

NEW
MORRISSEY
SERIAL

EVERY SCHOOLGIRL'S OWN PAPER

COMPLETE
CLIFF HOUSE
STORY

THE SCHOOLGIRL

Wk. 200. Vol. 24.
No. 10. 1927.
PUB. BY THE
SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN

EVERY 2^D SATURDAY

Incorporating
SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN



One of many amusing incidents
from

"BESSIE'S BIGGEST PROBLEM,"

the delightful long complete
Cliff House School story, by
Hilda Richards, in this issue

BESSIE BUNTER, Beloved Duffer of the Fourth Form at Cliff House School, features in this Grand Long Complete Story



Bessie's Biggest Problem

Where is Bessie?



"BESSIE—EE! Bessie Bunter!"

The walls of the Fourth Form corridor at Cliff House School hung the name back in a rumbling echo. But Elizabeth Gertrude Bunter, who was in such urgent distress, answered not.

"Bessie!" Barbara Redfern called again, a faint note of perplexity in her voice.

She stood at the door of Study No. 4, which was shared by herself, Mabel Lynn and the girl whose name she was now calling. She had stood at the door of Study No. 4 calling that name for the last two minutes.

The door opposite to Study No. 4—that belonging to Study No. 21, occupied by Bridget O'Toole, Lucy Morgan, and Joan Sheldon Charmant, opened. It was Joan herself who appeared.

"Calling for Bessie?" she asked. "Why, yes?" Babs replied innocently.

"Did you hear me call?"

"Thought I heard whispering," Joan smiled. "But I thought you'd like to know Bessie went out just after she'd sold me her stamp collection."

Babs blinked.

"Her stamp collection? She—the sold it? To you?"

"Yes, didn't she tell you?" Joan frowned a little. "I gave her five shillings for it. You can guess," she added, with a laugh, "what's happening to the five shillings. I should look in the tuckshop, if I were you."

But Babs stood still. She blinked again. She knew Bessie Bunter much better than Joan Charmant, and she

felt an inward corner of amusement. For that stamp collection, so often derided by the more expert philatelists of the Fourth Form, was the pride and joy of Bessie's existence.

"You're sure! You're not pulling my leg?"

"Why, no?"

"Then—thanks!" And Babs, still looking amazed, retreated into Study No. 4, where Mabel Lynn, her golden-haired chum, was kneeling in front of the fire, making toast. "I say, Mabs—"

"Done it?" Mabs cried, as she jumped to her feet. "Well, thank goodness, that's the last piece. By the way, Babs, did I tell you we'd got no butter?"

Babs jumped.

"Oh, rats! I bought half a pound this morning!"

"Well, we've got none. And neither," Mabs added, "have we any jam. We've also run short of the cake which Bessie received from home yesterday. And somebody seems to have been borrowing

breadth." "But she sold her stamp collection."

"Oh, rats! Not Bessie!" "But she has," Babs frowned. "You know how fond she was of that collection! —" And then she stopped as the door opened and a girl looked in—a senior girl, the was—Connie Jackson, the unpopular prefect of the Sixth. "Oh, hello, Connie!"

Connie glared.

"Where's Bessie Bunter?"

"In the tuckshop, I think. But what's the matter?"

"She'll jolly soon know when I get hold of her," Connie snarled. "I gave her a hundred lines yesterday. They should have been delivered at break today. Go and get her out of the tuckshop. And you can tell her," Connie added spitefully, "that if she hasn't done them I'll make it jolly warm for her."

"Now, girl!" Mabs sighed, as she went out. "Such a sweet disposition! But what the deuce is wrong with Bessie, Babs?"

But Babs shook her head. She was swooning into her unconscious then, for outside a nasty drizzle was falling.

She felt bitterly worried, faintly puzzled. Bessie was such a dear, blundering old duffer, really, so utterly harmless, so full, always, of good intentions, that it was difficult to imagine what bother she could possibly be in.

She went out, shivering a little in the cutting wind that snuck her as she emerged into the open.

No doubt at all had Babs that she would find Bessie in the tuckshop, but she blinked when she looked in. Two girls only occupied the tuckshop, sitting on the high seats at the counter. One was Diana Reynolds-Clarke, the blonde

By

HILDA RICHARDS

the tea and sugar. But what's the matter with you?" she added, staring at Babs' puzzled face.

"It's Bessie."

"You mean, Bessie's boned the butter?"

"No, but—" And then Babs, another train of thought set going in her mind by that question, looked up quickly. "My hat, I wonder!" she

FOR once, Bessie Bunter has something more important than her remittance—and her appetite—to think about. In this delightful story Bessie proves that besides having a heart of gold she has quite a share of the oft-vaunted Bunter courage!

Friend and of the Fourth; the other was Georgia Hingston of the Fifth.

"Yoicks, Babs, looking for something!" Diana asked.

"Only Bessie! Have you seen her?"

"Saw her an hour ago. Not since!" Diana chuckled. "Bessie had a fairly full load then. She drifted off towards the cloisters. Have something, Babs?"

But Babs declined. Filled with growing uneasiness, she went out. Bessie was not in the backlogs! Bessie had not done her lines. Bessie had not her precious stamp collection! What an earth had come over Bessie?

In great excitement Babs drifted back towards school. The dusk, quickening in the brightness of the afternoon, had almost deepened to darkness then. Lights were already glowing at the windows.

Babs recalled the school lawn. There, for a moment, remembering Diana's words, she seemed to fling a glance in the direction of the silent cloisters. What an earth could have induced old Bessie to go strolling in that direction!

And then Babs frowned, remembering that at the other side of the Cloisters was the hedge that formed Old Bessie's southern boundary, and that hedge was the convenient gap used by girls who wished to get out of school without being seen. Was it possible that Bessie had needed one?

But why? Bessie was no reckless law-breaker at a rule.

And then, even as she halted, a voice came to Babs' ears. A distressed voice—what said?

"Oh, dear—dear! I'm kiki-cought!"

"Bessie!" Babs cried.

Bessie's voice it was. It came from the gap in the hedge. Thither at once, Babs hurried.

Certain crashings, rustlings, and rustlings told her before she reached the hedge exactly what was happening.

Plump Bessie, pressing her too-tall hair through the narrow gap had become rather intricately involved with branches and thorns.

Babs saw her vaguely, struggling and worried, and, as usual, getting herself into a worse mess than ever.

"Bessie!" she cried.

"Oh crumbs, is that you, Babs! I— Oh! That went in my eye. Oh dear, I—I'm stuck!"

"Then," Babs said practically, "let me unstick you! No, hold still, please. How the deuce can I get you unstick if you wriggle about like that. There! And there! My hat, you are in a tangle."

"You know, somebody ought to do something about those beastly hedges," Bessie grumbled. "Why can't they grow hedges without thorns?"

"And who?" Babs demanded, "can't you like Bessie Bunter keep within school bounds? There you are!" And with a snap, she heaved Bessie free at last.

"Now, cheap, where have you been?"

"Oh, awfully, Babs!"

"Where have you been?" Babs repeated.

"Oh, anywhere, you know. At 14-15-16, only to Friendside Woods to see Ess May."

"And who?" Babs demanded, "is Ess May?" But back up now, chaps! Connie Jackson is looking

for you! You can answer questions when you've made peace with her. Come on!"

And breathlessly she hurried the fat one back to school.

They reached the study. Bessie blinked furiously at the table as she came in, smiled feebly at Mabel Lovers, who greeted her appearance with a stare of frank inquiry, and, in a woo-begone way, took off her hat and coat.

"Now, Bessie," Babs began, when Bessie had dropped into the armchair. Bessie blinked apprehensively.

"First of all, Babs demanded, "why have you sold your stamp collection?"

"Well, I had to buy—I mean—mean I— Oh dear—dear, I—I wanted the money!"

"And who," Babs resumed, "haven't you done those lines Connie Jackson gave you?"

Bessie blinked.

"Oh crumbs! I—I forgot them."

"And where," Mabel sternly demanded, "is the pound of butter and the cake that were in the cupboard?"

Bessie turned pink.

