

"FROM COUNCIL SCHOOL TO CLIFF HOUSE"

First Of A New Series Of Long Complete Cliff House School Stories

THE SCHOOLGIRL

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Incorporating
'SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN'



THEIR IDEA OF A JOKE

For this week's long complete Cliff House School story, the first of a new series featuring Miss Barton-Clarke

FEATURES DIANA ROYSTON-CLARKE: The Famous Firebrand of the Fourth in a Brilliant Long Complete Cliff House School Tale



From Council School to CLIFF HOUSE

By
HILDA RICHARDS

Invitation From Diana

"NEW girl!" asked Mabel Lynn with interest.

"New girl," affirmed Barbara Radford, captain of the Fourth Form at Cliff House School.

"Oh! What's her name?"

"Lily Watson."

"Never heard of her." And Mabel Lynn, Barbara's class and lieutenant, shook her golden head. "Where's she coming from?"

"London, I believe. But look!" Mabel whispered, "here's the Charmess!"

"The Charmess?" It was—obviously Miss Valerie Charmess, the exceedingly popular and pretty mistress of the Fourth.

She came into the classroom at that moment, when the Fourth Form was just finishing lessons for the day. An extremely trying and tiring day it had been, remembering that it was the first full day of the new Spring term.

Miss Charmess frowned a little as she saw Barbara's lips moving, then smiled and nodded her pretty head.

"Thank you, girls, that will do. The class is dismissed."

There was a relieved sigh. Thankfully, the girls put away their exercise books.

Quietly and orderly they filed out of the class-room, only to break into a run as soon as ever they reached the corridor outside.

"Race to studies!" Class Twelve cried hysterically.

And whoop! Off on a merry scamper they all started, with Clara, the long-legged Tommy captain of junior school games, well in the front, and fat Bonnie Hunter, waddling in breathless protest, bringing up the rear.

Clatter, clatter, clatter! Merry feet scuffled along the corridor. Babs and

Clara running neck and neck. By a fraction Barbara reached the door of Study No. 4 first, the famous apartment which she shared with Mabel Lynn and Bonnie Hunter.

"Won't she peep!"

"Watch to you!" she said cheerfully.

"O.K., Babs! Still, as the winner, you can pay the barmaid the largest being," Clara cheerfully announced, "an invite to tea for Study No. 7. Oh, didn't I mention that as a condition of the race?" she asked coolly. "Well, why did you think I let you win?"

Babs' eyes twinkled.

"Come, oh!" she said. "Well, I'm sorry, old thing, but there's no invitation to-day. We're broke!"

"Oh, really, you girls," Bonnie broke in peevishly. "I'm sorry, it's not fair, you know! Babs, you had ten shillings the day before yesterday."

"And, fair Felicia," Babs sighed, "I paid my Sports Club sub.; then I paid my Dramatic Society's subscription. Added to that, I bought a new handle for my ball, and spent the last twopenny in a glorious bust in the tack-room. So

there you are! No money! No tea in study."

"Which means," Janet Jordan indignantly concluded, "tea is dining-hall!"

A gloom came upon them. Bonnie looked almost on the verge of tears. Tea in study was a privilege very dear to the hearts of the juniors of Cliff House School. But tea in study meant that it had to be paid for out of one's own pocket. Tea in Hall, though free, was hardly an appetizing substitute, consisting simply of tea, bread and butter and jam, and—occasionally—cake.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bonnie. "I'm sorry, I think it a bit thick to let me down like this! You know what a delicate constitution I've got, and tea in Hall always gives me indigestion, you know. Can't you borrow some money, Babs?"

"What? What? Oh, Babs!" came a mockingly shocked voice, and one and all turned to stare at the breath-taking vision of the girl who now came scattering down the corridor. A girl dressed from head to foot in a creation of dainty silver satin, whose marbled Parisian shoes were the very latest word in fashion, whose startlingly pretty face, with its curving red lips, bore just the faintest trace of the powder its owner had used. "What is this advice, I hear?" Diana Royston-Clarke, the Firebrand of the Fourth Form chipped in. "Borrowing, Babs!"

ARROGANT, fiery-tempered, the deep-set slits of frown-creases and wrinkles, Diana Royston-

Clarke is aptly named the Firebrand of Cliff House. And now Diana has an ambition—that little Lily Watson, ex-Council School girl, shall become a great singer. Ruthlessly she sweeps aside opposition—bringing unpopularity to Lily and disaster upon herself. But Diana is determined. How will it all end?

"My hat, where are you going?" Clara asked.

"Nowhere!"
"But why are you dressed like that?"

"Oh, this?" Diana shrugged nonchalantly. "Rather neat, what?" she asked. "My father brought it for me on the Continent during the war. He paid the greatest money known here many francs!"—and she tossed back her glorious billows of plaited blonde curls, smiling with conscious pride upon the jankers of the Fourth Form. "As a matter of fact," Diana volunteered lightly, "I'm having a party."

Bessie's eyes gleamed.
"Oh, I see—yes, where?"
"And," Diana added pleasantly, "it seems that I've timed it well. Here," she added proudly, "are your invitations."

She dropped six cards into Babe's hands. The chums blinked. Diana, with a hardly nod of her head, swept on, leaving them gazing after her.

Babe frequently, indeed, did the severely Diana raise people to gape. In the whole of Cliff House School, there was not another girl like her.

For Diana was rich. Diana had a father who was rather inclined to be over-indulgent. Diana liked to compel notice and do things other girls would never dream of doing! A queer, yet fascinating mixture was she.

There were times when girls hated Diana; other times when they just adored her; but never, never could they fail to be attracted towards her; to be magnetized by her.

Strange girl, Diana Royston-Clarke! But, if Diana was giving a feed—why that was an event, especially at this laid-up juncture. Diana's feeds were famous for their lavishness, and great was the competition, as a rule, to get invited.

Babe, pushing open Study No. 4 door now, went in, followed by her chums, studying the invitation cards as she did so. As usual, the cards simply bore the name Diana.

Gold-edged and gold-lettered on expensive pasteboard, they read:

"Miss Diana Royston-Clarke extends the pleasure of your company at her 'Welcome-to-CLIFF-HOUSE' party, to be held in honour of her friend.

Miss Lily Amelia Walters, on her arrival at the school to-day. The party will take place in Study No. 22 at 5 p.m. prompt."

"Well!" breathed Babe. Anyone but Diana would, of course, have given her invitation warbly.

"Oh crumbs! I s'gaw, this is ripping, you know," Bessie Burder beamed.
"But I s'gaw, who's this girl, this Lily Walters?"

"Must be awfully well off, to be a friend of Diana Royston-Clarke's," Margjorie Handless murmured.

Clara smiled.

"Some new fad of Diana's," she said.
"Trust her! I expect her name is Lady Lillian Walters, or something. It would be like Diana to leave out her title and spring it on us at a party. Still, never mind! Hungry girls can't afford to look a gift horse in the mouth, and I must say this has come at the right time! But I say, if Diana's rigging herself up in frills, hadn't we better put on afternoon frocks, too?"

"Oh, yes, rather!" Bessie said.

And off to the dormitory they went, to find several other girls already in possession. Margot Lantham, the daughter of Lord and Lady Lantham,



DIANA took a furious step towards the sneering Lydia. "Will you get out of this room?" she stormed. Lydia sniggered. "No!" "Then," the Firebrand retorted, "I'll jolly well put you out!"

and the co-tenant of Diana's Study No. 19 was there.

So, too, were the Honourable Beatrice Beverley, Lolla Carroll and Jamaica Carstairs. They were all dressing, and all, it transpired, had been invited to Diana's party.

"But, say, who's the girl?" Lolla Carroll wanted to know. "Some high-stepper, I guess, if Diana's taking her up."

"Yes, rather. Do you know her, Margot?"

Margot Lantham shook her head.

"No, I've only heard of her. She's the daughter of a friend of Diana's father, I believe. Diana's known her a long time, but she's always been rather mysterious about her. She's in the study now with Miss Fitzroy. Now, dash it, what have I done with my other stocking!"

The door opened, and a snowing face peered in. It belonged to Lydia Unconscionable, the haughty, overbearing snob of the Fourth. She looked round.

"Is Diana here?"

"Try again, sweetest!" Clara advised. She's not. Coming to the party?"

Lydia snarled.
"That's what I want to know!" she said. "Dash it all, if Diana's holding a party, I should be the first to be invited!"

And, with another snarl, she was preparing to withdraw just as a voice rapped outside.

"This way, Lily! You change in here!"

There was a pause. Every eye turned with expectation towards the door. For the voice was the voice of high-stepping Diana, and the name she uttered proclaimed plainly that the girl she had in tow was the much-expected visitor. Lydia stood back. Into the

room, with queenly grace, swept Diana. Lydia gasped.

"I say, Diana, I hear you're throwing a party."

"Quite right," Diana nodded.
"Well, haven't you forgotten something?" Lydia asked, while Diana, knitting her brows, shook her head.
"What about me? Aren't I coming?"
"No!"

Lydia stepped back, her rather snake-like eyes suddenly glittering, her hands clenching by her sides.

Lydia, like Diana, had a high opinion of herself. She liked to be "in" things. She liked to think that Diana looked upon her as a friend—not, indeed, that Diana gave that impression to anyone for any length of time. But to be ridiculed in front of these others! To be so openly snubbed—

"You don't mean to invite me?" she asked.

"You've said it!" Diana retorted.
"Lily, this way, my dear."

There was a rattle. Every eye was directed at the girl who came in. A duchess, a princess! Some haughty "high-stepper," they all felt sure; for Diana was fond of making and of boasting of her aristocratic associations. The very tone she used now showed that here was one whose friendship she put upon an unconsciously high plane!

The girl appeared.

Instantaneously, bewilderedly, they stared. For it was obvious, at one glance, that neither in social station nor in wealth did this girl belong to Diana's class.

By, shrinking, timid, she came in, to blink open-mouthed amazement at the girls. For one concept such a look of intense fright shone in her big brown eyes that Babe had a momentary impression that she was going to bolt there and then.

Up from the girls went an astonished manner.

She was dressed in Cliff House uniform. But it was apparent that the uniform had been hastily chosen. The blouse was obviously on the large side; the coat, despite its fur collar, stood indifferently on the shoulders. Her thin face, pathetically pretty in its way, wore a frightened, pinched look.

"Lily, this way," Diana said kindly. "Don't be afraid, my little goose!"

"No-no, Miss Diana," the girl stammered.

"And you mustn't," Diana chided, "call me 'Miss' here. Diana is my name—Diana Rapston-Clark, not forgetting the hyphen on the 'a.' She reminded jealously. "To my best and most intimate friends, I'm known as Di—me! I'm Di to you, Lily!"

"Oh, my hat!" Clara discreetly murmured.

"And these," Diana declared proudly, "are some of my friends. Now, let me introduce you. Margaret, this is Lily Walters. This, Lily, is Margaret, the daughter of Lord and Lady Lantham."

Lily looked scared.

"Well, Lily, here you are," Margaret said cheerfully. "And I do so hope you'll enjoy yourself at Cliff House! Skank!" she added freely.

"And this," Diana explained, "is the Honorable Beatrice Beverley—"

"Oh hark!" murmured Lily.

"And this is Barbara Redfern. You'll get to know quite a lot about Barbara Redfern. She's captain of your Form."

If Babs had been a duchess, embarrassed little Lily would not have regarded her in greater awe. Almost touchingly she extended her hand toward her.

Babs took it, and at the same time gazed deeply into those big brown eyes. What was it she saw there? Some message, some mute appeal that stirred her heart to its depths?

"Welcome, Lily, to Cliff House. And don't," she smiled, "look so scared, you know! We're not going to eat you! What was your last school?"

"Please, miss, Lantham Council."

"Oh, my hat!" came from Lydia, at the door.

"And you lived in Lantham?" Babs asked kindly, trying to put the little one at her ease.

"Yes, miss, in Scrabble Alley."

From Lydia there came a shriek of mirth.

"Scrabble Alley! And who is your father, kid—the Duke of Scrabble?"

Lily turned to face her.

"Please, no," she said. "My father was a chimney-sweep, but—and here the lips quivered—"he's dead now. He was killed in a 'accident.'"

"Oh!"

A silence fell. Even Lydia seemed shaken. Diana coughed hastily.

