player who is holding the cushion is Out!

Just as good as musical chairs, this is, but takes up much less room.

"Balloon Race" is a good game for the babies of the party, for the more onlookers the better. Blow up a balloon for each kiddie, and give him—or her—a sheet of paper which is rolled up into a tube.

Each player must blow through the tube at the balloon, starting from one end of the room, and blowing it, without allowing the balloon to touch the floor, to the other.

The one who reaches the other end of the room first is the winner. A prize is indicated, for the kiddie will certainly deserve it.

Now while the small people have a rest, the older ones can do their part—and let the kiddies have the laugh.

"Tricks" are always a scream—even those who're tricked love these.

Make the players lie down full length on the carpet and then cross their arms. They must get up without using either hands or elbows.

I suggest you umpire this game, for I know you'll be able to do it. But it's



surprising the number of people who can't, and the laughs that result at their contortions will be long and loud.

And here's a trick for the men to try—to give all the feminine members a chance to laugh.

Place several bottles on the floor. Each man and boy must sit on one—with legs straight out and ankles crossed.

They must then pick up a box of matches that is on their left-hand side, and light a candle that is on their right—without falling off the bottle or losing their balance.

All the losers should certainly pay forfeits in this game. After which it could be the ladies' turn, and what fun

if they're cleverer at this than the men. It's difficult, I warn you!

A good romp around the Christmas tree and then it will surely be time for a light supper for the young ones before they simply must pop off to bed.

When they've vanished, some jokes round the fire are always a success.

Here are some for you to tell when it's your turn.

### Tales To Tell

It was the first morning of the new term and the mistress was taking the names of all the pupils. There were two new boys, and at last it was their turn.

"Now, what is your name?" she asked the first one.

"Please, miss, Sam."

The mistress shook her head reprovingly.

"You should always say Samuel."

That is your proper name. Now"—to the other new boy—"what is your name?"

New boy number two was very nervous. "P-please, miss, it's T-t-t-tomuel."

The mistress was asking general knowledge questions.

"Now, Edward, what plant did Sir Walter Raleigh discover?" she asked.



After a prolonged interval for thought Edward admitted that he didn't know.

"Well," persisted the mistress, "what does your father smoke?"

"Please, miss, haddock's."

John: "Are you having supper anywhere on Tuesday?"

Jack (eagerly): "No."

John (retiring rapidly): "Then how hungry you're going to be on Wednesday!"

Night falls, but it doesn't break; yet day breaks but it doesn't fall. Strange!

Seeing a notice, "BOY WANTED" in a grocer's shop window, Johnny marched boldly in and applied for the job.

"Well, sonny," said the grocer, "and what makes you think you'd be so suitable for the post?"

Johnny looked round the shop.

"Well," he said, "don't you think it would be better to label that butter 'CAN'T BE BEATEN,' instead of 'CAN'T BE APPROACHED'?"

Johnny wasn't long out of a job!

Can February March? No, but April May. Can a dragon fly? Probably not—but a cheese mite.

Joan: "Did you ever see a horse eat turkeys?"

Peter: "No, but I saw one with a bit in its mouth the other day."

Dancing, a game of cards, and supper take their place next. And I shouldn't be at all surprised if you don't suddenly look at the clock to find it's most shockingly late.

But even going to bed on Christmas Day is jolly, for you go with a delicious feeling inside you.

It's been the happiest day of the year. And, what's more, there's fun to come—lots of it!



# MAKE THE MOST OF EVERY MOMENT

**T**HERE'S no getting away from it. Joyous as Christmas Day is, there will be some work to be done.

But that needn't depress you. Far from it. For even the duty tasks of Christmas can be fun at such a time.

So when you wake in the morning and ransack your stockings, enjoy it as much as you like.

You'll probably get up early, so you'll be able to rustle round your bed-room then and collect all the scattered pieces of paper, bows, and even orange peel that may be lying about. Tuck all these scraps into a paper bag or piece of paper and put them to one side.

Then make your bed. I think mother will overlook the necessity for airing on this one day of the year, for she's probably given it an extra special "make" in preparation.

## So Helpful!

Then down to breakfast. Leave your "rubbish" by the kitchen fire and take your stocking contents in to breakfast—if they've not already been wolfed!

The youngsters of the family are sure to hurl strings and paper all over the room while undoing presents at breakfast, but I'm sure you can undo yours, and love it as much as they, without such a display of enthusiasm.

Clearing the breakfast table won't take long, and this you could do for mother, with the help of the rest of the youth of the family, while she dusts around upstairs.

I don't suppose you'll want to go out before eleven o'clock, for you'll be too keen to wait for the postman.

Another little tidy-up after his glorious arrival, and then you can take small brother for a walk. He'll insist on going on his new kiddicar, so it'll be glorious fun! Or small sister will proudly take out her new doll's pram.

So off you all go for an hour at least, right out of mother's way while she prepares the most glorious surprise of the day—Christmas dinner!

You'll be in such a good mood after



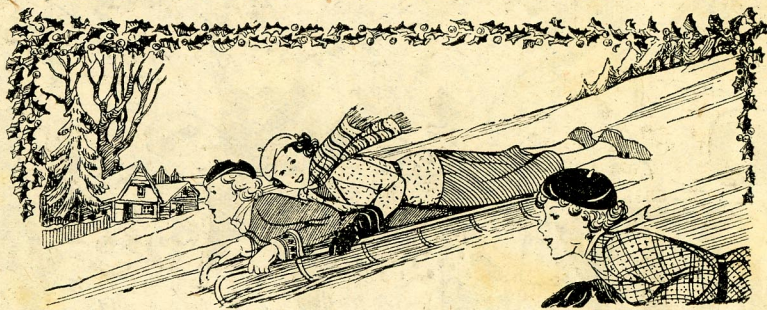
this that clearing up and washing up will seem almost as exciting as going to a party.

If everyone lends a hand you'll be sitting round the fire again in no time, you'll find.

The evening's fun will look after itself—all the cracker papers, nut-shells and tangerine peel only add to the gay atmosphere. They're part of Christmas!

But if you can help—very unobtrusively, of course—to keep the party neat, so much the merrier!

## Gather Round For Your Editor's Christmas Chat



# Between Ourselves

**M**Y DEAR READERS,—I do wish you could see my office at the moment. For it looks more like the Christmas card and calendar department of a big store, so many and varied are the tokens of greeting that have reached me from SCHOOLGIRL readers all the world over.

In fact, there's a terrific atmosphere of festivity about my office at this time—so much so that I really feel I ought to enter more thoroughly into the spirit of the occasion and appear at my desk in a Father Christmas disguise, complete with flowing white whiskers and a large sack of presents.

I wish it were possible for me to return your Christmas greetings personally. But that, of course, I cannot do. Only the printed word can reach you all, so I am going to take this opportunity of thanking all those of you who have been so kind in sending me your Christmas greetings.

At the same time I want to wish you all, my readers,

## A Very, Very Happy Christmas

and I do hope that this seasonable issue of your favourite paper will bring you added enjoyment.

### "TURKEY TIME!"

My dog Chum—imp of mischief that he is—seems to have caught the Christmas spirit. I think he must realise that his master—that's me!—is in a particularly forgiving and easy-going mood at the moment, for he's been up to all manner of tricks.

This is just one of his recent escapades:

Chum is in the habit of paying a daily call on a canine friend of his—a rather mongrelly terrier—who lives at the doctor's house in the High Street. (I must add that the High Street of my town is very, very quiet; indeed, only on market day is there any activity, when the local ironmonger puts a new plough and two new dustbins out on the wide pavement, and then solemnly takes them in again at sunset.)

To continue my tale. Chum, on his way to see his doggy friend, has to pass the butcher's shop. On this particular morning, evidently overcome by the feeling of Christmas in the air (and—who knows?—perhaps aware that turkeys were in demand) paused outside the butcher's and before anyone could say "Jack Robinson," had snatched at the long trailing neck of one of the birds that was lying on a marble slab, and was dashing down the street with it.

The next thing that happened was a telephone call to me from the butcher. Did I know that my dawg had stolen a turkey from his shop? Was I aware that it was a 16-pounder (as one might say of a newly-landed salmon) and did I know that it was now being mauled by all the dogs in the town? And so on and so on.

So much for Chum's Christmas escapade—which incidentally cost me the price of a turkey! Which means that Chum will now have to go without that new collar which I had promised him for Christmas. Somehow, though, I don't think he really minds.

### CLAUDINE'S CHRISTMAS.

My fortunate niece, Claudine, is spending Christmas winter-sporting—or, at least, that is her firm intention, though actually the skiing and skating won't be at their best until January.

However, Claudine is hoping for the best and has recently been spending some very busy days in Town, purchasing her winter sports outfit. To judge from the number of parcels she had acquired in one afternoon the outfit must be pretty considerable.

Claudine has never been on skis in her life, but with her usual confidence she believes that she'll manage marvellously. I'm not so sure myself. I once attempted to ski, and the effort was not what one could call successful—though I did manage to stand upright for about twenty-five seconds. The rest of the time I spent either lying on my back in the snow or in trying to regain my feet. However, it was all very good fun—especially for the spectators (who were mostly experts and seemed to derive lots of amusement from my antics).

No doubt, Claudine will do very much better than I did; at any rate, I hope, for her own sake, that she does!

### NEXT WEEK.

Next week's SCHOOLGIRL—on sale on Thursday, Dec. 24th—contains a fine budget of stories. Hilda Richards' grand long complete Cliff House Christmas holiday story is entitled "ONE CLUE TO GUIDE THEM," and tells of the chums' further adventures in solving the mystery of Mistletoe Manor.

Long instalments of our two fine serials, a merry complete tale starring Happy-Go-Lucky Lulu, and Pat's four article pages, complete a number that's much too good to miss.

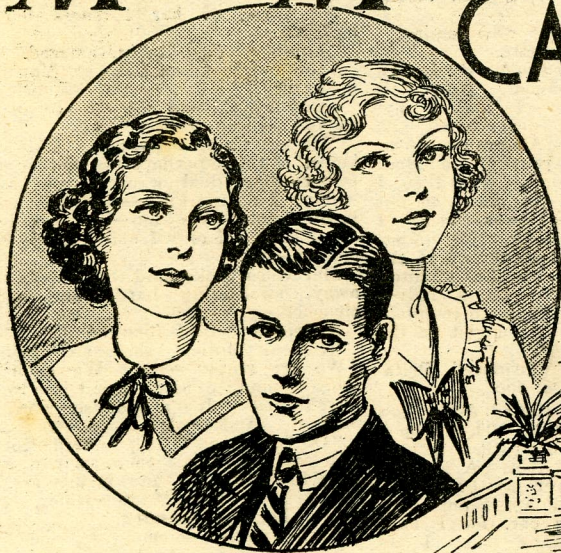
With best Christmas wishes,

YOUR EDITOR.