"Dad—did we have a cake and bit-butter?" she asked feebly.

"Well, you ought to know! The cake was yours," Mabel sniffed. "And you haven't told us yet why you went to the woods."

The door moved ever so slightly. Nobody in that moment noticed it, however.

"But—but— Oh crumbs!" Bessie gasped. "I wish you wouldn't ask all these questions," she said peevishly.

"Anybody would think I was an encyclopedia. I went to the woods because of those curious questions, you know. That is to say, I—I haven't seen my gram!" Bessie blurted desperately. "And I don't know a girl named Ess May, so you needn't think I do! And I don't know," she added wistfully, "why you should question me as though I was on trial, or something! Bless!"

"Oh, my hat! Bessie, old thing!" Babs said. "Look here—"

And then, quickly turning as the door cracked, she stepped in dimly as Connie Jackson came into the room. Bessie turned pale.

"Oh crumbs! It's—It's Kiki-Connie!" she stammered. "Oh dear— It's-b-hallo, Connie! Aren't you in-looking well, you know?"

Connie stood still. Very straightly, very strongly she looked at the fat one.

"Then amazingly the prefect's face broke into a smile.

"Hello!" she said. "Whose are those lines?"

Bessie gulped.

"Oh crumbs, I—I forgot to do them! I mean—mean I decided to do them, and I—I must have lost them, you know. Perhaps," Bessie suggested desperately,

"the cat ate them. The cat does eat the most extraordinary things, you know."

"Bessie, you fathead!" Babs hissed.

She waited then for the storm to burst—waited, fully expecting the half-tempered prefect to unweave out in with some scolding reprimand. But Connie, most astonishingly, stood still. Was she dreaming? Babs thought. Did she really see that smile on Connie's face? Did she really hear Connie's next words?

"Well, never mind the lines," was what Connie Jackson said. "I'll let you off these Bessie. I—I didn't come to see you about these, really. I just



"OH dear, I'm stuck! I—save me, Babs!" Bessie wailed. Babs repressed a smile. She could see that in trying to get through a gap in the hedge the fat girl had become helplessly entangled.

Bessie's Got To Work!



"YES, really, you know, I didn't feel like anything," Bessie

replied, shrugging with great satisfaction. "That's the best of being such a jolly clever ventriloquist and having such a quick brain in an emergency!"

"But what," Babs asked, "did she regard upon you for?"

"Oh, just something, you know," Bessie said evasively. "She was trying to get out of me why I made friends with the gipsy girl, Bessie— And there she paused, a sudden look of uneasy alarm in her eyes. "Babs, you wouldn't think she might come here after me?" she added apprehensively.

"I don't think, I'm sure," Babs replied. "As soon as your jolly clever ventriloquist trick draws upon her, that— Oh, my hat," she cried at a knock came at the door, while Bessie, with a frightened cry, leapt to her feet and stood under the table. "Babs, open the door," she muttered. "Bessie, keep still!"

"Oh, dear-dear. Tell her I'm not here," Bessie whispered. "Tell her you don't know where I am. Tell her I've gone to London."

Another knock. Babs, crossing to the door of Study No. 4, threw it open.

But it was not the expected Connie Jackson she saw. It was Miss Valerie Charmant, the elder sister of Joan and the very popular mistress of the Fourth Form. Babs, without Miss Charmant looking for once, however, as Babs, holding the door open, invited her into the study. She threw a quick look at Babs.

"Isn't Bessie in, Barbara?" "Yes—no!" Bessie's voice came in stifled accents from under the table. Bessie, from that point of disadvantage, not being able to see anything but the feet and ankles of the mistress.

Miss Charmant looked astonished. Then she smiled.

"Bessie! You foolish child! Come out at once!"

Bessie jumped.

"Oh, grandma! Is that you, Miss Charmant?"

"Of course it is!" And Miss Charmant pulled the cloth aside, blinking in consternation, as Bessie's fat, speckled face peered up into her own. "What on earth are you doing there, girl?"

"Oh, dear-dear! I thought you were some other cat," Bessie stammered. "I mean-mean I—I didn't think that at all, you know. It—it's a joke," she added feebly.

"A joke?"

"Yes, A—a new game," Bessie explained breathlessly. "B—B—" she called "Hiding under the table," you know, isn't it Babs, until— Oh, Miss Charmant—" And Bessie straightened up.

Miss Charmant smiled. Babs and Mabel gasped.

"Very well," the mistress said. "Now, please sit down, Bessie. No, Barbara, don't move. You and Mabel may stay, I have just," Miss Charmant added, "been talking to Miss Primrose, Bessie."

Bessie blushed. "And Miss Primrose," Miss Charmant added seriously, "is very disappointed with your half-term examination papers, Bessie. She says that you are the most backward girl, not only in the Fourth Form, but in the whole school. No, Bessie, please do not dear



"BESSIE!" a stern voice called. "Where are you going?" Bessie wheeled round, dropping her case. "Oh, really, you know! I'm not going anywhere. I—I was walking in my sleep!"

it. I may say," Miss Charmant added with a little sigh, "that I have spent a very strenuous half hour in trying to persuade Miss Primrose to change her mind about putting you into the Upper Third at once!"

"Oh no!" Babs cried in sharp dismay.

"Oh, but that's precisely, you know," Bessie put in feebly. "I mean-mean, fancy putting a jolly clever girl like me among those lags—"

"Bessie, please!" Miss Charmant's voice held a sharp note of admonition.

"You really must regard this matter as serious. You are not clever, Bessie. You are not even industrious. Now please do listen to me. There is still a chance for you, Bessie, but it means that you have to work as you have never worked in your life before."

"I have prevailed upon Miss Primrose to postpone her decision for a fortnight. During that fortnight, Bessie, you will have your opportunity to make good. You will have extra lessons. Three lessons," Miss Charmant added, "will be submitted to Miss Primrose herself, so now it is up to you."

Bessie blinked. She blinked in the most woe-begone consternation and dismay. To be sent down to a lower form! To lose the jolly company of Babs and Mabel—the comfort of Study No. 4!

Her lips trembled over as little.

"And—and who will sit on me—the extra lessons?" she asked.

"That," the mistress told her, "will have to be arranged, Bessie." And she looked up at the door opened and Connie Jackson came into the room.

"Yes, Connie!"

Bessie—"I heard something of what you said as I came in—the door was ajar, you know. I have," Connie added, with a faintly friendly grin at the astounded duffer of the Fourth, "a suggestion to make, if you don't mind. Naturally, none of us would like to see Bessie put down into a lower Form—"

Bessie's eyes opened wide. Babs and Mabel inconceivably stared.

"And as," Connie went on smoothly, "it is obvious that Bessie needs extra coaching—why, then, I should feel very pleased to give her that extra coaching myself!"

Miss Charmant looked immensely relieved. Babs and Mabel frowned. Bessie, however, looked frankly alarmed.

"But, let me hear here—" she began.

"Well, Connie, that is very generous of you," Miss Charmant said, after a pause—"very generous indeed! It would, of course, be better for Bessie to be taken charge of by one responsible person."

That settled it. From Bessie came an audible gasp. Babs bit her lip, glancing covertly at Connie, who stood there, a rather pink flush in her cheeks. Babs, like Bessie, felt there was a catch in it. Connie, so normally selfish, so unready to help, would never have taken on such a task had she not some interests of her own at stake.

"You hear, Bessie?"

"Yes, yes, thank-thanks!" Bessie said feebly.

"Very well!" Miss Charmant, with a hard look at the unhappy duffer, rose. "Connie, I will leave you to make your own arrangements," she said. "But please see that Bessie does at least one extra lesson a day."

"I will," Connie promised, but there was a note of grim satisfaction in her voice. "And we'll start," she added, as

the door closed upon Miss Charmant's retreating figure," now, Bessie Hunter! You're in my charge now! It depends upon me whether you stop in the Fourth or drop into the Third! Get out of that chair!"

"But, Connie—" Bessie cried.

