

COMPLETE
CLIFF HOUSE
STORY

EVERY SCHOOLGIRL'S OWN PAPER

EXCITING
MURDER
SERIAL

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EVERY
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Incorporating
"SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN"



"BABS WINS!"

One of many exciting
moments in this week's
grand long complete Cliff
House School story:

"THE SKATER IN THE
SCARLET MASK"

COMPLETE THIS WEEK: A Grand Story of Famous Cliff House School, Featuring Barbara Redfern and Phyllis Howell



THE SKATER IN THE SCARLET MASK

Lonely River



"FALL in, the skaters!" boomed Tuesday Clara Trevlyn cheerfully. "Here! My gaily aunt, isn't it cold? Mabel, have you seen Phyllis Howell?"

"No." Barbara Redfern's eyebrows lifted in surprise. "Isn't she here?"

"Well, do you think I'd be asking you of the worst?" Clara retorted.

Barbara Redfern frowned, pacing round at the merry group of girls which was gathered in the quadrangle of ancient and historic Cliff House School.

Bright, happy, and smiling these girls, but all were shuffling and stamping for, as business Clara had observed, it really was cold. It had been cold for several days now—so cold that the rivers in the neighborhood were frozen over with a thick layer of ice, and the trees gleamed frostily beneath a burden of icicles and glittering frost.

The best of it was, from Cliff House's point of view, that the weather showed no signs of breaking up. The experts prophesied, indeed, that it would last for another fortnight, at least.

And so at Cliff House skating had become the most popular sport, transcending even the interest in hockey, which held the school's attention for the

By HILDA RICHARDS

greater part of the winter and spring terms.

That sport was given an added popularity by the great Courtfield Carnival, which was to be held at the end of the week.

The Courtfield Carnival was always an event to provide great excitement, and usually it was held at the Courtfield Ice Rink. But this year, thanks to the extreme severity of the weather, it was to take place in the grounds of Courtfield Lodge, the residence of Lady Laura Courtfield.

And, of course, Cliff House was entered for all sorts of events. There was to be the ice hockey tournament, the races, the figure skating competition, obstacle races, and all manner of competitions.

Clara Trevlyn, as junior games cap-

tain of the school, had got a fairly strong team together; but then, so had Cliff House's great rivals, Courtfield School, which, this year, was openly boasting that it would knock Cliff House into a cocked hat.

Clara was grimly determined that Cliff House should not be knocked into a cocked hat. Clara, indeed, always ambitious, had decided that Cliff House was going to win the carnival cup, or hat!

Clara had high hopes. So had Barbara Redfern, Mabel Lynn, Jeanine Custaine, Lolla Carroll, and the rest of the team. But it must be confessed that these hopes were more or less centred in Phyllis Howell, the Fourth Form's champion skater in the absence of Joan Cartwright, who was at the moment making time in Hollywood. Phyllis was truly a wonderful skater! But where was Phyllis now?

"Anybody seen her?" Clara asked, stamping her feet.

"Well, I guess I saw her in class this morning," Lolla Carroll observed.

"Miss!" Clara said witheringly. "So did everybody else. Oh, my hat! Mabel, go and see if the champion is life stout, will you?"

"Why, of course! Mabel, you come, too!" Mabel asked.

"Rather?"

And together the two raced off, glad, if the truth be told, at a little exercise. Through Big Hall they trodged up the

WHO is the mystery figure—the skater in the scarlet mask? No one knows. Only Mabel and Co. realize that she is a threat to their success in the Carnival—a threat to their cheer's happiness. They mean to unmask her!

stairs, and into the Fourth Form corridor. At the door of Study No. 5, which Phyllis shared with Peggy Proctor, Babs knocked. Peggy's "Yes" laid their entry.

But there was no sign of Phyllis. "Oh, Peggy, where's Phyllis?" Babs asked.

"I don't know. Went out nearly an hour ago. I should think."

"Did she take her skates?"

"Well, I don't know; but she did take her coat. They might have been in it."

Babs hit her lip. She looked at Mabs. Together they went out; Babs a little glum and worried. Mabs glanced at her.

"Babs, what is the matter with Phyllis?"

Babs looked at her quickly. "Has she noticed it, too?" she asked.

"You mean about her being glum and moody?" Mabs shrugged. "I should think everybody must have noticed it. She seems to have been so since somehow, as if—as if—oh!" And Mabs searched for the word. "Well, as if she had something on her mind," she said. "Sort of strange. Remember her last night? She was sitting in her study after call-over bell—hadn't even heard the bell! And did you notice her at breakfast this morning?"

"Yes, she hardly ate anything. And in class," Babs said. "She actually said the Hall that a 'logarithm' was another word for an 'agreement'." And Babs frowned.

Decidedly there was something wrong with Phyllis Howell of the Fourth, they usually so bright, so alert, so sunny, alive Phyllis!

In the quad Clara received the news of her absence with dismay.

"But I told her we were going to practice," she cried. "Oh, great pip! What's the good of practicing without Phyllis? Babs, what the diabolos are we to do?"

"I don't know. Anyway, it's obvious she's not here," Babs said. "And as we can do no good by arguing about it, I vote we push off."

Clara granted. The rest of the team looked rather dismayed. It rather dampened enthusiasm to have the star of the side missing. But, as Babs said, they could serve no useful purpose by hanging about.

Clara granted. "D.K.!" Then pick up your bags," she said, a little crossly.

"I see, though—And in the act of stooping for her own bag, she crossed and glanced at Phyllis's seat."

"Whoops! In what Phyllis?" They all stopped. A figure wearing a green hat and a fur-trimmed coat had wandered through the gates. A figure which, at the distance, was remarkably like the girl of whom they were in search. But Babs shook her head.

"No; it's not Phyllis."

It wasn't. In figure and in outline the girl was exactly like Phyllis. Her walk was almost the same. But now, as the name occurred, they all saw that however much this girl might resemble Phyllis at a distance, there was absolutely no likeness in the characteristics of the two faces.

This-lipped and narrowed this girl was, with a cynical sort of smile which caused Clara, who made likes and dislikes on sight, to bridle at once. She stopped and looked at them.

"Fourth Form?" she asked, with a lift of the brows.

"Well," Clara answered, "who are you?"

"Know a girl named Phyllis

Howell?" the stranger asked, without answering the question.

Clara sniffed. "You know her?"

"I'm looking for her."

"Then," Clara said, with a hint of satisfaction, "you won't find her. She's gone out."

"Oh!" The girl looked at her.

"Thanks," she thanked, and nodded.

"Then perhaps I know where to find her." And, with another glance over the group, another walking stride, she turned on her heel, walking away in the direction from which she had come.

Clara gazed.

"My hat! Who's she?"

"Friend of Phyllis?—what?" Joanna observed, and scowled her mouth into her eye, gazing after the retreating figure.

"Not the sort of thing, however."

Clara shrugged. She was more than a little put out now. Clara hated things to go wrong with her plans, and she was feeling rather sore that Phyllis should have gone off without even an apology. In rather disappointed silence she led the way towards the gates.

They reached the tobacop. As they came almost of it a fat girl loomed in the doorway, waving a hand. Through her big round spectacles she blinked at the group.

"Oh, I'm sorry, you girls, here you are!" Beanie Hunter beamed. "I was waiting for you. I—I'm going skating, you know. Ahem! I say, Clara—"

"Keep it!" Clara advised. "We've no time for gossiping."

"Oh, readily, you know?" Beanie winked slyly. "Look here, you know, I've got a message—"

"Keep that, too!" Clara sniffed.

"Come on, kids!"

"But—but it's a message from Phyllis Howell."

"Eh!" Clara stopped dead.

"Oh?" Beanie blinked confusedly as she found a chosen pair of eyes upon her. "Er—Phyllis said that—that as she couldn't turn up for practice this afternoon, you'd better let me take her part. That is to say, Phyllis means to say that, you know." Beanie added hastily. "Knowing what a slipping skater I am—"

Clara gazed.

"You mean to tell us, you fat duffer, that all the time we've been waiting you had this message?"

"Oh, that Phyllis says?"

"Well, she said she had to go out. She didn't say where. Oh, really, Clara, I wish you wouldn't glare at me like that, you know." Beanie added warmly. "It wasn't my fault if I couldn't find you—I mean—mean it wasn't my fault if you weren't in the tobacop when I was here, but Phyllis gave me a shilling, you know—that is to say, she lent me a shilling."

"And is that her only message?"

"Yes!"

Clara breathed hard and deeply; she turned to Babs.

"Babs, will you deign for Phyllis?" she asked. "You've our next best, and," Clara added glumly, "if Phyllis is going on at this rate, it looks as if you'll have to do the job for her."

Babs nodded, but she paled a face. She was not as good as Phyllis—and was the first to admit the fact. With herself, instead of Phyllis, as leader, the prospects of the Cliff House team in carrying off the Cavalier Cup would be distinctly less rosy.

They reached the gates, striking left across the footpath that led to the boat-house on the River Pathosier. Above, a watery sun hung motionless in the bleak heavens, and before them the water, in the grip of the cold frost, gleamed smooth and hard.



THERE was a crash as Babs went down on the ice and the others piled up on top of her. While the mystery girl, who had so cleverly tricked the chums by her skating skill, sped on up the river.

The river seemed alive with girls, all wearing the Cliff House colors; there was a fair sprinkling of boys from Friendside School, too. Opposite the boathouse a crowd of Ladies Third Formers, headed by Mary Trebrers, had made a long slide, and, with shrieks and yells, were engaged in a vigorous tug-of-war with a section of the Upper Third, headed by Madge Stevens.

Frazer Frost of the Fourth, showing off, as usual, was demonstrating her ability on one long, sleek to the admiration of the boys. Duquesne Esmond of the Second Form, farther away, in lengthy detachment, a group of Cliff House seniors were cutting graceful capers and figures as they skated over the coated surface.

"Badder a crowd," Clara observed. "Methinks our sea is to get further up the river. What's for a race?"

"Dance!"

"Skates on!"

"Now, as far as the ice!" Clara sang.

"Babe, you're in the middle. Ready?"

"What-fo?"

"Then—go!"

They were off. Half a mile it was to the hat which Clara had named—an odd, ramshackle building now, which had served Cliff House as a boathouse in the days of long ago.

Swish, swish! went the skates; Marjorie Huxtable, Janet Jordan, and Marcella Biquet well in the front; then Clara and Babe and Mabel catching up, holding them, to be caught up and passed in their turn, by Lolla Carroll, Marie Beal, and the new Beatrice Beverley. Clara granted.

"Come on, Babe; you've got your legs now! Show what you're made of!"

Babe hit her lip. How Phyllis would have run away with this! she reflected. But she put it as sport. Grimly, doggedly, she forged ahead. She passed Beatrice, then Lolla, and, going strongly now, caught up Marie, and made a neck-to-neck race.

Then the hat, which was the winning post, came in sight. Babe reloaded her efforts. Now, with a whim, she swished westward, and, half a dozen yards in front, reached the hat just as the door came open and another girl appeared.

Babe, flying past, turned one quick look upon her, and then she blinked. What was this? What— And for a moment almost believed herself to be dreaming. For this girl, most astonishingly, wore a vivid market mask over her face.

That Babe observed in the instant she flashed past; she also observed something else. The girl carried a case—a case in which two initials were most plainly imprinted,—"P. H." Phyllis Howell's case!

But the girl was not Phyllis Howell herself. Phyllis chose wore a green hat, and had no collar-rod such as this girl wore; yet— And the truth flashed upon Babe as she remembered where she had seen that green hat, and that fur-trimmed coat before. Less than half an hour ago they had been worn by the mysterious girl who had inspired about Phyllis in the drive of Cliff House School.

For a moment Babe caught her eyes glancing through the slit of her mask as she flashed past. The girl hesitated, made a half-retreat, as if to retreat, and then, boldly skating forward, shot across the opposite side of the river.

"I say!" Babe called.

"The girl in the mask!"

"Yes! Look!" Lolla cried. "She's got Phyllis' bag!"

"Her?" yelled Clara Trevelyn.

But the girl, with one startled glance, was skating on. Babe made a move. Phyllis had gone out with that bag; then, had it come into the possession of this girl? Something here which must decidedly require to be explained. She started to head the girl off.

"Stop!" she cried.

But the masked skater did not stop. Abruptly she turned, sticking as Babe made a grab. Babe missed, tripped forward, went down with a crash, and Clara, racing on, piked on top of her. Marcella, unable to stop, added herself to the scene. There was a yell.

"Oh, my hat! Get off!"

"Get after that girl!"

"Get after a racket, moon like!"

Lolla whistled. "Good! Look at her!"

Babe sat upon the ice, gasping. She looked. There was the girl, a hundred yards away already, heading like the wind up-river, in the direction of Cliff Copse.

Babe blinched. Even in her momentary confusion and mystification she felt an awfully admiration for the prowess of the girl as a skater!

What speed! What sure-footedness!

"Anyway, follow her!" she cried.

"What's in?"

She, Clara, and Marcella scrambled up. The race was forgotten then; for they went, skating furiously; but as well try to catch a deer as their quarry! She reached the bend where the river normally flowed between two banks. She disappeared.