Early Chapters of a Brilliant Serial of Mystery and Adventure  
in the Sunny South of France

# 'Miss Mystery' of CARNIVAL LAND



**FOR NEW READERS.**

**HENRIETTA FORREST**, together with her brother **ROBIN** and her school friend, **DELIA VAUGHAN**, have been invited to spend a holiday with Henrietta's Uncle Richard in the South of France. They are anxious to meet their cousin Camille Forrest—whom they have never seen.

Unknown to them, Camille is being impersonated by a girl who is the dupe of schemers. Uncle Richard—who has never spent much time with his daughter—has been completely taken in by the imposture.

The train on which Henrietta & Co. are travelling stops at Lyons, where a strange Frenchman attempts to kidnap them. They elude him, however, and aid a little French girl who says she also has been kidnapped. The Frenchman attempts to recapture the French girl, but Henrietta, at risk of losing the train—which is already on the move—turns back to help her.

(Now read on.)

He stumbled, tripped, and fell to his knees.

The French girl leaped to the running-board, and Henrietta caught Robin's hand and jumped, too.

Robin hauled her right into the corridor, and she slumped against the wall breathlessly.

"Gosh! Jolly well done, Het!" he grinned. "Good shot, too!"

Henrietta let out a gasp of tremendous relief, and then looked for the French girl. An attendant had helped her in, and stood shouting at her furiously in French.

"She hasn't a ticket," said Henrietta. "Oh, poor kid!" murmured Delia compassionately. "They'll put her off at the next stop—"

"Or put her in prison!" grunted Robin.

The French girl was looking towards them in appeal, and Robin, at a nod from Henrietta, stepped forward to use what little French he had.

Henrietta looked at Delia in some dismay then.

"My goodness! I wonder if we've done the right thing?" she said anxiously.

Things had happened so quickly since

never seen before, had told them to get out. He had come to meet them.

The fact that he knew their names had made them think he was really what he said—their Uncle Richard's secretary.

It was odd, though, that they should be expected to get out of the train at Lyons—only half-way on their journey to the South! Most odd that their uncle's secretary should await them there!

But, still dazed by sleep, they had got out of the train, and let him take their hand luggage, too.

Then had come interruption. This shabby French girl, a shawl over her head, had appeared in the shadows at the station.

The Frenchman had seized her. There had been sharp words, and then had come her plea for help—her statement that she had been kidnapped from the South!

"Thank goodness, we didn't go out of the station with that man!" shivered Delia.

"We've got the girl to thank for that," said Henrietta.

Then she moved towards the spot where Robin and the attendant were arguing. The man had a cynical smile on his face.

"It is true," whispered the French girl. "I have not the ticket."

"Monsieur veut payer, peut-etre?" said the attendant mockingly.

"He says: 'Do we want to pay?'" frowned Robin.

Henrietta looked at the girl's sad, anxious face. She had seldom seen anything so pathetic in her life.

"Why, yes!" she said. "We'll pay!"

"You—you pay—for me?" the girl asked her, round-eyed. "Oh, but it is much money—so much money! You are rich?"

Henrietta looked at Robin, and then at Delia. They were not rich. They had holiday money to spend, but it did not amount to much, really.

If they paid the girl's fare, they would

**The Quest Begins!**

**"JUMP** for it, Het!"

"You'll be left behind!"

The Riviera Express was steaming out of Lyons; but Henrietta Forrest, instead of jumping on to the footboard, where her brother Robin stood, with outstretched hand, turned back.

At the moment she had no thought for herself.

For the sake of a girl she had never seen before, she took the risk of being stranded, left in the dead of night at a French station, and perhaps in the hands of kidnapers.

The girl—shabby, white-faced, and frightened—was running to the train, trying to escape from the bearded Frenchman who was only a yard behind.

Henrietta swung round. She had in her hand a small attache-case, in which they had packed sandwiches for the journey.

Like lightning, she thought—and acted.

With a swing, she sent the case hurtling through the air at the Frenchman's feet.

By

**Elizabeth Chester**

the moment their train journey had been interrupted that it was hard for Henrietta to compose her thoughts.

At one minute they had been fast asleep in a compartment of the Riviera Express, dreaming of their holiday to come in the glorious, sunny South of France. Then had come rude awakening. The train had pulled into Lyons at dead of night. The sliding door of their compartment had been pulled open, and a bearded Frenchman, whom they had



have less to spend in the South; they would have to go short.

The attendant put his hand roughly on the girl's shoulder.

Henrietta opened her handbag. Robin pulled out his wallet. Delia, her face troubled, found her purse.

"My old tennis racket will do as well," said Henrietta. "I don't really need a new one. So I can spare something towards—"

"Let's pool," said Robin.

"Yes," said Delia bravely.

She had not brought very much money, but she had had dreams of getting some French shoes, a hat, perhaps, some stockings, some presents for those at home.

But none of the three could see that pitiful look on the French girl's face and ignore it. Besides, she had saved them from going with the Frenchman.

"Nous payerons," said Henrietta. "Voice de l'argent. Combien?"

The attendant shrugged, spoke rapidly, and then slowly, indicating their compartment.

"Wants us to go in and wait," decided Henrietta. "O.K.! Oui, oui; nous restons ici. We'll hang about here," she said.

They went back to their compartment and beckoned the shy French girl.

"Thank you so much!" she said in a soft, pleasing accent. "You are so very kind! I do not know why."

And tears shone in her eyes.

"Oh, well," said Robin deprecatingly, "it's nothing much. And, after all, you did come to our rescue."

"Yes. But for you, we should have gone with M. Lejeune," said Henrietta. "Is he really our uncle's secretary? Our uncle is Mr. Forrest—Mr. Richard Forrest—at the Hotel Magnificent, Mayon, near Nice."

The French girl shook her head; her brow furrowed.

"No; I do not know Mistairst Forrest. But Miss Forrest—Miss Camille—yes, I know."

Henrietta's eyes lit up.

"Cousin Camille—you know her? How wonderful! Well, that's something I don't. Even though she is my cousin, I've never seen her. Is she awfully nice—pretty?"

The French girl pursed her lips and seemed embarrassed.

"Mais oui; but, yes, she is pretty!" she said, with some slight shadow of doubt. "I—I take flowers to her. I am flower-girl, you see," she said simply. "I am poor—I am nobody, as you say."

"But you say you were kidnapped," said Robin. "They don't kidnap nobodies."

The French girl seemed more perplexed than ever.

"I do not understand," she said, speaking slowly, choosing her words, "how it all is. To me, also, it is a mystery. Yet it is my fault. I have behave bad, and I am ashamed—"

LOOK OUT—

*for a wonderful new series of Cliff House stories featuring—*

DIANA ROYSTON-CLARKE

Her cheeks were crimson now, and Henrietta regarded her in perplexity.

"You were bad?" she prompted. "In what way?"

"Oh, but I am ashamed," said the French girl, covering her face. "I go to the hotel. I take flowers to Miss Camille—the beautiful flowers of the south, you understand. I go to the room. It is wonderful. To me, who live in dark room, where all is so worn, so shabby, it is wonderful. It is like the room of a princess, you understand."

They wondered what was coming. "Go on," said Henrietta.

"On the bed there are pretty frocks, also a pretty cloak, a hat. No one is there—I am tempted. I think to myself—I say: 'Julie, never shall you have such prettiness. Always on others. You shall see it, but yourself, you shall wear it never, never!' And then I think but this once—this once, to put them on! Who shall be harmed? I have been told to await, you understand. Miss Camille will return in ten minutes of the clock. For five minutes, perhaps, then, I can be a lady—a princess, even. Helas, I am tempted. I am weak, I am silly. I put on the things."

"Who wouldn't?" murmured Delia. "I love pretty clothes, too."

"No, I am bad," sighed Julie, her pretty face clouded over. "I put on a cloak, also a hat. And then it happens—a soft tread of foot. A hand is over myself, then over my head, too, something. I am kidnap, I am taken away. I go into a car, for I hear the engine. For many hours I am drive—many hours. Then to a house I have never seen."

"And then?" said Henrietta, in hushed tones.

"I am lock in room. There is much talk—oh, much talk. I hear little of it. The room I am in, it is far from the ground. But I am despair—despair—desper—"

"Desperate," prompted Henrietta.

"Yes, yes. I make of sheets a rope. I climb down. And there is the car waiting. Someone comes. I hide in the car. And then someone gets into car—Monsieur Lejeune, as he is called. And he drive to station. All that happen then, you know."

The three exchanged glances. It was a strange, exciting story, but very perplexing. For what could it mean but that an attempt had been made to kidnap their cousin Camille?

That was how they pieced it together. And the wrong girl had been taken—this poor flower-girl!

"My word! We shall have a few things to tell Uncle Richard," murmured Henrietta.

"Anyway, we'll know that Frenchman again," said Robin grimly. "If only by the black eye I gave him."

"I hope to goodness we don't see him again," said Henrietta, with a shiver. "But just one thing more, Julie. Your people—your father and mother—we'll have to let them know you're safe at the first possible moment."

Julie shook her head, and her voice was husky.

"My mother. Father I have not." "Oh, you're an orphan!" said Henrietta gently.

Julie shrugged her shoulders, and a frown settled on her brow. "I do not know," she said. "There are two people I sell the flowers for. They give me food, a room, and sometimes clothes. But no, they are not my father or mother, or uncle and aunt."

Henrietta stared at her fixedly. The

mystery of the girl grew every minute, and so did Henrietta's perplexity.

"I see," she said slowly. "But you have been well educated. Otherwise, how is it you speak English? You have been to school, and a good school, to learn English so well."

Julie shrugged her shoulders.

"Always I have spoken English. Sometimes, with practice, well; other times, it is hard. Yet always I have spoke it because—I think I am English."

All three of her listeners looked startled.

"English!" said Robin, amazed.

"But how?" asked Delia. "You live in France."

Julie sighed, and she bit her lip as though stilling its trembling.

"Please," she whispered, "I do not know. I think perhaps my mother and father—they died when I was very young. I do not know—perhaps I shall never know. Oh, but—but if only I could know—if only I had a father and mother—"

Her voice broke, and then she turned away, swallowing hard, her hands clenched.

Henrietta leaned forward.

"Listen, Julie," she said gently.

"We are going south. We shall be there a month or two. Don't lose touch—we'll help. It's a promise—word of honour. And uncle'll help, too."

"Of course we'll help," said Robin. "If you're English, then we can jolly soon find out who your people are."

Henrietta looked at Robin and Delia, her eyes shining.