"Well, never mind now, Lily. You can answer questions afterwards. You'll have to dress, you know. We're holding a lovely party in your honour, Lydia," she added, as another cackle came from the door, "would you mind removing yourself?"

Lydia groined.

"Why should I?" she asked innocently. "Dash it, I can watch the entertainment if I like! After all, you must admit—with a sneeze—that it's not often we have the pleasure of welcoming the daughter of a chimney-sweep from Scrabble Alley!"

"Oh, check it, Lydia!" Clara exclaimed.

Diana's eyes glistened. She flung one look towards the speaker. And then, suddenly, she flushed with fury. In

three branches she was across the room. In that growling rage which so swiftly engulfed her, she confronted the giggling snob.

"Lydia, will you get out of this room!"

"No!"

"Then——" Diana said, and her white teeth fastened on her lower lip.

That temper of hers, so easily aroused, sent a flash of fury to her cheeks. Her hand came up and delivered a stinging blow upon Lydia's face.

Sideways reeled the snob of the Fourth, into the corridor outside. Diana, quick as thought, slammed the door, turning the key on the inside.

When she turned back into the room, she was instinctively flicking her palms together and smiling.

"And now," she announced, without a trace of that temper which had swept over her a moment ago, "we'll finish dressing, shall we? Tea will be served in ten minutes!"



The Four Who Came to Jeer

"RIPPING!"

"Gorgeous! Fan the pin, Lydia!"

"Gosh this way, Babs!"

"I didn't mind you know, if I have another helping of that blancmange!"

The party in Study No. 10 was at its height.

And at the head of the table, dispensing honours, sat the beaming Diana.

— Diana looked and warmed with immense gratification; a Diana who, at that moment, felt like a queen. No doubt that Diana's guests were enjoying themselves. No doubt they were doing full justice to the good things their rich hostess had provided.

But one among them, at least, was not happy.

Little Lily Walters.

On Diana's right Lily sat, staring almost in fright along the table. There was a pastry fork in her hand; on her cheek was an embarrassed flush. Covertly she was watching Barbara Redfern, selecting those things to eat which Barbara ate.

Babs noticed it. Diana, in her own satisfaction, did not.

And from down the table Babs' eyes met those of the new girl! What pity stirred within her! What a poor frightened little thing the girl looked!

How utterly scared! From Scrabble Alley to Cliff House School was a long, long jump. Lily, deeply conscious of her social untidiness for such a leap, was like a fish out of water.

"Enjoying yourself, Lily?" Diana asked.

"Y-yes, thank you," Lily wavered.

"Have some blancmange!"

"No, thank you, Miss Diana," the new girl said.

"Di!" Diana warned her.

"Di-Di!" Lily gasped, and turned fery red as if that correction had caused her a physical effort. "Oh dear!"

"Bit strange, eh, Lily?" Babs smiled encouragingly.

"Oh, shabite! She'll soon shake down," Diana boasted confidently.

"Now, please, Lily, don't be as nervous! Have something else. Look! You're getting into a most awful mess with that blancmange! But wait a minute!" Diana rose. "Youks, girls, I've for-

gotten something! A toast! A toast to the guest of honour!"

"Gurrah!"

Diana beamed down the table. She raised her cup. They all stood up, and Lily, with one scared blink round her, stood up with them. Diana bit her lip.

"No, Lily, don't be so stupid! You're the one who's being toasted. Sit down. To Lily!" Diana cried, raising her cup. "Lily, my protégée!"

Lily?

They all sipped tea. Wonderingly, touchingly, Lily sat down, blinking around her.

"Oh hark!" What do I do now?" she asked desperately.

"Now," Diana calmly informed her, "you make a speech." And, apparently unaware of the utter panic on Lily's hot face, she stamped the table. "Silence, everybody! Speech from the guest of honour! Now, Lily!"

Lily stammeringly rose again, turning hot and cold by turns.

Babs bit her lip.

"Oh, Diana, don't you think we might wait?"

"Why?"

"Well, I'm sure Lily doesn't want to speak yet, do you, Lily?"

The grateful look the girl from Scrabble Alley flashed was eloquent enough answer. But bravely she turned.

"Well, if Miss—if Di wants me to——"

"Oh, I don't want you to!" Diana said, but she smiled a little. "I want you just to please yourself and—be happy!" she said. "After all, you've got to make speeches some time, and the sooner you start, the better. You won't gain anything by being shy," she went on, "and—well, if you don't want to make a speech, I'll make one for you. Ahem! Girls!" she cried.

The girls were immediately attentive.

"I—I want to tell you something," Diana said, about Lily. "I just want you all to know what a ripping little sport she is, and—how she came to be here."

"You all know about Lily now, and I want it to be understood, from this moment, that she's here as my friend. Thank goodness, at least, that you are not snobs!"

"Years ago," Diana continued, "Lily's father saved the life of my father. He was too proud to accept help while he was alive, but when he met with the accident that killed him, he asked my father to look after Lily."

She paused. Lily bit her lip.

"And so," Diana continued—"well, my father kept his promise. Since her father's death he's in sort of adopted Lily. It was my idea, though that Lily should be given the best possible chance in life. It was I who persuaded my father to send her here. I've known Lily for years. I've always been fond of her, and I'm going to see that she does big things. She's got it in her. I'm going to bring it out!"

She sat down. There was a murmur. Babs, looking at her, shook her head, wondering. For well she knew the stormy nature of the Firebrand; her sudden impulses, both generous and selfish. Diana certainly seemed to be very fond of her protégée, but would that fondness last?

Obviously, to "adopt" Lily was one of the Firebrand's latest whims. At the moment Diana was sincere in her intentions. But Diana had had so many hobbies in her time. One by one, with the sport girl's thirst for new sensations, she had flung them on the scrapheap, to take up some fresh interest.

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Was this Quixotic adoption of Lily Walton to be just another passing fancy which, when its novelty had worn off, would show the same fate as the others?

Baby, wondering, sighed. And then quickly, as a knock came upon the door, she glanced up.

"Well, come in!" Diana invited. The door opened. Lydia Crossendale stood there. Behind Lydia were Freda Ferraris, Frances Frost, and Matilda Taitersall. Lydia grinned.

"Just brought some of the girls along to look at the latest creation," she said softly. "There she is. Father met with a 'misadventure,' she added abruptly.

"Ho, ho, ho!" giggled Freda Ferraris. "Her name is Lily Walton. She comes from Stann Alley, Scrabble Lane, Lydia went on. "Her father might have been a lord if he hadn't been a chimney-sweeper. Isn't she just the sweetest thing you ever saw!"

"Ho, ho, ho!" yelled Frances Frost. Diana rose. The dangerous glint in her eyes should have warned the baronesses at the door—but it didn't. Lily, her face crimson, her lips trembling, had half risen to her feet. Clara's hand was grimly creeping towards a jam tart just when Diana's hand reached for the cushion behind her.

"—That—"
"Get out!" Diana yelled. Straight as an arrow the cushion shot. It was aimed at Lydia, but that girl, just in the nick of time, saw it coming and dodged. Freda Ferraris, behind her, received the missile full in the face. "That was sufficient to rouse Freda. Normally she was the biggest of fools, but she thought nothing of her quarrel now. Back into the study, with an enraged yell, she charged, wielding the cushion. After her came Lydia and Frances, followed by Matilda.

In a moment Diana's guests were on their feet. "You sat!"
"Get out of here!"
"Keep off, you idiot!" Diana yelled. And, desperately scrambling round, she grabbed up the first missile. It was a tea-cup. Wildly she hurled it; wildly it flew.

At the same moment there was a step in the corridor outside. A sudden squealing cry—a scolding exclamation. "Why, good gracious! Who three that!"
And everybody stood numbly into inaction as Miss Wright, dusty mistress for the day, strode furiously into the study, her face white with anger.

heard it as I came along the corridor. Apparently," Miss Wright went on, "some quarrel ceased between you and Diana. Lydia, which of you started it?"

"Well, Diana!" Lydia put in at once. "We just popped in, you know, to see how the party was getting on and how the new girl was enjoying herself—"

"Well, my hat!" gasped Clara Trevillyn. "Diana, is this true?"

Again the Firebrand shrugged. The chaos sat still, knowing perfectly well that Diana was very capable of handling the situation, and would handle it in her own most peculiar way.

Diana, in fact, rather enjoyed these situations. But before she would reply, she jumped Lily.

For one moment Lily had forgotten herself, her surroundings, these rich girls in whose company she found herself.

She saw only danger to Diana—Diana who had given her this glorious chance, the Diana she worshipped, for whom she would do anything. This awful Lydia girl was attacking Diana, was trying to put the blame for her mistakes on the shoulders of her benefactor. Red in the face, she blurted:

"Oh, please, miss! It wasn't Diana! It was 'er!"

"Lily, sit down!" Diana cried. "But I'm not a-going to sit down!" Lily cried. "I won't sit down and see you blamed for something you didn't do!" Miss Lydia came in with 'er friend. She started slipping me, and— and Diana went for 'er—"

And then perhaps she became aware of the frozen expression on the faces of the girls who heard her, of that appalling message which Barbara Hadfern was trying to flash with her eyes. Her voice faltered, broke off.

And in the midst of the electric silence which ensued there came in a hissing undertone from Lydia.

"Sneak!"

Miss Wright's eyes glittered. "Thank you!" she said. She turned contemptuously upon Lydia. "So that," she said, "was how it happened! Lydia, I am surprised, ashamed and disgusted with you. You will soon take a hundred lines. Diana you will take twenty for allowing yourself to lose your temper. You may go!"

And Lydia & Co., with bitter glances at the new girl, went.

While Lily, her cheeks red with shame, seeing that she had done wrong, stared blindly and miserably at her plate!

"HYOU sneaker's!" Diana told her

kindly, "have done that, Lily!" It was half an hour later. The party was over. The guests had departed. Diana and her prestige sat alone in Study No. 10.

"But Miss Diana, I—I only did it because that girl wanted to get you into a row!"

"I know," Diana shook her head. "The motive was good, but the execution was wrong! She wouldn't have got me into a row, though, Lily. You can always trust Diana Koynton-Clarke to look after herself! There are some things here, old thing, that you mustn't and can't do whatever the provocation. Sneaking, as we call it, is one of them."

Lily Walton looked very unhappy, very wretched. She looked, in fact, pathetically like some small puppy that has been scolded.

She didn't know—how could she, she who had never experienced this sort of thing before!—that she had committed a crime ranked as intolerable in the schoolgirls' code!

"I—I'm sorry!" she said. "I—I didn't know! Oh, O-Diana, you don't think that Miss Barbara thinks I'm a tell-tale, too?"

Diana looked at her sharply.



"Sneak!"



DIANA read the insulting notice, her face flaming with anger. So this was the latest work of Lydia and her cronies!

FOR a moment such a silence reigned in Study No. 10, a pin could have been heard to fall.

"Diana!" Miss Wright rapped out. The Firebrand shrugged. "Did you throw that?"

"I suppose I must have!" Diana said softly. "But it wasn't intended for you, Miss Wright! It was meant for Lydia."

Lydia coughed. "Ahem! Perhaps I'd better go—" "Wait!" Miss Wright snapped. "Before you go, Lydia, I want an explanation of this! There was some sort of a quarrel going on in the room. I

"Why should you worry about what Barbara thinks?"

"Well, well—," Lily crisscrossed. "Oh, nonsense! But she seems such a nice girl, that's all! So—so different from the others, you know—like that Miss Crossendale, Primrose. I should like to be to think bad of me!"

Diana scowled a little. "Well, never mind Barbara or anyone else," she said with a touch of irritation. "Now, stop scolding, guess! I don't suppose Bob thinks anything at all about it. But that honest Lydia will just leave it. You've got to watch that cat! But now," she added, "let's forget all that and have a chat. I want to talk to you, kid. About yourself!"

Lily looked apprehensive. "Yes, Miss—Diana?"

"I've told you," Diana said, and stepped as a sheep came at the door and Francis Frost looked in and yelled "Break!" Her eyes glimmered a little, and Lily flushed, but Diana pretended to take no notice. "I've told you," she went on calmly, "that here you'll find things rather different from what you've been used to, Lily, but remember always that you've got me behind you—and I count for a lot!"

The girl from the dorm gulped. "Yes, Miss—Diana?"