"Never mind! After her!" Beatrice Beverley cried.

And after her they went—what! Babe and Clara reached the bend. They skidded round it, and then, skating on, blinked. Here the Falls were straightened out again. For nearly a mile one could look straight along its course, but of the mysterious skater in the market mask there was no sign.

They stopped.

"Must have gone into the copse!" Clara cried.

And that seemed to be the only reasonable solution. On the left of the river, Cliff Copse, looking like a summer forest of lacy Christmas-trees in its glistering coat of ice and frost crystals, offered the girl natural retreat, except for the grim-looking, half-ruined, half-rotten old Miner's Mill, which was entirely surrounded by a wide sweep of water that made it unapproachable when the river was not frozen, and which stood forbiddingly sentinal on the opposite bank.

"Search the copse!"

"Come on!" Mabel cried.

They swed on. Passing only to kick off their skates, they plunged into the copse. It was not a large strip of woodland. It required little exploration, and there were few places, especially in the winter, where a girl could hide from the inquisitive eyes of twenty intrigued and excited school-girls. From end to end they explored it, gathering finally in bewilderedness in the glade that formed its centre.

"Well, where the dickens—" cried Clara Trevelyn.

"Must have gone into the mill!" Marcella Biquet said.

"Then—" Mabel! Who's that?"

And they all stopped, wheeling round; for, of a sudden, from the direction of the river, came a crunching footstep. Through the trees a form loomed up—a girl's form, wearing the familiar Cliff House hat

and the regulation dark brown coat. They stared in astonishment.

"Well," cried Mabel Lynn, "if it isn't Phyllis Howell herself!"

A Girl with a Problem



PHYLLIS HOWELL it was. What a strange, startled-looking Phyllis!

Normally, Phyllis Howell was one of the choicest girls in the Fourth Form at Cliff House. Merry and sparkling her blue eyes; pink and white her pretty complexion; always ready for any prank, and always full of high spirits.

But there was no trace of high spirits now. That pink-and-white complexion had given place to an almost haggard yellowness. She looked nervous, ill-at-ease, almost afraid.

"Well!" granted Clara. "Where the dickens have you sprang from?"

Phyllis looked her lips.

"I—I heard you in the wood," she said.

"And did you," Clara asked, "see a girl in a market mask?"

Phyllis flushed.

"Well, I—that is to say—Oh, please," she desperately looked out, "don't ask me questions. It—it's all right now, isn't it? I'm here. No, Clara, don't look at me like that," she appealed. "Did Bessie give you my message?"

"Yes, Bessie gave me your message," Clara said gruffly, while the others grouped round, mystified and wondering. "But she gave it to me when we had already given you up."

"Phyllis," she added quietly, "I don't know what's the matter. If you don't want to tell us, then I guess it's your business, but I do want you to play fair with us. You know that you've entered for the Carnival Cup. You know that we're relying upon you to help us win that cup, but we can't win, Phyl, if you don't show your best form, and you'll never get your best form, if you don't practise. Now tell us," Clara asked, in that blunt way of hers, "are you still keen on this competition?"

Phyllis wavered.

"Why, yes, of course."

"And you're still going to practise?"

"Yes."

"Now?"

"Well, if you want me to—"

"No do," Clara said grimly; "but I guess practising means that you'll have to have skates. Where are your skates?"

Phyllis gulped.

"I—I left them—" she began, and paused. "Oh, Clara, can't I borrow a pair?"

Again Babe glanced at her oddly. A pang of pity shot through her. Poor old Phyllis! She did look so worried; so worried.

"Well, if you like, Phyll, you can borrow mine," Mabel Lynn offered generously. "I'm only one of the make-something, anyway!"

"Oh, thank you!" Phyllis gulped.

"Then right," Clara cried. "We'll all race back. Now, Mabel, get off those skates! Phyl, put them on. Babe, give her a hand, will you?"

And while Phyllis sat on the trunk of a fallen tree, Babe sprang nimbly to her side. She looked up at her.

"Phyl!" she whispered.

"Oh, you, Babe—"

"You're sure, old girl, there's nothing else you'd like to say? No, don't look



SEEING a figure moving between the trees, Clara and the others started in pursuit. "There she is!" the Tomboy panted. "After her!" But Babs had already recognized the fugitive as the girl in the green coat!

at me like that. I'm not trying to nose into your business! But I can see, Phil, you're in some bother or other. If there's anything I can do to help—"

Phyllis bit her lip.

"Thanks, Babs, that—that's awfully sweet of you. But there's nothing, old girl. I shall be all right presently, you see."

But it was plain from the start that Phyllis was far from all right. She looked queer; she looked nervous. Though she held her own in the race back to the beach, she was no better than Babs had been on the ground run.

Clara sighed as she stood with Babs watching her from the bank.

"Not so good," she said grimly. "Oh look! What are you going to do?"

"Say nothing," Babs advised. "Don't let her see you're disappointed. Once she gets this worry off her mind, she'll be all right, you'll see."

But inwardly Babs was wondering—would she?

In the Misty Woods



"HALFER" (a nervous!) Clara Trevlyn and Phyllis Howell.

The last half-holder before the carnival finale. We'll practise the whole afternoon, as the street, so mind you, slipping don't get you! You'll be all right, Phyllis!"

Phyllis Howell, who was seated by the fire in the Fourth Form Common room, looked up with a faint start.

"Well, yes, I think so," she said uncertainly.

"Good enough!" Clara roared her criticism. "You're not looking too fit," she commented, with characteristic candour. "But perhaps a good night's sleep will put you right. Feel more merry and bright now—eh?"

"Yes, thanks!" Phyllis said, with a slight blush.

But she did not look fit. And Babs was watching from above the

draught-board, on which she was pursuing an intricate game with expert Bridget O'Toole, wondered. Very silent, very thoughtful Phyllis had been all that evening, starting quickly at every sound, and jumping quite nervously every time the door had opened.

Phyllis looked up, caught her eye, and smiled faintly. Bridget at the same time let out a triumphant yell.

"Arrah, and it's myself that sweeps the board!" she cried joyfully. And just then that same her triumphant king as she swept Babs' three remaining pieces from the board. "Sure, and it's a breath of a game that was!" she cried. "Take you on again, Babs?"

"No, thanks!" Babs smiled. "You're really too hot for me, Bridget. Perhaps," she added, "you'd like to play something else—Lexion, for instance? Phyllis, you're good at Lexion! What about a hand?"

But Phyllis Howell shook her head. Normally, she would have been all eager delight. Babs, in fact, had only suggested the game to give Phyllis's mind a fresh field of interest. She did so late to see her worrying like that.

"Thanks, no!" she said. "Please leave me out! I—I think I'll go and do my lines."

"Let me help," Babs offered generously.

"No, thanks! I can manage."

And Phyllis, as if anxious to get away now, rose to her feet and stroked off. Clara exchanged a glance with Babs, and made a very face.

And then, until bedtime, was the last they saw of the girl whom they were expecting to carry off the Carnival Cup on Saturday. In absence Phyllis understood, in absence got into bed. Mary Butler, duty prefect for the day, came to put out the lights; the Form settled down to slumber.

Babs, tired after the excitement of the day, slept with the ease.

For how long she remained asleep she did not know, but suddenly she awoke, blinking in the bright light. There was some sort of commotion in the dormi-

toey. Half the Form were awake, the lights full on. Babs started up.

Her eyes went towards the door. Three figures had just entered. Miss Primrose, the store-faced headmistress, was one; Mary Butler, the duty prefect, another; the third—and Babs' heart gave a queer jump—was Phyllis Howell.

Phyllis was dressed as if she had been out, with frons still glistening on her shoulders and her hat. Babs let out a cry.

"Phyllis!"

"Barbara, go to sleep!" Miss Primrose rapped. "Phyllis, you will immediately go to bed! You still refuse to say where you have been?"

Phyllis lips shut tight.

"Very well," Miss Primrose said stiffly. "To-morrow, Phyllis, instead of enjoying your half-holiday with the other girls, you will remain in the classroom, and will do a special detention task, which I will set you myself. Now, please, undress!"

Phyllis undressed in silence and climbed into bed. Not until then did Miss Primrose extinguish the light and go out. For a moment there was silence. Then Clara burst out:

"Oh, my giddy aunt! Phyllis, you cheap, where have you been?"

"I'm sorry!" And something like a sob came from Phyllis Howell's bed.

"You know," Clara went on, "that we're relying on you."

"I—I'm sorry?" Phyllis said, in a stifled voice.

"But why?"

"Oh, please, please, don't ask me questions!"

And that was all they could get out of her. Clara sighed. Babs, in her own bed, shook her head. What was the matter with Phyllis Howell?

But, astonishingly enough, when rising-bell rang next morning, Phyllis Howell was not in her bed. Babs got up, dressed, and hurried down to Study No. 6. Gently she pushed the door open. She went in. Phyllis Howell, her face bearing tell-tale traces of her disturbed night, her eyes looking as if

she had been crying, jumped round to meet her.

"Phyllis!"
Phyllis stood still.
"You're up early," Babs said gravely.
Phyllis answered reluctantly.
"I couldn't sleep," she muttered.
"And so get up?" Babs shook her head. She closed the door and came farther into the room. "Phyl," she said earnestly, "what is it, old girl? What are you worrying about? Why are you doing these things? Are you sure there is no way in which I can help?"

Phyllis gulped.
"Babs, no!"
Babs eyed her strangely.
"Phyl, I'm your friend, you know."
"Oh, I know—I know! Babs, please leave me alone! I'm sorry! I can't tell you anything!"

Babs sighed and went out, joining an apprehensive and gloomy Clara in the common-room. Clara was looking as harassed as Phyllis herself. The last practice before the carnival, and Phyllis met in it!

Clara's lips set.
"Babs, you've got to get her right. If we don't—" And she shrugged with an eloquence that conveyed the grimness of the situation. "Meanwhile, you do what you can, old girl, just in case you have to be called upon—"

"But you know, Clara, I can't hold a candle to Phyl!"
"Never mind. Do your best," Clara advised. "You don't have to hold a candle to Phyl, anyway. What you have to do is to beat this Gazon Fairleigh at Courtfield!"

The bell rang for breakfast then, and they went into dining-hall together. After breakfast, classes, then dinner. In the quadrangle Clara collected her team, just as Phyllis Howell was marched off by Sarah Harrigan to the Fourth Form class-room for her afternoon's detention. In a body they tramped off down to the river.

There, at the boathouse, they exchanged shoes for skating boots. It was a fine, frosty day, still freezing hard, and ideal for the afternoon's fun. Energetically Clara put her team through their paces—figure skating, top-of-war, a blind man's buff game on the ice, followed by laughing on skates. They were all racy and breathless when the ten interval came.

"Not too bad," Clara approved.
"But the next test is yours, Babs! As soon as tea is over we'll have a race—and send you off all out, as it was for the Carnival Cup itself! Now, let me see!" The cup course is a mile and a half, isn't it? A mile and a half from here will be about as far as Colne Cottage. All gone?"

All gone they were, though it must be confessed that Babs was not too happy, mentally comparing her own prowess with that of the girl for whom she was the substitute.

Nevertheless, she was determined to do her best. If it so happened that she was called upon in Phyl's place, it should not be for want of either practice or effort that she would let the old school down.

On the river they lined up—brooks of them—bent, eager, alert, feet moving to maintain their balance upon the ice. From Clara—also taking part in the race—there came a "Ready!" and they all started. Then—

"Off!" Clara shouted.
And away they shot, Babs in the van, skimming over the surface of the ice at a really incredible speed. For the first hundred—two hundred yards the out-

stripped all. Then gradually Clara drew up—then Janet Jordan—then Lolla Curran!

"Come on! Keep it up, Babs!" Clara urged.
But Babs panted, shaking her head. She knew her best was shot. That slight weakness in her ankle which she had contracted last term, though never affecting her on ordinary occasions, was rapidly making itself felt. But she did her best. Babs always did her best. She put forth a terrific effort.

"Go on!" Clara sang.
Babs was going on. But she knew it was just a dash. The sport took her to the edge of the South Copse of Pleasure Wood. She was a little ahead of the others when in the bushes on her right she saw a movement. A girl, hurriedly standing up, caught her shoulders upon a thorny branch, and, turning to unscramble herself, for one moment showed Babs her face. And Babs, seeing it, almost fell down.

For the eyes were hidden by a scarlet mask. It was the skater in scarlet!

"Clara!" she yelled.
"My hat, look!" cried Clara, seeing the girl at the same time.
"After her!" yelled Lolla.

After her, indeed! The race was forgotten now. Here was the girl who was at the bottom of all Phyllis Howell's troubles! Here was the girl they had sworn to get hold of. For a moment she cast one hunted look towards them, and then, blindly, she started to run.

"Stop!" cried Babs.
Three, four yards she went, then with a crash she fell. One hand instinctively went to the mask which concealed her features. Babs had a vision of a pair of skating boots with the skates attached waving in midair. Desperately she started forward, only to remember, too late, that she also wore skates. Down with a third she came. At the same moment, ten yards ahead, the girl jumped on to the ice.