"Well!" Connie snarled. "Who asked you to interfere! This fat skeleton is going to work—and work hard! And don't," she added threateningly, "either of you two help her out! I put you on your honour to let her get through her self! Now, come on, Bessie! I'll set you your feet loose!"

And, with a groan and a pathetic blink at her sympathetic charms, Bessie rolled out of the study in Connie's wake.

Lost Pearl



"O! dear!"

That sigh, in impressively accentuated accents, came from Bessie Hunter half an hour later.

Bessie was seated at the table in Study No. 4. There were books on every side of her. In front of her were sheets and sheets of lined paper, most of them covered with the spidery handwriting so characteristic of Miss both Gertrude, and embellished with the blots that seemed to be inseparable from all Bessie's scholastic efforts.

Babe and Mabel were seated at the fire. Mabel was reading. Babe was also pretending to read, but for the most part her eyes were fixed anxiously upon the broad back of her fat chair.

Bessie was approaching her first paper. It was a stiff paper. Even Babe, high up in the scholastic ladder of the Fourth Form, would have experienced difficulty in wrestling with it.

"I say, Babe—" Bessie said tentatively.

"Yes, Bessie?"

"What's the space-specific gravity of iron?"

"I'm sorry, old Bess, but you know I'm not allowed to tell you!"

"Oh, crumble! You tell me, then, Mabel."

"Bessie, please don't ask me. You know, old Bessie, it isn't so you a scrap of paper. Look up your 'Physical and Chemical Constants!'"

Bessie sighed again. It was a sigh that was almost a groan. Poor old Bessie! Agony that it was for her, she really was trying hard.

The door opened. Clara Trevlin, the boisterous Tumbler of the Fourth, breezed in.

"My hat, the family at home?" she inquired. "What the dickens are you all rasping here for? What are you doing, Faithkins—writing I O U's in expectation of your next postal order? But, I say, kids, the porter's just sent me ten bob! Who's coming to help me blow it in the tuckshop?"

Bessie looked up eagerly.

"Oh, I say, are you standing there?"

"Crumble it," Clara beamed. "A treat it is. But if you're coming, young Bessie Bess, for goodness' sake, take a few pints of that ink off your face first."

With alacrity, Bessie jumped up. Babe and Mabel followed suit. At the same moment there was a footstep in the passage. Connie Jackson looked into the room just as Bessie was in the act of denuding her hat.

"Oh, you," she cried. "And where are you going, Bessie Hunter?"

"She's just going to the tuckshop," Mabel replied.

"Really?" Connie smiled with

saturnine sweetness. "Finished the lesson, Bessie?"

"Oh, dear! Nonsense quite, you know!"

"Then," Connie said calmly, "there'll be no tuckshop or anything else until you have! Go on, Barbara, and you, Mabel! I'll stop here and see that Bessie gets on with it!"

"Oh, riddle it! Give her a break!" Clara groaned.

"You can take twenty lines for instance!" Connie snapped. "But it?"

"Yes, look here—" Bessie tearfully blurted.

"You get down to it!"

Bessie's lips quivered. For a moment she looked at her own work. Then, cutting a look from Babe, she shook her head. Babe sighed, ingested a little, and then, seeing that she might only make matters worse by remaining, trotted off with the rest down the passage.

Woe-stricken and disappointed, Bessie drifted to her chair once more and set down. Connie grinned.

"Tough—oh!" she sneered. "Is that the lesson? You seem to have got a lot of ideas on that page!"

"Yes, I'm necessary!"

"Don't be sorry," Connie advised sweetly, and lifted up the paper by one corner. "I think," she added, "just to watch you scribble, that we'll have this done again!" And, in spite of Bessie's alarmed protest, she calmly tore the sheet across, dropping the pieces into the wastepaper basket. "Proceed, Bessie!"

Bessie blinked.

"Yes, look here, you know, all my answers were on that page! That means I'll have to look them up again!"

"Good for you!"

"But—"

"And take twenty lines for making such a fuss about it!"

Bessie, with a groan, bent to her task again. There was nothing else for it; she could almost have wept in that moment. As it was, a choking lump came into her throat, and she found the sheets in front of her suddenly swimming as if in mist.

But she said no more. Earnestly, almost angrily, she got on with it. Fortunately, Babe and Mabel were not more than ten minutes away when they came back. Connie, with a malicious grin and a warning not to slack, left.

Bessie valiantly poked on while Babe looked at Mabel and shook her head. It almost broke Babe's heart, knowing what a terrific effort this writing was costing her. But at last, with a heart-felt sigh of relief, Bessie stood up.

"Oh, crumble, I'm done, you know! Oh dear-dar, I've got cramp in my writing hand and my hand's going round and round! Dad—did you have a machine man in the tuckshop, Babe?"

Babe smiled tenderly.

"We looked back just as soon as we could, old Bess," she said, "and," she added brightly, "we've brought you some chocolate, old thing. Wait a minute, though. Let's have a look at what you've done." And Babe cast a critical eye over the answered sheets.

"It's! Not so bad!" she said. "Trot 'em off to Connie, Bessie!"

Bessie beamed. Now that her task was finished, she was all happiness once more. She was pleased, on the whole, with her work, though she had so hated the doing of it. Much nearer and truer than Bessie's usual efforts her sheets looked—not half so many blots, and with a distinct improvement in the writing.

Old Bessie smiled. In ten minutes she was back. Babe, with a laugh, feeling, moreover, that a great strain had been taken off her own shoulders, pro-

ceeded the chocolate—a whole good slab of it.

"There we are, Bessiekins! A reward for a good little girl!"

"Oh, thank-thanks!"

And Bessie took the chocolate. But she did not, to Babe's mild astonishment, rip off the wrapping and eat it there and then.

With an uneasy blink at her two charms she stepped over to her attaché-case which stood in the corner, and, keeping her back to Babe and Mabel, opened the case and hurriedly popped it in. Mabel stared in astonishment.

"My hat! What's the matter, Bessie! What are you hoarding it up for?"

"I'm not hoarding!" Bessie blurted indignantly.

"Then what are you—"

There was a knock at the door. Bessie, the headmistress' personal maid, answered the invitation to "Come in!"

"Oh, Miss Hunter, will you go and see Miss Princess, please?"

"Oh, crumble, what's the matter now?" Bessie gasped.

"I don't know, Miss Hunter. But Miss Princess doesn't seem very pleased. She said you were to come at once!"

And Bessie, with an apprehensive blink, called out of the study.

"More trouble?" Mabel guessed.

"Oh, I don't know! I don't see why they should be—" Babe replied. "But when on earth is the old thing being mysterious about! And why," Babe worried, "is Connie so suddenly interested in her?"

They stared at each other, neither able, in that moment, to answer that question. Mysterious Bessie had been since her return from Friarlands Woods, yet Connie had been seen none.

Abstractedly Babe began to tidy up. Bessie, as usual, had left everything in rather a mess. She was just finishing when the door came open and the subject of her thoughts reappeared.

Both Babe and Mabel wheeled at once to meet her. And then—

"Bessie! What's the matter?" "Oh, my goodness, what's the matter?"

For Bessie's face cheeks were quivering. There were tears trickling down beneath her thick, round spectacles. In her hand she carried a sheet of impetuous paper. One glance told Babe that they were the papers she had handed in to Connie only twenty minutes ago.

"Lal-look!" Bessie gasped. "Lal-look!" Pathetically she held out the sheets, and at sight of them Babe jumped.

"Lal-look at those blots! Lal-look at those grease-marks! Miss Pip-Princess says she refuses to read them in that disgraceful state, and—and I've got to do them all over again!"

"Oh, my hat!" And Babe blinked.

With incredulous dismay she stared at the papers. She had seen those before Bessie had taken them in. She had commended Bessie upon the neatness and care which she had taken over them. Now—

"Wait a minute!" she said. "Bessie, what's happened in there?"

"I—I don't know," Bessie replied miserably.

"You handed them to Connie?"

"Yes."

"Then," Babe decided, "they must have got into that state while they were in Connie's charge. If Connie had gone out of accident with them she ought to have told Miss Princess, although—"

And Babe stared hard at the sheets again.