"It's a vow—a solemn vow," she said. "You can rely on us to help you."

Julie's face brightened, and something like happiness showed in her eyes.

"You make me so happy—so brave!" she whispered, a falter in her voice. "But if you should wish to change, then I shall understand. For the people I work for are most cruel and harsh. They will be angered—they will turn you away."

But Henrietta, Robin, and Delia were not dismayed.

They did not realise what a net it was in which they were entangling themselves, for they had the idea that in the South of France all must be sunshine and joy.

### The Impostor

"**H**OW I hate wearing these dark glasses! They cut out the sunshine! They're awful! They spoil my appearance. How can a girl look chic in dark glasses? It is unsupportable!"

Camille Forrest spoke angrily in French, for she spoke French rather better than she spoke English.

It was a brilliantly sunny Riviera morning. From the hotel bed-room in which she sat before the mirror the sparkling blue Mediterranean could be seen over the white stone balcony.

Below was a lovely garden, and between it and the sea a road, where cars flashed by, and a promenade where smartly dressed men and women walked.

The furniture of the room was light walnut, and the curtains, bedspread and chair coverings were of a golden hue that reflected the lovely sunshine.

With touches of green here and there, and the brown carpet, the room spoke of sunshine, the songs of birds, gaiety, and happiness.

Yet the girl who was pretending to be Camille Forrest wore a pouting look as she stared at her reflection in the mirror.



At her side was her French maid, Violette, who stood with her head on one side.

"It is good—it is quite necessary," she said in French. "Without these glasses you will be recognised instantly by this girl, Delia. It would be terrible."

Camille shrugged her shoulders.

"But if Delia does not come, what have I to fear? Nothing—nothing!" she insisted. "They left the train at Lyons. According to plan, Delia will have been sent back to England."

She looked up to Violette, who was more than a maid, as her tone of voice betrayed. But before the Frenchwoman answered that question she cast a wary, furtive look at the door.

"I advise you well," she said. "You must do as I say, my child. Remember that with one word I can rob you of all this pleasure in this magnificent home in the hotel—all the joy of a carefree life. And I can send you back to poverty. You understand?"

Camille turned pale; the sullen look changed to fear, and her hands caught Violette's.

"No, no!" she said, in horrified tones. "You couldn't do that—you couldn't—"

Violette drew her hands away and shrugged.

"What is necessary can always be done. It would be better for you to disappear, my little one, for you to seem to be kidnapped, lost—anything, than that it should be known you are not Camille!"

"Ssh!" With finger to lips, Camille silenced the maid. There was desperate fear shining in her eyes behind the glasses.

"Don't even breathe it!" she muttered. "Oh, if anyone should hear you say that—but just one word would be quite enough! Oh, Violette, be careful! I am Camille—I am Camille—Mr. Forrest is my father! It is no pretence!"

Violette gave a grim smile, amused by the fears she had aroused.

"Then be wise. This girl Delia knows you by sight, you say. Once she was at school with you. Very well. These glasses, your sun tan, your darkened hair, will help to make your recognition difficult."

Camille's hands whitened as they tightened in nervous tension.

"Difficult? It must be made impossible," she said. "Or—or I am ruined!" Then she relaxed and tossed her head. "But what needless worry. Delia is not coming. I need not fear Henrietta or Robin; they have never seen their cousin."

Anyone overhearing this conversation would have known beyond doubt that this girl who called herself Camille Forrest was an impostor, masquerading as a girl whose happiness she had stolen.

No one could have doubted that there were those who profited by this masquerade, who helped her, at times even forced her to carry through the imposture. Violette, the "maid," Madame Montane, the bearded Frenchman—all three were in the conspiracy.

Camille, silent, resigned, was adjusting the glasses when there came a tap at the door, and Henrietta's Uncle Richard entered.

He was bronzed, greying at the temples, and his face had a grave, thoughtful expression.

"The car will be leaving for the station soon, Camille," he said. "I hope you will be ready—" He puckered his forehead and stared.

"Your hair looks much darker. Have you done anything to it?"

"To my hair?" said Camille sharply.

"No, no, daddy! Oh, no!"

"The hairwash, m'sieu," said Violette. "P'raps a leetle dark, hein?"

"H'm! It changes your appearance rather. I'm sure that it's more than a little darker. I hope that, at your age, Camille, you are not being silly enough to use dyes of any kind?"

"Oh, no, daddy! It's the room. I'm sun-tanned, and—and it's dark in here."

"Dark?" he said, in surprise, blinking a little in the sunlight. "I should say the glasses make it seem dark."

"The glasses? Oh, yes, perhaps! But the sun's too strong. I must wear them. My eyes ache a little," said Camille, in agitation.

"Oh, if your eyes ache, then you had better," he agreed, in the same grave way. "If they aren't better soon, you must see a doctor; but hurry, my dear, I don't want your cousins to be kept waiting at the station."

He turned to go, but as he did so a post office messenger arrived, tapped, and pushed into the room in the French manner.

"Mademoiselle Lavant," he said; and Mr. Forrest, with a gesture, indicating Violette, passed out of the room.

Violette gave a start.

"Oui, oui, c'est moi!" she exclaimed, and snatched the envelope, slit it, and read the message.

Camille heard her gasp and saw her face pale.

Then she spoke to the telegraph boy, asked for a form, scribbled a message, and took some money for it from Camille's handbag.

"What is it?" gasped Camille, in dread.

Violette stared at the telegram in her hand.

"The plan has failed. They are coming, after all. But one thing is good. They do not know that it was a plot to kidnap Delia."

Camille went limp.

"Delia is coming? Oh, no! No!" she gasped.

Violette compressed her lips and crumpled the telegram in her hand.

"There is nothing we can do. You must be careful. If she seems to recognise you, treat it lightly. You must pretend that there is someone like you. It has been said before—"

Camille pouted; sullen fury marred her prettiness.

"Very well, but the sooner Delia goes home—the sooner they all go home—the better I'll like it. And I'll see they do, too—I'll see they do!"

Then, with deep misgivings and alarm, which she hid by fury, she hurriedly dressed herself to go to the station.

### Land of Summer

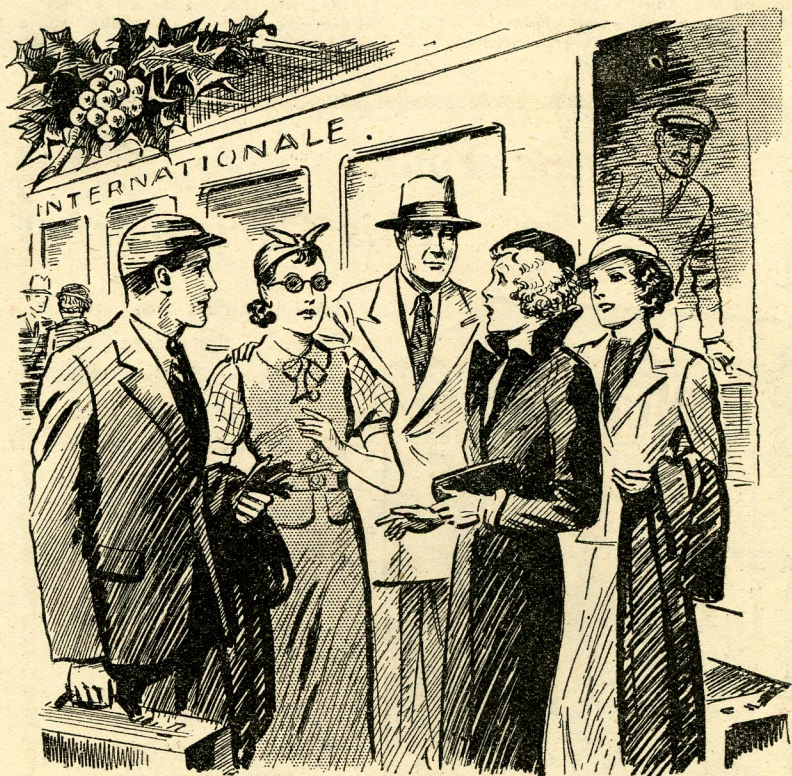
"B URRAH for sunshine!"

"Isn't it wonderful?"

"It's just like fairyland!"

Henrietta, Delia, and Robin feasted their eyes on the magnificent scenery of the Riviera. Never had they seen anything so captivating, so entrancing. The Mediterranean was a magic blue; the trees were a deep olive green, and all the villas were either gleaming white, or else colourfully decorated.

The Grand Corniche road was magnificent. The cars went hurtling along it—cars of all nations and every possible type, from magnificent landaulettes and limousines to small sports cars.



CAMILLE looked at Delia very steadily as the introductions were made. "You must be mistaken in thinking you know me," she said at last. "I've never seen you before!" But she knew that Delia was not mistaken!



From Marseilles it had been sunshine all the way

"Who'd guess it was winter?" gasped Henrietta, fanning herself. "It's midsummer—it must be—and what pretty frocks—"

"A bathe for me just as soon as I can," said Delia

"Must look magnificent at night," murmured Robin

Julie stood back shyly, now and again making a remark, or answering a question, telling the names of flowers, or perhaps translating some strange announcement

Station followed station. At last the gay Nice!

And then—Mayon.

It was early afternoon. They had been travelling for a whole day, with only fitful sleeping, and they were all tired. But not too tired to enjoy the magnificent scenery

There was, too, a most romantic atmosphere, foreign and fairy-like. The names on shops, the announcements, the advertisements, the stations, the platforms, everything was so different. The motor-coaches, and even the cars, made them realise that England was far away.

"Yet, for you, it is home, Julie," smiled Henrietta. "Lucky you!"

"Yes," said Julie, a little wistfully. "It is wonderful for those who can enjoy; but it is better, anyway, that there is sunshine than cold."

"You bet it is," agreed Robin. And then, all too soon, the train pulled into Mayon.

Julie turned to them suddenly, agitated and a little breathless.

"Please—so many thanks!" she said. "If ever it is possible, I shall repay for the ticket, please. So kind you have been—"

They said it was nonsense; Henrietta invited her to the hotel, so that she could meet Camille and explain what a marvellous escape that girl had had.

"Yes, yes," said Julie.

She moved into the corridor, and while they were busy with the small luggage she crept to the nearest door. As the train slowed, she opened it and jumped.

Running, stumbling, she made for the exit, and passed through.

"Arretez!" shouted a girlish voice.

Henrietta and Delia looked out.

"Julie's bolted!" gasped Henrietta.

Delia was staring at the sun-tanned girl, who ran forward, shouting, to the little flower girl.

"Well, my goodness! Shows how small the world is," she said. "You see that girl?"

"The one with the dark glasses? Yes," said Henrietta.