"Stop!" Clara roared.
"Clara, her!"
Babs, panting, looked round. She saw the girl skating away. Frantically she got to her feet, with the Cliff House girls in full cry scolding after her. The girl had a start of ten yards, but Babs, determined as she was in that moment, did woman's work. Putting forth every ounce of energy, she sped on.

Five yards, three, two! She was gaining!
The girl in the scarlet mask looked round. Babs saw the glitter in her eyes, and that showed fear in their depths. She set her teeth. One last spurt, and there she was! She was up with her! Was beside her! She caught her arm.

"Now, you?" she panted.
"Hold her!" cried Clara.
The advice was good. But its execution on the ice was another matter. Babs had reckoned without the elastic adroitness of her adversary. Like an eel she dodged, and, wriggling under Babs' outstretched arm, she took straight towards the Cliff House skaters who were on her track.

So astonishing, so surprising was that move, that Clara & Co. were appalled. The very last thing they expected was that their quarry would double back and come shooting along them. She was past Clara, past Jennina, past Marcella, Mabel Bond, and Beatrice Beesley before they realized her intention. Too late Jennina called towards her, too late gasped! The girl pushed her aside, and Jennina, cussing into Marcella, assailed her length upon the ice.

"Well, my hat, the nerve!" gasped Clara. "After her!"
And after her they sped, skating hard. But Babs, who, from the start, had been foremost, was somewhat awed, and it was obvious that the chase was hopeless. No doubt the girl in the scarlet mask could skate. She simply flew! Fifty yards she put between herself and her pursuers in a scanty second. In five minutes she was just a speck up the river.

"Come on!" Clara gritted.
They flew on, hopeless—hopeless it seemed. And then suddenly they saw the girl stop, saw her seat herself on the bank.

"She's taking off her skates!" Janet Jordan cried.
"Come on!"

Nearer, nearer they drew. They might catch her now! But no good! They were still fifty yards away when the girl stood up. They saw the skates glittering in her hand. One look she threw towards them, then, looking like a rabbit, disappeared into the trees.

Down went Clara. Down went Babs. Fervently they fumbled with their skates. Mabel and Jennina, seeing their intention, dropped where they stood. They, too, began to unlatch the skates from their boots. Clara looked up.

"Mabel, and you others," she said, "keep on the river. Grab her if she comes back. Hold her! Babs and I and Jennina and Mabel will try to head her back through the woods. Ready!"

Ready they were.
They stood up. At a nod from Clara, they plunged into the woods, striking across in the direction the mystery girl had taken. The hard frost crunched crisply beneath their feet, awakening strangely hollow echoes as they plunged on. Under the trees, the mist which had begun to descend with the setting of the sun hung thickly in patches.

Half a mile they went, then suddenly Babs stopped.

"Hark!" she cried.
They halted, listening. And then they thrilled. Hereabouts the mist had thickened so that it was impossible to see more than twenty yards ahead. But distinctly they heard the sound. The brisk crackle of feet under hurrying feet.

"It's the girl!" Jennina breathed.
"Come on!"

They started forward. On, on, on! Unwarily the footsteps led them, sometimes running, sometimes walking, sometimes halting altogether. And then suddenly the mist brightened. Now a dozen yards ahead they saw a girlish figure moving ghost-like through the trees. Clara let out a shout:

"Quick!"
They rushed forward. The girl turned. And then Babs almost cried out. For the girl had shed her mask, and for one instant Babs glimpsed the features she knew as well—those of the strange girl in the green velvet. In her hand she carried a pair of skates.

For one brief instant she stood. It seemed, in that fraction of time, that she was debating whether she would stop and face them. Then suddenly she took to her heels.

"Stop!" cried Clara.
But the girl did not stop. Flout of foot she had shown herself on ice; now she showed herself equally speedy on land. Through the trees she sprang, the chains on her boots. She disappeared for a moment in another pocket of mist, then reappeared, running like a deer, twenty yards ahead. Clara's eyes were glancing now, Babs set her teeth. At last, it seemed, they had her!

But had they?

Artfully the girl dodged and deflected. Once or twice they lost her altogether, and the mist, thickening with the darkness, which was rapidly descending, confused and confounded them. For an hour they played an exasperating game of hide-and-seek in the woods, their quarry always eluding them. Sometimes they saw her; sometimes they just followed blindly the sound of her steps. Darker and darker it became, and thicker grew the mist. Grimace and grimmer their determination not to let her escape.

And then suddenly, from Clara, there went up a wild warning shout:

"Look out!"

But too late. Babe, Mabe, and Jennina, following closely on her heels, never even saw the Tomboy until they crashed into her, and went gasping and squabbling into the masses which fully engulfed them up to their knees.

The late Babe realized the trap into which they had fallen. Too late, however, that she had not taken better heed of the direction—though it was questionable if that would have been possible. The girl, leading them on a doubling chase through the woods, had lured them in the marsh that separated the North Copse of Friedale Woods from the south. By that time they must have been a good three miles from the river, and another three, at least, from Cliff House School.

"Oh, goodness!" Jennina cried.

"Get back!" Clara gasped.

Keep to say: hard to do! It had taken them one second to get into the marsh; it cost ten minutes of gasping effort to get out of it! Feet and legs were numb when finally, disoriented and fainting, half-dressed and clinging to beams and stockings, they reached the safety of the bank.

Breaking vengeance, they scrambled round in the darkness. With frozen faces and heavy, they did what they could to remove the clinging mud from shoes and stockings, and, still numb, got off for Cliff House School. There was no light, no sound, no trace whatever of their quarry now!

"But what's the time?" Mabe asked suddenly.

Babe consulted the illuminated dial of her wrist-watch; cried in dismay:

"Five past six!"

"Which means," Jennina sighed,

"that we're far, old Spartans! Tut-tut! What a life!"

"For it!" they were. Decidedly fed-up, they finally reached Cliff House, where neither temper nor apprehensions were improved to find the gates locked. First, of course, took their names; finally they trudged up to the dormitory to change their stockings and to restore the circulation which seemed to have fled from their numbed limbs. They were preparing to leave when Sarah Harroppe poked her head into the room.

"You're to report to Miss Primrose at once!" she said grudgingly.

"Pace to it!" Jennina sighed.

They went. Miss Primrose was in her study. She was not looking pleased.

"Well, Barbara, an captain of the Form, you speak for the rest. Why were you late?"

"Please, Miss Primrose, we got lost in the woods."

"Indeed! Then you should have known better than to have got lost in the woods. You will each take two hundred lines."

"Yes, Miss Primrose."

"And," Miss Primrose added, "when you get back send Phyllis Howell to me."

"Yes, Miss Primrose. But—" And Babe frowned. "Oh dear, I-I hope Phyllis has not done anything wrong!" she blurted.

"Phyllis," Miss Primrose tartly informed her, "has done something wrong, Barbara. I want to know why, although she was detained this afternoon, she did not do the special attention task I set her! Now, please go!"

"And the four, exchanging looks of deepest dismay, left the room!"

While Cliff House Slept



"Oh, bother it! I'm fed-up!" Clara announced resentfully. "It's all very well! Phyllis may be in some sort of a scrape, but, dash it all, there's the Form to consider, too. I'm not saying that she could help being caught last night breaking boards, but I do say that, having been given detention, she might have done her attention task. Now she's got Primrose's back up again. Primrose will give her a—She's still got one hope against Courtfield, although she doesn't seem to be thinking about the carnival at all!"

Silence followed those words in the Fourth Form Common-room. It was silence which gave consent to the Tomboy's remarks.

The door at that moment opened. A girl slipped into the room, a girl with wild eyes, whose lips were quivering, who came in hesitatingly, uncertainly. Clara's eyes gleamed.

"Phyllis—"

"Oh, yes, Clara!"

"Have you seen Primrose?"

"Yes!"

"What did you see?"

Phyllis smiled tentatively.

"Oh, a talking-off!" she said. "And my detention task to do all over again, tomorrow after lessons. And—and—"

She shook her head. "Oh, I don't know! Primrose threatened to give me for Saturday if—if she has any more of it. Clara, I'm sorry, dreadfully sorry. I did intend—"

Her voice faltered and trailed off. Clara's face became grim.

"And if you're detained for Saturday," she said, "that means we're in the soup. That means"—blithely—"that Courtfield's got the crew over us. You can't back out now; you know very well that we've nobody but you!"

Very strangely Phyllis looked at her. The tragedy, the hurt, that for a moment sprung into her eyes, flitted Babe with an awful foreboding that she was going to burst into tears. Almost unawares, the glance she gave Clara before, most astonishingly she turned on her heel, and, without another word, another glance, walked out of the room!

"Oh, my hat!" Clara cried, and crisscrossed furiously at her own bluntness.

"Phyllis!"

But Phyllis had gone.

And, again, not till bed-time did they see her. And, again, Phyllis, in strange, dejected silence, undressed and went to bed, seemingly afraid to meet the inquisitively curious looks of her Form fellows.

Babe sighed. She closed her eyes. But her thoughts were all of Phyllis—of Phyllis looking so ill, of that marvellous skater in the market square, who seemed to be exercising so sinister an influence over her; of the coating carnival.

She dozed. For a space she slept, and

then, awakening, sat up with a startled jerk. What had disturbed her?

She could not say. Certainly, there was no unusual light or sound in the Fourth Form dormitory, unless Ronnie Hunter's deep bass voice could be termed unusual. Yet Babe had a queer, awe feeling that something was wrong, and that something was wrong with Phyllis herself. She looked towards Phyllis' bed. In the gloom, however, she could see nothing.

She called the girl by name. She received no answer. Still that queer, uneasy sense persisted. She crept out of bed.

On tiptoe she made her way towards Phyllis' bed. In the darkness she groped over the cottopanope. Her hand came in contact with a huddled form beneath the bedclothes. She breathed:

"Phyl!"

No reply. The figure did not move. Babe listened, her eyes growing wider and wider in the darkness. She took a quick step towards the head of the bed. What was the matter with Phyllis? Why didn't she move? Why wasn't she breathing?

"Phyl!" she called again.

No response.

Her hands groped over the coverlet once more. Phyllis, apparently, was lying with her head under the clothes. For a moment Babe rose to check her heart. Then quickly she tore the cottopanope aside. The faint light which filtered through the window gave just sufficient illumination to show her what she feared there. Not the girlish form of Phyllis Howell, but the end of Phyllis Howell's bodice!

For a moment, Babe felt inclined to laugh in shaky relief. Oh great goodness, what a fright she had had! Then, as the significance of the discovery made her, she straightened sharply, her lips working in a line. Phyllis was not lying; breaking boards at the dead of night! Phyllis was out, knowing very well that if she were caught Miss Primrose would carry out her threat and detain her for the carnival on Saturday! Phyllis had left this dummy in bed, hoping in the event of a prowling prefect or mistress entering the dormitory her absence would remain undetected.

At the same moment Babe peled with a new alarm. The sound of shuffling steps came unmistakably from outside.

A mistress or a prefect perhaps!

Coming here!

Oh, great goodness! What could save Phyllis now?

No time to think. Babe acted purely on instinct. Quickly she threw back the cover; quickly pulled for her own bed. She had hardly flung the sheets over her when the door opened. The light came on and Miss Ballivan, the acid mathematician mistress of the school, in company with Frances Barrett, Cliff House's temporary captain, came into the room.

"You see, Miss Ballivan," Frances asked, "every bed is occupied! If any girl has been breaking boards it can't be a girl from this dormitory."

"Yet the window catch in the lobby is unlatched," Miss Ballivan pointed out.

"Oh, it must come undone by accident," Frances said. "The wind shook it."

"It did not come undone by accident," Miss Ballivan said stiffly. "I made it my business before turning in to see that the catch was fastened. Also Frances, I must remind you, there is no wind. It is strange—"

Babe lay tense.

"Well, are you satisfied, Miss Bullivant, that no girl is out of bed? If you would like me to make the girls—"

"No, thank you, Frances; not that," Miss Bullivant said hastily. And Babe, peering through half-closed eyes, saw her positively freezing as her gown ran up and down the length of the room. "I suppose," she said, though in no convinced voice, "I must have made a mistake. You are sure you closed the window again, Frances?"

"Quite sure, Miss Bullivant."

"Very well, then let us get to bed." The light went out—click. The door softly closed. Babe lay still, breathing hard, her whole frame rigid. Too well had she followed the trend of that conversation. Search-breaking Phyllis, having gone out had left the lobby window unfastened to admit her when she arrived back. The suspicious Miss Bullivant had discovered it and had closed it again. That meant that when Phyllis arrived back she would find the window shut against her—herself looked out of the school. Exposure, then, was inevitable. And if she were caught—

No, no! She shouldn't be caught! Her heart thumping, Babe slipped out of bed. Deceitfully she heard the door of Miss Bullivant's room close. Stepping to catch up her dressing gown she crept it around her, tiptoed to the door and opening it, stood for a moment, tensely listening. All was quiet.