Those grease-stains might have been accounted for by an accident, but the blots most certainly were not. They looked to Babe as if they had been deliberately spotted over the sheets.

Early One Morning

"Child Connie, in her new-fangled spite against Bessie Hunter, have done that! A flash come to Babe's eyes. "Bessie, give me those sheets," she said quietly. "I'm going to see Connie."

And, giving the fat duffel on time to her maids, Babe sailed out of the room. Bessie grimed her expression, decidedly firm her step as she tripped on to the Sixth Form corridor.

She reached the door of Connie's study. So angry was she that she pushed it open at the moment she knocked. There she stood and stared. Connie was not in the room!

"All right," Babe said grimly; "I'll jolly well wait for her!"

Across the room she strode towards the wardrobe. She was about to sink down into it when her eyes, arrested by something that shone out a tiny beam of reflected light, made her pause. She stooped, picking the thing up. Then she blinked.

"Hallo! I wonder if Connie has lost this?" she muttered.

She fastened a little on the twisted it between her finger and thumb. For the thing was a lost pearl, which had obviously at some time formed part of a necklace. A real one, too, by the look of it—though she couldn't ever remember having seen Connie with pearls. She put it on her hand. Again, more interestedly, she examined it, turning it over and over. And then—

"You awful spy!" a voice behind her hissed.

And suddenly, startingly, a hand was thrown from behind her shoulder, viciously plucking the pearl from her palm. Babe turned to see Connie, white-faced, standing before her.

"You little spy! And Connie glared back. "Where did you get that?"

"I found it—in your carpet!"

"And you were going to pocket it, I suppose?"

Babe eyed her contemptuously.

"Aren't you rather forgetting your-elf?" she asked coolly. "I had only just that moment picked it up."

Connie gulped. She looked rather ashamed all at once, realizing, too late, that she had made an exhibition of herself.

"Well, it's mine," she growled. "And I don't like tags interloping with my property. Anyway, what the dickens do you want here!"

Babe's lips compressed.

"I came to see you about those!" she said, and flung a finger at Bessie's sheets which she had placed on the table. "You know that Miss Pringle has ordered Bessie to do those again?"

"Well?"

"Connie, I saw those sheets before Bessie brought them to you. They weren't in that state then!"

"No!" Connie glared. "Are you hinting that I messed them up?"

"Well, it's jolly heavy—"

"Is it? So are you!" Connie retorted irritably. "Anyway, get out! And, out," she added, "for your insolence, Barbara Brewster, you can take fifty lines!" And it, she muttered, "you're not satisfied now, you can jolly well go and tell Miss Pringle what you suggest! Now get out!"

"You will—"

"Oh, get out!" Connie blazed, and, catching Babe by the shoulder, went her staggering through the door and into the passage. "And," she added vindictively, hurling Bessie's sheets savagely into her face, "those with you!"

And slam went the door.



"B-R-R-R-R!" shivered Bessie Hunter, a cold griping shiver—slightly, for her spectacles, she sat up in bed in the Fourth Form dormitory.

It was early—so early, indeed, that the room was still full of the grey light that comes with the early dawn. A bleak, dreary morning, too, with a wind whistling outside, and the soft pitter of rain washing against the tiny diamond-paned windows. Not for an hour yet would rising bell ring.

That in itself was amazing—to find the most notorious slacker in the Form even awake at this hour.

Naturally Bessie commenced in bed till the last possible minute—and on such a morning as this would cheerfully have remained at three until morning school.

But there was none of her usual lethargy about Bessie now. There was an air, indeed, of almost wide-awake alertness as she gazed round the sleeping dormitory. Softly she lowered herself out of bed.

"B-R-R-R!" she said again. She shivered again as she dressed. The briefest of ablutions served her that morning. With a cautious glance at the still shimmering furms of her Form-mates she tiptoed out of the dormitory.

The corridor was empty and deserted as in the grey morning light, she moved down to Study No. 3. There she leaned on the stiller-case in which the hand ladder the bar of chocolate lay.

Had Babe and Mabe seen the contents of that case as she opened it, they would have been utterly astonished—and perhaps a little wonderful, too. For, besides the chocolate, there was Study No. 3's missing pound of butter.

There were also a quarter-pound packet of tea, the cake which Bessie had received from home the day before yesterday, a pot of jam, and a carton of sugar.

Bessie blinked doubtfully at this array.

"B-R-R!" Not much for a hungry girl," she mused. "And poor old Ene must be half-starved. Perhaps—"

And hastily she advanced to the study cupboard, blinking at the food-stuff with which Babe and Mabe had replenished supplies last night. For a moment Bessie eyed them, lowering a little, ducking her head. Then, as if suppressing a scruple, she took down a packet of biscuits, a tin of sardines, and a pot of salmon-and-shrimp paste.

"I'll make it up to Babe out of my next postal order," she muttered.

"And, anyway, Babe wouldn't mind if she knew for what a jolly good cause it was. Alas! That bit-cake looks unappetizing!" And Bessie glanced at it, struggling with a momentary temptation to sample it there and then. "You couldn't see beyond yourself. No," she said firmly. "You'll have your breakfast when you cross back, and poor Ene will have none."

And resolutely she that the case, donned her hat, and waddled off into the corridor again. Down the stairs into Big Hall she went, and there, pausing to unlatch the main door, she jumped. "Bessie!" a voice behind her cried.

Bessie jumped, dropping the case with a clatter.

"Where are you going, oh?" And Connie Jackson, in her dressing-gown, came striding across the floor. "Where are you sneaking off to, at this time of the morning?"

"Oh, dad-dar! I'm not sneaking off anywhere. I'm just walking in my sleep, you know!"

"And don't tell mamma. What's in that bag?"

"No sneaking!" muttered Bessie. "No!" Connie's eyes glared.

Connie, for some reason best known to herself, had awakened early that morning. From her study she had heard Bessie's movements, and had come down to investigate. Now she caught up the case; in spite of Bessie's blushing exclamation, threw it open. She glared.

"What are you going to do with this?"

Bessie gurgled.

"I wasn't taking it to anyone, you know!" Bessie blurted. "I would never dream of taking it to the gipsy girl in the woods. In fact," she blushed dimly, realizing that she had let something slip, "the—the thought of going to the woods at this time of the morning, never entered my head, you know. I mean, it's silly!"

Connie's lips came together.

"I understand," she said. "So you were going to the woods, you fat fibber. The woods, Bessie Hunter, are out of bounds except on half-holidays, as you jolly well know. I think," she added calmly, as she looked the case under her arm, "that I will take charge of this. Meanwhile, as you are so jolly energetic, you can go to your study and copy out the table of logarithms from the treasury file."

"But—but—" Bessie quavered.

"Oh, Connie—"

"And this afternoon," Connie bit back indignantly, "you will do a detour—in the classroom. And you needn't think"—with a flash of spite—"that you'll dodge it. I'll take you myself. Now get back to your study!"

Poor Bessie! Heartbroken, she turned ferriously back to Study No. 3. There were tears in her eyes as she dragged out her hated book of maths and produced pens and paper once more.

"It's not fair!" Bessie broke out, her voice choking with indignant tears.

Not fair—no! Connie was being just as tyrannical as she could be. But Connie had the whip hand. Connie was the force of her own order.

But Bessie, in that moment, was not thinking so much of her own cruel misfortune. She was thinking of that lovely, hungry, gipsy outfit in the woods.

Ene May!

Very tenderly Bessie thought of Ene May. A long while ago, when Bessie had been helping to make a film with her pet Pekinese, Tigg-a-ding, at the Hatteridge Studios, she had met the girl for the first time. She liked Ene—she, gentle, dark-haired, and blue-eyed. She was sorry for Ene without ever knowing why. Ene was the quite knowing why. Ene was the daughter of a rather unusual tribe of gipsies—a group of eight or more—of which Ene's grandfather, Coach Mary, a horse-ved revivalist, was the leader.

Quite by accident Bessie had stumbled upon the May encampment in the woods. Quite casually she had stumbled upon Ene, sitting on the steps of a caravan, placed well apart from the rest, making wicker baskets.