"Wel, I know her—I think. I was at school with her, or met her at a party, or something. Anyway, I know her. And fancy running into her here, of all places!"

The girl turned at that moment, and rejoined a stout man, of middle age, dressed in a light grey suit.

He waved at Henrietta and Delia, and moved forward.

"Henrietta?" he asked.

Henrietta's eyes widened.

"Uncle Richard? Oh, hurrah—"

Robin opened the door, and they tumbled out, while a porter took their luggage.

But the girl in the dark glasses stood back, eyeing Delia furtively. And Delia, not having been recognised, felt a little shy at the idea of claiming acquaintance.

"Henrietta—Robin, of course—and, I suppose, Delia," said Uncle Richard. "Splendid—splendid! And this, you've guessed already, is your cousin, my daughter Camille."

Delia started, and Henrietta, kissing her cousin, gave a little laugh as she stood back.

"And Delia thought she knew her."

"Delia—you," said Camille, in a shaky tone. "No, I've never seen you before."

"Then the world isn't so small, after all," said Henrietta. "Delia thought she had met you before, at school, or at a party somewhere."

"A mistake," said Camille more easily as she noticed that nothing much was to be made out of this. "I myself made such a mistake a little while ago. I went up to someone in the street and said 'Hallo!'—but I was wrong."

Delia, embarrassed, laughed.

"Then this is my mistake," she said. "Although—there's a resemblance. The way you ran—ah, yes, it was at school!"

She spoke more or less to herself, and Henrietta interrupted.

"Camille, did I see you running after the flower girl?" she asked. "Julie?"

Camille gave a jump.

"You know her?" she exclaimed.

Henrietta explained just what had happened at the station at Lyons, and Uncle Richard listened in amazement. Camille fidgeted nervously.

"Daddy, they misunderstood the man's French?" she said.

"No, no. It is a very serious business," he said gravely. "It was clearly an attempt at kidnapping."

"You don't know a Monsieur Lejeune, uncle?" asked Henrietta.

"No, and I haven't a secretary. I know no one who answers that description, either. It is amazing!"

Uncle Richard was deeply perturbed. "Julie—the flower girl!" said Henrietta. "She could help us to identify the man!"

"Yes, of course!" he nodded.

"Camille, you have had a lucky escape. This poor girl was kidnapped in mistake for you. I must compensate her!"

Henrietta's eyes lit up.

"Oh, uncle, I'm so glad!"

But Camille interrupted.

"I do not think she needs more compensation than she has already," she said. "The cloak she took was enough. I think, and also—the diamond brooch."

Henrietta felt a stab of alarm.

"Diamond brooch?" she said aghast.

"Not the one you had for Christmas?" Camille's father exclaimed, in wonder. "You did not tell me it was missing."

"No; I have only just learned myself," said Camille. "I guessed who had taken it. Now I know. That story of the kidnapping—poof! An invention, of course! What else? How did she pay the fare back from Lyons?"

Henrietta explained that they had paid.

Camille shrugged her shoulders.

"More duffers you, Henrietta, my dear!" she murmured, with a twisted smile. "Doubtless she goes back and forth to Lyons in that manner, telling tales of woe, getting money, stealing jewels. Well, the police will be on her track."

Henrietta flushed. She did not like Camille's hostile attitude, or her tone, and she realised that if she said more now there would only be more laughter.

"If you knew Julie you would not say that, Camille," she said, trying to keep her voice even, and not give any hint of anger or quarrelling. "And I'll find her! I'll let her explain herself—and deny that she took that brooch!"

With that, Henrietta hurried to the exit.

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FOR NEW READERS.

**PAM WILLOUGHBY** of Morcove School has become a day-girl in order that she may have time to act as hostess to

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

**VIVIENNE MUNRO**, having heard of Claire's fortune, schemes to take her place. She meets Claire and tells a plausible story to the effect that the heiress is wanted by the police. She represents herself as an amateur detective and offers to hide Claire in the East Wing at Swanlake until she can clear her name. Claire consents, and Vivienne arrives at Swanlake to be welcomed as the real Claire Ferrand. But

**BETTY BARTON**, one of Pam's Morcove friends, is at once suspicious of Vivienne. Vivienne, realising this, fears Betty's presence at Swanlake. She means to prevent Betty & Co. coming to Swanlake, and rings up the headmistress of Morcove to tell her that she has influenza and that the girls ought not to risk infection. This actually is untrue, and Betty, Pam & Co. set off in a car for Swanlake. But can they get clear of the school before they are stopped?

(Now read on.)

Plan and Counter-plan

**ACKED** together in the Swanlake car, Betty Barton & Co. were shrieking with laughter; and yet—they were anxious.

It was, in fact, a moment of tragedy-comedy.

Their chauffeur had only to see the several girls who, having burst through Morcove's boundary hedge, were waving to him to stop, and, of course, he would stop!

Then there would be the shouted message—an urgent order from the headmistress. "Turn back at once, the girls are not to go to Swanlake, after all!"

And if all this happened, Betty and her chums would suffer more than a cruel disappointment.

For reasons known only to themselves,

they were in the very greatest need of going home with Pam Willoughby to Swanlake this afternoon.

The mystery connected with Claire Ferrand might be solved at last—if only there could be a chance for further investigation, without delay!

So, at one moment the girls were watching Chauffeur Jennings, to see if he were taking his eye off the road, and at the next they were glancing at those distant schoolmates who were trying to attract his attention.

Suddenly they felt the powerful Roysler drop from forty to a mere twenty. Jennings had seen! He was going to stop!

"Ugh!" Polly raged. "Dash!"

"Yes, sweendle!" shrilled Naomer.

But Pam, as calm as ever, put her head out of window to call round to the driver:

"It's all right, Jennings; carry on."

Then—what a prompt pick-up the car made. Pam dropped back into her share of a crowded seat, looking neither triumphant nor surprised.

But her excitable chums hurrah'd afresh—and perhaps that was just as well. It prevented Jennings from catching exactly what those other girls were yelling.

Jennings, as Pam and other cooler heads were realising, had fancied that the calling out and waving meant "Stop, stop!" To him, however, there had been the possibility that it might be merely a bit of Morcove skittishness over the departure of his car load of scholars.

Was he really meant to stop, or were those girls over there simply calling out and waving to his passengers?

That calm cry from Pam had settled the doubt. Whatever "Miss Pam" might say, at any time, was good enough for Jennings. He drove on.

And so now the chums of Study No. 12 could settle themselves comfortably for the journey, their merriment over the

"get away" continuing for a full minute.

"But how lovely!" Bunny still gurgled.

"Only—dash!"—Polly suddenly grimaced—"don't forget that Miss Somerfield can telephone to Swanlake that we're all to come back—without even going inside the place!"

"Yes—well," smiled Pam, "I think you can trust me to make that all right."

"Good!" said Betty very happily. "At that rate, then, Polly and I may as well explain the latest idea. It came to Polly in class this afternoon—a real brain-wave. It was all arranged, wasn't it, that she and I were to sleep the night at Swanlake? Well, so we shall; but in secret!"

"Wha-a-at!" shrieked Bunny and a few others. "Betty!"

"Quite simple," Polly stated. "The idea is for Claire not to know that Betty and I have stayed on for the night. So we shall leave with those of you who are to start back for school a couple of hours after tea. Half-way down the Swanlake drive, we shall stop the car, get out—and go back!"

"Bai—Jove!" gasped Paula. "Pwetty dawing, what?"

"It's everything," Betty said, "for two of us to be in the house all night, unbeknown to Claire Ferrand. Just realise! If she has some need to be up to mysterious tricks in the night, what does she do first of all? Make sure that Pam is asleep. Having accounted for Pam, that will seem, to Claire, to mean a clear field. By the way, Pam, Polly and I take it that you have no objection?"

"Not a bit!"

"Then we've got her!" Polly exulted, meaning the girl they knew as Claire Ferrand.

Along the lonely, empty by-roads across the moorland the car made its familiar run from Morcove School to



Swanlake, and a few minutes after four the girls were all alighting at the mansion porch.

"Look, there she is!"

That was Betty, as she caught sight of a very pretty face at a drawing-room window.

"And hasn't it given her a turn, too," Polly chuckled, "to see us arriving, after all! But I'm not going to flare out at her—"

"No, for goodness' sake," Betty half-seriously implored, "don't!"

"I'm going to be an angel!" promised Study No. 12's madcap.

She had, in the very next moment, an opportunity for being as sweet as honey to the suspect; for that girl came running out to the hall whilst they were entering.

"Hallo, Claire!" Polly said most sweetly. "How's the cold now?"

"Yes, Claire"—others voiced the sympathetic inquiry—"you have a bad cold?"

"Terrible!" the impostor wailed, with a handkerchief up to her nose. "And I—I thought you were to be kept back because of it! I rang up the head-mistress. And she said she would get you called back!"

"Then, somehow," Pam said blandly, "we were not stopped, after all! Claire, I wouldn't be out here, near the front door, if your cold is as bad as all that!"

"It's influenza!"

"Have you had the doctor?"

"Oh, as if I can't tell! Pam, do send the girls back before they catch it from me! Miss Somerfield told me to tell you—"

"Wait a bit," Pam said steadily. "Will you not have the doctor?"

"No; I—I've not as bad as all that!"

"Then, instead of phoning for the doctor, I'll phone to Miss Somerfield. You be taking your things off, girls," was Pam's going-away remark. "And we'll all have tea."

She went to the telephone, which was at the back of the hall. Her side of the subsequent conversation with Morcove's headmistress was perfectly audible to the other girls, including the suspect.

"That you, Miss Somerfield? Pam speaking!" And very serenely, too! "About Claire, Miss Somerfield. Her cold is nothing, really. I've offered to fetch in the doctor, but she says it's not as bad as that. Pardon? Influenza? No-o-o! I wish you could see her! But, look here! Shall Mrs. Greddon decide?"

Good Mrs. Greddon was the Swanlake housekeeper; known to Miss Somerfield as one who was as experienced as any school matron.

"And if my chums don't come back at once, you'll know it's all right? Yes, well, good-bye, and thank you, Miss Somerfield—thank you!"

And Pam hung up. She turned away from the telephone, to find her chums roughly pointing towards the drawing-room, to which the "suspect" had retired. Pam, going into that room, was followed by Betty and the rest.

"Oh, Claire, will you let Mrs. Greddon see you about your cold? Then, if she says—"

"No! I—I don't want any more fuss made about my cold! But if your chums are all laid up afterwards, it won't be my fault!"

"It certainly won't, so that's all right," Pam agreed, and smiled across to a hesitant parlourmaid at the doorway. "Yes, Annie, bring in the tea."

For at least ten minutes after this the juniors were providing a jollity from which the much older girl remained aloof.