Along the corridor she stole. With her heart leaping at every step she swept downstairs. Now—tidy work—she had to pass the door of Miss Bullivant's room. The light which gleamed faintly beneath it told her that that mistress was still awake. Need for all her caution now. Holding her breath, she tiptoed past it.

Across the dim, ghostly Big Hall she went. The lobby loomed before her. She reached the window, blinking at the grey, glimmering expanse of frost-covered ground outside. Scowlingly her arm moved up towards the catch. With the faintest of squeaks it slipped back.

Good!

And then she stopped, as hurrying through the grey shadows she saw a form—the form of a girl, Phyllis Howell herself!

One with backward glance towards Miss Bullivant's room. Babe froze. Then quietly she opened the window. Phyllis came up, starting back in the gloom as she found Babe leaning over the sill.

"Shush!" Babe said. "The Bell locked the window. I just came down to untangle it. She's suspicious, Phyl!"

"But, Oh, Babe—" Phyllis faltered.

"Come in! Got back. But be careful as you go by her door. Leave me to look up. I'll follow."

"But supposing—"

"Back up!" Babe said softly. Phyllis gasping, climbed in over the sill. Babe gave her a push. Off went Phyllis, while Babe again closed the window, waiting in the darkness for her to get away. She stood in an agony of apprehension as she tiptoed past the mistress's door and went up the stairs, waiting for her to get clear away. The square of Phyllis vanished into the Fourth Form corridor. Babe gave a sigh of relief.

Now! Her turn!

Perhaps her achievement so far made Babe a little less careful than she should have been. It was sufficient enough that Phyllis had got safely away. Phyllis's escape remained undisturbed

—that was enough! And in her relief over that she took less precaution than the night otherwise have taken. She crossed the Hall, was in the act of knocking past Miss Bullivant's door, when the little net in front of it slipped beneath her feet. Before Babe could stop herself, she came down against the door.

"Oh," she gasped in dismay. Inside there was a movement. A sharp voice.

"Who's that? Stop, stop this instant!" Even then Babe had a good opportunity of getting away. She realized that Miss Bullivant would have to get out of bed. That, and the closing of her dressing gown would take time—time enough, anyway for Babe to get back without detection in the Fourth Form dormitory. But Babe knew Miss Bullivant. She knew that she would not be content with just coming to her door. All the odds were, indeed, that she would immediately chase up to the Fourth Form dormitory. And if she caught Phyllis there, in the act of undressing—

Better that she, Babe, should suffer than the girl the whole Form was relying upon to carry off the Carnival Cup.

"Oh, dear, I—I'm sorry," she cried in dismay.

The door opened with a crash. Miss Bullivant, grim lipped and angry stood before her.

"Barbara, you! What are you doing out of bed?"

"I—I came down—down stairs," Babe murmured.

"That's very apparent!" Miss Bullivant stared at her penetratingly. "Barbara, you have not been breaking bounds?"

Babe smiled in spite of herself. For reply she opened her dressing gown to show her pajamas, and stuck out one bare, bed-room-slipped foot.

"H'm," Miss Bullivant pursed her lips. Then quickly her eyes turned towards the lobby. "Have you," she inquired, "been to the lobby, Barbara?"

Babe caught her breath.

"Oh, Miss Bullivant, what do you mean?"

"Perhaps you know," the mistress glanced at her sharply. "I discovered the catch undone. I imagined that it was left open by some bounds breaker. A few minutes ago, Barbara, I had reason to come to the Fourth Form dormitory, where I mentioned the fact to Frances Barrett. You are sure,"—sharply—"you did not come down to release that catch?"

Babe gulped.

"Oh, Miss Bullivant, how could you suspect such a thing?"

"Barbara, did you?"

"But why should I, Miss Bullivant?"

"That," Miss Bullivant replied grimly, "is a question far pointed to answer! If a girl had been breaking bounds and was a friend of yours, then that would furnish a sufficient reason. It would furnish a very one," Miss Bullivant added. "We will see. If that catch is released, then obviously you have released it. Come with me!"

Babe went with her. The catch was found to be intact. Miss Bullivant passed her lips.

"H'm! Well!" she said. "All the same, Barbara, you have no right to be prowling about the school at this time of night. What were you doing?"

"Well, I—I just came down, you know."

"To play some practical joke, perhaps? To get lost from your study?" Miss Bullivant's eyes gleamed. "You seem very reluctant to state a reason.

Barbara. I can only conclude, therefore, that you were acting in a spirit contrary to the discipline of the school. You may go to bed! In the meantime, I shall make it my business to see that you get an extra hour's detention after lessons tomorrow!"

And Babe very handsily went.

PERNIX HOWELL, white and determined, faced the captain of the Fourth Form in Study No. 4 next morning.

"You're not going to get the Blues for my misdeeds! I'm going to own up!" said Phyllis.

"And if you own up, Phyl?"

"I don't care!"

Babe gazed at her sadly.

"No? But we do! Phyllis, listen!" And Babe, with a patient smile, pushed the girl gently into a chair. "I did that," she explained, "because I didn't want you to be caught. I did it because I wanted to save you being gazed for the carnival next Saturday. Well, Phyl, I'm not grumbling! But if you go and own up now, please, what difference will it make? You don't think the Bell will let me off detention for helping a girl who was breaking bounds, do you? And you'd only go and get yourself the gazing I was trying to save you from!"

Phyllis stared at her. That was pure logic. But she shook her head.

"But, Babe—"

"Phyllis, listen!" Babe said. "I'm going to ask you for the last time. I'm asking you, not only as captain of the Form, but as your chum. You know, old girl, you've got an all worried-to-death. It's pretty obvious to all of us that you're just going to poison. Phyl, I want to help you. We all want to help you! Won't you let us?"

Phyllis bit her lip, hiding her head.

"Babe, I—I can't!"

Babe heaved a deep breath.

"But, Phyl, why didn't you do your detention task yesterday?"

For a moment Phyllis did not reply. Then strangely she looked up.

"Because I wasn't there to do it."

"Oh, goodness! You mean you broke out!"

Phyllis nodded.

"To meet this girl who's masquerading in the scarlet mask!"

Phyllis looked startled.

"What do you know about her?"

"Nothing—yet," Babe said. "But she's the girl at the bottom of all your troubles, Phyllis!" She ignored the distracted shake of the head the other gave, and reached her on the shoulder.

"If we can get hold of her—"

she added, and paused. "Phyl, who is she?" she asked.

"Oh, please!" Phyllis distractedly bent out. And, breaking down altogether then, buried her face in her hands.

"Babe, please," she begged, "don't question me—don't! That girl—the girl you mean—"

She gulped.

"Oh, no! No! I can't tell you! I haven't told you! Babe," she added, with sudden desperation, "let's go now! Let's get in some practice! I don't want to let you down! I won't let you down! Have patience with me—just a little longer!"

So startlingly abrupt was the change that Babe gazed at her. But Phyllis

was on her feet then, face feverishly flushed, eyes flashing with determination. Obvious it was to Babe that she wanted to get away. Obvious she was afraid of being questioned. Babe nodded her head. They went out. They found Clara, Jessica, Lilla, and Janet, who,

overjoyed at the change in Phyllis, agreed to go off to the river there and then.

There was just time for half an hour's skating before lessons. And Phyllis, for once, all excitement, shuddered and delighted them with the brilliancy of her performance. For a space, it seemed, her cares, her worries, her sweet sorrows, were shed. Never before, even at her brilliant best, had she given such an exhibition anything like that practice.

Clara glowed.

"My hat, Phyllis, if you only perform like that in the carnival!"

"I'll do my best," Phyllis promised.

They trooped back to school, more joyful, lighter-hearted than at any other time that week; Phyllis herself, laughing, looked almost happy, her cheeks rose with the heat of health. If anything was required to strengthen Babe's and Clara's determination to get Phyllis in for the carnival, that exhibition decided it. They simply could not risk losing Phyllis now!

And yet!

Babe was still anxious. She fancied that Phyllis' new-found form was just a flash. She had been almost too good! She had a dread that Phyllis' reaction to that terrific sport would be an even bigger flop than before. And in that she was right. Before lessons were over that morning, the lines of worry had returned to Phyllis' face. Those healthy cheeks of hers were no longer glowing, but had resumed their sallow, sharp-lined contours as before.

Lessons were over at last. The Form dismissed. Clara, in Study No. 4, looked at Babe.

"Time for a practice," she said. "Babe, get Phyllis. I'll get the others."

Babe nodded. She went along to Study No. 6. She raised her hand to knock at the door, which was slightly ajar. At the same moment a feverishly panting voice came to her ears:

"Oh, if only she would leave me alone! If only I could get rid of her! Why must she watch me? Why must she always make me sweat her?"

Quite plainly the words came to Babe's ears. She paused, biting her lip. In the room she heard Phyllis striving about. She guessed at once to whom these words referred—the girl in the market mask! She did not know as she had intended. It was pretty obvious that Phyllis was not looking fit for practice. She slipped back along the corridor. At the same moment an excited voice hailed her:

"Oh crumbs! I sit-say, Babe!"

"Hallo, Bessie!" Babe smiled.

"The—the postman's just been!" Bessie blurted. "I say, Babe, I've got a letter! It's from my father—my cob uncle—I mean, Lord Blunt—de Hunter. And there's one for you, too! Here it is! I brought it up from the rack. And—and— Oh crumbs, come into the study!" And Bessie, handing over Babe's letter, breathlessly led the way into the study, and blinked sheepishly at the remaining two in her hand.

Babe smiled. She glanced at her own letter—a missive from her uncle, General Redfern, who, at the moment, was helping a friend, a Mr. Pembury, through a rather involved business in London. Bessie, quivering with excitement—for Bessie was always tremendously excited every time she received a letter—was already sitting the first envelope open. She dragged out the missive it contained, shamefully unfolded it, and, in doing so, allowed it to fall to

the floor. Quickly she grabbed at it, letting out an "Oh!" of anguish, as her head came into contact with the leg of the table.

"Nerve mind, Bessie!" Babe laughed.

She stooped for it herself. And then, in the act of reaching for it, she passed. For the letter, obviously, was not for Bessie Hunter. It consisted of one sheet of paper. And it bore no address. It was simply addressed to "Phyllis Howell, Cliff House School." Underneath was a message:

"You can't pull the wool over my eyes any longer. Meet me at six o'clock by the withered oak in Friar-chale Woods."

All that Babe took in before her hand touched the letter. She straightened up.

"Bessie, this is not yours. Whose did you get it?"

"Eh?" Bessie blinked. "But— And then she examined the repeating letter in her hand. Her jaw dropped. "Oh dad-dar, I've opened the wrong one!" she stammered.

"Whose did you get it?" Babe repeated.

"Well, a—a girl gave it to me. In the quad, you know. A—a girl in a green hat. She asked me if I knew Phyllis Howell, and when I said 'Yes,' she asked me to give her this." Bessie gulped. "Oh, Babe, you dad-dar don't think Phyllis will think I—I opened it on purpose?"

Babe smiled.

"Don't worry," she said. She paused. "Phyllis need never know you opened it at all," she promised. "Bessie, I

don't think," she added thoughtfully, "that I'd say anything about this, if I were you!"

"No-o!" Bessie stammered.

"Meaning," Babe added, "I'll take charge of it."

"Oh, thank-thanks! But I mean—"

But Babe was already walking out of the study with the letter in her hand. Her eyes were shining; her face was flushed. Babe most certainly intended to give Phyllis that letter. But not yet!

If Phyllis followed out those instructions in that letter, it meant she would have to break boards again, and breaking boards at half-past six was more serious than breaking boards at midnight, seeing it was prep hour. But that was not her only reason.

For the girl—the mysterious "G." who had sent the missive—was obviously the sister in the market mask; that girl, Babe felt, who was responsible for Phyllis' secret worry; that girl who could, Babe was convinced, remove that worry if she only cared. She remembered Phyllis' words:

"If only she would leave me alone! Oh, if only she would stop watching me!"

Her eyes flashed, her lips tightened. For a long time had Babe sewed in come to grips with the sister in the market mask. Now, it seemed, was her chance. At half-past six that night the appointment with the mysterious sister in market would be kept.

But it would not be kept by Phyllis Howell; it would be kept by Babe herself!



"COME along in—quickly!" Babe breathed, and so without another word, Phyllis climbed in over the sill. Babe's heart was thumping with apprehension; how she hoped that she would be able to struggle Phyllis back to the dormitory unseen!

Secret Meeting



DURING afternoon hours and the period of detention which followed, Babs made her plans. The detention was shared by Phyllis herself; but, as Phyllis had a task in addition, Babs was released half an hour earlier. It was an o'clock then and quite dark, with few, misty rain clouds dressing the countryside. Not a gleam of moonlight. Not a star visible.

Babs smiled grimly. "So far, so good! It suited her plans well."

Phyllis was safe. Phyllis, with no knowledge of the letter, would not be worrying. Babs meant to find out, once and for all, what was on that girl's mind. And since Phyllis herself was as cozy-like, she would find it out from Phyllis' energy. The girl, naturally, would be expecting Phyllis. Phyllis and Babs were much of the same height, and it wouldn't be hard for Babs to imitate Phyllis' voice when she spoke. The darkness would aid her deception.