Ene, she had heard with distaste, was in disgrace with her grandfather, and being punished for something she had never done. What it was all about, Bessie, who was never very quick on the uptake, was not, even at this moment, quite sure.

But Ene's plight did distress her,

especially when she learned that she was shunned by the rest of her tribe, was not even allowed to speak to anyone, and was kept on the extremely short ration of one meal per day. This information particularly had touched the tender heart of Bessie Butler as no other information could have done. She had promised to take Essie back.

And now—
Bessie sighed as she reviewed the situation. What could she do? With Connie dogging her every step, with Connie in charge of her this afternoon! Fairly she shook her head. Forward—and distastefully—she got on with her table of logarithms. She was making snail's progress with that task when Bessie and Mabel came in.

"Hi, Bessie!" Bessie cried. "What on earth! I nearly had a fit when I got up and found you not in bed. But—what are you doing?" she asked, with a gasp. "What's that? An insect?"
"Connie gave it to me," Bessie said. "What for?"

"'Tis because she thought me sneaking out, you know?"

"But why were you sneaking out?" Mabel demanded.

"Oh, dear! I wish you wouldn't fire questions at me like that, you know. You make me all flustered! I was going to meet Essie, you know, I was going to take her some food—"

"But who is Essie?"

"Well, she—she's a friend of mine. And—"
"Bessie pathetically looked up. She shook her head. "Oh crumbs, Bessie, I'll have to go," she said. "I'll have to go, if it means breaking boards. I—I can't let her down again!"
Bessie shook her head.

"Bessie, wait," she counselled. "No, don't get all hot up, you old goose. You can't break boards. At Connie's given you a deposition. That's the way to get yourself shoved down into the Third at once. On the other hand," Bessie considered, "you can't break your promise to Essie. But," she added, a gleam in her eyes, "if you can't go there's no reason why somebody else shouldn't go for you. Mabel and I aren't dummies."

Bessie's face brightened with hope. "Oh crumbs, Bessie, you wouldn't, would you?"

"Why not?" asked Bessie.
"But the task! Connie's got that!"
"We'll take another basket. Now cheer up, old Fitzhugh, and let Mabel and I help you with these tables!"

And Bessie cheered up. There and then Bessie and Mabel got to work. Connie must have been astonished to have got her proposition in before breakfast, but in it was. And Bessie, for all the weight of care and worry on her shoulders, was noticeably happier after this.

Without a word, after afternoon lessons, she allowed herself to be dragged into the Fourth Form classroom. Almost obediently she took her place. Connie eyed her suspiciously.

"You seem jolly chippy for a girl with a detention," she snapped.

"Y-yes, Connie. You see," Bessie carefully explained, "it's necessary nature to be absorbed. Think—that's why they call me the snubber of the house, you know. At Hunter Court—"

"All right, cut it out!" Connie snapped. "Get out your books."

And unhappy Bessie, her thoughts with Mabel and Mabel, got down to work. For once, even she was crushed into silence. The knowledge that her shame were carrying out her commission, however, did quite a lot to ease her burden.

Gipsy Judgment



"WELL, here's the encouragement, all right!" Bessie cried as she took it, by the look of it, to be Essie's caravan. That will be Essie herself sitting on the steps!"

In the clearing in the middle of Fairford Woods she and Mabel lay on mats.

There, in very truth, the encampment was—three caravans drawn up in line on the opposite side of the clearing. A fire burned in front of these and on the ground there sat, cross-legged, an old, old man, with a long, trailing length of beard, peering solemnly over a heavy book.

"Tough old customer!" Mabel murmured.

But it was not the "tough old customer" or his obvious intellect which engaged Bessie's attention. It was the girl who, all unconscious of their presence, sat on the steps of the caravan, apart.

A good-looking girl, this, so dark in complexion that she might have been Spanish or Italian, with a wealth of wavy black hair falling over her shapely shoulders. Her face, even from that distance, looked rosy and fresh. And she sighed at her desk, quick fingers were the green tinge in and out of the supports of the basket she was making.

"Ess!" Bessie whispered.

Mabel nodded.
"That's her, all right!" she agreed. "Better sneak round to her the other way."

They moved back, making a detour. Fortunately, they had not been spotted by the latest gipsies in front of them, and very soon, crawling up on the far side of the clearing, came in full view of the girl. Bessie whispered her name.
"Ess!"

The girl started. Quickly she looked round. And her large eyes, big as Mabel's or Bessie's, betrayed amazement to see her there. Quickly, with an oddly nervous glance, she looked in the direction of the gipsy camp. Then, hesitantly, she descended the steps.

"Who are you?" she whispered.

"We're Bessie Butler's class. We've come," Bessie announced, "because Bessie can't get away. She promised you a parcel, and—well, we've brought it for her!"

"Is—it is food?" the girl asked quickly.

"Yes."
"Oh, thank you! But please don't hand it up. Leave it there—on the ground, among the boxes," the girl said and agitatedly. "I'll get it when it's dark." She threw another half-second glance towards the caravan. "Can you get back a little? If my grandfather sees me talking to you—"

She gulped. "Oh behind the caravan," she whispered. "I'll come through to you."

She smiled. It was a pretty, but rather sweet smile. Bessie, staring at her, blinked a little, wondering what double-edged sort of punishment the girl was undergoing. Quickly sympathetic in all her reactions, Bessie felt strangely touched at all, even, felt, for some unfathomable reason, a gust of anger shake her against the old man who so obviously was the cause of her fright. She jerked her head at Mabel.

"Come on!" she said.

Together they wrapped their way round to the rear of the caravan. Here they were completely screened from the view of the camp. Ess, still looking

anxious and scared, was there to meet them.

"Oh, please, I—I'm so awfully grateful," she said tremulously. "It is so awfully kind of you to bring it!" She shivered a little. "But you won't mind if I don't stop talking to you for very long?" she added. "My grandfather seems to have the care of a house. And I'm being punished, you know."

"But why?" Bessie asked, staring.

"I'm afraid suspicion for theft!"
"Oh, goodness!"
"But—I didn't do it," the girl faltered. "I didn't! Another girl—"
She paused, standing still, straining backwards. "Oh, please excuse me!" she said. "I'm all nervous. I've told Bessie, but I don't think Bessie understood properly—"

Bessie and Mabel nodded. More than ever, they felt themselves intrigued; found their sympathies strangely stirred. This girl—a thief? Impossible!

And yet, bit by bit, the pitiful details came out. Essie May, which was the name of the girl's grandfather, was fearfully strict, honest, almost to a point of meanness. That and Essie, he declared, were the greatest sins of the earth. And Essie, in his eyes, had been guilty of both!

It was all such a tragic little story. It did not take long to tell. Unlike most gipsies, Essie May was looked up to and respected. Apart from her rigidly observed standards of right and wrong, he was also a most accomplished musician, and he had trained his little band of sons and grandsons to play musical instruments, too, Essie being the only one yet who had not mastered any instrument to the old man's liking. In this way the tribe received many invitations—more to important people's houses.

And—and—it happened three weeks ago," Essie explained. "I was once playing at the house of a Mrs. Cooney. I wasn't in the band, of course, I had nothing to do. I don't know what made me do it, but I was restless that night. The house was old and ramshackle, and I felt I wanted to see more of it. Well, I set off on a tour of my own. I got to a room upstairs. The door was slightly open, and I looked in. I oughtn't to have done it, of course—but—well, perhaps you have been curious yourselves—"

Bessie nodded sympathetically.

"Yes. Go on, Essie."

"There was a girl in this room—a girl in a green satin dress. She stood in front of the mirror, and she was trying on a pearl necklace. As I peered in, she must have seen my reflection in the glass, and she gave such a frightened start that—that she broke the necklace!"

And she went on to tell how the broken pearls had scattered on the floor; how she had offered to help pick them up; how the girl, in great agitation, had furiously pushed her out of the room, slamming the door upon her. She had gone downstairs.