"Lily," Diana resumed, "I'll make something of you while you're here; I've promised my father that. I've got the sort of girl who makes every body, and I'm jolly well going to do it, see? You're going to be somebody at this school—as I say," Diana could not resist adding, "Now, let's run through the list of your accomplishments and see how we can use them."

Lily blushed.

"Ac—ac—," What did you say, miss?"

"Diana!" the girl fiercely frowned. "Please do try to remember, Lily! Accomplishments, I said. Yeticks! Can't you understand a word of more than two syllables? Things you can do, I mean. Things you're good at. Now, what are you good at?"

Lily hesitated.

"Well, I can knit—"

Diana gave an exclamation of impatience.

"I know that! And you can cook, too! And darn! And perhaps—with a hint more she did a stitch—" said Diana. "Oh, sorry! I didn't mean that! I've a hunch! But then, you see, aren't the things that are going to get you anywhere at Cliff House. Can you play hockey, for instance?"

"Yes, I—I think so!"

"Bother it! You must know! Are you any good?"

"Well, I—played centre-half for the Lanthorn Council School!" Lily blushed.

Diana grinned. "Not a great recommendation," she said. "Well, what about swimming, rowing, jumping, sewing?"

Lily shook her head.

"Oh, Miss Diana, I'm afraid I'm a proper let-down!"

"Oh, rats!" Diana snapped. "There must be something you can do. Don't you see," she added patiently, "I'm trying to find a jumping-off point to get you into the line! I want you to be a credit to me, I want— But wait," she stared at her suddenly. "Haven't I heard something in connection with you about stajing?"

The new girl frowned thoughtfully.

"Well, I—was taking lessons," she ventured. "My de-father, y'know, said I'd a nice voice, and he was having me trained at the night school."

"And what did the night school say about you?"

"Well, I—I won a certificate!" Lily confessed hesitatingly.

"Did you, now?" Diana's eyes glimmered. "Well, that's it!" she cried, snapping her fingers, "that's what we'll try. We haven't a great many singers here! If you can only make an impression with your voice, I'll have you in one of the school concerts in no time. And as," Diana whooped, jumping off the table, "there's no time like the present, we'll start now!"

"But, oh—"

"No objection!" Diana cried. "You've my charge now, Lily Walters. Look in that box! You'll find music there. Looky for you," she added with her eyes twinkling, "that I can play the piano! We'll go down to the music-room and have a sing-song. Now, grab that music! And, hushingly, she swung open the door. Then: "Who put this here!" she asked in a changed voice.

For as she opened that door, a notice fastened by a drawing-pin flapped in her face. That notice read:

"Take your shoes off at Cliff House!"

For one instant Diana stood stock still. Then into her rose-colored cheeks her wrath flamed up. With sudden impetuosity she tore down the notice.

"Lily, wait for me," she called thickly.

"But, oh, Miss—"

Diana did not reply, however. Eyes glimmering, she hurried, she was straggling off down the corridor.

She reached the door of Study No. 1, occupied by Lydia Crossendale and Freda Ferris, and Ross Radworth. Without deigning to knock she turned the knob and, with a kick, sent the door flying inward!

Two girls were in the study—Lydia and Freda—both leaning themselves before the fire. They jumped round with a start at the intruder's unceremonious entrance.

In three strides she was across the room. With one savage hand she caught the collar of Lydia's tunic; fiercely, frantically wrungled the tunic in her hand, and viciously rammed it down the neck's back. Lydia frantically squirmed.

"You see! What are you doing? Help!"

"Diana!" came a quivering voice at the door. "Why, my goodness! How dare you!"

Diana, breathless, wheeled round.

Miss Crossendale, headmistress of Cliff House, eyes glimmering, stood in the doorway. Behind her, peering into the study with startled faces, stood Bala and Maba.

"Diana, that was a distinct and premeditated assault!" Miss Primrose declared angrily. "I have never, never witnessed anything so outrageous in my life."

Diana's red lips set in a sneer. She looked at the girl furiously wringing Lydia.

"Ask her," she invited, "to tell you why I did it!"

"But, oh, Miss Primrose," put in Lydia quickly. "I haven't the least idea why—"

"That's a fib, and you know it!" Diana interrupted contemptuously. "Why don't you insist she tells the truth, Miss Primrose?"

"Thank you, Diana! I have no intention of doing any such thing. You will go to my study."

"But—"

"At once!"

And Diana, with a sneer, seeing; while Bala and Maba, silently reaching way for her, sadly shook their heads.



A Little Bit Jealous

"LILY!" Lily Walters looked up with a start.

Rather lonely and before did Lily look as she sat alone in Study No. 10. Diana, had said to her, "Wait for me!" and Lily, whose one and only ambition in the world was to please Diana, would have sooner thought of cutting off her little finger than disregard her teacher's faintest command.

She did not know what happened. Did not know that, at this moment, Diana was in Miss Primrose's study receiving the "dressing-down" of the term. She only knew that she was lonely and miserable; was sadly reflecting that she was a misfit at Cliff House.

She blinked as a girl came into the room. Then her cheeks turned fiery red with pleasure.

For the girl was Barbara Radford! Lily caught her breath. She liked Barbara Radford, though, as in the case of all these girls whose stations in life were as far above her own, she felt nervous in her company.

There was something about Barbara— not indeed, that she had had a lot to do with her at far—that was different. Something which made you feel that she was understanding, sweet and sympathetic. Something which just made you like her from the moment you set eyes on her.

"Oh, Miss Barbara!" she stammered. "Bala, Lily, Bala to you," Bala said brightly, and stepped into the study. "I thought you might be feeling lonely, Diana," she coughed—"has gone to see the Headmistress, I thought, perhaps." Bala added kindly, "that you might like to wait for her in Study No. 4."

"Oh, Miss Bar—"

"Bala!" that girl laughed.

"Bib-Bala," Lily pronounced, crisscrossing. Then, with a wondering shake of the head: "You're not up against me like the others!"

Bala frowned.

"Against you, Lily. Like what?"

"Like Miss Lydia and the others. They kept on knocking the door and shouting 'assault.'" Lily answered, going redder than ever. "Diana said I'd read; you read by talking that talk to the mistress, you know."

Bala smiled tenderly.

"Poor Lily," she said. "Goodness, no! That's forgotten. You didn't know, after all, did you? And you're not likely, now that you do know, to do it again?" she added kindly. "We all have to learn, don't we? What's that you've got there?"

"Music!" Lily volunteered, and was thinking what a sweet, sympathetic girl this Barbara Radford was. "Miss Diana asked me to take it to the music-room, you know! We was going to practice singing."

"Oh!" Bala's eyes lighted up. "Then," she said with a laugh, "Mabel Lonn will be interested to meet you! Mabel," she explained—"but you must call her Maba, Lily—is the organizer of your Junior School concert, and Maba is always on the look out for singers! But come along," she added gently. "I'll leave a note for Diana, telling her where you are! And, while Lily, trembling with gratitude—she had such an enormous capacity for gratitude!—stood there, hanging her arms, Bala rapidly scribbled the note. "Now there we are!" she said. "This way, Lily!"



"QUICK march!" Clara chuckled, and to the plea of the others Lydia was forced to retreat at the point of the Tambo's hockey stick!

And channely taking her arm in that of the new girl, she pivoted her off to Study No. 4. Mabel and Bessie were there. Bessie, despite that she spread in No. 18, cooking chorvats at the fire, Mabel seated at the table, her golden head bent over the new playlet she was preparing for the Fourth Form Amateur Dramatic Society's next production. She looked up with a friendly smile as the maid entered.

"I say, what's that? Music! Lily, you never sing!"

"Well, I do a bit," Lily said.

"Oh, that's topping," Mabel cried.

"I'm just frantic for singers! You know, Lily, that we have a dramatic society, and"—she went on to explain while the girl from Lantham listened with enraptured eagerness. "The great difficulty at all times, though," Mabel added, "is to fix up singing parts. That's why we don't do many plays with songs in them. If you can only sing, Lily—"

Loudly! What a nice girl Mabel was! How adorable, Babs! And how jolly, let old Bessie!

And—amazingly—wasn't it easy to call them just Mabel, Babs, and Bessie?

She glowed. For the first time, the wait from the Courtfield always really began to feel that she was enjoying herself.

It was good to see her flushed, earnest little face as she spoke. Good to see those tender smiles on the faces of her listeners; the enthusiasm on Mabel's.

And then—

Thump!

And simultaneously the door came open.

Dianna stood there.

A Dianna who obviously was still in a temper.

She had reason to be. That brush with Lydia had upset Dianna. The fact that Lydia had escaped punishment while she bore the brunt had further incensed her. Then, returning to Study No. 18, expecting to find her willing little slave waiting for her, she had discovered Babs' note.

And how low was Lily—Lily flushed and looking happier than Dianna had ever seen her look—in earnest conversa-

tion with these three. A jealous pang ran through the Firebrand.

"Oh, so here you are!" she exclaimed. "Why didn't you wait for me?"

Lily hit her lip.

"I—I'm sorry, but Babs—"

"Babs?" Dianna's delicate brows arched. "Yelkie! Getting chummy, aren't we? Still, when I ask you to do a thing," she said, "I expect it done. I told you to wait, and you didn't wait!"

Lily gulped. Babs frowned.

"Dianna, don't you think you're being a wee bit unreasonable?"

"Thanks, I'm not asking for your opinion!" the Firebrand snapped.

"Leave me to mind my own business, Barbara. Lily's in my charge, not yours. I know what's best for her. Now, come along Lily, you little goose, and don't stare at me as if I'd hit you."

And, clutching her penelope by the arm, she led her away.

a girl's voice—clear, sweet, bell-like—rose in a song, which, being from one of Shakespeare's plays, was very dear to the heart of the chairman of the Old House junior amateur dramatic society.

In rapid silence the four of them stood. Clearly, unobtrusively, the song continued. Doors opened up and down the corridor; girls came out, to stand listening. There was a murmur.

"My hat! Who's the nightingale?"

Muriel Bond asked.

"What a voice!"

"It's Lily!" Mabel cried. "That's Dianna playing. Oh, my hat! Come on! Miss Chantry, will you come, too?"

"Miss Chantry smiled.

"I should have," she said, "to be left out! Of course I'll come!"

In a body they tripped along. Girls joined them as they went along. In a body they invaded the music-room, where Dianna, flushed and triumphant, was seated at the piano, while Lily, a sheet of music in her hand, was standing by her side. Her jaw dropped at the door opened; the Mashed in the roots of her hair; tongue-tied and crimson she stood as Miss Chantry approached.

"Were you singing, my dear?"

"Oh, couldn't I have done anything wrong?" Lily blurted apprehensively.

"Wrong!" Miss Chantry smiled, though she frowned a little at the girl's queer accent. "My dear, that was very beautiful," she said, to Lily's nervous embarrassment. "You have a really glorious voice for one so young. Cultivate it; take care of it. One day," she added, "it may bring you fame."

Dianna looked up quickly.

"Fame, Miss Chantry? You mean Lily might be—"

"I think," Miss Chantry replied, "that, with training, Lily will make a really wonderful singer. I would," Miss Chantry added, "really love Professor Larkin to hear her."

Mabel blinked.

"You mean the singing master at the Opera House, in Courtfield?"

"Yes," Miss Chantry smiled.

"Though that," she added, "is too much to ask; but I'm afraid he is a frightfully busy man—and frightfully expensive.



Ambitions—and Impositions

"LISTEN!" cried Mabel Lynn in a husky voice.

And she held up her hand.

It was three minutes later.

The door of Study No. 4 was open, mainly because Miss Mabel Chantry, the visiting singing mistress, was standing at the door, Miss Chantry having popped in to see Mabel before she left, in connection with the school concert which was to be held in a few weeks' time. She started now, however. One and all—Miss Chantry, Mabel, Babs, and Bessie—turned in the direction of the music-room.

From that room had come the sudden tinkling strains of the piano; and now

into the bargain. You've heard of him—have you, Mabel?"

"Goodness, I should say so!" Mabel laughed. "Who hasn't! Hello, Diana! What's the great thought?"

Diana started. She had been leaning forward, staring into space, face flushed, eyes sparkling. The music mistress's words had incited her with their implied meaning. Lily might be a great singer—might be a future opera star!