Detention finished, Babs, with a sympathetic glance at the remaining delinquent, rose and left the class-room. She went at once to the cloak-room. She was leaving nothing to chance. Therefore, she did not take her own coat, which was of a darker material than Phyllis'. She took Phyllis' coat, and, dressing it, hurried out of the school. The midnight air was a familiar refreshment, measured about twenty yards within the wood along the footpath that led to the abandoned quarry. Her heart was throbbing as she squashed through the wet grass. So dark was it that she could hardly see the trees.

She felt rather than saw a form lean in front of her. She heard a whisper. "That you, Phyllis! Have you brought it?"

Babs stopped. What was Phyllis supposed to have brought?

"Have you?" The question was impatiently repeated. "Oh, come on!" she added rather irritably. "It's no good trying the silence racket again! I know you're in touch with her! I know she stole it, and you're hiding her—presiding her!" The voice took on a snarl. "And you can't fool me." It went on, "with that silly trick you've been playing! I jolly well know who the masked skater is now, and I jolly well know why you've been playing up to her! Stop it, dodge me! Simply so that I shouldn't recognize you and follow you."

Babs stood still. She felt her brain whirling. Wait a minute! What was this? What was this girl saying? Had she made some mistake? Wasn't this girl herself the Scarlet Mask?

And then suddenly there was a movement from the girl in front of her. Babs caught the glint of something in the darkness, and then, without warning, a beam of light flashed dazzlingly into her eyes. Instinctively Babs took a step back, blinking in the rays of a powerful torch. From the girl in front of her went up a cry.

"My hat! It's not Phyllis! You are!"

Babs gasped in sick dismay as the unknown, with a quick thrust, sent her reeling against a tree, and swiftly took to her heels. Babs, tripping, collapsed on to the wet ground.

Happened to follow the mystery girl. Without a light of any description, she was helpless; also, she was decidedly wet.

Flicking herself up, she turned hopefully the way she had come. Light!

She had read on her hand. Unthinkingly she plucked the hand into a pocket of Phyllis' coat in search of a handkerchief. There was no handkerchief there, but her fingers closed round something soft, crumpled, and silky. She drew it out.

She had reached the road again now—was in the act of passing the lighted telephone booth that stood at the cross-roads. Without thinking, she examined the thing she had taken from Phyllis' pocket. And then she stopped, staring as if she could hardly believe her own eyes. For it was a mask—a silk carnival mask, scarlet in colour.

"Phyllis!" she breathed. Her eyes widened.

In a moment all the mysterious girl in the green beret had said came rushing back. That girl had accused Phyllis of being the masked skater. She had said that Phyllis had adopted the disguise in order to throw her off the track.

Her mind went back to the first time she had seen the masked skater on the river, when she had run away from herself and her shame. They had thought then that the girl in the green beret was the masked skater. They had chased the masked skater because she had Phyllis' bag. They had never dreamt, even for a moment, that the mask could have been worn by Phyllis herself.

And this afternoon again they had seen the masked skater; but when the masked skater had shuddered then, it was the girl in the green beret they had followed.

Then—then Phyllis was the masked skater!

Her mind in a whirl, Babs raced back into the school. Her face was grim now, and yet there was satisfaction in its greenness. She had unravelled part of the secret. Once Phyllis learnt that she knew so much, she could no longer refuse to tell her the whole truth, in which case Phyllis might accept his help. Straight to Phyllis' study she hurried. That girl, who had just been released from detention, was alone when she entered. Her eyes blinked.

"Barbara—yes, in my coat!" For answer, Babs put the mask upon the table. Phyllis stared at it. Then her face went as white as death.

"Where—where did you get that?" she cried.

"I found it," Babs said quietly, "in your pocket, Phyllis." She paused.

"Phyllis," she said earnestly, "why didn't you tell me?"

"Told you?"

"That you," Babs replied, crying her straightforwardly, "are the skater in the market mask!"

Phyllis went white. Her lips parted. Then, without a sound, she collapsed at Barbara's feet!

At the Old Mill



"P H Y L L I S!" cried Babs.

In fluttering anxiety, she jumped to her side. Oh, goodness, what a carbuncle!

Blundering idiot she was! Poor old Phyllis! She should have been more careful. She should have remembered Phyllis' agitated state of mind. Accounting her like that without warning, without preamble, went has been like striking a blow.

Desperately she reached for the water-jug which was on the table, quickly poured some into a tumbler, and, raising the white-faced girl's head, forced some between her lips.

"Phyl!" she muttered brokenly.

Phyllis opened round and glassy eyes. She gave a shuddering groan.

"Phyl, I—I'm sorry!" Babs started.

Phyllis passed a hand across her brow. "It—it doesn't matter," she said wearily. "Oh dear! No, Babs, don't fuss, please! Let me sit here a minute."

And looking dazedly ill and weak, she bent her head against the table-top as she sat up on the floor. "I—I suppose it had to come sometime," she said. "But, oh, Babs!"

"Very sorry she started to cry. Babs choked down the lump that came into her own throat.

"Phyl, won't you tell me about it?" she said. "Phyl, you're ill—"

"I—I'm all right," Phyllis denied bravely, but her eyes closed even as she uttered the words. "Oh, Babs," she almost moaned, "what am I to do? What am I to do?"

"Phyl, you've got to let me help you," Babs said. "No, please, old girl! I know something. I—I met that other girl just now. She knows that you are the Scarlet Skater. She knows that you adopted the disguise simply to put her off the track. She said you were hiding something. Phyllis, this happened you to turn up with something. Phyl, who are you hiding?"

"My sister!" Phyllis whispered.

Babs started. She knew that Phyllis had only one sister—a girl very much older than herself, who acted as a very efficient secretary to her father. "You mean Elaine?" she breathed.

"Yes, Elaine," Phyllis nodded dazedly. "But! She's hiding in the old mill, but she's lost, Babs. She can't be moved. That—that's why I've had to break bounds to often to go and see her, to take her food, and—and also to meet this other girl." And then, with sudden irony, she clutched at Babs' arm.

"Babs, Elaine's got these—the papers! These people are after them, she muttered wildly. "Babs! I must get the papers! I must—I must!"

But, Phyl—

"No, no, no go!" And, in sudden frenzy, Phyllis jumped to her feet.

But it was only a spasmodic effort. No sooner was she on her legs than she swayed again, putting a hand to her eye. If Babs hadn't caught and assisted her to the armchair she could have fallen once more.

"Phyl!" Babs cried.

But Phyllis' eyes were closed. Her face was ghastly white. She had fainted again.

Babs thought desperately. Phyl was ill—desperately ill. The strain and the toils had been too much for her. Again she gave her water. She shook her; called her. No good; Phyllis simply lay back like a dead thing.

There was only one thing to do. Babs fetched the matron.

And as a result of that Phyllis was put to bed in the matron's room at once. Before an hour had gone by she had a high temperature. Dr. Longmore, from the village, was called in. His verdict was one of grave concern. She must be watched, carefully nursed.

And all night long Phyllis raved in a delirium of fever. In the fourth hour the pulse of collapse was removed with shocked dismay and gloom concern. Phyllis croaked—and the carnival only two days off!

But it was Babs who worried most. Inevitably she blamed herself for Phyllis' collapse. It was her fault, she told herself. It was up to her to help Phyl. In the morning she went to see her.

Phyllis, with her face like wax, was resting on a high fever in the bed, muttering she did so. Babs bent over her.

"Phyl—"

"Get the papers!" Phyllis whispered.

"Get them now! Elsie has got them. Elsie's in the old mill. Babe, get the papers!"

"I will!" Babe said.
"But—but—Phyllis looked at her; for a moment the fever was out of her eyes—don't let the Barfields know!" she whispered.

Babe ran. It was up to her. What the papers were, who the Barfields were, she did not know. There and then she left the school. Going to the house, she put on her slippers and started up the river towards the old mill. She reached it—that tumble-down, broken-down old structure which stood on an island surrounded by its uncovered mast.

She looked round. No one was in sight. Up the rotten steps she climbed. She knocked at the door. There was no reply.

Babe set her lips. Was Elsie in there? Well, she had to find out. If there was a key, Phyllis must have it. In any case, the door, like the rest of the building, was old and rotten. She had already taken off her slippers in order to ascend the steps, and with the blades she made an energetic attack on the door. Thump, thump, thump, thump, thump! Presently she was inside until the old door shook, and at last the rotten wood splintered.

Was it her imagination, or did she hear, in a hall of her attack, a faint voice from inside?

"Then—at last! The woodwork around the lock splintered. Babe drew back, drawing her teeth, she kicked herself against it. Crash! The door flew inward, with a crack like thunder, and Babe, irresistibly carried forward, gruffly skidded across a dusty floor, only saving herself from violent contact with the opposite wall by stretching out her hands. Then she straightened.

"Elsie!" she cried. "Elsie, this is Barbara Barfield! I've come instead of Phyllis. Where are you?"

A faint cry from above answered her. "Up here!"

In a moment Babe was racing up the wooden stairs. She reached a tiny landing. A door on the right stood ajar, and from the room beyond came a cry. She pushed open the door.

A girl came to meet her—only to sit down, with a groan. A girl of about twenty, strikingly like Phyllis, with one foot swathed in bandages. Babe knew her; recognized her at once.

"Elsie!" she cried.

"Elsie Howell it was."

"Where is Phyllis? What is the matter?" Elsie asked.

"Then Babe told her, while Elsie listened, with a strained face.

"Then—then that means she won't be able to come any more?"

"Elsie, no; not for a while. I'm afraid," Babe said. "But, Elsie, I'm here to help! I'm going to help. What is the trouble?"

Elsie's face whitened.

"Babe, not! You can't!"

"But why can't I?"

"Because," Elsie muttered. "If—I I've found out it—may mean prison. A few sat, at least. I don't want to drag you into it."

"Well, but tell me," Babe said.

And Elsie, after some demur, told her. It was rather a long story, but, reduced to its essentials, this was it:

Phyllis' father, Mr. Howell, was a jeweler in Cornwall. He had a partner, a man named Henry Barfield, when Elsie had never trusted, though her father had always put the greatest confidence in him.

"Well," Elsie said, "a week ago father was hurriedly called abroad. I did tell you, didn't I, that I act as my father's secretary? I had a feeling that

something was going to happen. For days Barfield had been behaving queerly."

And she went on to tell her, with growing suspicion, she had watched Barfield. How, just before her father had gone off on his Continental trip, Barfield had slipped a document which made over his own share of the business.

**WHEN YOU WRITE
TO YOUR CHUM—**



**—TELL HER ALL ABOUT
THE
SCHOOLGIRL**

to Henry Barfield, the deed to be executed within the next ten days.

What was she to do? She knew that by the time he came back, unless she did something, Mr. Howell would find his business entirely in Henry Barfield's hands.

"So you see," she added, "what a fix I was in. I knew that Barfield had forged that document, but I had no proof."

"Yes," Babe said. She followed properly. "And so," she guessed, "not knowing what else to do, you grabbed Babe."

"Yes, I—I ran away with it! I knew Barfield would raise a hue and cry. I had to hide until my father returned. I couldn't get in touch with him, I didn't even know where he was. Barfield did raise a hue and cry. Not knowing what else to do, I came to Cliff House and saw Phyllis. It was at her suggestion that I hid in this mill. But the first day I had an accident. The stairs above collapsed and I went through them, injuring my ankle."

Babe took a deep breath.

"That made it impossible for me to get about," Elsie added. "But there's something else. Barfield has a step-daughter. She goes to Cornfield School. Apparently he suspected I might try to get in touch with Phyllis, so he put this girl—I don't even know her name—an actress here the next day and would follow her. She went out to her, threatening her that she would find me.

Phyllis, to throw her off the scent, wrote a scurrilous note."

"Yes, yes, I know that," Babe broke in. "But, Elsie, what are you going to do now?"

Elsie shook her head.
"I—I don't know," she confessed. "If they find me, they will find the document. They can force me to give it up. If necessary, they can put me in prison. They—"

And then she stopped as she looked through the window. Suddenly she turned, catching at Babe's wrist. "Barbara, look!" she whispered tremulously. "They're here! They're after me!"

Babe started. She stared at the frost-covered window through which Elsie was staring. And then she peeped as she saw, down the river, two figures which were rapidly gliding towards the mill—the girl in the green beret and a tall, middle-aged man whom she guessed at once must be the girl's father. They were coming here! Perhaps, she thought, they had spotted her, had traced her. She turned swiftly.

"Elsie, quick! Give me those papers."

"But—"

"Give them to me! I'll take care of them!" Babe cried.

Elsie snatched at her. She fang one last hurried look through the window. Her face was white now. She plucked her hand from her dress, and brought forth a small, rolled-up, parchment-like package.

"Good!" Babe took them quickly.

"Now," she said grimly, "when you want these ask me for them. Elsie, look! They're coming here."

"Yes, yes! Babe, get away!"

"But you!"