Next day, at the camp, had come the denouncement. She had been seen by someone going out of that very room—Mrs. Cooney's own—room which a valuable pearl necklace had disappeared. She was accused. To her horror, one of the pearls was found upon her. Mrs. Cooney—out of her great respect for old Essie May—had not prosecuted.

"But—but—Essie said with a quivering lip. "He still believes that—that I told her."

He still believes that I stole the necklace, and that I've got it hidden away somewhere. That's why I'm being punished—until I give it up! And

the worst of it, I can't prove a thing. I don't even know the name of the girl I saw trying the necklace on. I haven't seen her since. Oh, if—if only I could! If only I saw her once again! But quick!—she broke off, in sudden pain. "I can hear footsteps! Get back! Get back!"

"But—"
"It's grandfather!" Bea cried. And, like a frightened animal, she fed back into the cavern, leaving Babe and Mabe, struggling and emotionally strained, gazing blankly at the doorway through which she had passed.

"That's the Girl!"



PUZZLED and worried, trying to help the gipsy girl, but failing to see how they possibly could, Babe and Mabe made their way back to Cliff House.

As they entered Study No. 4, Benson, looking a little white and strained, wheeled eagerly to meet them.

"Oh, B-Babe, you saw her?"

"You, Benson."

"And what did she say?"

"We'll tell you that over tea," Babe smiled. "Come on, Mabe. Benson, old time, you look frightfully tired," she added sympathetically. "Be sit down while Mabe and I get tea. How did you get on with Connie?"

But Benson, apparently, hadn't got on at all well with Connie. "Come but just been awful! Apart from her deterioration, Benson had passed a crop of extra lines, and had been reported to Miss Primrose. With deepening anxiety, Babe heard that Miss Primrose had threatened that if she did not quickly get better reports of her, she would put her down into the Third at once.

Babe and Mabe looked a little glum.

"But why," Babe distractedly asked for the fifth time, "is she making such a deal out against our Bea?"

"But that was a question which, apparently could only be answered by Connie herself.

In any case, Benson did not seem to be worrying unduly. The fact that Babe and Mabe had successfully carried out her mission was enough, for the time being, to relieve the fat one's mind of her worries. She was all agog to hear of their visit to the woods, and to know what they thought of Bea. Tea was prepared, and over the meal Babe related what had happened. Benson listened.

"She's a jolly nice girl!" she said, in the tone of one who does her best to challenge that statement. "And I think it's a lot sicker, you know, the way that old gipsy man keeps her cooped up."

Babe was looking strangely thoughtful.

"I wonder," she mused, "if we could do something about it. I've heard of this Mrs. Cooney. She lives on the other side of Lantams, I believe. We might go and see her. Or perhaps—under consideration—it will be better if we see Bea first and try to get a few more details. We've still got time to pop back into the woods after tea."

"Oh, I guess! I'll come with you!" Benson said eagerly.

"Oh!" an impatient voice broke in, and Connie, to Benson's dismay, came into the room. "Where will you go, Benson Butler?"

"I did didn't say any anywhere!" Benson defensively started. "I wasn't disdressing of going to the woods

with Babe and Mabe, you know. Such a thing never occurred to me—"
Connie's eyes glared.

"I hope," she said, "it didn't. Because I want to see you immediately after tea, young Primrose. Come to my study."

She closed the door as she went out. But as she glanced off down the corridor her expression changed. Nervously

she looked at the door. "Just for a change you'll do it here—and no sticking!" she warned.

She passed as she turned towards the door.

"I've got to go to see Frances Barrett about something, but I shouldn't be long," she said—"and just to make sure you don't slide out while I'm away, I'm going to lock you in!"



MISS PRIMROSE was in her sternest mood. "On Thursday, Benson," she thundered, "you will be moved down into the Third Form." Benson quailed. The very worst had happened—despite her efforts to stay in the Fourth!

Benson, with a blink, deliriously drifted towards the chair. With a heavy sigh, she sat down. Connie, with one look at her, slipped through the door and turned the key.

Now to find out what Babe and Mabe were up to!

she hit her lip. Why were Babe and Mabe going to the woods?

Were they—and how!—going to her face momentarily drain of colour—stop trying to see Bea in Benson's place?

But that was silly, whether it! She just had Bea May on the brain. Babe and Mabe might be going to the woods for a dozen or more reasons. All the same—

She reached her own study. She entered it, her eyes, for some reason, travelling swiftly towards the bureau. Shakingly she drew a piece of paper towards her; nervously began to write out the lesson which Benson should do as soon as she arrived. But her eyes were clouded. That guilty tear upon her, rather than dismissing, seemed to intensify as the minutes ticked on. She rose restlessly at last.

"No, I must find out—I must!" she breathed.

She passed the door. Instinct took her towards the window. As suddenly she stared out, two figures came out of the schoolhouse and walked off quickly down the drive towards the gates. Babe and Mabe! They were going to the woods!

If they were going to see Bea May! If, perhaps, they should think of bringing Bea May back to the school!

A tap on the door. The fat face of Benson Butler peered in.

"Oh, come in!" Connie cried. "That's your lesson!" She pointed at

"As you can't," Babe asked, "give me any more information than that, Bea? You can't describe the girl who was trying on the necklace, for instance?"

Bea May's forehead hit her lip.

"Only that she was taller than I am. A girl of eighteen or nineteen, I should say. I remember she had lightish hair, but whether red or brown I'm not sure. You see, I only saw her in artificial light."

It wasn't helpful. Babe and Mabe looked at each other. They were in the gipsy camp again, talking to an Bea who seemed rather distressed.

"And you have no idea," Mabe asked penetratingly, "how the pearl came to be in your pocket?"

"No; but I do remember that when the girl pushed me out of the room she grabbed at my shoulder. The—her pocket was a breast-pocket, you see, and as she laid the pearls in her hand it would have been a simple enough matter for one of them to have slipped into the pocket. Or she might—and here Bea shook her head—"I hate to think of it, but she might have deliberately planted it upon me!"

"And you don't know who reported having seen you come out of the room?"

not believe what she said. As soon as Bessie had got over it, they told themselves, she would come to her senses again.

But for once Bessie was in earnest. Strange and tempestuous thoughts held her in their thrall.

Sick with distress, humiliated, after all her efforts, that everything should have turned out like this, Bessie, from that moment, was a different Bessie from the girl they had known.

She—with all her Bessie pride—to be put among the lags of the school! She, who had worked so hard to redeem herself, whom Miss Parramore had practically thrown out of her study when she had tried to tell her the truth about the failure of her efforts!

For once, Bessie felt that she hated Cliff House—yes, hated it! But she hated Connie Jackson most of all!

In vain Babs and Maize enjoyed, pleaded, pleaded. Bessie refused to be comforted. She was going, she said stubbornly.

Babs and Maize were sick with dismay. What would the Fourth, and Stud, No. 4, be like without their dear old chuffer? What sort of life would Bessie lead among her prodigious Fourth fellows of the Third?

It was not an enjoyable evening, that, in Stud, No. 4. Bessie, long-faced and silent, was not good company. She sat alone, wrapped in her own woody thoughts.

Strangely silent, she went to bed. In the morning she was up betimes, but her mood had not changed. Bessie had made up her mind! She was going!

"No, Babs-Babs, pip-please leave me alone," she said most annoyingly when, after breakfast, Babs asked her if she was coming to the trackshop. "I want to-mp to be alone, you know. I—I've got a letter to write," she added desperately.

Maize shook her head.

"Better leave her," she said. "I won't do any good. Babs. She'll cheer up this afternoon, when Ena comes."

But Babs did not know the Bessie of that moment. Bessie had thought it all out. That morning she packed her bag. The rest of the time she spent in Stud, No. 4, poring over a letter to Connie Jackson.

In that letter she laid all her woes, all the responsibility for what might happen to her at Connie's door, intending to make Connie feel the stinging and heartless wrong that Bessie visualized. She would not let it be Connie's body before she went, she thought.

Dinner came. Bessie, still the stubborn rebel of the Fourth, so far from eating, just sat there over the meal.

After-dinner came—with a hockey match on Junior Babs, and Bessie drifted disconsolately about the school.