She kept to herself at the fireside, and

they had no doubt that her moodiness was genuine enough. Only they refused to believe that it was due to any slight indisposition. Having pleaded a cold, of course, she felt herself to be safe in displaying a poorness of spirits. But they reckoned her to be as peevish as this on account of her artful ruse having failed.

"Sorry!" She dropped her sulking at last. "I feel much better now I've had that cup of tea. And I'm so terribly glad, really, that you girls are here, after all. It's time that play of ours for the Barncombe Gala began to take shape, isn't it?"

"Polly has brought the book of words with her."

"Oh, has she?" Betty was eagerly caught up. "Hope you haven't given me too big a part to play, Polly? I'm no actress!"

At that instant the door opened to let in the parlourmaid, Annie, with one letter on a salver.

"For you, miss."

"For me? Oh!" laughed the girl whom all knew as Claire Ferrand, as she read the embossed address on the back of the letter. "My lawyer, in London! I hope he has sent the cheque I asked him for."

She set a finger to rip open the envelope, and then took out a type-written note, and an enclosure.

"Yes, Pam—all of you! Fifty pounds! Something to be going on with. Look!"

Fifty pounds! A mere nothing, compared with that vast fortune which the real Claire Ferrand had inherited. But fifty pounds to-day could easily mean thousands in a little while.

Next time she, Vivienne Munro, wrote to the lawyer, it would be to ask him to send down the famous Ferrand jewels, "as I may be wanting to wear the pearls, anyway."

And if only she could get away with them before the whole fraud was found out, then, indeed, she would be made rich for life!

But nothing of what was passing in her mind revealed itself to her companions.

"If you'll excuse me, girls," she said lightly, "I'll just run up and put this cheque away before I lose it. Then I'll be ready to start in with all of you over the great play."

"But we're going upstairs now—to that lumber-room in the east wing," Pam lightly responded. "You don't mind our not waiting for you?"

"Oh, no, I don't mind!"

Nor did she. The east wing had ceased to be the hiding-place of the real Claire Ferrand, and it was not for fear of anything the girls might come upon up there that she, Vivienne, had tried to keep them out of Swanlake to-day.

Even so, it was a maddening thing for her that they were here once again.

Somehow, she never felt safe when these chums of Pam's were about the place.

### Suited to Her Part!

"AND now, how about a run through the play?"

"Yes, Betty—yes!"

They were all downstairs again, after a most useful hour spent in that lumber-room in the east wing.

All those old-time costumes and bits of useful fabric were properly sorted out at last. Each girl knew what she was going to wear for the amateur theatricals. There were some terrible misfits, and the next time Pam's chums came over to Swanlake, there would have to be a sewing-party. Subject to

"alterations and repairs," Study No. 12 was quite satisfied that its gala week effort would be no flop on account of bad staging.

The old dower-chests and the great cupboard in the lumber-room had yielded up a most useful, money-saving array of materials.

"I say, Claire!" Betty called out to the older girl, who was in their midst. "If Polly lets you have her typescript of the play, will you take your part as we go on by reading it?"

"Of course!" cried Vivienne Munro, with well-acted enthusiasm. "What am I, Polly, in the play?"

"You're the cause of all the trouble," said Study No. 12's versatile scholar, as she offered the already battered-looking typescript. "You come to Barncombe as a stranger, and we village girls—Barncombe was a village in those days—we can't make you out exactly."

"Oh, I get you! Sort of villainess of the piece. Well, I'll do my best, although I don't know that villainy is in my line. Do I come in for an awful showing-up in the end?"

"You do," Playwright Polly sweetly answered. "Betty sees to that."

"Oh, how very funny!" Vivienne Munro tittered.

But at heart she felt irritated—a little afraid. Was all this a means of hinting to her, through the medium of this rubbishy play, that they knew the truth? Was it only because she was so much older than any of them that she had been chosen for the part of "villainess"?

Was it only a coincidence that in the play she was to be matched against Betty Barton? Or did it mean that Polly's play was so designed as to make a theatrical counterpart of a situation which, it was suspected, existed in real life?

She stood a little apart from all of them, now that they were refreshing their memories by taking a look at their copied-out lines.

Pretending to be looking through the part for which she was cast, Vivienne shot a swift, searching glance at one girl and another. Anything to be derived from their looks? No; nothing, except a great excitement and enthusiasm for the play.

She breathed freely again.

"Oh, I'm a fool to start feeling jumpy! They haven't the faintest suspicion—how could they?"

Madge, at the Swanlake piano, rattled off a most tuneful medley that she had put together as "overture," whilst stage manageress Polly had some last-moment ideas about grouping for the rise of the curtain.

As Polly always became rather wild and violent when conducting rehearsals, much of the overture was overwhelmed by her storming at Paula, Naomer, and others, and their heated retorts. Came rather too soon the moment for the "opening chorus"—such an out-of-tune business as left Polly stamping to and fro, hands up to her ears.

But at last they made a good start. From the opening chorus they went straight on into dialogue, taking it as vivaciously as Playwright Polly meant them to do.

Even though the players had yet to get their lines quite by heart, they managed to do some very good acting.

Paula was the only one, during the first five minutes, to hold up everything. She needed to refer to her copied-out lines, and was unable to find the place. Whereupon, Polly "prompted" with a degree of lung power that must have made servants,



in Swanlake's far-off kitchen regions, enjoy a quiet laugh.

"But see!" Polly shouted Paula's forgotten line. "A stranger approaches!"

"But, see! Bai Jove—"

"Not 'bai Jove!' you goop! All right, though; stick to that. It may get you a laugh," Polly said witheringly. "Bai Jove," from an Elizabethan handmaiden!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut up!" Polly silenced Bunny and other gigglers. "Now, Paula!"

"But see! Bai Jove, a stwanger approaches!"

Cue for the "villainess," this. She sauntered on, and—what an actress born! No fear of her being taken with stage fright at the first public performance.

She soon had the juniors convinced that hers was a self-possession, a boldness, just right for acting. But that, they were thinking, only showed what a dangerous girl she might be in real life. Now it was certain, if any girl could tell a lie without turning a hair, that girl was in their midst this evening. And her name was—so they thought—Claire Ferrand!

As the play was only being rehearsed in an incomplete state, they had time to go through this first portion all over again. Then Pam's touching a bell-pess caused two mirthful-looking parlourmaids to appear with trays of refreshments. Those who were going back to school this evening must be off very soon now.

"But you two girls are staying the night?" Betty and Polly had their "suspect" coming across to them to remark, as they stood about, enjoying sandwiches and lemonades. "By the way—what room has Pam given you? One near mine?"

"In the same corridor—yes," was Betty's smiled answer. She had too much sense to ask why the question had been put. "But you won't hear us."

"Oh, nothing keeps me awake!"

"Your cold won't, anyhow," Polly said, looking at the sandwich she had just bitten. "It hasn't troubled you a bit during rehearsal!"

"Er—no, it is better," Vivienne thankfully admitted. But she wished she had remembered to give a sneeze now and then. "Was I all right in my part?"

"Fits you like a glove!"

Polly, having sipped some lemonade after saying that, became aware of this well-grown girl glaring at her angrily.

"Not a very nice thing for you to say, Polly Linton! I mean, considering I'm not a nice girl in the play. Perhaps—Vivienne's guilty-minded uneasiness made her go on sullenly—"you think I may be like that girl—in real life?"

Polly looked at her sandwich, as if to see where to take the next bite.

"I always try to give a girl a part to act that will come naturally to her."

"Now you're being rude to me! I won't speak to you again to-night! I shall go up to my room—"

"To get quite rid of the cold?" Polly twitted.

"No! To avoid you—and Betty!"

"You needn't go off to bed," Betty quietly remarked. "As Polly has given offence—she and I will keep out of your way, that's all! We'll put our things on, with the rest, Polly."

"O.K.!" said Polly. "Pam will understand!"

They moved off together, and Vivienne, for the life of her, could not be

sure whether a quarrel had been deliberately picked, or whether her own "jumpy" state had made her take offence where offence was not intended.

But she was glad—intensely relieved that Betty and Polly would soon be going out to the car, along with their chums.

From her bed-room window, a few minutes later, Vivienne could see them all getting into the Roysler, where it was drawn up on a patch of gravel that received light from the hall.

Pam had run out to have a last word with the girls, and in a moment or so

seconds, that was all, the girlish form was shown to her, spectral-like, and yet—she knew it! And utter panic seized her.

The real Claire Ferrand had come out of her latest hiding-place—and was even coming to the house!

**Out in the Dark**

**V**IVIENNE MUNRO drew away from the window, in her unlighted bed-room, to make a wild dash for the door.

It was as if her very life depended



**VIVIENNE** rushed up to Claire Ferrand. "Go back!" she panted. "Go back into hiding—for your own sake!" But it was for Vivienne's own sake that she made that frantic appeal!

she was alone on the gravel. Now the car door was being slammed shut, and Swanlake was to be rid of them again—Betty and Polly included!

"Well, that suits me beautifully!" exclaimed Vivienne Munro, never imagining how her own craftiness was being matched with clever strategy on the part of Study No. 12. "Only Pam and the servants sleeping here to-night. Just as well, when there is one thing I simply must do—to-night!"

She saw the car glide away, its headlamps casting fans of light upon the drive, and then the thought of what she had to do to-night caused her to peer in a different direction.

Her eyes, set close to the dark window-pane, tried to make out, in the night, a ruinous building which stood all by itself in the old deer-park. But she could not discern it, the night being moonless, and she was not sorry, for it confirmed her belief that the ruin was at a really safe distance from the mansion.

Something she did discern, however, in the night-bound park, that gave her a great fright. There was a girlish figure, darkly clad, coming towards the house from the direction of the ruin!

Glimpse the figure, Vivienne never would have done, but the night was faintly brightened, to right and left of the leafless avenue, by the strong lights of the going-away car. For a brace of

upon her getting downstairs and out of the house before another minute had sped.

Her dupe, the real Claire Ferrand, was no longer in hiding!

It was just over twelve hours ago that a fresh hiding-place had been found for her, out there in the great old deer-park; and it was there she should be now. It was there she must remain in concealment—yes, whether she liked it or not!

So, in a stop-at-nothing mood, Vivienne rushed down to the ground floor by way of a secondary staircase, and flitted to a seldom-used outer door.

As she reached the open air, she could tell that Pam had already returned indoors. The main front door was now closed against the night, and there was no longer any light upon the gravel drive.

"Thank goodness!" the panic-stricken schemer gasped to herself. "And it's certain no one saw Claire from the car—or it would have stopped on the drive. Ah, but what does she mean—the fool!—by coming away from where I left her just before dawn this morning? Only let me get hold of her! Either I persuade her to go back, or else—I take her back against her will!"