"Never mind me. Get away. There's not a moment to lose!"

Babe grabbed at her slippers. The documents she slipped into her pocket. Elsie was right. If she was to get away she must get away now. One last look she gave the quivering girl. Then down the stairs she flew. The man and the girl in the green beret, a hundred yards away, saw her as she came out of the door.

"Hi!" yelled the girl in the green beret.

"Stop!" the man cried.

But Babe did not stop. She turned. No time to put her slippers on, but fortunately, the rim of frost on the surface gave her a foothold. She saw the two put on a start.

Now!

Across the river she ran, plunging into Cliff Copse. Thank goodness, she reflected quickly, she could not be followed. If these two were after her they could hardly run through the woods on skates.

She reached the Ferry road. Breathing hard, she looked back. Two hundred yards behind her the man and the girl were following, gesticulating as they ran. They had seen her!

Babe set her teeth. She would feel them yet. She breasted the rise, ran down on to the wide deserted road. No hiding-place there. She knew that. But could not hold out much longer. But across the road she saw the twin ledges of Galton's Lodge, the residence of Mr. Lander, and reflected, even in that desperate moment, that Mr. Lander, the popular centre of the country hereabouts, was the chief judge of the court which was to be held the day after to-morrow. There, in his grounds, there might be safe retreat!

No further than that did Babe think. Desperate indeed her circumstances were. If she were caught, she would have betrayed Phyllis, have betrayed Elsie, have deprived Mr. Howell of his business. Across the road she plunged. Through a gap in the hedge she threw

herself and stood, painting and polystyling, as the other did. Heady had she recovered her breath, however, than a gruff voice spoke: a hand shot out, clucking at her shoulder.

"And what," demanded a suspicious voice, "are you doing here?"

And Babs, wheezing with a gasp, found herself staring into the curly features of one of Mr. Lander's gardeners.

A Matter of Inches



"**W**HAT are you doing here?" the gardener repeated suspiciously.

Babs gulped. What was she to do now? Through the gap in the hedge she glimpsed Mr. Barfield and the girl in the green beret standing on top of the rise, looking this way and that along the road. At all costs they mustn't see her—not, at least, while she had this incriminating document in her possession. Then, suddenly, she remembered the carnival. Any chance! Anything, anything to gain a respite!

"I've come to see Mr. Lander," she panted. "I'm a Cliff House girl. I've come in connection with the carnival."

"Ho! Funny way to come, isn't it? Through the hedge?"

"I'm sorry," Babs said.

"I should hope you are!" Still he did not look convinced. "Well, if you've come to see Mr. Lander, you shall see him," he said. "And perhaps at the same time you will wish to hire a few chairs to walk on his snug beds instead of the drive. This way."

He jerked his head. Babs, with a beating look back at the two figures still on the rise, followed him.

They reached the house. There Babs was handed over to the butler. The butler showed her into a room and told her to wait there until Mr. Lander should appear. Babs breathed relief as she sank down, cupping her brain for some excuse when she should find herself face to face with the power of the house. And there, for the first time, she became aware of her surroundings.

Mr. Lander was to be the chief judge at the carnival. Mr. Lander was also president of the Hospitals Association which promoted the carnival. As such, Mr. Lander was also custodian of the prizes which were to be presented at the carnival—and here those prizes were, the whole glittering array of them, standing on a table beneath the window. The striking silver cup, complete with lid, which was to be the carnival's chief gem, was conspicuous among them. That was the cup—the cup which Cliff House looked longingly forward to winning!

And then Babs jumped.

For, hearing footsteps crunching on the gravel outside, she had glanced through the window to see coming up the drive, Mr. Barfield and the girl she now knew to be his stepdaughter!

They had traced her! Had probably seen her, from their high position on the crest of the rise, walking up the drive in the gardener's custody. They were coming here for her!

Convulsively Babs' hand closed upon the document. They must not find that—must not—must not! She must hide it—now, at once. Imperatively she looked round. The cup! Suppose she hid it in the cup! In that moment of panic she could think of nothing else. Quickly she lifted the lid. Quickly she popped the rolled-up document inside. Just at the very moment the door swung open, she clamped the lid back again.

Then, fighting to maintain her composure, she wheeled.

Mr. Lander, his kindly face wearing a welcoming smile, stood in the doorway.

"Why, Miss—Miss—what did you say? Ah, Babs! Yes, yes, of course. I have heard of you. A Cliff House girl, eh? What was it you wanted to see me about?"

"Oh, I—I called in to—to ask if you had got an advance copy of the carnival programme, yet," Babs stammered, blushing the first excuse that came to her lips.

"Why, yes, yes," he said. "Very nice of you to ask, I'm sure. Come with me." And, smiling benignly, he led her into his study. "Here, my dear, is the programme," he said. "I hope you will enjoy looking at it. A nice bit of work, eh? I laid it out myself."

Babs smiled as she took it. The butler appeared.

"Ahem! There is a man and a girl who say they would like to see you, sir, if you are unoccupied."

"Oh, yes! Very well, I am coming!" the old man said loudly. "You like the programme, my dear? I do so hope you shall have a good day. Can I get you something to eat—or drink?"

But Babs declined that offer. She had done all she wanted now. She thanked the man, was graciously shown out by him through a side-door. Back on the road, she took to her heels, heading for Pegg village. There she ordered a cab.

There—back to the old Miller's Mill. Hastily she told Elsie what had happened. At Babs' suggestion, Elsie went back in the car to Pegg village, there to be low at the Archer Inn for the time being. Babs herself went back to Cliff House School. Immediately on arrival there, she made her way to the mansion. Phyllis, wide awake, looked a little better, but very flushed and most excited.

"Babs, you saw her—"

"Indeed, old thing. Yes, I saw her. She's all—and so are the papers," Babs whispered. "Now, Phyl, don't worry any more."

"Oh, Babs, how can I thank—"

"Simply by getting better," Babs replied.

But she was wondering as she went out—how to get hold of those papers again? Concealed in the Carnival Cup, they would be safe enough—and on Saturday there might be an opportunity of retrieving them.

Meantime, she was now leader of the Cliff House team. She had, after all, to take Phyllis Howell's place. There could be no slacking now. Whatever doubts she might feel about the ultimate result, she had to race against the Courtfield champion, Grace Farleigh, and with the rest of the team she must put in a full spell of training.

All that afternoon Babs was on the river. At the final meeting of the carnival sports committee that night Clara made a decision.

"Babs," she said, "I want you to save yourself up for the last event to-morrow. For that reason I'm not including you in any of the others. The best thing you can do is to save your breath and some your strength and throw everything you've got into the final race."

It was a good idea. But it was an idea, apparently, which Courtfield had also thought of. For next day, when they reached the gala-deck grounds of Courtfield Castle, where the great ice carnival was to be held, and were presented with details of the opposing

teams, it was to discover that Grace Farleigh's name was not championed until the very last event—the championship race of a mile and a half round the track. A great crowd had assembled, and the great crowd, it happy, festive mood, was ready to cheer itself hoarse.

Near the judges' stand, where the roving Carnival Cup was on show, Babs took her stand. Interestingly, she watched the events as they progressed. The top-of-war was first—was Cliff House won by two pulls out of three, thereby scoring four of the six possible points. The next event was the obstacle race, with a total of ten points at stake. Clara got first place; Janet Jordan fourth. But the rest of Cliff House were nowhere.

That meant another five points in the bag, however, giving Cliff House a total of nine. Courtfield, their nearest rivals, had a total of seven.

But in the next event—the figure-skating—Courtfield came out strong.

Five points were awarded for this event—three for the winner, two for the next best, none at all for the remaining competitors. Courtfield carried off the lot. Nine points to Cliff House; twelve to their rivals.

Babs watched in growing trepidation. Rapidly her eyes were scanning the crowds. More and more spectators were arriving. The ropes that divided the sports enclosure were growing denser with people. Cliff House were looking anxious; Courtfield already cheering.

She saw, for a moment, the face of the girl in the green beret.

"Not doing too well?" Clara muttered just before the hoop-rolling event.

"Looks as if it's going to be up to you, Babs."

Whereas Babs smiled grimly.

The hoop-rolling race came on; Clara again the first, and with Cliff House taking a lead over Courtfield by one point. One point! Babs clenched her hands. Two points only were awarded for the championship race—both, of course, to the winner—or one each in the event of a dead heat.

The announcer was on his feet—was shouting through his megaphone:

"Now, ladies and gentlemen, the final event! The race between Cliff House and Courtfield School! The winner receives the championship cup, Miss Barbara Rodden, this way please!"

A burst of clapping; a storm of cheering. Babs, Janing, gratefully stooped to the starting-point.

"Now, Miss Grace Farleigh, of Courtfield!"

And another roar. Out of the crowd a girl came languidly skating. She was dressed in a white jersey, and blue skirt. Babs took one look at her, and for a moment held her breath.

For the mysterious Grace Farleigh was none other than the girl in the green beret!

As Babs stared at her, Grace Farleigh's lips curled in a smug.

"So it's you!" she said. "Barbara Rodden! I know. You were the girl my father and I chased the other day, weren't you? You were the girl who gave us the slip in Mr. Lander's house."

Babs eyed her contemptuously.

"But you didn't realize, did you, that we've since transferred to your little garage? You didn't know that this morning we found Elsie Howell lying low in the kitchen, had? My father had her arrested!"

Babs' breath came in a little hiss:

"And—and—"

"THE SKATER IN THE SCARLET MASK"

(Continued from page 12.)

"And the papers, you mean?" The other laughed mockingly. "We haven't found them yet—yet," she added significantly; "but we know for sure now that Elsie handed them over to you the other day. That rather makes you an accessory in the conspiracy, doesn't it? Where did you hide them, eh?"

But before Hilda could reply, the starter's booming voice rang out: "Ready!"

RAPID, if a little shaky, Hilda was. And desperate, too!

Elsie shrieked! The papers which would bring ruin to her father looked in the cup for which she must race! If this girl won—

But, no! She must not! Must not! For there was more than the honour of Cliff House involved now. Once this girl got her hands upon that cup—

Hilda gritted her teeth. No farther than that date she allow herself to think.

Bang! That was the starter's pistol. And then they were off, Grace Farleigh leading her a contemptuous glance as she sped away. With a jerk, Hilda came to herself. She shot forward.

Down the straight they went at a whirling pace, Grace half a dozen yards to the good as they reached the bend. Hilda reducing the lead by three yards as she slowly rounded it. There—off again, Grace straining every nerve, Hilda skating desperately.

But Hilda, for all her apparent desperation, was keeping something in reserve. No doubt that Grace could show. No doubt that she had earned the reputation which preceded her. The case, the grace, the speed of her!

First lap—with Hilda a good ten yards in the rear. Second lap—with the Cornfield lead increased to nearly thirty. She heard the voices starting, starting:

"Come on, Hilda!"

"Grace, Grace, Grace!"

Now! Desperately she spurred. The skates rang on the ice. Third lap—sixty yards in front. Fourth lap—Grace ten yards. Hilda let herself go! But Grace also spurred, and there seemed nothing to choose between them. The fifth and last lap—with the crowd in a frenzy of excitement, with Grace still clinging to her ten yards lead, Hilda summoned every ounce of her strength, put forward every ounce of effort.

On—on they skidded.

Ten yards start Grace had when the last lap started. At the bend it had been reduced to five. Half-way round the oval, and only four yards between the two girls—now only three! Hilda felt the blood pounding in her ears. A hundred yards to go! Now fifty! She was still catching up. Twenty yards—ten yards! The winning post is sight! One last desperate spur. She was abreast of the girl. She was—

"Hilda, Hilda, Hilda!" went up a hysterical yell. "Hurray! Cliff House wins!"

Cliff House had won—by inches, no more. Almost in a state of exhausted collapse, Hilda was helped off the ice. Still dazed, breathless, and bewildered, she found herself surrounded by her cheering schoolfellows, in front of the judges' stand. She saw Mr. Lander lift the cup. She heard, at some distance, the congratulatory speech he had to

make. Then the cup was being handed towards her. With trembling hands she was reaching to receive it—

And then—

"No, wait!" a vibrant voice, thick with hate, roared. "Wait!" And everybody turned as the girl in the green beret, her face livid, came threatening a way forward. "Officer," she cried, pointing a quivering finger at Hilda. "That is the girl. I accuse her of conspiring with Elsie Howell to rob my father of a valuable document. Arrest her!"

There was a buzz, a clamour. Hilda, shrieking round, saw Grace Farleigh, saw her grim-faced father, saw Inspector Winton, of the Cornfield police, leaning down upon her. Her heart gave a frightful leap. The cup which Mr. Lander was extending towards her, he drew back. She was to be arrested. In the very moment of her triumph!

And then, while everybody stared in stier consternation, a new voice broke in upon the tumult.

"By gad, what's this!" And a new figure came striding on the scene—a Sissy Hilda well knew. "Barbara, what is this? Where is Phyllis? What is this about Elsie? And what are you doing here, Baskfield? Bless you! This is a pretty nice state of affairs to greet a man on his return from the Continent, Barbara!"