Diana—the ambitious, the vain-glorious, thinking every bit as much of her own glory as of Lily's welfare—was thrilled. Lily was her find! Lily was going to be a star! Lily was going to have Professor Larkin, if it cost every penny she possessed! She was going to be trained—trained not for mere Cliff House concerts, but to go on the stage! Covent Garden, Queen's Hall, Paris, Milan—these were the names that flashed through ambitious Diana's mind even in that moment. And she was going to have the honor and glory of having discovered Lily, of having found a new star into the forefront of music!

It was absurd, of course. Opera stars are not made overnight. Long before Lily was old enough her voice might have deteriorated, or faded her altogether. But Diana did not pause to think in her feverish excitement.

"Well—well, thank you very much, everybody," she said, impatient now to get on. "But—well, would you excuse me, Miss Chantrey? And you others, please! You see—with a glance at her prototype which dared her to say anything—" Lily's a bit nervous in public, and I just must take her through some more songs."

Lily blushed. But the hint had the desired effect. Miss Chantrey shook her head with Lily; regretfully the other girls tramped outside. Spellbound, eager, Diana struck up the opening bars of an operatic air—a well-known one, which Lily sang well, if a little hesitantly.

"Oh, topping!" Diana breathed; and scowled at a knock came at the door.

"Go away, please!"

"Sorry to interrupt. Just came in to remind you that prep starts in five minutes," Mabel said, knocking in.

"Oh, bother prep!" Diana snapped.

"But—"

"I'm busy!" Diana retorted impatiently. "Close the door!"

Mabel's lips compressed a little, Lily, looking at her scornfully, shook her head. Rather rebuffed, Mabel closed the door; her steps could be heard trotting off down the corridor. Lily looked uncomfortable.

"Oh, Diana, you didn't ought to have said that!" she said. "Miss Barbara looked quite awed."

"Oh!" The Firebrand stared at her. "What's the matter with you? Getting set about Mabel? And don't, for goodness' sake, say 'Didn't ought to.' That's dreadful! Say 'Ought not to.'"

"Yes, miss—yes, Diana. Ought—ought not to," Lily mumbled feebly. "It does sound funny, though—doesn't it?"

Diana frowned impatiently; she swivelled upon her stool.

"Never mind," she said, "what it sounds like; it's right." Now, listen! I'm going to make you famous. I'm going to make you rich!" Diana rushed on. "I'm going to give you the biggest, the best, the brightest chance a girl's ever had! Lily, listen! You've heard of the Albert Hall, in London?"

"Oh, yes, that's where they've the boxing matches," Lily said eagerly.

"That's where," Diana explained patiently, "they have some of the world's greatest singers. For goodness'

sake, stupid, do try to follow what I'm talking about! I'm going to get you there. I'm going to train you. Tomorrow, Lily, we both go to see this Professor Larkin."

"But didn't the lady say he was expensive?"

"Oh, not in expense! And then, then—" Diana gulped, quivering herself now at the magnitude of the vision. "Some day, Lily—perhaps a day not so far off—we'll have you at the Albert Hall. Everybody will be awed about you. You'll be a sensation. A rage! They'll have your voice on gramophone records. You'll be singing in grand opera! And I shall be managing your affairs, looking after you. Oh, ponds!" she finished breathlessly. "Think of it! Think of the programme!"

"Diana Keyton-Clarke presents Miss Lily Walters—"

Lily looked dazed, but some of the other's infectious excitement caught her, too.

"That will be lovely," Lily said, "because, then, Diana, I'll be able to pay you back for everything you've done for me."

Diana laughed.

"We'll talk of that when the time comes," she said. "Now, Lily, practice! Let's go through the opera thing again."

"But what about this prep?"

"Oh, in the diabolic with prep. Come on!"

Lily held her lips. She flung an anxious glance towards the door. Dear Diana! Wasn't it just too wonderful of her to make all these marvelous plans! All the same, Barbara had said—

"Ready!" Diana rapped, concluding the pianoforte introduction.

Lily commenced to sing, one nervous eye upon the clock. She was half-way through the song when the door was flung open.

Connie Jackson, the ill-treated prefect of the Sixth Form, glared into the room.

"Diana!" she rapped. "Why aren't you at prep?"

The music stopped. Diana glared back indignantly.

"Don't you usually knock when you come in?" she demanded.

"No, check! The time," Connie reminded, "is now six-thirty p.m. Prep was supposed to have started ten minutes ago. Instead of being at prep, I find you here, singing and playing, and making it impossible for other girls to work. For that, Diana, you will take a hundred lines. And you, new girl, Lily. Now get back to your study!"

Diana's cheeks flushed.

"For I tell you—"

"Take two hundred lines!" Connie snapped.

"Why, you—"

"Two hundred and fifty; and," Connie added, eyes gleaming, "I shall report you to the headmistress for insolence. Now clear out!"



Diana Rules the Roost

LILY'S the girl!" "Buzzer!" "If anyone can do the trick," Mabel Lynn went on. "She can," Mabel finished. And I vote," she added, "we go and put it to her now."

At Study No. 4 Mabel Lynn at once

rose, gathering the sheets which were spread before her on the table.

Mabel's face was flushed. Her eyes were sparkling. It was after prep, and in Study No. 4 Mabel had been working upon a playlet she intended to produce at the school concert.

An usual there were difficulties in the way, and, as usual, the most troublesome of those difficulties was to find a girl who could sing the extremely difficult theme song of the play.

Now, however, that problem seemed to be banished for ever. In Lily Walters, the Fourth Form had found its singing star!

"But can she act!" Mabel asked doubtfully.

"That doesn't matter," Mabel said. "We know she can sing! We'll teach her to act. Come on!"

Roger was Mabel, excited was Mabel. Off with Mabel she rushed to Study No. 30. She tapped upon the door. The voice of Diana, rather testy, told her to come in.

They went in. Diana was seated by the side of Lily at the table—a Lily looking distressed and perplexed—a Lily who most demagogically was grappling with the problem presented by prep.

Diana looked up. It was not a friendly look. Diana, full of her glorious plans, was fuming. It had so pleased Diana to be reported for a second time to Miss Primrose, who had given her rather a serious warning about taking advantage of her prototype's ignorance of school rules to involve her in her own lawlessness.

She scowled at the sight of the two girls from Study No. 4.

"Well, what do you want?" she snapped indignantly.

"Ahem! We want to speak to Lily," Mabel said.

"What about?"

"Well, about a—song," Mabel glanced at the girl, whose lips were eagerly parted. "We're doing a sketch at mid-term," she explained. "There's a song in it that would just suit you, Lily!"

"Oh, bother! And do you want me to sing!" Lily asked incredulously.

"Well, if you don't mind."

"Oh, bother! My mind!" Lily laughed at the very idea. "I'd love to!" she said eagerly, and for a moment her eyes shined brightly upon Mabel.

"When do we—"

And then she stopped at Diana, her brows knitted, rose to her feet, impatiently sweeping her back into the chair from which, in her eagerness, she had half-risen, Diana's eyes were glittering.

"Wait a minute," she said. "Wait a minute, I think," she added pointedly, "that you might ask me what I think about it first, Lily's my prototype! I've got other plans for her! And those plans," Diana declared, with a glance, "don't include practice for your petty playlet, Mabel Lynn!"

Mabel flushed angrily.

"And has Lily herself no say in this?"

"None whatever. Now come!" Diana said.

"But, oh, Diana—" Lily faltered. "I'd like to—"

"And please be quiet!" the Firebrand snapped irritably.

Mabel and Mabel glanced at each other. Mabel gave a significant little nod. Lily gazed at them wistfully and yearningly, shaking her head with just the faintest suggestion of tears in her eyes.

They went out.

The next twelve hours or so were not happy ones for the wall from Scrabble Alley.

Turn between her fierce loyalty for Diana, and her growing affection for Barbara Hadford and Mabel Lynn, made the best of all the jokes of spiteful and ill-natured Lydia & Co., there were moments during that time when she felt like running away altogether.

For Lydia & Co., of course, were not disposed to leave her alone.

Lydia, spiteful and vindictive, had her nails into Diana Roynton-Clarke. As it was impossible, however, to "go for" Diana—Diana, who was dressing none of nothing else save that glory which would accrue to herself by launching her protégée as an opera star—the brunt of her spite fell upon Lily.

Meanwhile, Diana had been active. Diana, full of her idea of the training of Lily, was impatient to get started. The following morning she had phoned Professor Larkin, to be told that he was in bed still.

Undaunted, she phoned again after luncheon. Professor Larkin, she was told then, was busy. But Diana was not to be put off. There was only one thing for it. That was to take Lily and board the lion in his den.

That afternoon was a half-holiday. Diana had sleeping to do in Friar-dale. She would meet Lily there.

"I'm going out first," she told Lily, after dinner. "Catch the bus outside, and I'll meet you in Friar-dale in half an hour."

"Yes, miss—I mean, D-Diana?"

Diana went off. Lily sighed, shaking her head. She didn't want to meet Professor Larkin. She felt she had met enough "big pots" for the time being, and the prospect of encountering another vaguely terrified her. She'd meant rather to have spent the afternoon with Barbara Hadford—Babs, who was always so nice and so kind to her, and wasn't a bit starchy like some of these others. But Diana's word was law. Diana, to Lily, was "She-Who-Must-Be-Obedied." Reluctantly she got on her hat. With a sigh picked up her gloves. She went out.

"Eh, 'ere she is!" said a voice in the corridor. "Going 'ome, Bessie?"

The exaggerated emphasis on her own unfortunate accent caused Lily to turn round. She flushed crimson as she found the mocking faces of Lydia Crossendale and Freda Forriers staring at her.

Lily gave them a look. Anger ran up into her pinched face. At that moment the door of Study No. 7 came open. Clara Trevlyn, a hockey stick under her arm, came out, accompanied by Janet Jordan.

"Hello, hello!" she cried. "What my little Lily of the Valley! But, I say—" And quickly, understandingly, her eyes fastened upon Lydia & Co., questioningly turned to the flushed face of the new girl. She pushed her way between Lydia and Freda, and charmingly took the new girl's arm. "What's the matter, kid?"

"Non-nothing!" Lily blurted. "These outsiders here saying things!"

"I—I'm not telling tales, never any more, Miss Clara."

Lydia giggled. "I ain't done nuffin at all!" she scoffed. "I'm a good little girl, I am, Miss Clara! Oh, my hat, listen to it—and that's in a Cliff House uniform! If you— Here, you cat, what are you doing?" she added, in alarm.

"Frodding," Clara said pleasantly, and, with the butt of her hockey stick, pretended to jab Lydia. "And I'm going," she added pleasantly, "to keep

on prodding until one nasty little cat, Lydia by name, crosses herself from this corridor." Well—and prod, prod, prod went the stick, while Lydia gasped in fury—"going!"

"Look here—"

"I'm looking! I can keep this up all afternoon, you know! Shall I prod you all up the passage?"

Lydia gave her one poisonous look. Freda, coughing a little, nervously retired out of harm's way. Clara laughed as Lydia gave back.

"Senseless!" she applauded. "Don't you take any notice of that lot, Lily. Not worth bothering about!"

Chatting cheerfully, she accompanied the new girl to the porch, then left her, to saunter off towards Junior Side. Lily, with an ardent glance towards the hockey field, went on down the drive. She caught the bus. As the War Memorial in Friar-dale she alighted. A girl in a taxi drawn up at the kerb, hailed her.

"Lily—in here! I don't want to be spotted!"

"Oh, Diana! You—in a car!"

"Well, where did you expect to find me—sitting on the pavement? Come in!" Diana said impatiently.

She opened the door. Lily, gulping, climbed in. Then off they bowled,

edged cards—"give him that! And don't," she added imperiously, "be too long away. I'm not used to being kept waiting!"

"Yes, miss," the commissionaire said, and, with a queer glance, strode away. Lily looked at her mistress in awe. What a way Diana had of doing things!

In three minutes the commissionaire returned.

"I'm sorry, miss, but the professor's rehearsing at the moment. He won't see anybody!"

Diana hit her lip.

"What time will he be finished?"

"Not till six, I'm afraid, miss!"

"Very well," then, Diana said laughingly. "Hand him my card as soon as possible. I'll be back at six. Come on, Lily! We'll drop in at the Royal and have some tea!"

Meekly Lily went, thinking, however, not of the appointment, but of Mabel and Babs and that tugging girl, Clara—playing hockey at Cliff House! How she would have liked to be there with them. Into the taxi they climbed again. Off to the Royal Restaurant they were whisked.