Vivienne plunged grimly on in the darkness.



Suddenly, just after she had clambered over some iron railings that fenced off the park, the desperate girl who had posed as Claire Ferrand caught a sound that did much to allay her terrible dread. She had come aright! There was to be no missing her dupe in the deep darkness. They were very close to each other now, treading the twig-bestrewn grass under the leafless beeches.

She glanced behind, to make sure that the encounter would take place at a safe distance from the house. And then, looking the way she was going, she found the real Claire there in front of her, at a standstill. The white face was like a mask against a black curtain.

Vivienne rushed closer still, to give a hissing whisper.

"Go back!"

"No—"

"I tell you—go back! You must be crazy to be throwing away your safety like this!"

"Safety for me is at the house, Vivienne Munro—not in that old ruined chapel where—"

"So you're mistrusting me again, are you? Got that silly idea into your head once more, although I've done my best, have worked so hard to save you from the police, I feel just about knocked up!"

"There is only your word for that," was the real Claire's low reply. "There has been only your word for everything! And I tell you quite candidly it isn't good enough. I am going indoors to see Pam Willoughby, and I shall probably put through a trunk call to my lawyer in London."

"Oh, but listen!" panted Vivienne. "Why—why spoil everything, when another day will—"

"Sorry, but you talked like that the night before last. One more night, you said, and you would have me saved from the police. But that didn't come about. Instead, you persuaded me to slip away from the house and go into that awful sort of crypt under the ruined chapel. I don't like it there! And, anyway—"

"Claire—Claire, dear," came Vivienne's soothing, coaxing whisper, "don't be such a fool! Now, come along, back to the chapel over there, if only for a few minutes. We mustn't stand about in talk here, so close to the drive. I'm sorry, Claire, but the success I hoped for hasn't come off. And I fancy the police have got a warrant now—"

"All the more reason, then, why I should—"

"Hark! Oh—someone coming up the drive!" Vivienne gasped, in genuine alarm. "Now, who will that be! The police again, perhaps," she hastened to suggest, wanting to infect Claire with fright. "It sounds like two persons."

She took Claire Ferrand by the arm to hurry her away.

"Do—do come back to the ruined chapel, Claire! In fairness to me, when I have done so much already for you!"

"Very well. But I warn you—"

"Yes, I know. Having to be in hiding has made you depressed, nervy, fanciful. Come on!"

AT THAT moment, Betty and Polly were calmly returning up the leafless avenue, having alighted from the car when it had got as far as Swanlake's entrance-gates.

They were not walking at all cautiously, feeling no need to do so at this distance from the house. The time for tiptoeing would come when they had to enter at a side door, their secret return known only to Pam!

"Claire had gone up to her room when we drove away," Betty softly commented; "but I don't see any light behind her curtains now. Is she with Pam again, downstairs? If not—what's she up to now?"

"Isn't on the look-out for us, is she, suspecting that, after all, we were not going back to Morcove?"

"Oh, I can't believe it—no! But perhaps we had better go a bit more carefully now," Betty's hushed voice

## FOR A MERRY CHRISTMAS

### THE SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN ANNUAL PRICE 6/-

responded. "And take an extra-good look round, just before we get to that side door."

They did so, and although there could be no certainty in such darkness, both girls felt confident that their "suspect" had not suspected them! Eyes and ears, acutely alert, detected nothing of an alarming nature.

The extra wariness must have added, they reckoned, at least ten minutes to the time occupied in getting to that side door; but they felt that it had been well worth while.

This one night, spent in secret by them beneath Swanlake's roof, might easily achieve results such as a dozen day-time visits would fail to produce.

When the need was to keep their suspect under secret observation, what could be better than her believing them to be miles away at Morcove School whilst, in fact, they were—at Swanlake?

Betty groped for the outer doorknob, to turn it. Pam was not to let them into the house. Pam, at present, was at the drawing-room piano! They were to creep in and steal up to the bed-room originally assigned to them for the night, there to lie low.

Suddenly, when another moment would have found Betty and Polly indoors again, a sound came that, by its strangeness, made them keep quite still.

A faint, jarring noise, it was—not from anywhere about the house, or it would never have puzzled them. They would have guessed it to be the rather forcible closing of some door or other that needed dragging round, because of an unevenness of the floor.

Betty and Polly stood halted in surprise, because the sound seemed to have come from the hundred-acre park, where, so far as they could remember, there was no habitable building. Wintry grass, leafless trees, the herd of hardy bullocks lying down for the night, and that would be all. What, then, could have caused that noise?

They could not imagine. But it was not repeated, and so they resumed their stealthy re-entry. Some final flittings, and they were in their bed-room—one that was close to their suspect's, so they had got to be extremely cautious. The light must not be used, and, although the floor was richly carpeted, movements must be as few as possible, lest a board should creak.

Unable to forget that inexplicable sound from the nightbound park, they took their stand at the window. They were still in watchful attitudes when the voice of their suspect, loud and cheery, came up to them from the hall below.

Then suddenly Pam came slipping into the room.

"She's trying to get through to her lawyer, up in London," Pam whispered, "so I can stay with you until she rings off. But we quite understand, don't we, about to-night? You've got everything, I know. Hot coffee in the flask, and—"

"Oh, it's all right, Pam, dear," Betty nodded, and smiled. "What's she ringing up about—any idea?"

"She told me. To thank him for the cheque, and to ask him if she can have the Ferrand jewels. Silly of her, I think. It's all right for a girl of her age to like to wear some good pearls. But—"

"I say," broke in Polly, lest a sudden ringing-off downstairs should compel Pam to flash away, "a queer noise, just now, away over in the park. What would it be? Betty and I have wondered!"

"Noise? How do you mean?"

"Oh, a faint rumbling sound, like something wooden and heavy being knocked over, or dragged about. Rather like the thudding of a door," Betty whispered.

"Over in the park? Oh, I know," Pam smiled. "It was one of those feeding bins getting knocked over by the cattle. Often in the night a couple of bullocks will get to barging about round the cake-bins. They can be very tiresome—"

"St!" Betty emitted, throwing up a warning finger. "She's ending her call, down there."

Pam darted back to the bedroom door, to go out quite quietly. As she opened it and slipped away, a last "Good-night, and thanks so much!" was cried into the telephone receiver downstairs.

Pam had gone—was already in her own room, a few doors off, humming a tune.

Then Betty and Polly heard her come out of that room, to go downstairs again. She must have met "Claire Ferrand" coming off the stairs, for the Study No. 12 pair caught the airy remark:

"Oh, Pam, I think I shall go to bed now. I didn't get much sleep last night. My cold, you know."

"Right-ho, Claire! 'Night, then!"

"Good-night, Pam darling! Don't think me unsozial, will you?"

"Just as if!" Behind their closed door, with the room in darkness, Betty and Polly heard their suspect stride past, to go into her bed-room. Its door was closed next moment, with that definite kind of slam which so often implies:

"To bed now!"

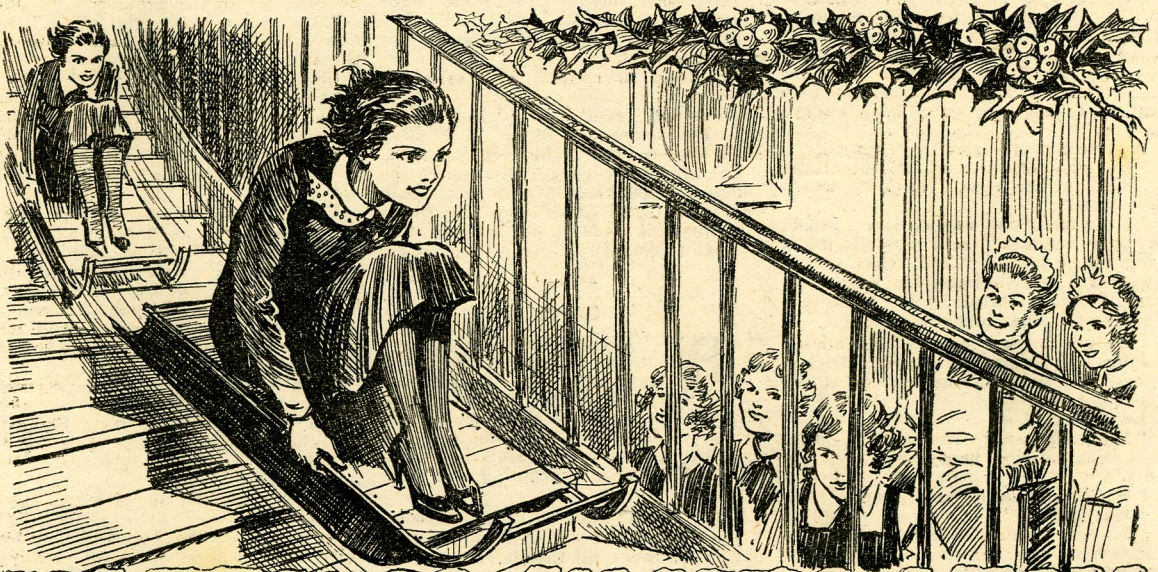
"Yet—I wonder!" Polly breathed in Betty's ear. "Gosh, I don't know that I ever felt more excited!"

"We're here—and she thinks we're at Morcove," Betty whispered back. "Yes, Polly, it does make you wonder what's to happen between now and morning!"

**WILL** the chums' daring be rewarded? Will they learn the truth about Claire Ferrand—or the girl they believe to be Claire Ferrand? You must not miss next week's enthralling chapters of this powerful serial in **THE SCHOOLGIRL**, which will be on sale on Thursday, December 24th. Order your copy at once.



# Christmas at School! It Might Have Been Dull—If Lulu Hadn't Been There To Liven Things Up!



## HAPPY GO-TUCKY LULU

### The Girl Who Came Back!

"GIRLS, it's going to be the most staggering, wonderful Christmas ever! Think of it. No mistresses—no prefects—whoopee!"

And Lulu Fairfax, as she gave that yell of joy, lounged back in the deep chair in the prefects' room usually occupied by Sonia Hawtrey.

It was a cheery, comforting scene in the prefects' room at St. Winifred's—far cheerier, of course, than was the case when it was occupied during term by prefects.

But this was holiday-time, and Lulu Fairfax and her friends, who were staying on at the school for Christmas, were enjoying every minute of it.

The morning had been busy; the late-goers had been hustling their luggage, doing last-minute packing, and saying good-byes. But they were gone now.

Lulu & Co., save only for Miss Mudford, the softest, most easy-going mistress at St. Winifred's, were alone.

The powerful wireless set belonging to Lulu, given to her by her fabulously rich uncle, was playing at full pressure in the Hall, and could even be heard through the closed doors. Outside, snow fell thickly, but Lulu & Co., beside the roaring fire, were snug.