"Mr. Howell!" Hilda cried joyfully. "Yes, you, but what?"

"Mr. Howell!" And Hilda, almost delirious with joy, flung herself upon him. "Oh, thank goodness! Thank goodness!" she cried. "Mr. Howell, one question—quickly, please! Did you sign a paper making over your share of your business to Mr. Barfield before you left?"

"Oh! Bless my soul, I certainly did nothing of the sort! But what—"

"Then," Hilda cried triumphantly—and before anyone could stop her, she snatched up the cup. "That man has tried to swindle you!" she cried

vibrantly. "It seems to me anything to do, arrest them, not me!" And suddenly plunging her hand into the cup, she drew forth the incriminating document. "Here is the document that will prove it. Look—your signature—forged by Barfield!"

And while Henry Barfield's jaw dropped, while Grace Farleigh, ghastly white, shook at the knees, she pressed the paper into the hand Mr. Howell's hand.

AND THAT, as Clara cheerfully remarked at last, was the end of that.

But it wasn't—quite. For after the cup had at last been presented to Barbara, they all went back to Cliff House in joy and triumph, Mr. Howell and Elsie among them, carrying the Cornfield Cup aloft. And in the anteroom they broke the wonderful news to the shing-around Phyllis as they greeted around her bed.

"And we've got Hilda to thank for it all!" Mr. Howell said. "Thank goodness I returned to-day. I happened to remember that you had your carnival on, and so broke my journey, expecting to see you perform, Phyl. Instead, I was just in time to prevent Hilda being arrested as a conspirator, and to get Elsie out of jail."

Phyllis laughed.

"And Barfield?"

"Barfield," he replied, "is no longer my partner. As for the girl—well, I don't think we need worry about her any longer. I hear they are both getting out of the country at the earliest possible moment, and it is unlikely we shall ever see either of them again. And again, Barbara—"

He turned impetuously to the smiling Hilda. "I thank you!"

Hilda laughed. She felt she could afford to laugh now. For, thanks to her, all had gone right. Cliff House were the carnival champions. Phyllis and Elsie were happy once more, and two costly schemes had received their just deserts.

THE END.

RIVALS FOR A PLACE IN THE HOCKEY TEAM

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If Study 12 Fails!

"Hullo, hullo! Is that Swan-lake, please? Could I speak to Pam? Right? I'll hold the line!"

It was Sunday evening at Morcova School, and Betty, with permission from her Form-mistress, had rung up Swanlake.

For various reasons Betty had felt that she could not wait until the morning to know how affairs had gone at Swanlake since Saturday afternoon.

Now there was Pam's call, inquiring "Hullo?" from the other end of the line, and Betty said eagerly: "Oh, Pam dear! I let it wait just give you a ring! How are things now, Pam? How's 'Miss Blank' going on?"

"The answer was:—
 "Just the same, Betty!"

"Mean to say, Pam, she still isn't able to remember the least little thing? I—I've been so hoping all day that something might sort of give her memory a bit of a jog!"

And Betty grinned again as she heard her Swanlake chum voice a regretful "No!" What an amazing circumstance, it was that Miss Blank was still suffering from this after-effect of her accident of a few nights ago. Her memory completely lost, and showing no signs of waking again!

"How about Claire Ferrand, Pam? Suppose you've not seen anything of her to-day?" Betty gave a little laugh as she put the question in another form: "Claire hasn't come back to Swanlake?"

"No, Betty."

"Then perhaps she'll really do as she said, and not come back to Swanlake again now! Pardon?"

Pam's answer remark that she really didn't mind; if Claire Ferrand never came back there a very disconcerting cry from Betty.

"Oh, but I shall mind, Pam! I'm just taking the idea of never going to the bottom of all the mystery. Well, see you at school in the morning? Bye for now, Pam! Night, dear!"

FOR NEW READERS:
PAM WILLOUGHBY of Morcova School has become a dog-girl in order that she may have time to act as listener to:
CLAIRE FERRAND—a girl who, after living all her life on a sheep-station in Australia, has come into a fortune. Until she is able to settle down in England she is to stay with the Willoughbys at their stately home—Swanlake.
VIVIANE MURDO, having heard of Claire's fortune, wishes to take her place. She meets Claire and tells a plausible story to the effect that the ketone in the pocket, she represents herself as an amateur detective and offers to take Claire in the East Wing at Swanlake until she can clear her name. Claire consents, and Viviane arrives at Swanlake to be welcomed at the end Claire Ferrand, but
BETTY BANTON, one of Pam's Morcova friends, is at once suspicious of Viviane. The real Claire Ferrand is discovered, but, as she is suffering from concussion, she can tell nothing. Betty and Pam discover, however, the impostor's real name. As a result, and fearing that the real Claire will soon be in a condition to tell the truth, Viviane leaves Swanlake, determined to hide at Morcova school.
(See end on.)

Then from the telephone-box in the Hall of Morcova's great schoolhouse Betty went storming upstairs to her Form's study quarters.

She sped down a long corridor and slipped into Study No. 12, where the chambermaid was holding one of its pleasant weekly meetings. This took the form of a definite relaxation from discipline imposed during most of Sunday.

Chatter and laughter were the noise on Saturday night's, and although Naomer, like other boyish spirits, was in Sunday clothes, she had not yet that prevent her from keeping the usual jog of clove cordial.

Cups and tumbler of this steaming nightcap had, circulated when Betty switched upon the happy crew. And

making Polly, who sat perched upon the table-edge while quaffing, raised her glass as if to propose a toast.

"Success," said, Polly, "to Ram-cord's gala week!"

"Hurrah, hurrah!"

"Not forgetting—our play?" Betty asked, as she took up her steaming ration of Naomer's "grand potage."

"Hear, hear!" droned Betty and others. "The play! The—"

"Hi, wait a bit!" yelled Naomer, caught with a drained glass. "Let me get a refill quick!"

Next moment, owing to the dusky one's too hasty manipulation of the party's empty jug, there was a loud rump from pretty Paula Ured. Up from her favourite nap-chair, she bounded, shaking splashes of clove cordial from her frock.

"You goop, Naomer! Now look W!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Eel you will stick your foot out, of course I must fall over you!"

"My frock!"

"Ah, hah! What about my clove cordial! Hehehe—"

"Ruler!" Polly interposed, snatching up the handy length of cloth which she so often brandished, manically, in the mis-called Abode of Harmony. "Sunday-night!" said Polly victoriously. "Dis-graceful! You don't see me—"

But, anyway, they saw Polly just then slip off the table-edge and go bump! to the floor, with a consequent jerking of ears but drink all over Paula.

"Girls," said Betty, when at last the nightmare had subsided, "about Swan-lake—"

"Oh, yeah!" But Polly was more seriously eager than the Americanian implied.

"Have just spoken with Pam," went on Betty. "No change. So there it is, and it means that the mystery about Claire Ferrand is not a bit nearer being cleared up. Which makes me feel—"

"Rotten!" Polly applied the word. "Gosh, it is a wicked, no mistake! Day after day has gone by; night after night—and we're still whacked!"

By
MARJORIE STANTON

"Betty might as well have said the mystery about Claire Ferrand and Miss Blank," came from Betty Trevor gleefully. "It's all one—"

"Comes it in?" sneered Polly. "Who cares how often the Ferrand girl has said that she had nothing to do with Miss Blank being found in the east wing at Swanlake, impossible after an accident; we know very well that Claire Ferrand was up in some queer game or other—in the east wing!"

"If only Miss Blank could get her memory back!" Betty sighed helplessly. "There, in a moment, we'd know how far our theory has been right or wrong."

"Another week before we, Betty," murmured Judy Corvair hopefully. "And I suppose we shall be going over to Swanlake every other afternoon after school!"

"But if Claire Ferrand isn't there," Polly framed. "Where's our earthly chance of solving the mystery? She's checked up her part in the play. She's gone away from Swanlake, saying she'll stay away! As for poor Miss Blank, she'll—"

Pausing, Polly took a hasty turn about the study.

"For my part," she next murmured, "I hope that Miss Blank, as we have called her, does not recover her memory! Any rate, not for a little while yet! As soon as she does—it's no longer up to us!"

Betty smiled at that.

"Well, if you wish, Polly, suppose I look tonight, that she's still going to be up to us. Miss Blank looks like going in in just the same strange state for many a day yet."

Then they laced the bell for Big Hall, and so there was no time for further talk. Most of the classes rushed away to join in the general stampede down to prayers. But Form-captain Betty, for one, only dashed down wearing a hard-thinking look.

And, in the dormitory after lights-out, however quickly subconscious of how dropped off to sleep, Betty herself was kept awake by an active mind.

Even more so than Polly, who had always the play to think about, Betty fairly worried over the problem of Claire Ferrand. Mackerling, to have suspected so much, and yet to have been able to prove—nothing!

To-night it seemed to Betty that some change in the situation was urgently called for.

Her strong sense of fair play made her realize that unless she got her clues were soon able to justify her suspicions, the suspect would be acquitted, as it were, to an "acquittal."

And in a most unpleasant light would they all figure, if in the end they had to admit—say, in the presence of Fran's parents—that Claire Ferrand had been introduced by these all, for no sufficient reason.

Suddenly, while Betty was still racking her brains, she heard a sound that quite startled her. She sat up in bed sharply—was the only girl in the great dormitory to do so, which showed that she was the only one awake.

Quiet—that sound which, just then, had disturbed the brooding silence of night-time in the schoolhouse. It had resembled a couple of stumbling feet—falls overhead. But the floor above the dormitories was simply unadorned attic and their landings. Why should anyone be creeping about up there at this late hour of the night?

"Mackerling about, too! so it's one with a tooth," Betty shrewdly murmured. "Yet a mistress would be certain to light her way about the place with a torch."

For a few moments longer she listened intently, but there was no repetition of the unaccountable noise. So, with a shrug, she curled down in her bed again.

Then she sat up once more.

"No; not good enough," was the thought which made her throw back the bedclothes, and come, quite quietly, feet to floor.

The Girl Who Limped

BETTY thrust her feet into flannel slippers, and washed at her dressing-gown, to get it on as she padded across to the dormitory door.

She was going out to take a look round—not for any officious reason. As the Form-captain, she was only concerned with girls belonging to her Form, and they, she knew for certain, were all in bed and fast asleep.

What had prompted Betty to leave the dormitory was a sudden idea that they could not possibly find, possibly which she had heard. Nobody was groping about upstairs. Probably it was one of the school cats jumping about—mean in appearance, by accident, and trying to find a way out.

The thing had happened before now, and it had ended in a distressed mackerling that fetched the whole dormitory awake. And the Form, when awakened at midnight, did not seem to go to sleep again.

But there was no hapless party to be set free when Betty got upstairs. Of the several attics, only one had its door closed. She expected to hear a grateful purring as she softly opened that door; but nothing of the sort came, nor did a fluffy head rub itself against one of her bare ankles.

She padded here and there, went from one attic to another, and still all was as it should be, so far as eye and ear could tell. Greatly helped, too, were Betty's peering eyes, by bright moonlight, shining in at most of the dingy windows.

The school's crypt-ward chimed rung the hour quarter. Then came the first peep-show bang of the hour bell striking midnight.

She was at one of the attic windows, rather dreamily gazing out, when the bell stroke became away into silence. From so high up, very fascinating looked the grounds and gardens, and the great playing fields of the dear old school in the moon's incandescent light. It was a vivid scene, all in silver and black.

"Goodness!"

This time, sight and not hearing, had been greatly startled. Down there she could see a figure moving quickly, yet haltingly.

It was a girlish form, as black in the moonlight as was any of the clipped yew shading the spacious grounds. Going away from the schoolhouse, it appeared to be, but going by no path that led even to a side gateway.

For a moment Betty was inclined to jump to the conclusion that a schooler was wandering, by the use of the sly device—was running away. There was a hasty making for a shrubbery, where she would be out of the moon's light. And that path, as Betty knew, would take the girl close to a boundary hedge, on the other side of which was open woodland.

But before the girl, whoever she was, had gained the shelter of that shrubby path, something caused her to turn past. Then Betty, excitedly peering

her hardest, witnessed a kind of bending down as if to tie a shoelace.

The girl was still in that bent state, when Betty noticed that a small bag or parcel, which it was impossible to tell exactly, had been set down upon the ground.

A few moments, and then its owner went on.

There was a last glimpse of her, walking more at ease now, so that Betty wondered if the girl had been forced to stop because of a bit of grit in her shoe. She had certainly limped until she folded with a faint of heart.

Then she was gone out of the moonlight, and quite out of sight.

At once Betty turned away from the window, to go downstairs. She meant, she felt, do something about it all without a moment's delay.

She could not account for the noise of a few minutes since, up here in the attic. The runaway had first crept up to the attic, to possess herself of that bag or parcel. In it were things which had been packed, and put by in secret, to await this midnight light.

FIFTEEN or more later someone came tiptoeing into the Fourth Form dormitory. Betty had returned to bed some fifty minutes ago, but was still wide awake.

To her bedside stole Miss Eversard, for she it was who had entered so quietly.