The magnificence of the place, with its waiters and its gilt pillars, almost ceased the girl from Scrabble Alley out of her



STORMING into the room, Diana wrenched the wig from Lydia's head and flung it to the floor. Diana was determined to end, once and for all, this cruel baiting of the new girl.

Diana, as was her wont when she had nothing on her mind, talking feverishly the whole way. They reached Court-side, swept up the High Street, to halt outside the door of the Opera House.

"Now," Diana warned, "watch me! Let me do the talking!"

"Yes, Diana," Lily agreed humbly.

Up the steps Diana swept, to be met by the commissionaire.

"Yes, miss?"

"I want to see Professor Larkin."

Diana announced, with haughtiness.

"Here"—and, with a queenly wave of her arm, she handed him one of her gilt-

wigs. She gazed around in awe. She knew she'd never be able to enjoy a meal in a palace like this!

But Diana did not seem to notice it. And, hark! the way Diana ordered those stiff waiters about! You really would have thought Diana owned the place. Lily mentally noted.

"Well, it's six," Diana said at last, impatiently consulting her watch. "Come on, Lily! Oh, postie, call me a taxi, please!"

"Oh, errand, don't you think we'd better walk?" Lily gasped.

"Eh?"

"Well, look at the awful lot of money it's costing!"

"Money," Diana returned, "was made to be spent. Come on now! Here you are! Jump in!"

They jumped in. In three minutes they were at the Opera House again. But again disappointment awaited them when the commissioner said:

"I'm sorry, miss, but the professor is in conference."

Diana angrily hit her lip.

"My hat, doesn't that man ever relax? Did you give him my card?"

"Yes, miss. He said he didn't know you!"

"He did?" The crimson ran up into Diana's pretty cheeks. "Didn't you tell him that I'm the daughter of the Mayor of Larchmont?"

"Oh dear, miss, no! Are you?"

"Then go and tell him now!" Diana ordered imperiously.

"I'm sorry, miss, but it's more'n my place to worth. If you like to come back at half-past seven—"

Diana knitted her brows. But she was speaking to her girls. Coming back at this hour would mean that she and Lily would be late for school; but that was a minor matter. She'd come back at half-past seven, she said. And she did, to learn, to her chagrin, that the professor's conference had broken up earlier than was expected, and the professor had gone off.

Diana fumed. All the afternoon waited, she declared bitterly. But tomorrow—well, she'd have him tomorrow, if she had to break a door down to get at him!

Not in a very nice temper was Diana, as the taxi rolled back to Cliff House, with Lily sitting moan and nervous and ill-at-ease beside her. Girls were looked when they reached the school. Diana wrenched at the half-past seven with a jerk as savage that the chair almost snapped.

"Which you're late," Pipon, the porter, squabbled, peering at them through the bars of the gates. "Which my orders are to tell you and Miss Walters that you're to report to the 'administration!'"

"Oh, go and be yourself a wig!" Diana retorted, and marched into the drive.

"Come on, Lily!"

"Cranda, will we be for it now?"

Lily asked in dismay.

"Oh!"

"Well, aren't we awful late!"

Diana winced. But she stopped, with a sudden contraction of the heart. In her temper she had forgotten that Lily would share her disgrace. "Oh, quick!" she groaned. "I'm sorry, kid! But look here! It isn't your fault, and it's not fair that you should stand the racket. You go up to the study."

"But, Diana, you—"

"Leave it to me. I'll face it out," Diana said. "No, don't argue, for goodness' sake! Trip along!"

"But—"

But Diana had turned, was already climbing the stairs that led to Miss Primrose's quarters. Lily looked after her with a furtive eye, hit her lip, and would have way along the Fourth Form corridor.

She hesitated at the door of Study No. 4, which was partly open, to throw a wistful glance into the room, where Mabe, Babe, and Beanie were seated round the fire. At the same moment Babe turned.

"Why, goodness, Lily! Come in, old thing! And where," Babe demanded, "have you been?"

Lily hesitated.

"Pleaso, I've been with Diana."

"Oh!"

"We've been to Courtfield, trying to

see a fellow. A man named Larkin—a professor, y'know," Lily said simply.

"Larkin!" breathed Mabe.

"But it wasn't so good, because he wouldn't see us," Lily went on. She coughed, coming farther into the room, and, unaware that Freda Ferriero had followed her up the corridor, and peered outside the door, she constantly took a view, "Diana," she said, "as got a 'widen' I should be 'trained.'"

Babe smiled gently.

"By this professor?" she queried.

"Yes."

"But why," Babe asked, "doesn't Diana leave Miss Charters to do it? You don't really want Professor Larkin, do you?"

Lily shook her head.

"It ain't for me to say what I like?" she said stoutly. "Diana knows best. She says she wants to make me famous and rich and—and all that," Lily went on.

"She says she's going to put me on at the Albert Hall, where they have been doing dances and singing. She says she'll make me a sensation! And—"

her current flow was slight with eagerness as she added: "Diana'll be with me, y'know. She's agreeing to be my manageress. She's going to print her name on the programme with mine. She's—"

And there she broke off, hitting her lip as she saw the peculiar look which flashed between Mabe and Babe, wondering if she had said too much.

"Lawks!" she gulped. "P'r'aps I shouldn't have said that, though Diana didn't ask me to keep it secret," she added doubtfully. "Miss—Babe, you won't say anything, will you?"

"Of course not," Babe said fondly.

And, noticing the door was open, she rose to close it. At the same moment a figure detached itself from the doorway outside, and, sniffing her laughter, fled in the direction of Study No. 1.

WHERE, IN Miss Primrose's study,

Diana, fuming, impatient, stood solemnly in front of Miss Primrose's desk. Miss Primrose, her eyes glinting, was summing up a billing lecture which had lasted about a quarter of an hour.

"And I repeat, Diana, I don't think you are fit to have charge of this girl from Courtfield! It was against my instructions, in the first place, that I allowed her to come here. Your father pressed me, however. You, yourself, undertook to be responsible for her—"

Diana protested.

"And what," Miss Primrose went on sternly, "have you done? From the moment she arrived, you seem to have taken her on your senses. I have heard nothing but bad reports of you. Not satisfied with getting the school rules at defiance yourself, you are taking advantage of this new girl's ignorance to lead her into your own bad ways, too. You stayed out after hours, forcing this girl into the same sort of lawlessness. What have you to say?"

Diana shrugged.

"Well, what can I say? I take full responsibility!"

"Very well, Diana. Now listen to me. You are detained from this moment until further orders. In the meantime," Miss Primrose went on, "I'm going to write to your father."

Diana stifled a yawn.

"You may go!" Miss Primrose said.

And Diana, sternly and savagely, went. What narrow-minded folk these people were! They didn't understand, didn't realize that she had the making

of a future opera star in her hands—a girl whom, some day, Cliff House would be proud to honour!

Galling punishments, reprimands! All these petty annoyances which she was on the verge of doing the biggest, most tremendous thing she had ever done. Why couldn't they leave her alone!

Into the Fourth Form corridor she violently stormed. Call-over bell was ringing then, and as she passed Study No. 4, those girls came out. Diana stopped out of sight of one of them.

"Lily!"

Lily Walters jumped.

"Oh, Diana!"

"What are you doing here?" Diana asked sharply.

"Well, you see—"

"I saw!" She glared angrily at Babe.

"Falling up again with those girls? I thought I told you not to go to the study!" she said.

Babe's eyes gleamed.

"Diana, it wasn't Lily's fault. We asked her to come in."

"Thanks! I'm not talking to you!" Diana bit back.

"But I'm talking to you!" Babe said straightly. "As captain of the Form, it's my duty to remind you, Diana, that Lily is as free to come and go as any other girl. You didn't exactly let it be understood that she came here as your servant!"

Diana gave her a bitter look. Lily, distress in her eyes, shook her head. The Prefessed cried the words, however, by catching at the other's arm and holding her off.

As they went into Study No. 10, two girls came along. One was Lydia Cromwell; the other Freda Ferriero. They stopped and giggled, and then, as Diana glared, coughed, and walked off. Lily trembled.

"Oh, Diana, I hope I 'won't' doo anything wrong!"

"Wrong!" Diana snarled. "You, you have!" she retorted. "You've dropped a stick, for a start! How the dickens am I going to make a lady of you if you will leave—"

"Oh, my hat, don't cry!" she added hurriedly, and fell a mass of reproaches against herself as she saw the quick tears start up in the stout girl's eyes.

"Kid, I'm sorry!" she added gently. "I'm a pig, I know; but—well, I'm a bit upset—"

She stopped. "Now, take that twist out of your face, and come and answer call-over!"

Call-over was answered. The Fourth stamped up to bed. Lydia & Co. glanced peculiarly at the Prefessed and her protégée as they came in; but no tags the look in Diana's face warned them that baiting for this evening was better postponed.

Tomorrow, Diana decided, tomorrow—if she had to move heaven and earth—she would see Professor Larkin!

But she was pated.

Well, what did that matter!



"You Little Traitor!"

"MY hat! What a yew!"

"Who the dickens is it?"

"Oh, my goodness!"

Babe & Co. and several other Fourth Form girls, on their way to hockey practice, after morning lessons past day, stopped outside the door of the music-room to stare and listen.

And certainly there was sufficient cause to compel their attention: for from behind that door a most unearthly din was coming. A girl's screeching falsetto was shrieking a distorted version of one of Lily's songs. From the piano came a thundering accompaniment which had little or no relation to the tune of the song.

The girls looked at each other. Then Bridget O'Toole, with a grin, pushed open the door. There was at once a burst of hysterical laughter.

For there, a blonde wig perched every upon her head, was Lydia—Lily's leading, leaning desperately over the piano, thumping the keys with frenzied energy.

And there, standing on a box at her side, dressed in a uniform that obviously belonged to an Upper Fifth or a Sixth Form girl, was Freda Parrier, a smudge of smut on one cheek, and a dampen soaked under her arm. Her head was thrown back. Her mouth was open, and she was screeching the words of the song.

"Oh, my giddy aunt!" gasped Clara.
"Dianna and Lily!" shrieked Martha Tallorah.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh!"

Lydia stopped. She put one elbow on the keys and looked up at the spectators. Freda admitted.

"You know, kid, you've got a marvellous voice!" she said. "How would you like to go to Covent Garden, where they throw cabarets?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But, Miss Dianna, I ain't out for that sort of thing!" Freda stretched back. "What would the folks of Sten Alley say?" She gave an affected giggle. "If ever I want to Covent Garden I should say I go there to sell flowers, 'know?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Frances Frost.

"Oh, but think of the honour!" Lydia said. "Think of the glory! Think of the programme, done out in gilt lettering and dotted with diamond powder." Miss Dianna Roynton-Clarke present, Miss Lily Blinton, the famous Opera Prima Donna. No taxation by request."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And then there was a movement! Just when Babe was about to interfere, someone brushed her aside. It was Dianna; she came sailing into the room, eyes gleaming, hair red. Violently she wrenched the wig from Lydia's head, and flung it at Freda, who, with a yell, went tottering off the box on which she stood.

Then Dianna kicked the stool from under Lydia, scurried her one moment the havoc she had wrought, and then, as violently, stormed out again.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Babe. "Look here—"

She turned: interest in Lydia and Freda had evaporated now, to follow the form of Dianna Roynton-Clarke, who was hurrying towards Study No. 11. She reached the study. Crash! With a shrieking thud, the door that behind her. And Lily, who was in the act of sliding the desk, jumped round with a start.

"Di—"

Dianna was spluttering.

"You little wretch!"

Lily's eyes widened in black amazement.

"You awful little wretch!" Dianna bit out with measured spite.

"Oh, miss! What 'ere I done now?" Lily protested.

"What haven't you done? What

haven't—?" Dianna choked. "Holding me up to ridicule!" she stormed. "Making me the laughing stock of the Form. Didn't they even teach you that there are some things that you can't do! Things like blabbing private conversations, for instance! What do you mean by telling Lydia Cromdale all that I told you yesterday in the music-room?"

Lily looked dumb.

"But I haven't said nothing to Miss Cromdale. I—I only mentioned it to Miss Barbara."