She had looked up her train. It went at five-thirty—just time, she thought, to see Ena and say good-bye to Babs & Co., before she departed for ever.

At half-past three Babs & Co., catching their half-time lesson, saw Connie Jackson, walking hurriedly, disappear through the gates.

"Hallo! Connie looks upset!" Babs murmured. "Wonder where she's going?"

They would have been more interested in Connie's movements if they had known the desperate plan at the back of her mind.

Connie, in fact, was on her way to stop Ena. Whatever happened, that girl was not going to sit lost in Cliff House. She wasn't—couldn't! She had a good idea which way Ena would come, and in that she was not wrong.

Knew the old quarryman's hut on the footpath that ran through the wood she would.

Grin her face, inflexible her purpose.

Reinforced by three wazo lookers, Connie turned. Along the path came

Ena, talking, as Connie stood straddled in her way. She jumped as she recognized her.

"You!" she cried.

"Where are you going?" Connie asked.

Ena's face flushed.

"I'm going to Cliff House."

"Really?"

"Yes—please stand aside."

But Connie did not stand aside. Connie, desperate indeed now, passed just a moment. Then suddenly she snatched, made a leap, wrapping her arms round the waist of the other girl, bearing her startled and unprepared victim backwards towards the open door of the shed.

A grunt, a heave, and Ena, dazed and half-strained, crashed to the floor. Like lightning, Connie had banged the door to, slipped the bung over the staple, and clicked the key in the padlock.

Then, breathing rather heavily, she went back to Cliff House School.

Her nostrils ran pink in her cheeks. Her heavy breathing, when Connie stepped through the gates, just as the Fourth Form hockey team was dressing off the field.

Babs, noticing that there was something very unusual about Connie's attire, noticing by expression, stopped.

"Oh, Connie, I say—"

Connie glared.

"Well!"

"About Bessie?"

"Bessie? Bessie!" Connie snapped, and passed on her way.

"Nice, polite sort of prefect," Clara said. "Excellent example, to us juniors, what! But where the dickens has she been? Did you see her shoes, Babs?"

Babs was staring rather strangely after the prefect's retiring form.



STANDING motionless behind the screen, Bessie watched as Connie emptied the contents of the envelope into her palm. Were these, she wondered, the very same pearls that her gipsy friend, Ena May, was accused of stealing?

"No! what about her shoes?"

"What wasn't the matter with them? Surely another?" Clara declared.

"All covered in that wet sandy-clayey stuff. Is this you get in the old quarry in the woods. Looka," she added shrilly, "as if Connie's been there. But why the deuce should she go there?"

Babe started. Very peculiar the look she dashed at Clara then. Very significant—though Mabe did not understand its significance—the glance which she flung at Mabe.

Babe had now noticed the shoes—but she had noticed something else, and she wondered rapidly how Connie, who was a light-haired girl, came to have jet black hairs showing on the cloth of that bright yellow blazer which she so liked to affect.

"Not suspicious was Babe, as a rule, but now a startling thought leapt into her mind. She drew Mabe aside.

"Mabe, come on!" she said.

"Where?"

"To the study. I've an idea about something."

Mabe glanced at her quickly. Together they rushed off to Study No. 4. Bessie, still tight-lipped, was there—Bessie having hung about the school all the afternoon on the effusions of popping that letter into Connie's bureau. But Connie—The mean beast!—had locked her door when she went out.

She blinked at the two girls in.

"Oh, I see—see, you know, it's twenty to five, and Lisa hasn't come in yet. She's late!"

"You're telling us!" Mabe said.

"Well, I hope anything has happened in here," Bessie said indignantly.

"Has that black Connie come in?"

"Yes—yes!"

"Oh! Then—"

"Bessie, where are you going?" Babe cried.

But Bessie did not reply to that. Bessie, with a rather strange expression on her fat face, watched off. Mabe made a movement to follow her, but Babe plucked at her arm.

"No! Here can wait!" she said.

Mabe looked startled.

"What's up with you?"

"Wait a minute! See if you see things as I see them," Babe said.

"Babe's late—got she promised to turn up on the table. Connie's been out. She's been in the woods. The clay on her shoes proves that. And Babe—Connie had black hair on her blouse—Kia's hair!"

Mabe looked startled.

"But—"

"Supposing," Babe said, "that somehow Connie's got word to the fact that Kia's coming here. If all we suspect is true, there the most disastrous thing in the world, from Connie's point of view, would be for the gypsy girl to turn up here and recognize her."

Mabe's eyes widened.

"You mean—"

"I mean," Babe said, "no—I know! Something tells me I'm right. Connie somehow has stopped Kia coming here. She went out to meet her—and the next her. Somehow she's got rid of her. Perhaps," she added, guessing shrilly, "she's shut her up somewhere. For the moment, at least, Connie feels safe."

"But—how—"

"Here, listen," Babe said feverishly. "Mabe, you've your make-up box here, haven't you? We've got gypsy props. If we're right—well, we can't surprise Connie into giving herself away! Kia's about your size. It shouldn't be a hard matter for such a good actress as you are to make up like her. There's the hair, of course—"

"Oh, I've got a patent quick-drying dye," Mabe said. "But what's the idea?"

"The idea," Babe breathed, "is to give Connie the fright of her life. Make up as Kia. I'll take you along to her. Then—Well," she chuckled, "it's a question of bluff—bluff all the time! And in low-breathed accounts she told Mabe the rest of her plan. "You see?"

Mabe did see. Her eyes blazed. It was an undertaking after her own heart. At the word it would only be a lack. At the best—well—

Quickly she got out her make-up box. While Babe flew off to the attic to get a gypsy costume, Mabe got busy.

Meanwhile, Bessie Butler, in the Sixth Form corridor, was, her last being message in her hand, waiting her opportunity to slip into Connie Jackson's study unobserved.

She saw the door of Connie's room open. Connie, breathing a little more freely, walked off down the corridor. In a moment Bessie had reached the study and slipped inside to stand there, blocking round.

She suddenly she quivered. Foot-steps were coming up the corridor—the familiar, hated foot-steps of Connie again. Quick as thought Bessie dodged behind the screen.

But Connie did not come in. She had nearly forgotten to lock the door. Bessie, to her bewildered dismay, heard the key turn on the other side of the door, and realized with horror that she was a prisoner in the study!

Connie was breathing rather heavily as she went back again. The thought of those people lying in the bureau haunted her. She was taking no notes that any suspicious justice might come prying around.

Later on, when it was dark, she would take little peeps out with her. Since there was no other means of getting rid of them, she would again plant them upon the hapless gypsy girl when she released her, and then ring up the police.

It was a good plan—so Connie thought. Having decided upon it, she left easier in her mind.

With a little more persistence in her step, she strode towards Big Hall. Rather a lot of commotion was coming from that direction, and Connie, remembering her duty as prefect, followed. A rather grim light in her eyes, she strode towards it.

"Here, what—" she began, and then halted, her eyes dilating, every drop of colour draining from her face.

For there, confronting her, charmingly arm-in-arm with Barbara Redfern, was Kim May herself!

Bessie Butler's Bombshell



"O H, Connie!" Babe smiled disarmingly.

Connie's eyes almost popped out of her head. With a desperate effort she pulled herself together.

"Oh, Connie," Babe went on, "I—I want you to meet a friend of mine—a step, Kim May. Kim is beautifully good at telling fortunes, aren't you, Kim?"

The disgraced Mabe, alas Kim, smiled. "Well, I am supposed to be," she said modestly, "and I would—with a bold stare—like to tell this lady her fortune." She challenged Connie Jackson with her eyes. "I think," she said, "we have met before, haven't we, Connie Jackson? In the woods this afternoon? Would you, like me to say what happened then?"

Connie turned white. She flung a heated glance round the crowd.

"I—I don't know what you mean," she stammered.

"No?" Mabe smiled sweetly. "Don't you remember the old quarry?" she asked. "Don't you remember—Babe ah, the details are painful. I would not like, for your sake, sweet lady to narrate them here. They might not," Mabe added, "be pleasant, oh! But please, please do let me tell your fortune."