"And you know what we're going to do on Christmas Day?" said Lulu, her eyes shining. "Have a real old-time Christmas dinner—with the housekeeper and the cook, the gardener, Mrs. Good-year! from the tuckshop, the groundsman; all of them—"

"Hear, hear!"

"And a Christmas-tree, too—"

"What-ho!"

"And we can make slides in front of the school and build a snowman. Let's build one of Sonia!" decided Lulu excitedly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Sonia Hawtrey was easily the most

unpopular prefect at St. Winifred's, and the girls had given her a magnificent send-off.

There had been one moment of qualm when the car taking her had slowed in the drive and turned back, but, apparently, Sonia had forgotten her gloves—only that. And never had girls searched more willingly. They didn't want Sonia to lose her train!

Lulu sprang up. It was comfy by the fire, but she liked action.

"What now?" asked May Gordon.

"Tobogganing," said Lulu. "The toboggans are here—"

"But the snow isn't. At least, not thick enough," objected May.

"Snow nothing! We can use the staircase!" said Lulu.

"Phew!"

There was silence. The girls couldn't get used in a moment to the fact that there were no mistresses or monitresses to keep an eye on them. But Lulu Fairfax had made a firm resolve that while the cats were away the mice should play.

She led the way into the deserted hall, and the others followed. The brand-new toboggans were brought from the games-room, and the girls rushed up the broad staircase.

The polished skids did the staircase very little, if any, harm, but the speed was exciting.

In two minutes, to the accompaniment of wild yells, the girls were slithering down the staircase in turn.

Some of the servants came to watch and smile. But Miss Mudford, if she heard, heeded not.

The fun had been in progress for five

By

Ida Melbourne

minutes or so, and the noise was riotous when the hall door was hurled open. A flurry of snow swept in, the wind whistled round the hall and rattled the pictures.

Lulu, perched on her toboggan, went whistling down the staircase.

She had heard the door open, but if she thought about it at all, she guessed it was one of the servants.

But she was wrong.

From her friends came warning gasps.

"Sss!"

"Whoa!"

But Lulu, whistling down the staircase towards the large mat placed ready on the polished floor, heeded not.

"Whoopee!" she yelled.

Jill Evans and May Gordon fell back, exchanged dismayed glances, and then looked towards the grim, stern figure which had just entered the Hall.

Lulu, as she finished her slide in a glorious skid, heard an awful voice cry: "Lulu!"

Lulu scrambled up.

"Golly, girls!" she said. "Shows what my conscience does. I thought I heard Sonia's voice. The same old parrot-like squeak!"

Soft, nervous titters of mirth came from the girls.

"But she's far, far away," chanted Lulu, sliding across the Hall and dragging the toboggan with her. "Pestering the life of a poor old aunt and uncle. I bet she gives her cousins fifty lines—"

"Lulu!" stormed the voice again.

Lulu pulled up, saw who had entered, and then—so great was the shock—lost her balance and fell down—thud!

"G-golly, S-Sonia!" she stammered.

"Yes, I," said Sonia gratingly. "And

Complete This Week:

"The Carolers"



a good thing I came back! I guessed something like this was going on. It's just as I supposed."

Lulu scrambled up and smiled.

"Oh, well, it is the holidays, Sonia!"

"There is no need for you to behave in this disgraceful, hooligan manner! Miss Slater doubted if it were wise to leave you here with the freedom of the school. Apparently it wasn't. And that means that I must sacrifice my own holiday to stay here and keep an eye on you."

A hollow groan came from the girls.

"But you can't punish us," said Lulu, a glint in her eyes, "or keep us in detention!"

"I can make out, day by day, a report of your conduct," said Sonia with a triumphant smile. "And, moreover, if there is excessive horseplay or unruliness I shall curtail your Christmas dinner and other luxuries."

"By great, good fortune," she added, taking advantage of their stricken silence, "I met your uncle's car at the station, Lulu."

Lulu started.

"My uncle's car? Not my rich uncle, he's in a nursing home with appendicitis."

"But his car isn't," said Sonia.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence, I mean," she corrected, "his car is here. He has sent it for our use during the holidays."

Lulu stood stock still in stunned silence. She had not missed that "our" part.

"Golly," she said faintly. "The car. Come on, girls——"

She led a rush past Sonia to the door, pulled it wide, and looked out. A dozen yards away stood a magnificent limousine.

"Ours," said Lulu joyfully. "Phew! What an uncle, girls! We can go where we like, buzzing off just where we like, eh?"

The girls were about to give joyous assent when Sonia's voice was heard, like the knell of doom.

"Come inside, all of you. I have told the man to put the car away. It is snowing too heavily for driving to be safe."

Lulu Fairfax stood there, rebellious. "But it's my uncle's car," she protested. "And sent for me——"

"Yes," said Sonia, with a faint smile. "The girls who are left behind. And here is a note addressed to the senior girl of the party. I think I am that girl?"

Lulu uttered not a yelp. She heard and she understood. Her uncle did not believe in giving her ideas of excessive affluence and swelling her head. She knew that; and apparently he had decided to put the senior girl in charge.

Lulu took the letter and read it. It was addressed to the "Senior girl of those left behind," and wished her and the others a merry Christmas, gave permission for her to use the car as her own, all expenses paid.

There was also a special Christmas-tree being sent, and her discretion was to be used as to the method employed to distribute the gifts fairly.

Lulu let out a miserable groan.

Sonia in charge! They hadn't escaped the prefects after all. But for Sonia, a charming Fifth Former named Molly Kingsley would have been in charge, a cheery, popular, easy-going girl.

"Well," said Lulu with a shrug. "There it is, girls, step inside——"

After a farewell sigh and look at the car, they stepped inside, made towards the prefects' room and hesitated. Then,

at a sweeping gesture from Sonia, they went upstairs to their Common-room.

"No merry Christmas now," sighed Jill.

"Just like Sonia," groaned May.

"Oh, what luck!" and similar sighs came from others.

But Lulu Fairfax, bringing up the rear, chuckled.

"Nothing to chuckle at," said Jill glumly.

"Not yet," said Lulu. "But this is only the beginning. Sonia may think she's staying, but I think she's not."

But even Lulu, confidently though she spoke, did not know how or why Sonia was going: and considering that Sonia Hawtrey had made up her mind to stay, Lulu's problem would prove to be tough.

## Carols

"No! Decidedly no, Lulu."

Sonia spoke firmly. She was alone in the prefects' room listening to her gramophone. Lulu's radio set had been ordered to the Junior Common-room, and the projected dance in the Hall had been cancelled. Almost everything was to be cancelled.

"No?" said Lulu, without surprise. "You mean we're not to have a merry party and invite all the staff?"

"No! We are having a reasonable Christmas dinner in the school dining-room. I have no objection to crackers being pulled, and some quiet games. But no horseplay."

Lulu was not surprised. She had expected this, and so had the others, waiting in the corridor outside the prefects' room.

"Well?" said Sonia sharply, turning her head. "What are you waiting for?"

Lulu coughed.

This was where she broached her great idea, and she had to be careful.

"Please, Sonia," she said meekly, "the girls would like you to head a carol-singing party to go to Colonel Bluster's house, and the Manor, and Biggeridge Court, and round about."

Sonia was surprised.

"It's a cold night," she said.

"It won't be too bad outside, although it's jolly dark," admitted Lulu. "We can take lanterns, of course."

"M'yes," said Sonia. "Couldn't you go alone?"

"Well, we could," said Lulu. "But we're not much in the way of singers, really, you see, and you're in the school choir, and people might open their windows and listen if you sang——"

Sonia was easily flattered. She rose from her chair, a smirk on her face. She little dreamed the true intent. And mercifully, she had not heard the candid opinion of her vocal cords that had passed round the school in term times.

"Shall we wait in the Hall, Sonia?" asked Lulu.

"Yes—and wrap up warmly. Top boots, you know, mufflers, gloves, and things——"

"We've got some special snow capes uncle sent," said Lulu. "He sent some for distributing among the village kids, too."

"Oh, very well."

"You can have one, too. There is a big one," offered Lulu. "I should think he bought a job line of a gross of them. But they're stunning."

Ten minutes later, Lulu & Co., wearing dark waterproof capes and hoods, well muffled, with thickly gloved hands and wellingtons for crunching through the snow, stood in the hall.

Sonia Hawtrey, in a similar cape,

strode forward to meet them. She had brought a pocket torch with her.

But Lulu had borrowed some hurricane lamps from the gardener, which he had used at night, ringing round a hole he had dug in the grounds.

"Ah, that's the right thing," said Sonia. "But a little practice first, I think."

Lulu looked solemnly at the girls. "Sonia's the leader in everything, remember, girls," she said.

"Everything," agreed Jill.

There was a hint of deep, sinister meaning in the word, but Sonia did not notice it.

Then they tried "Good King Wenceslas," and as Sonia was singing lustily the whole time, she did not notice what they were singing at all.

"Christmas comes but once a year!" Lulu chanted. "Hurrah! Good-bye to Sonia! When she goes, we'll raise a cheer! Hurrah! Good-bye to Sonia!"

Sonia broke off, and Lulu managed to check herself just in time.

"Very good indeed!" said Sonia.

"What a lovely voice you have!" said Lulu.

Sonia smiled.

"Well, come, let us give the people a treat."

She turned to the door and then hesitated for from outside came the yapping of carol singers. They had shrill, girlish voices and plenty of gusto.

Lulu opened the door and looked out.

"Golly, rivals!" she said. "Village kids!"

Sonia pointed across the Hall.

"Out by the other door," she said. "Give them twopence, Lulu."

Lulu found half-a-crown, and told them to sing outside the kitchen and ask for some oranges and dates. That done, she held a further whispered conversation that brought giggles.

"Lulu!" called Sonia. "Hurry!"

The holiday-making prefect led them out into the snowy night, her feet scrunching the crisp snow, her head bowed against the flakes, a swinging lantern in her hand.

"Do you like ghosts, Sonia?" said Lulu.

"Eh? Like them? Of course not," said Sonia, with a wary glance about her.

"Of course, it's all piffle about the White Monk," said Lulu. "Don't you think? I mean, just as if there's a ghost haunting the quad! It's silly——"

"Ridiculous!" said Sonia, quickening her steps.

"Would you scream if you saw a ghost?" asked Lulu.

"No!" snapped Sonia.

"You must be jolly brave," admitted Lulu, trotting to keep up with her.

"Because it's supposed to haunt the prefects' corridor at Christmas-time. Still, it's probably—— Oh golly!"

Lulu pointed, swung her lantern, and, drawing her breath, let out a really good scream.