"O-l-y-o-n-a-l-y—" Dianna's chest heaved. "And Babe, of course, blabbed it to someone else. So that's why you were in her study last night! Talking about me! Raising me down behind my back while all the time I was taking a ragging from Patsy for you! You're getting thick with that Study No. 1 crowd, aren't you? You're—"

And then she flung round as the door opened, and Lily, with a sudden, spluttering cry, disappeared into the wardrobe and reappeared in a moment. "Well!" she rapped, as Babe put her head in at the door.

"Babe's eyes were gleaming."

"Dianna, don't be so horrid!"

"Get out!"

"I won't!" Babe retorted. "Now, wait a minute, Lily!" she cried, and sprang at once to the shaking little blond girl. "Dianna, you're being terribly unfair!" she cried. "Why don't you make a few inquiries before you go in at the door and Lily—"

"Lily reacted!"

"Lily didn't. All right, Lily!" Babe scolded. "Don't cry, old thing! All Lily did was to tell us what a topping girl she thought you were. All she did was to tell us— Oh, but what's the good of talking!" Babe cried. "Lily, my dear, get up! Come with me!"

Lily, crying as if her heart would break, ran.

Dianna took a step forward.

"Where are you taking her?"

"Where," Babe retorted, "she'll be happier than she is here. Where," she added bitterly, "she'll find friends who are real friends. Lily, come along to my study."

And Lily, with one heart-broken look towards Dianna, stumbled out of the room, Babe kindly protecting arm around her.

A MAN—TEMPERED, mean-natured, spiteful beast! That's what you are, Dianna Roynton-Clarke!" Dianna said fiercely, and to express what she thought of herself, violently caught up a cushion, hurled it across the room and watched with a sort of malicious joy as it swept her precious Sylvia vase off the sideboard and crashed it on the floor in a hundred pieces. "You don't know how to control yourself! Why do you always allow yourself to be off the handle like that?"

She paused, spluttering.

She had forgotten Lily Walker's heart—Lily, her slum-girl friend, the girl she had sworn to protect! Lily, who, in her own selfish way, she loved, for whom she had snatched out so glorious a career!

Dianna scowled. She took a turn up and down the room. Of course, the poor kid had meant no harm. Reviewing the facts now, in the light of Barbara Redfern's explanation, she saw that Lily, hounding her, loving her, had only told those things to Babe out of her sheer adulation! Well, she'd got to make it up to her! She'd said— Oh, bother it, she supposed she must do the

same old and same again. She'd go to Study No. 4—now!

She went out. In the corridor, however, she encountered Miss Butler.

"If, you? Wanted on the phone?" the prefect said.

"Who is it?" Dianna asked.
"Sorry, I don't know!" Miss Butler shrugged, and passed on.

Dianna paused. Her father, perhaps! Well, she'd attend to him first. She could hardly keep him waiting while she made it up with Lily. She hurried to the prefect's room.

A man's voice came over the wire as she picked up the receiver. It was not her father.

"Hallo!" This it Miss Roynton-Clarke? This is— and Dianna gave a jump—"Professor Henry Larkin, from the Courtfield Opera House—"

"Oh, you!" beamed the Firebrand.

"I'm sorry," the voice went on, "that I couldn't see you yesterday, Miss Roynton-Clarke. It is— it is true that you are the daughter of the mayor of Larkham, is it not?"

"No!" Dianna thought, and grinned gleefully. In her heightened tone.

"You, quite true!"

"E—thank you! As I said, I am sorry. But if you would come to come to the Opera House at once, I can give you an audition. You must get here in half an hour, however, as I have a very important rehearsal at three!"

"Thanks! I'll be along right away!" Dianna promised.

And, with a breathless whoop, she hung up the receiver. She had got here—got her! But wait a minute! And suddenly she dashed, feverishly rang the Firebrand's Gavage, looking for a car to be sent at once. "Yolks! That's what some of being the daughter of a mayor—and she laughed. Now for Lily. She must get Lily."

Back she flew to Study No. 1. She rapped on the door. From inside came the voice of Barbara Redfern.

"Who is it?"

"Dianna," that girl shouted impatiently. "I want to see Lily!"

"Lily doesn't want to see you!"

"But look here— Oh, you'd!"

Dianna angrily shook the door, to find, to her mortification, that it was locked.

"Lily!" she cried.

A suffocated sob was her answer.

Dianna fumed. Oh, dash it! Well, never mind! Better Lily! If she couldn't go with her, then she'd have to go without her—in any case, she only needed to do things up with the professor. But, goodness, she'd have to look up! Back she skinned to Study No. 11, grabbed her hat and coat, and pepped down the stairs.

Corrie Jackson, on the steps, turned to stare as the Firebrand, like a whirlwind, came rushing towards her.

"Hi, you're not going out?"

"Yes, mistake! I am!" Dianna fired back.

"But you're gated—"

"Well, who cares?" Dianna cried rebelliously.

And the few on, to meet the car which had just drawn up outside the gate. She was queering now. Not Dianna to be put off by Corrie. It was doubtful, in that moment, if she would have stopped even for Miss Princess.

This was Lily's chance at last! At last! Reconciliation could wait. This should be her moment—this should show Lily how anxious she was, how eager she was, to help her! To return to Cliff House with an agreement with Professor Henry Larkin in her pocket!

Breathlessly she bundled into the

waiting car, was whisked away only a minute before, a majestic limousine swept in at the gates and parked smoothly on the cobble-stoned drive.

Mr. Royston-Clarke, her father, the mayor of Larchton, alighted.

"Wait here, Jennings!" he instructed the chauffeur.

Rather hesitantly he stepped into the school. He knew his way about. Up the Fourth Form passage he trod, to pause outside the door of Study No. 4, which had just come open to admit Babe. For a moment he looked, glancing the fair-haired little figure which staggered in the armchair. Then he turned.

"Lily, your Crying! What is the matter, child?"

Crismon, confused, suddenly dashing the tears from her eyes, the veil of Courtfield bounded out of her seat.

"What is it—oh?" he asked. He stared from Babe, biting her lip, to Made, frog-jer to Dumboy Clara, who was also in the room.

"Have you girls been quarreling here?"

Clara's lips curled.

"Not at all."

Clara shrugged.

"You don't mean—" He frowned.

"Diana?"

Lily jumped to her feet.

"Oh, Mr. Royston-Clarke, Diana didn't mean anything," Lily sobbed.

"She didn't understand. She doesn't think anything of me any more. Oh, mamma, won't you take me away from this school?" she pleaded.

"It was a mistake for me to come here. I ain't Miss Diana's sort!"

Mr. Royston-Clarke panted. He looked round. There very quietly but very worriedly he shook his head, and went off along the corridor. Heavily he climbed up the stairs, to enter Miss Frimrose's study where an indignant Connie Jackson was reporting his fire-brand daughter's latest delinquency. Miss Frimrose's eyes glared.

"Thank you, Connie! You may go!" she said. She rose to meet her visitor. "I am sorry, Mr. Royston-Clarke, that it should have been necessary to have sent for you."

Diana's father waved his arm wearily as he dropped into a chair.

"What has she been doing?" he asked.

Miss Frimrose told him. She told him of Diana's defiance, her lawlessness, her insolence, and her impudence. She told him that at that very moment Diana was breaking boards. She told him all that had happened these last few days. But more importantly did Miss Frimrose dwell upon the bad influence Diana was exercising upon Lily Walters.

Mr. Royston-Clarke, remembering Lily's dreadful upbringing, winced.

"Diana," Miss Frimrose summed up, "is by no means a desirable companion for the girl, Mr. Royston-Clarke. As

you know, I accepted Lily Walters with reluctance. I felt, however, that it was not fair to the girl to withhold the chance you so generously put in her way, and decided, finally, to proceed with the appointment of having her here. I consent"—and here Miss Frimrose paused—"consider Lily's still remaining here if you insist that Diana still looks after her. Either she must go, or—"

"Or what?" he asked.

"Or you must give me the power to consent her to another girl."

He hesitated deeply. Not at once did he reply. When he did:

"Miss Frimrose," he said sincerely, "I still want Lily to have this chance. I cannot understand what has come over Diana. I—I really thought she loved the girl. She— But still! That is your final word?"

"Certainly it is," Miss Frimrose said stiffly.

"And who," Mr. Royston-Clarke asked, "do you intend to put in charge of Lily?"

"A girl," Miss Frimrose replied, whom I have reason to believe has already taken a great interest in her. A girl who is a great influence for good in the school, whom Lily herself likes very much." She touched a bell.

"Please send Barbara Redfern and Lily Walters to me at once!" she instructed the maid who entered.

And while Mr. Royston-Clarke nervously depressed his fingers on the arm of the chair, the maid departed upon her errand.

"Thank you, quite! Cliff House?" Diana Royston-Clarke gasped.

And flustered, she, she flung herself into the vehicle as it glided up to the herb outside the Courtfield Opera House.

Thrilled, excited was Diana. She had succeeded! Professor Larkin had accepted the task of training Lily! Professor Larkin, dazzled by Diana's personality, had declared that if Lily had anything in her at all, he would get her on the stage in record time.

Further to that, he had accepted an advance fee for a course of lessons. The receipt, proof of her success, was in Diana's pocket now!

Reverently Diana laughed as the taxi hovered on. Oh, what a surprise for Lily! What a peace offering! She felt already that her prestige's feet were on the road to fame, she saw her own name linked proudly with the future opera star that was to take the music world by storm.

Five minutes was the lavish tip she pressed upon the pleased driver when finally the taxi deposited her at the gates of Cliff House School. Eagerly she burst in. Frances Barrett, temporary captain of the school now that

Stella Stage had left, met her in Big Hall and frowned.

"Diana, the headmistress wants you!"

"Oh, bother the Head!" Diana cried.

"Where's Lily?"

"With Miss Frimrose. And your father, too—"

Diana gave her one quick look, then off she flew. Broadly she tumbled into the study when Miss Frimrose's voice replied to her knock; and then, all at once, she pulled up. Four pairs of eyes fastened upon her at once.

Coldly condemning were the eyes of the headmistress; reproachful the eyes of her father. Barbara Redfern and Lily Walters merely looked uneasy.

"Er—hmm!" Mr. Royston-Clarke cleared his throat. "Diana—"

"Oh, Carmelidge, hullo!" Diana said hurriedly, using the nickname by which she always called her father. "But wait a minute! Lily, I was just told why are you staying at me like that, your little mother?"

"Lily," Miss Frimrose put in heavily, "Ah—! I think it is only fair to tell you of our decision right away, Diana. The time has come, she went on, "for us to make up our minds whether Lily Walters remains here under your influence or is sent away altogether. We are not sending her away, however. She is staying here. But in future, Diana, you will have as little to do with Lily Walters as possible."

Diana stared incredulously.

"You mean?"

"I mean," Miss Frimrose said, "that I have made other arrangements. From this moment Barbara is in charge of Lily Walters. Lily will be moved into Barbara's study. In all things concerning Lily, Barbara is accessible to me and will directly consult me."

Wildly, dazedly Diana stared at her father.

"Carmelidge, you've never consented to this!"

Mr. Royston-Clarke cleared his throat.

"I am afraid, my girl, I had no alternative."

"But—!— Oh, yinks! Lily!" Diana cried. "Lily, I'm sorry—for what I said. You're not against me, too—"

For answer Lily flushed. The look in her eyes showed that she was not against Diana—nor ever would be. She opened her mouth to speak, caught Miss Frimrose's glittering eyes, and mumbled something in a choked voice as she hung her head. Diana's hands clenched.

For a moment she stood stock-still, a crimson flush staining her fair face. Then she turned.

"I see," she said quietly. "Yes—I see!" She flushed round upon Barbara Redfern.

"I suppose," she added, her voice rising on a note of intense bitterness, "that I've got you to thank for this. You would stop in and spoil everything I've planned. You would interfere! But watch out! Watch out, that's all!" she cried passionately.

"You shall see, Barbara Redfern, whether you shall have the last laugh! And as for you—her eyes blazed her fury at the shrieking Lily—"You little traitor!" she cried with cutting scorn.

And then, before any of them could stop her, she flung open the door and savagely hurled it open. From Lily came a choked, heartrending cry:

"Diana!"

Slam!

With a crash that shook the corridor the door slammed. That was the Firebrand's reply!

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HER SECRET AT SWANLAKE



Their Suspect Still

"Do you feel like a good breakfast, girls?"

"Hello, Pam!"

Morning had come again to stately Swandale, after the thrilling night that it had been for Betty and Polly and Pam.