"Oh, I have been all round the place, Betty," was the Form-mistress' deep whisper. "Everything is quite all right, except that I found an un-latched window. Not a girl is missing. So the most likely been a stranger you saw—some poor out-of-work girl. I can only suppose, who is even homeless. Tramping from town to town by day, and resting where she can."

"But, Miss Eversard—"

"Lie down now, Betty dear, and go to sleep. You did quite right to come to me about it. But there is nothing more to be done, and I am only so sorry that you have been kept awake like this."

And Miss Eversard went away as quietly as she had come, leaving Betty to deal a pillow many another restless perch before she finally found sleep.

Pursuit!

AS usual, it took more than Monday morning in class to enable the Form to get over the unaccountable effects of the week-end.

Two o'clock bell for afternoon class produced as many neck wrappings as had been heard at the first master bell of the day.

One girl, however, was having the luck to be exempt from afternoon class—Betty. And how the rest of the girls envied her! What playful jestings there were as she was seen to rick away on her bicycle just as that horrid bell was sounding its unaccountable note again!

Form-captain Betty had to be at Barcombe Castle by half-past ten.

Possibly that bright young thing, Lady Evelyn Knight, could very well have saved a time for seeing Betty that would not have clashed with school hours. But Lady Evelyn Knight, herself not so long ago a schoolgirl, could be trusted to engineer time off from lessons for another girl, especially on a Monday.

So there had been Lady Evelyn's "ring through" to the Form-stressors after school, making a request with irresistible blandness. There were certain matters that her youthful ladyship wished to talk over with Betty in regard to the play and the gala week generally. And this afternoon would be no exception if Miss Everett would not mind.

"I mean to say, time's getting on, isn't it?" had been Lady Evelyn's sweet submission over the phone. "Only ten days now!"

That the great opening day for the town's carnival week was close at hand, boardings and shop windows of quaint old Harrogate were proclaiming. Betty, as she peddled along the old-fashioned High Street, saw many a three-colour poster and many a pink or blue placard.

The printed bills had so much to say, it was difficult for the public to "read as it ran."

But the local printers had done their best to put various attractions in display type, and Betty was to be forgiven a great thrill as she caught two lines in great black capitals:

"THE MORROVE PLAYERS IN "BYGONE HARROGHE."

For a certainty, these were lines of smaller print underneath, saying how the play had been written by a Morrove scholar, and was to be the omitted production of those amateur players whose previous shows had so delighted the world of Harrogate.

But Betty could not stop to read the details. The star's name, "BYGONE HARROGHE," there in large print, was causing her to pedal all the faster.

It was a wonderful reminder that one had not a minute to spare. From Harrogate (Leeds) presently the motor left, for, post, to Swanslake, several miles away.

Falls and the rest were all going over to Swanslake with Pam at the close of afternoon school. Another rehearsal! And Betty must be there on time.

Yet an event her brakes suddenly, so that she might hop down from her machine, after all, half-way along High Street.

There had been such a surprise for her, she had wobbled in the traffic, and had very nearly fallen off her bicycle.

Clair's remark! That girl actually here in the heart of Harrogate!

She was at the kerb in front of a cycle shop, looking ready to slide away on a machine so spick-and-span and shiny, it was obviously brand new.

Betty, running her own rust-speckled push-bike to the pavement's edge, was with the well-groomed girl before there had been time for a rubber damaged spare to be replaced by an amored snirk.

"Oh—er—hello, Betty?" stammered Study No. 12's "suspect." "Not in 'hood!"

"No, and you, Claire—you went away from Swanslake on Saturday morning to go right away, we thought!"

"That shows what thought did!" was Claire's rejoinder. "As a matter of fact, I've wack-ended at Sandton Bay, where I stayed before. Pam knows how I was taken with the place."

"I see! And now—going back home?"

"Is it any business of yours where I'm going?" Betty was polite answered, "when I've told the lot of you I'm quite done with you? But I don't mind your knowing. As a matter of fact, I came into Harrogate to see about buying a bicycle. I can do with one. I've just bought this machine, and I'm going for



CREEPING up to the broken fence, Betty was just in time to see the girl she knew as Claire Ferrand clambering over the window-sill into the ruined house. "So this," the Captain instantly guessed, "is her new hiding place!"

a ride round. May get as far as Swanslake, just to pick up any letters for me."

She set the brand-new machine for riding away and pushed off, coasting with some awkwardness.

"Try!" the Jeag bask at Betty disdainfully. "And I may take a ticket for the wonderful play—just to see what looks you kids make of yourselves?"

The offensive remark had no effect on Betty, who merely smiled. She stood looking after the well-dressed girl, looking pretty sure that Swanslake would be visited during the "ride round." The way taken now at setting off was the way one took to make for Pam's house far out in the country.

This thoughtful gazing after the suspect caused Betty to notice that the girl was not riding at all easily. For a moment Betty attributed this to the being a newly acquired machine. Then she remembered that "Miss Tricky" had suffered a nasty wrench to the saddle last week. She had been with a little lurch when she went away from Swanslake on Saturday morning. So Pam had said, on getting to school for the half-day's attendance.

The cyclist became lost to sight in the traffic, and Betty herself pushed off again.

Then came more excitement nearly made her fall off.

"Lance! And—great goodness, it was a lovely girl who was going away from Harrove in the night—a girl, too, about Claire's age!"

Betty, at the kerb again with her machine, was far more out of breath

from the "turn" that such thoughts had given her than she had been at the end of the devil run into town.

It had even taken giddy effect upon her, this sudden sensational notion that Miss Tricky and last night's midnight prowler in the school grounds were one and the same girl!

Suddenly Betty stood her bicycle against a lamp-post, and ran to the cycle shop. There was a young man assistant in the shop as she entered.

"Afternoon!" Betty began, doing her best to appear calm. "The young lady who was here just now—"

"The one I saw you talking to, miss!"

"That's right! Can you tell me the make of the machine she has just bought? It seemed such a lovely one!"

"The latest model, miss—a Silverstreak. But she hasn't bought it, miss; only hired it."

"Oh, I see! Just trying it, is she?"

"Well, I'm hoping she'll take to it. Really, she only wanted to hire a machine for a few hours. I let her have that model, hoping to get a customer. Would you care to take out—"

"Oh, no, thanks—at least, not to-day!" Betty hastened to laugh. "I don't know about some other time—next term. But the machine did look tempting! Silverstreak! I must remember that."

She walked, hoping to soften the young salesman's ill-concealed disappointment, and went out. Back on the pavement, she reacted as excited:

"Who? My goodness, what would

Folly and the others say to all this? Moon trifles! Only kind! But she told me she had bought it! Hired for a few hours—just to get her to Swanlake and back! "So pick up my letters," she said. "But why—why couldn't she have her letters sent on to where she is staying at Sandton? That—Betty's mind reverted to the occasional belief—she hasn't been staying at Sandton! That's another of her lies! She's been staying—has been in hiding—at Marcorve!"

Now the heart of Fernandine Betty was beating fast. Now her astute mind was working fast.

Get after Miss Tricks, taking it for granted that the road to Swanlake would be the one to follow! But the appointment with Lady Evelyn, at the Castle!

In a moment, Betty's mind was made up.

The main post office was close by. She ran to it, and was next minute in talk with Lady Evelyn, on the phone.

"I say, Lady Evelyn, I'm terribly sorry, but do you mind if I can't turn up, after all? I was on my way to you—I'm in town now; but something terribly important—Pardon!"

Just like her youthful habit, she "ripped" that she was, to be already crying back over the line:

"Quite all right; you just do as you please, Betty darling! I only thought—you know, being a bit Manchester, perhaps, you might like to visit Fernie, or whatever it is!"

"Thanks—thanks! Then—I say! Hello, hello! I'll give you a ring by-and-by, and explain!" "Bye!"

And Betty, bursting clear of the machine, rushed away to find her machine at that lamp-post, and so to off after Miss Tricky—full past.

The House in the Woods

A GREY sky hovering over the meadowland decided names; a horn wind whirling through the dead branches, and a schoolgirl riding fast along this lonely road.

Betty Banton, gaily "clicking to the quarry!"

Mile after mile she had come along from Marcorve, going all-out on the level, skirting "fence-walk" down into any dip which the undulating road provided, and then plunging her head on to the opposite rise.

And now Betty glimpsed her quarry—just the head and shoulders, which next moment went down out of sight as Study No. 22's "expect" took the gentle descent into another hollow.

Sharply the Marcorve parson looked up and frowned. Bearing in mind that Miss Tricky had a thousand a mile, which made pedalling more two cars, one was slow enough up with her. She would probably have to walk, pushing her bicycle up the other side of the dip. A bit warmed-up and breathless, Betty was glad enough to go slow now.

It had taken her as long as this, riding her fastest, to do the overracking. So, then, in spite of that troublesome a mile, Miss Tricky must have got along pretty swiftly. And why? Where was the necessity for the girl to subject a hurt ankle to the strain it must have meant, just for a ride round? Betty wondered.

"Half-way to Swanlake, we see," she realised, stopping along very quietly with her shopping machine. "And just over there, this road joins the one that runs from Marcorve to Swanlake. Hallo!"

And she stopped dead, at the same time ducking her head so as to be quite out of sight to Miss Tricky, who was off her bicycle at the foot of the slope and whirling it into the bracken.

Instantly, Betty trundled her machine off the road, stalling it against a crusted holly. That done, she nudged cautiously forwards, through withered branches that were still high, so as to leave the other girl under observation from a spot affording ample cover.

Betty had not failed to notice a forlorn-looking dwelling-house within a short distance of this spot at which Miss Tricky had broken her cycle ride.

It was a rambling old place, built many years ago by some eccentric man to whom druggists surroundings made a strange aspect. Since his death, the place had been altogether too gloomy for anybody else to want to take it, and so only it was in a ruinous state.

Betty & Co. had often glimpsed part of its damp-darkened walls and mossy tiles as they went by on the road between Marcorve and Swanlake. Careless plants to give grotesque solutions had grown to a great size, and this dense surround of dark-green trees made the place all the more sombre.

Already Betty had wondered whether Miss Tricky had sighted from her bicycle, to take a look at the property. And now there was a fresh sight of the girl, striding towards it, across rising ground, that was all a waste of leather, lying behind the derelict building.

After her word "that Betty," the rank grass-growth affording ample cover. So the moment came when the schoolgirl shadowed was close to some broken-down house, that had once parted the open moor from the thickly planted grove behind the house, while the shadowed girl was herself climbing in at a back window. The window was one of many that had long since lost every pane of glass.

Continually waiting a minute or two after Miss Tricky had entered the old house, Betty signalled through the long-reflecting grounds, and got to that same window.

She had seen that her suspect had done her article no good by this afternoon's activities. The loop was as noticeable as ever. And yet, this time she was coming across to the house!

But Betty was in no doubt as to why the girl had been attracted to the tumble-down building. A fresh hiding-place! Saturday and Sunday night

she had sheltered in the attic at Marcorve School. Now she was going to see if she could shelter here, when night had come again. Perhaps she feared discovery at Marcorve! Perhaps, too, she now needed a hiding-place—nearer Swanlake!

Over the rotting sill of the kitchen window cowered Betty. Making not a sound herself, she was listening eagerly for sounds that would tell her what had become of Miss Tricky.

A complete absence of any such sounds compelled her, at last, to start upon her own round of the place. At the risk of finding herself suddenly face to face with the girl, Betty had to loop after her. "Utherston," she murmured to herself, "she may be gone without my knowing it, and then I'll have her!"

So, from a dim passage leading away from the kitchen region, she solitary Marcorve wayly tiptoed to the front hall.

The wind, coming freely at so many broken windows, caused its own little eerie sounds about the gloomy house. But she still could not detect anything resembling a footfall on the bare sounding boards.

All was deathly still, save for that eerie moaning of the wind, and the "caw" of a few jacobins who had made their home in this mansion.

Recklessly Betty crept to the stairs; she had a feeling that perhaps the suspect had gone into an upper room, and so she decided to go up and investigate.

The landing above was long and dim and utterly quiet. Betty paused, looking about—and then suddenly her heart seemed chilled as three crows, from below, a ghostly shriek.

She turned and dashed downstairs, wondering, leaving:

And then she could have laughed aloud with relief as she realized that the cause of that triple-crow cry was only a white owl, disturbed from its lonely haunt.

"With I had Folly with me!" she thought, and then, with a rather grim smile: "But perhaps it's just as well she's not here. She'd be sure to fall over or something and make a fearful row!"

Into one empty living-room and another she looked, then stole back into the hall.

As she did so, a door upon the left of the kitchen passage, at this end, suddenly creaked open. Betty started back, giving a startled cry.

There, halted in amazement, at the top of some cellar steps, was none other than the Vicar's Marcorve-imposter of Swanlake.

FACE to face—fugitive and Fernandine! And now that Betty has so daringly tracked the imposter to her lair, what will happen? Read in next Saturday's thrilling chapters of this powerful serial how the captain challenges the schemes, and of what occurs then. Order your copy of next week's SCHOOLGIRL at once.

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