The party stood quite still, and Sonia Hawtrey, staring with wide eyes in the darkness, saw the outline of a white figure in a hooded cape.

Lulu swung her lantern high, and the shadows of the metal pieces swung round across the figure in eerie fashion.

"Oh—oh!" choked Sonia. "It's—it's the eyes—they're glowing——"

"Run!" said Lulu.

She ran, and Sonia, after a moment's hesitation, ran after her, thudding



through the snow to where, at a fork in the drive, where a roadway branched to the garages, the limousine stood waiting.

Sonia's face was pale, and she was shivering.

"It—it couldn't have been a ghost!" she muttered.

"Of course not," said Lulu. "Silly! But what else could it have been?"

Sonia did not answer. She was suffering from what is popularly known as the "creeps."

And so would the others have been if they hadn't known that the "ghost" was a snowman, wearing a snow-covered, frozen-stiff hood, and cloak like their own.

"Well, a jolly good beginning, I call that!" said Lulu. "Perhaps we shall see some more ghosts in the lane. Perhaps it will haunt the prefects' corridor. I say, girls, how thrilling! It may haunt the prefects' corridor!"

"How lovely!" said Jill, and nearly giggled.

Any little thing that would make Sonia reluctant to stay could not be considered too much trouble.

The girls tumbled into the luxurious limousine, with fur rugs and heating devices, and pretty little lights, chattering and laughing. There were five besides Sonia, and it was quite a crush in the car.

Lulu had told the driver where to go first, and the car presently pulled up outside White Gables—a large house not far from the school.

"Now, girls," said Sonia, as they stepped down from the car. "Remember the honour of the school. No roughness, no snowball-throwing—no hooliganism at all!"

"Yes, Sonia," said Lulu meekly.

"It would be a terrible thing if it became known that any girl from the school had made herself a nuisance or misbehaved herself."

"Yes, Sonia," said Lulu, with a chorus from the others.

"Lead the way, Sonia," said Lulu.

But Sonia hesitated.

"This is White Gables. I thought it was empty. The people away?"

"Not now," said Lulu, shaking her head.

Lights showed at a lower window, so Sonia marched up the drive, swinging her lantern, and took her stance by the door.

But Lulu and the others hesitated.

"Ahoj there!" said Lulu softly.

Figures came out of the bushes.

"Remember what I told you?" said Lulu.

"Yes," came responses.

Five village youngsters, clad in snow-capes presented by Lulu's uncle, trotted up the drive to a point short of where Sonia stood.

Lulu & Co., giggling softly, crept away.

"Now!" breathed Lulu. "Quick, girls!"

Peeling off the hood and cape, Lulu brought into view a man's dressing-gown belonging to the Junior Dramatic Society. It had been held up by the cord.

"Got the wig, Jill?" she hissed.

"Yes, here it is—"

"And the whiskers?"

"Here!" breathed May.

Lulu pulled on the wig of hair with a nice bald pate and fringe, and then affixed the bushy whiskers and moustache.

Next came a large rubber nose, attached to a pair of eyeglasses.

Rustling away in the darkness, she reached the house and crept out of sight behind the shrubbery to the back.



AS Lulu swung her lantern high a shapeless white figure was revealed through the driving snow. Sonia uttered a piercing shriek: "It's a ghost!" Lulu didn't add that she might have explained the presence of that "ghost"!

An old woman opened the door; but Lulu had taken her disguise off, so as not to frighten her.

It was the school gardener's wife who stood there.

"Why—Miss Lulu!" she whispered.

"Ssh!" said Lulu.

"Is this the joke you sent me word about, Miss Lulu? I don't really know, by rights—"

"It's all right," said Lulu. "You're coming to the Christmas dinner, if I can diddle Sonia. If not—the Christmas dinner's off. And there's no harm in it, really there isn't."

The old woman was caretaker of the house, and when Lulu promised that there'd be no harm, she smiled.

Lulu put on the wig and beard and trotted through the house to the front door.

Sonia's shrill voice was heard piercing the silence lustily.

Lulu hurled open the door and glared round it.

"Stop!" she cried hoarsely.

Sonia stopped, and raised her lantern.

"Eh?" she said.

"How dare you bring your motor-horns here and sound them?" snarled Lulu.

"M-motor-horns?" said Sonia blankly.

"I was singing."

"Bosh! Don't try to fool me!" came the gruff voice through the whiskers. "I know you village urchins!"

"Urchins?" said Sonia, aghast. "Do you know who I am?"

"I'll find out all right, and bring the police! Coming here annoying me—with your motor-horns and screechers and things!"

Sonia glared.

"You are a very rude and offensive man," she said. "We are carol-singers—"

Lulu stepped round the door. "You're egging the others on. In another minute you'll be slinging snow at me—"

She was right. A rain of snowballs whistled through the air. Lulu ducked, and the snowballs landed on the dressing-gown and her ears.

"Stop!" shouted Sonia. "Goodness! Girls!"

Lulu let out a yelp of pretended rage.

She snatched up some snow and hurled a ball of it at Sonia.

Sonia reeled back.

Swinging her lantern, she suddenly saw that the other carol-singers were not St. Winifred's girls. She had never seen some of them before.

"Wha-wha—" she gasped.

"Ha! Millie Hicks, Lizzie Jones, Maud Brown," said Lulu. "I know you, but who's the ringleader, eh? I'll have the police on you! What's your name?"

Sonia drew back, her mind in a whirl.

"I—I—it's a mistake!" she choked.

"Mistake, is it? Come here!"

Sonia, instead, backed farther away in horror.

The bearded "man" advanced with the obvious intention of grabbing her and demanding her name.

"You can run all right—I'll know your face again!" he shouted, in an oddly girlish voice.

The village youngsters fled, and Sonia fled with them.

"Come on, miss!" said one. "He'll chase his dog after us—"

"He'll call a copper—"

Sonia slithered and slipped, and went down bump in the darkness.

She felt a hand grasp hers, and wriggled and struggled.

"Golly—it's Sonia!" came Jill's voice.



"Sonia—snowballing an old man!"  
"Phew!"

Sonia scrambled up and looked back.  
"Bunk!" cried May.

"Quick, Sonia—he doesn't know who you are, perhaps," said Jill urgently.

Sonia suffered herself to be led, and arrived panting at the end of the drive, where the car waited.

A moment later Happy-Go-Lucky Lulu joined the group.

"Phew! What's Sonia been up to?" she said.

Sonia had recovered her breath.

"I have been up to nothing," she said, panting hard. "It was a mistake——"

"I suppose you lost your head and got annoyed," said Lulu. "But fancy snowballing him——"

"Hear, hear! Let-down for the school," nodded May, suppressing a giggle.

Sonia Hawtreay breathed hard and noisily.

"The man's crazy," she said. "Thank goodness he doesn't know my name, or know me by sight, that's all."

"And she gave a shudder of horror at the mere idea.

"As long as he doesn't come up to the school to-morrow, you'll be all right," said Lulu.

### Sonia Has a Train to Catch!

**S**ONIA HAWTREAY stared at her book, and tried to read; but she could not. Every now and then she went hot and cold all over at the thought of the man with the bald head and red whiskers and his rude remarks about her singing.

Sonia turned over a page, and then half jumped out of her chair as the door opened. She wasn't sure whether to expect the White Monk or the man with the red whiskers, or a combination of the two.

But it was only Miss Mudford.

"Sonia," the flustered mistress exclaimed anxiously, "a terrible thing has happened. Some naughty village girls singing carols have snowballed some man in the village——"

Sonia swallowed hard.

"R-really?"

"Someone has suggested that the ring-

leader might be a girl staying on here, and he insists on coming to make an inspection."

"Wha-at?" yelped Sonia. "Oh, no, he can't do that!"

"What ever is the matter, Sonia?" asked the mistress, in surprise. "I'm sure none of the girls were to blame. I've asked Lulu, and she denies throwing snowballs. They all do."

Sonia groaned.

"Oh dear, I—you're not going to let him come?"

"Yes, I said he could," said Miss Mudford, in surprise. "Surely, if we say no, it will look as though we have something to hide? As he saw the girl's face most clearly, he will recognise her at once."

She did not know what poor comfort this was to Sonia.

"And he suggested getting the girls to sing, because he'd know her screechy voice anywhere."

Sonia's eyes glistened.

"He's a horrid, bad-tempered old——" she began, and then broke off.

"He is coming in half an hour," said Miss Mudford, "and as I shall be out, I have asked that he shall be referred to you."

"Me?" said Sonia.

Miss Mudford, puzzled by Sonia's manner, departed, and then Lulu looked into the room.

"S-sh!" she said. "I've got an idea, Sonia. How about disguising yourself with a false nose and ears?"

"Be quiet!" snapped Sonia. "Do you want Miss Mudford to hear? Go away!"

But Lulu hesitated.

"Nothing you want put on the London train, is there? The chauffeur's taking the car to meet it at the junction, to see if there are any parcels——"

Sonia shot up.

"The London train?" she exclaimed excitedly. "Is there another?"

"This is the last one," said Lulu. "He'll have to start in ten minutes."

Sonia did not hesitate.

"Tell him to wait," she said. "Tell him to collect my luggage. Quick—hurry! Don't stand there gaping!"

Lulu was gurgling with mirth inside.

"You're going to London?" she asked.

Sonia gave her a challenging look.

"Yes; I—my people telephoned. I must go, after all."

"Oh dear!" said Lulu. "Well, never mind. Perhaps it will be jolly there."

Sonia did not answer. She rushed to pack the only suitcase she had yet unpacked.

Five minutes later she was ready for the journey, and Lulu & Co. assembled in the hall to sing her a parting carol.

They hustled her to the car, and the last they saw of her she was waving from the rear window. In the powerful lights of the headlamps the snowman monk stood out, and Sonia, in passing, looked at it fixedly.

"Well, the cheeky jimps!" she muttered.

But the car swept on, and the snowman was left behind.

**M**ERRY CHRISTMAS! Pull a cracker, Mrs. Goodyear!" said Lulu.

In the School Hall, a magnificent table had been laid. It almost groaned under the weight of good things.

Lulu and her friends were there, and so was the entire school staff. There was laughter and merriment, and the pulling of crackers. Everyone wore a paper hat, and everyone was in jovial mood.

The Christmas pudding was amazing. Cook had excelled herself, and the pudding was the largest any of them had ever seen. With the lights off, and candles providing the sole illumination, the cook brought in the pudding blazing with blue flame.

"Hurrah!" called Lulu. "Hurrah for Christmas, everyone!"

"Hurrah!" came a cheer.

"Hurrah for Miss Lulu, it is!" said the gardener's wife. "And the red whiskers, too!"

And laughter was loud and long!  
END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

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