"What I don't like," grumbled Polly, as the three of them sat down to the breakfast table, "is the idea of going off to school!"

"Fraid we must," sighed Betty. "If Miss Butterfield had us asking to be allowed to have the morning off, because of all that's happened in the night, she'd have a fit. But it would be fine if we could all stay around this morning so as to be on hand when that mystery girl recovers consciousness. Until she does—well, she just remains a mystery!"

"Hardly it won't be long now before she does come to, and speak at last!" Polly impatiently exclaimed. "The doctor, when he got here, said there was only slight concussion, nothing to need an operation, thank goodness."

Some hasty disposing of eggs and bacon ended the talk to lapse for a few moments.

Then Polly, suddenly nodding towards a vacant place at the table, asked innocently:

"Wonder how our other patient is this morning?"

"Claire Ferrand?"

"Yes, Pam, poor Claire with her cold! Oh, and on top of that she had a splitting headache, hadn't she?"

"That's what she said the last time I had word with her in the night. She called out to me from her bedroom, you know, that she'd come in bed—"

"Ghatted with us, too, didn't she add?" chuckled Betty. "Better her having to be off in the car to school in a few minutes! We can't even stay around until Claire comes down!"

"How she can sleep on!" Polly said disgustedly. "I noticed the beds taken in her early morning cap. It

FOR NEW READERS,
PAM WILLOUGHBY of Morcove school has become a day-girl in order that she may have time to get in touch 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—Swandale.

WILHELM MURDO, having heard of Claire's fortune, wishes to take her place. She meets Claire and tells a plausible story to the effect that she believes is wanted by the police. She represents herself as an amateur detective and offers to take Claire to the East Wing at Swandale until she can clear her name. Claire, content, and Vivienne arrives at Swandale to be welcomed at the real Claire Ferrand. But BETTY HARTON, one of Pam's Murove friends, is at once suspicious of Vivienne. She and another classmate, POLLY LINTON—now staying at Swandale—go right when they discover a strange girl in one of the secret passages. She is unconscious. Although she is the real Claire Ferrand, and Vivienne, having exposure, decides to run away. (See next on.)

down," Polly grumbled, "look as if Claire Ferrand means to worry herself about that girl when we discovered in the night. Claire's own cold is more important than the state that poor girl was in, after falling down those dark steps in the east wing."

Betty frowned.

"Perhaps Claire's keeping to her room means that she is ashamed to face us; afraid of being questioned! For, although we don't know, even now, that she knows about that other girl, we do know that Claire's conduct all along has been very—uh—uh, though?"

Betty had broken off to give that surprised remark as they all three heard the voice of their support in the hall. Miss Tricky had come down from her bedroom after all, and was exchanging a few remarks with one of the maids.

Then the room door opened and the same in, wearing such a make that Polly said at once:

"Oh, you're better than, Claire!"

"Morning! You, I feel pretty good considering." But the smile was changing to a rather sullen one. "And so glad to hear that that girl wasn't really seriously injured after all! You

still don't know who she is, or how she came to be wandering about those secret passages in the night?"

"Perhaps you can throw light on the mystery!" Betty calmly spoke across to the suspect, who was now sitting down to breakfast.

"What! Look here, Pam," the girl who was Swandale's guest appealed to the schoolgirl daughter of the house. "I don't think you should sit there, allowing Betty and Polly to insult me!"

"There's no insult, Claire," was Pam's steady answer. "Only we naturally want to know what's going on. Last night wasn't the first time that girl was hiding in the east wing. Something has been going on—"

"Which I had to do with! If you say that," cried Miss Tricky, starting up angrily from her chair, "then I say it's an insult that I won't put up with! I'll get my breakfast when you've gone!"

Again the much-older girl turned to Pam.

"Now Pam, you understand! I shall catch the first train up to London to see the lawyer! I'm sorry; your parents wanted me to make Swandale my home, and I'm sure they never meant me to be treated like this—"

"They never imagined that you'd behave so strangely when you got to Swandale. You go on—"

"What do you mean, my going on?"

"Oh, you know perfectly well. And it has all led up to—to last night, and the discovery of that other girl in the east wing."

"Will you three," hinted the one they knew as Claire Ferrand, "kindly wait until she has recovered consciousness! Then see if her being in the east wing has had anything to do with me! Or do you think she is going to tell a lot of lies to sort of shield me?"

"No," Pam said, "by the look of her, that girl is all right as regards character. We can't believe that she was hiding about the place for a dishonest purpose!"

"That is to say, she wasn't out to rob Swandale! Well, I'm sure, I hadn't put

By MARJORIE
STANTON

her there in the east wing after robbing her! When I've come into such a huge fortune, as you know I have, I don't need to take from others!"

And Miss Tricky laughed once more. "Oh, get along off to school," she said, striding back to her chair. "I'll make it good-bye to you all, for I shan't be seeing you again. I shall pack a bag, and, as I say, go up to town, to my lawyer."

"You won't stay," Betty demurely suggested, "until that girl receives consolation?"

"No—why should I? I'm sorry for her, and I'll be glad to know how she gets on."

"Yes, well?" And Pam, as she made that characteristic remark, glanced at her wrist-watch. "It's half-past, girls!"

"Dash!" said Polly, sitting down again, to finish her breakfast.

"Timeous, isn't it?" Miss Tricky retorted then. "When you do so want to play at private detective! And then, too, there are those amateur theatricals that you're getting up! By the way, good idea! As I shan't be here, perhaps that girl will be able to take the part I was going to act!"

Betty and Pam were never ones to hand words uselessly. They were going to finish their breakfast in silence. Polly, of course, always ready for wordy warfare, might have engaged in a verbal duel with the subject; but a disapproving glance from Betty took effect.

So, a couple of minutes later, all three Monevians went away from the breakfast-room without having said another word to the much-older girl who, this morning, was in such an insolent, injured-innocent mood.

She, the impostor against whom nothing had been proved, even now, went on with her breakfast, alone at the table.

To her ears came the welcome sound of the Swanklake car, going off with its three passengers to Monroev School. And she gave a sudden little laugh.

Still here! Still at Swanklake, although there had been that moment of dire panic, in the night, when she had been as the point of leaving the place.

She had even opened her bedroom window and let down some tied-together sheets and blankets, meaning to go out that way. And then had come the sudden deterring thought: "After all, why not wait?"

Why not, she had suddenly asked herself when she had been told that the girl found in the east wing was likely to remain unconscious for several hours yet. "Comatose!" And that even meant, sometimes, a lying unconscious for whole days.

But there could be no thought of staying on at Swanklake this morning. That would be running too, too big a risk. At any moment, yes, at any moment the girl might regain her senses, and then her first word, surely, would be to give her name. And the name—Claire Ferrand!

As imperative as ever was the need for flight. But this was far better, to have waited for morning to go away probably as one who was simply going off to London. Walking out of Swanklake, attended!

Had she gone in the night, by now they might even have been breaking open her bedroom door, to find the room deserted—in disorder, and those bedclothes dangling, in tell-tale manner, from the open window as if blown by the wind.

"Oh, much better to go off as I mean to do presently," Vivienne Munro, the impostor, thought to herself, finishing her second cup of coffee. "There'll be

no hue and cry for me—how can there be, until that girl does come round. And that, after all, may not be for a good while yet."

The empty coffee-cup clattered back into its saucer. Vivienne Munro, her dining table again, jumped up.

"So now I'm off to kids—at Monroev School!"

"Miss Tricky's" Latest!

ROUND about seven o'clock that evening a breathless postcard, marked "Express" and addressed to Betty Barton, was handed to her by the porter at Monroev School with the urgent word for Betty Barton. Wanted on the phone!

"Oh, good!" cried the Fern captain.

"That'll be Pam, for a cert!"

"I'll come down with you!" Polly excitedly offered. "But you two"—as Pam and Munro also three down pens that had been scratching away at them—"have an need for you!"

"Pardon, Polly dear; but, really, we—"

"Indeed, what an diggings!"

But it was to see Munro's saying more. Those to whom the complaint was addressed were now streaking for the stairs.

Whereupon it occurred to the dainty one that she might as well nip back to the study and help herself to a snack from the corner cupboard as compensation for the hard life she was led.

As for Paula Cress, she went into another study to let Madge, Tom, and several other good chums know about Pam's ringing up. The result was that they all went downstairs together, to form a waiting crowd behind Betty, as she spoke on the phone.

Polly, of course, was already there, and as a minute Munro came down, quarantining an orange.

"Then Betty being up, and so they could clamour to be told."

"What did Pam say, Betty? What's the latest?"

"The doctor's looked in again, this time with his partner. They're saying that the girl must be treated by a specialist. One will be down to-morrow from London."

Betty was returning to the state as she appeared. She and her chums started to mount to their Fern quarters, one tongue going as fast as another ceased.

The affair of Swanklake's "mystery patient" was still providing a jollity of comment when the chums were at the landing off which their study corridor turned.

"Oh, but it's maddening for us," Polly bawled loudly, "that we don't know who the girl is even now!"

"And not likely to know," Betty rejoined, "until the day after to-morrow!"

"Why-a-ah!" Polly's consternation caused her to stand still on the landing, bringing the rest to a stop. "But you said, Betty, that Pam said to-morrow the specialist will be down."

"Yes; but can you imagine their allowing the girl to speak at once when they have pulled her round? I can't. She'll have to be kept quiet. The brain is a funny thing!"

"Best to be like Munro, and not have one!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

So, with another peal of laughter, due to Polly's habitually pretence of hostility towards the adored imp, they all flitted into the corridor, and were soon continuing the debate in Study No. 12.

There was a feeling that prep might very well be finished before breakfast in the morning. Authority, had it known,

would not have agreed; but Study No. 12 was unconscious in thinking so.

They had more important matters than school work to tackle.

VIVienne Munro took steadily satisfying steps from the top of some attic stairs in Monroev's great school-house.

There was no light up here, as it would have shown her to be smiling to herself in a most excited, gleeful manner.

She had just overheard, and what she had overheard meant tremendous possibilities for her.

The real Claire Ferrand was not expected to regain her senses until late to-morrow at the earliest. Then was the opinion of two doctors who had studied her case.

"And I shouldn't wonder if that Betty was right just now in what I heard her saying to the other girls."

Vivienne breathed to herself. Even when Claire had had attention from the specialist, she may not be allowed to say a word at once. In that case, I'll even have until the day after to-morrow.

And to-morrow the Ferrand jewels should be reaching Swanklake.

There had been the lawyer's promise to have the jewels sent down from London, and that arrangement still held good.

He was not to know that the girl who had rung him up to ask to be allowed to have the use of the jewels had since gone away from Swanklake. The lawyer knew absolutely nothing as to the real state of affairs at Swanklake.

So this was over the dazzling possibility for her—Vivienne. She had only to return to Swanklake to-morrow morning, and she could be there when the jewels turned up.

They might even have arrived by registered post by the time she walked in.

"And as I'll have to do would be," she chuckled to herself, back in the attic to which she had found her way in secret, directly darkness closed over Monroev, "tell Pam a few lies, ask kindly after the patient, and then walk out again—with the jewels in my possession, after all!"

Something like a coup that would be a real triumph, leaving one so enriched that there could be an end to this living by one's wits.

Even if the lawyer only sent the pearls, reckoning that no girl so young as Claire Ferrand should want to wear diamonds when going out to parties, those pearls alone were worth thousands.

And the risk of coming to grief, after all—was there such a risk? Yes, a big one. The doctors might have taken too serious a view of the real Claire's condition. She might, after all, regain consciousness before being treated. In other words, one might walk in at Swanklake to-morrow morning, only to find that all was known!

No doing another getaway then.

"I'll be for it, right enough!" Vivienne agonizedly realized. "And prison, too! Oh, but I'm going to take a chance!" she firmly decided. "When it means a possible fortune, against the mere fifty pounds I've had up to now—"

And even that fifty pounds was not yet hers to touch. It was in her pocket only as a cheque which had yet to be cashed. There, again, it might get to be a case of "nearly a slip between cup and lip."

Right on through the wistful evening Vivienne hung about in this safe, well-hiding-place which Monroev School had offered her. She was not going to

venture forth, to creep away, until girls and staff alike had gone to bed.

So, at dead of night, she was no longer haunting Morrone School in secret. She had crept down through the dark and silent school-house, lit herself out into the starry night, and had flitted for the cyclorama.

"She hoped maliciously that the bicycle she was 'borrowing' was 'that Betty's'!"

"Sure her right if it is!" grinned Virviana Mauro, wheeling the stolen machine to where she knew it could be put through a gap in the boundary hedge. "If it hadn't been for Betty and her class, I'd never have been so afraid at times. She's very nearly found me out near everything more than once!"

Soon the crafty girl was riding away from Morrone school, pedalling warily along the narrow, rough road which waded its way over the moorland water in the direction of Swanslake.

Long after midnight this brave schemer that she was got rid of the stolen bicycle. She was then still two miles from Swanslake, but she had no further use for the machine.

Wheating the machine off the by-road, she laid it flat in a corner, a dense growth of gorse-bushes. To make doubly sure of its not being chanced upon for many a day, she covered it over with a good deal of dead bracken.

Then she picked her way in the darkness to a nearby stone quarry. It was one no longer worked, and in the half-darkness, indeed, she had deposited the single piece of luggage which she had taken with her when, yesterday morning, she left Swanslake—to walk to the station."

By the light of the stars, Virviana made her way down to the floor of the quarry, got to the shed, and remained there for the rest of the night.

Daylight would find her making herself nice and tidy again, by means of things which the week-end bag contained. Meantime, she ate a little more of the food with which she had recently provided herself yesterday morning, and could even enjoy a drink of hot coffee.

There was a patent flask that she had primed with coffee before she left Swanslake, and what was left of it was still piping hot. A few sips not only warmed her, but made her come over quite pleasantly droopy, and this aided in her going off to sleep.

She awoke long after daybreak. By her watchwork it was half-past eight. She ate a few biscuits, and drank the last of the coffee. A drowsiness assailed her, presently, that she would be turning up at Swanslake looking as sweet as ever.

Her plan was not to put in an appearance at Pam's home until the middle of the morning. But in a little while she left the quarry, going away from it all the more wary because now she had the bag to carry.

By ten o'clock she was on the outskirts of the great Swanslake estate, quite openly walking along the road like a girl who had recently alighted from a train at the wayside station. She felt herself to be as strong-curved, as audacious as ever; and then, suddenly, fright seized her.

Beyond the ash fence which girdled Swanslake's private park she glimpsed a gathered man, who was obviously one of the woodmen.

His lounging stride was bringing him towards the road, and if she went on she would encounter him just where he had to clamber over a stile. But she could not go on, to let herself be seen by him. He belonged to Swanslake, and that made her—afraid!

In sudden panic, she darted off the road, to hide while he might go past. There was no time for her to get far from the road; she had to resort to a clump of hollies, huddling down behind it, with the bag beside her.

Her heart was pounding, sending the blood throbbing behind her eyes. She had thought she had sufficient nerve to walk into Swanslake quite calmly, this morning, and instead, at sight of this man, who was only an outdoor servant, she had gone to bits. How, then—how was she going to have the nerve

of other nights, from the runs over those in the park?"

"You don't say, Mr. Adams! What, the old chapel?"

"Yes, Mrs. Brinkie, 'twas so. There's been some queer doings, no mistake. And yet they tell me the young woman has a nice lads; nothing of the look of a wrong 'un."

More than this did Virviana overhear before the man. But it was one of those first remarks which, to her, remained of most importance. "Just the same!"



"HOW'S the mystery girl, Pam?" the stern Claire Ferrand asked, with forced composure. "Has she come round yet?" Pam shook her head. "Not yet." The inspector did not show her relief. But she was thinking: "Still a chance for me!"

She could hear the worthy fellow whistling a tune as he leisurely clambered over the stile.

Then he came traiking this way along the road. Lucky for her that he was not a gamekeeper, with dogs at heel to nose her out. The risk was great enough as it was—OH, and now there was someone else—a woman—coming from the opposite direction.

The heart of Virviana Mauro beat faster than ever with dread.

She felt sure that in a few moments these two wanderers on the road would meet—would stop for a friendly word—within a few yards of where she crouched.

Will Her Luck Hold?

"HALLO, Mr. Adams!"

"Morning, Mrs. Brinkie! Keeps fine!"

"And what's the news this morning, Mr. Adams, up at the house? Have you heard?"

"About the young lady? Still the same—just the same! Marvel, isn't it? But we know one thing, anyhow, although she hasn't yet come round, she is able to give account of herself. She got to where she was, in the east wing,

the man had said. And that was apparently the news about the real Claire Ferrand."

"My luck again!"

She, Virviana, could now forget how her nerve had been failing her only a few minutes since. She picked up her bit of luggage and returned to the quiet country road. A quarter of a mile of further walking, and then she was at the belated gateway from which the famous avenue ran uphill through the park to stately Swanslake.

She had gone half-way up the drive, walking as boldly as ever, when, to her amazement, she saw a girl enjoying a gallop across the grass on a spirited pony.

Pam Willoughby!

"Dash it!" Virviana muttered. "Why isn't she at school! But I don't care. I know I'm safe until Claire does make a statement, whether Pam's about the place or not!"

The fat little pony had been set to gallop this way, and so it seemed as if Pam had seen her—Virviana. In any case, Virviana would have felt bound to wave to attract attention.

She dumped her bag, and walked out on to the open grassland, to meet the schoolgirl who, instead of being at her

desk in class, was enjoying a morning off.

"Hello, Pam!" said Vivienne, with a laughing air, as Swanslake's "little lady" pulled up within speaking distance. "Not at school then?"

"No. Jennings had to go to Krooter to get things that the doctor said we must have. No I couldn't have the car."

"Hah! Nice to be a day girl, isn't it?"

"Not as nice as it might have been," Pam calmly answered the cheer. "You'll remember, Claire, it was arranged that I should be a day girl at Morocco, except for your sake. But I don't know that the arrangement has worked well."

"We were all right, you and I," said the shame Claire Ferrand, "until those classes of yours started to turn you against me. But I am not going to start about all that now. I've come back, and not to be upset again!"

"Why have you come back, when you talked of staying up in London?"

"Yes, I know; I did go off yesterday morning in a rage. You had all offended me terribly! Then, on the way to the station I began to get over things that had been said. I suppose I was walking off my anger. At any rate, I thought I wouldn't go to London, after all. So I went to Sandlay Bay instead—stayed the night at a nice hotel, too."

"I see. You must have come away early this morning."

"I felt I ought to come back and—well, patch things up with you. After all, my lawyer and your parents meant me to be at Swanslake. And I should be sorry for them to hear that we've been quarrelling."

Pam received this in silence, heading forwards to get her pony's always back completely.

"How is that girl, Pam? Has she come round yet?"

"No. But they're getting a specialist from London to handle the case."

"Oh, really? Do hope he does some good! By the way, Pam, any letters for me this evening?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

And Pam, bringing her pony round, gave a "see you later" nod, and then went off upon another glorious gallop.

"She's another—just the same," Vivienne scowled to herself, contrasting upon her way up to the mansion.

"Always like it—to reserved. Good breeding—but! Going to come in for all this place some day, and be the grand lady! Oh, well, I'm not going to have such a bad time, come to that—if only the luck holds!"

But there was no registered package for her when she got indoors. Not even a line from the lawyer, to say that the jewels would be along by a later post. There was an afternoon delivery every week-day; perhaps they would come to hand then!

Good Mrs. Goodden, the housekeeper, was surprised at "Claire Ferrand's" walking in upon her this, when it had been so evident yesterday that the young lady would be going in a huff.

But the impostor was as ready as ever with more lies, and it was in her favour that Mrs. Goodden could spare little time for talk, having the so-called mystery-girl upon her hands upstairs.

So, within five minutes, Vivienne Moore was back in her room at Swanslake. She was faced with a wait of several hours, until the afternoon post

came in. And, whilst she waited, she would be aware of the specialist's arrival; would have to think of him as doing his skilled, magical work at once!

A bold girl, Vivienne Moore; but the eye of this fateful wily afternoon found her almost in a state of nervous collapse.

She had come upstairs again, and was waiting now behind the closed door—standing close behind it, so as to catch any whisper that might be voiced by someone just come from the saloon's bedside.

A little after four, and the short day nearly at an end, and the postman almost due.

Hark! There was someone coming along to her door. Perhaps everything was known!

A moment more, and a gentle tap was followed by Pam's inquiry:

"You there, Claire? I want you!"

"No, was refusing to go out to her. Making a desperate effort to appear as sane, Vivienne went to the door.

"Are you just going downstairs," she lied. "Are you?"

"Yes. The surgeon from London has done the trick. The girl would have spoken directly she opened her eyes, but he wouldn't let her. It makes me think of something Betty said; that they'd insist upon the patient not exciting herself—going to sleep for a bit. But,"—Pam fervently added, passing downstairs with the one whose imposture had still to be revealed—"it's splendid that the poor girl will go on all right now."

"The post isn't in yet!" Vivienne presently asked as airily as possible.

"Oh, but there is the postman!"

And she flew across the hall to get rushing out by the porch-door, having seen the man arriving on his bicycle.

"Anything for me, postman—Miss Ferrand you know?"

"No, miss, nothing for you."

"NINETEEN!"

The jewels had not come yet, and not a line from the lawyer about them, even now. Whilst upstairs, in the sick-room, the real Claire was at last a restored victim of the accident. A little sleep, and then—she would speak at last!

Vivienne's brain turned giddy now, and she felt the sickness that comes of fright. Remain at Swanslake for another night, in the hope of the jewels arriving by the first post in the morning—how dare she?

"Here's a car, Claire—"

"What! Oh, yes—yes!"

Pam had muttered out to join her on the gravel sweep.

"From Morocco, Claire—"

"From—from where?"

"Can't you see?" Pam severely smiled; "Polly Linton putting her head out of the window and waving! Oh, and there's Betty, too! How jolly!"

The fire car whisked about on the white carpet, and stopped.

Out jumped Betty and Polly, and after them alighted a stylish lady who was a stranger to Vivienne. But the gaily-minded girl instantly guessed:

"Mercere's headmistress!" And it meant—

What else could it mean?

Her, Vivienne's, hiding at Morocco School, last night, was known!

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BETWEEN OURSELVES

MY DEAR READERS.—A very, very happy New Year to you all! That is my wish, which is shared by all the contributors to your favourite SCHOOLGIRL.

I wonder if you've made lots of New Year's resolutions! I expect you have—though if I know anything about these resolutions the majority of these won't be kept very long. But, of course, it's fun making them, for all that.

But there's one resolution which I do hope every single one of you has made—and intends to keep—and that is, not to miss one single copy of THE SCHOOLGIRL during 1935.

That shouldn't be a very hard resolution to keep, now, should it? Though I might suggest that you improve upon it by resolving to place a standing order with your newsagent for the paper to be delivered to you every week.

That's a really sensible idea, for not only does it save you the bother of visiting your newsagent's every Saturday, but it means that you'll never have to worry about the issue being sold out. You'll get your SCHOOLGIRL every week for certain!

For my part, I've made a vast number of Good Resolutions—in many, in fact, that I've already forgotten most of them. But one there is that I am going to carry out, and that is, to make your favourite paper even better.

This is where you can help me. I want you to write to me—all of you—and I want you to tell me just how you like all our present features. I want you to put forward suggestions you may have for improving THE SCHOOLGIRL. Don't be shy of sending me your comments and criticisms; I shall welcome them all.

Will you do this? Will you write to me—as often as you like? I delight in reading your letters, and the more I receive, the happier I am. So don't be shy; don't wait to pluck up courage. Write now!

Of course, you are all longing to read the grand, long complete Cliff House School story which appears in next Saturday's issue, and which again features Diana Rayson-Clarke.

The title of this powerful tale is—

"A MISFIT AT CLIFF HOUSE."

By Hilida Richards.

Hain & Co. are to be the first in a story which is packed from start to finish with exciting incidents.

Long instalments of our two popular serials, a sparkling complete tale, starring Happy-Go-Lucky Laine, and a breezy, full-of-ideas edition of OUT OF SCHOOL HOURS, make next Saturday's SCHOOLGIRL one not to be missed on any account.

With best wishes,

YOUR EDITOR.

FOUND out at last! Her cunning deceit known! Is that what it means for the impostor? A thrilling instalment of this exciting Morocco School and mystery serial will be one of the many topping features in next Saturday's SCHOOLGIRL. Make sure of your copy by ordering it at once.