There was a hint of a threat in the crowd. It was confined in the look in Mabe's blue eyes. Connie gasped. What did the girl want? Why did she not denounce her there and then?

She blushed.

"But—" And then, thinking she might gain time, she shrugged. "Oh, well, go on, then," she said. It would give her time to think, anyway. "What do I do?"

"Hold out your hand," Mabe said.

"Go, gather round," Lella Carroll grinned.

Connie held out her hand. Mabe solemnly placed a small crystal on it. The girls clustered round as Mabe intently stared into the little glass ball. Then her face became thoughtful.

"You have," she said, "a secret in your life, Connie Jackson. No, wait, let me see. I think it started with a party—a great luxurious party in a big house. It is shadowy—no, wait—the shadows are lifting! I see you, Connie! You are in a bad—room—"

Connie's lips came together.

"You are standing in front of a mirror," the gypsy girl went on. "You are trying on a necklace. It is a necklace—yes, of pearls." And she looked again challengingly into Connie's eyes.

"A girl comes into the room. You are startled. The girl's necklace breaks. The pearls fall all over the floor."

Connie gasped.

"What an imagination you've got," she said. "But go on."

She grinned then. She saw the gung now. This girl, by reconstructing that scene, was hoping to surprise her into blaring out something. Well, bluff could be met with bluff. Kim, of course, knew all about that, but she didn't know where the pearls were hidden at the moment. She shrugged carelessly.

"Any more wonders?" she inquired.

"Yes. I see you push the girl out. Now the pearls flash. Now I see this school. I see a room! It is a study. It has a number on the door. The number is five."

"Five?" whistled Lolly Morgan.

"How does she know that? That's your study, Connie!"

Connie's lips came together. A look of alarm came into her eyes.

"And in this room"—Mabe peered once more—"yes, I see those people—again. I see them, not as a possible now, but as a—"

And then, as she felt Connie's fingers beginning to tremble in her grasp, she looked up quickly. "I see—" she said.

"You see what?" a harsh voice behind her queried. "Nothing, you good-for-nothing little idiot! Turn round! This is what you see!" And Mabe almost fell down as a figure came striding through the door—the figure of the patriarchal Knock May, the father of the gypsy tribe. "You troublesome girl," the man went on, "why have you broken camp?" And, as Mabe blinked in utter dismay, he dropped his hand sternly upon her shoulder. "Wicked child!" he cried. "You will return with me!"

And while Babe stared in utter consternation, while Mabe realized that the

reality of her disguise had caused her to be mistaken by this man—supposed to be her grandfather—the figure of Miss Primrose issued from the Head's corridor, at the night.

"And what," Miss Primrose demanded, "is the explanation of this?"

"And now," Connie thought, with lightning inspiration, "in my chance! And, her eyes flashing feverishly, she slipped, unnoted in the general excitement and commotion, quickly away. For, with that swift, lightning-like desperation with which peril sharpens the mind, Connie could see how, if she acted swiftly, she could save the situation for herself, after all.

If she got those pearls now—if she could only place them on the girl before she left the school—

She flew to her study.

Bessie Stevens, inside Study No. 2, gave a gasp as she heard the key turn in the lock. Quick as thought, she dashed behind the screen in the corner of the room.

Click! The key turned. Crash went the door, bang back on its hinges as Connie raced into the room. Bessie held her breath.

Her amazed eyes widened as, through the join in the screen, she saw Connie stride towards the bureau. Down, with a thud, went its lid. Out of the little drawer on the right Connie snatched up an envelope—a crumpled envelope. With an expression on her face which fully assumed the fit into the Fourth, she snatched it into her palm.

Pearls!—yes! Even Bessie could not be deceived by the screen, the luster of them.

With some vague apprehension of the truth, she watched. Now saw Connie rumple up the envelope, now her doves it towards the fire. The envelope, hitting a piece of burning coal, reformed, straightened, and fell in the hearth. Connie did not see that. Connie, by that time, was already leaping through the doorway.

Would she be in time?

She was. She saw that as soon as she reached the top of the stairs, which looked down into Big Hall. Her heart leapt then. For, down those, surrounded by a murmuring crowd of schoolgirls, conspicuous among whom was Barbara Redden, the old man stood, his hand still firmly clatching at the shoulder of the man in the black coat as he answered the questions of Miss Primrose. Obviously, Miss Primrose was hearing the story of the stolen pearls.

Connie's lips set. Quietly she stepped down the stairs, unconsciously guided by way into a position just behind the girl she thought was Eva May.

While Male, still desperately considering how she was going to disentangle herself from this predicament, faced Miss Primrose, Connie's hand unrolled round. For a moment it rested over the slightly bulging pocket of Male's coat. Then, convulsively, it opened.

It was done!

A surge of triumph swept over the advancing Connie. At last she had got rid of the incriminating pearls!

She drew back, as Miss Primrose turned from Elizabeth to the disguised Mabel Lynn with extreme disfavor.

"And why," she asked, "did you come here?"

"Perhaps," Connie answered calmly, pushing her way forward, "I can answer that question, Miss Primrose." She gazed convulsively at the pipy girl, very sure now that the cards were all in her hands. "I was at Mrs. Conroy's

"HUSH!"
"HUSH!"

"What's her secret?"

"Whose secret?"

"Mab's secret!"

"I don't know!"

"Neither do I—"

Neither did anyone!
But YOU'LL KNOW!

—When you read

"MAB'S THE MYSTERIOUS!"

By Hilda Richards

in next Saturday's

SCHOOLGIRL

party. I happened to see this girl coming out of Mrs. Conroy's room. Naturally," Connie added, "I told Mrs. Conroy this, when she discovered that her pearl necklace had been stolen."

Bessie eyed her in contempt.

The next day, Connie smoothly resumed, "Mrs. Conroy went to the Gipsy camp. This girl was searched. On her was discovered one of the pearls—just one. From that day to this the whereabouts of the necklace has remained a mystery." Connie added with a sneer. "But I can give a very good guess as to why this girl came here to-day. She came here, not to sell my fortune, as she pretended, but to try to plant that necklace on me, hoping by that to get me blamed and, at the same time, prove her own innocence. And if," Connie said spitefully, "you require proof of that, I suggest you search her now!"

There was a buzz. Bessie compressed her lips. But old Knock gave a cry.

"No!" said Mabel firmly.

"No!" said Mabel firmly.

"But it shall be investigated!" the old man said sternly. "Yes, you shall be searched! Miss Jackson, will you hold her arms, please? Eva, I order you not to struggle! Now!" And, as Connie willingly pinned Mabel's hands to her sides, he plucked a hand into her pocket. The next moment, "Eva," he cried in a terrible voice, "what is this?"

And out of the pocket of the coat which Mabel wore he dragged forth a handful of pearls!

FOR a moment there was a dreadful silence. Under her make-up, Mabel turned white. Bessie felt her eyes smarting. Amazingly now everybody stared at Mabel. And then, before any of them could say another word—

"Hush!"

It was a dull day from the top of the stairs, and a fat little figure came stamping down them—a figure which carried a crumpled envelope in one pocket hand. With an eagerness which almost precipitated her from top to bottom, Bessie came bounding into the hall, to halt, in indignance fury, before the group.

"Eva, Bessie gasped, "is not the girl?" She pointed towards Connie.

"Bessie!" Miss Primrose gasped, "And I can p-prove it," Bessie added

breathlessly, "by this!" She waved the envelope in the air. "I was in Connie's study not two minutes ago. Connie came in. She threw this envelope away after taking these pearls out of it. There's still one of the tiny pearls in it, Miss P-Primrose!"

Connie drew back. Miss Primrose, looking dazed, took the envelope. Without doubt, it was Connie's. Her name and address were on it. And, sure enough, there was a tiny pearl, overlooked by Connie in her haste, still in the corner of the envelope.

Miss Primrose's glance hardened.

"Connie—"

"It's a lie!" Connie burst out desperately.

"Hush, look here, you fibber, I suspect you!" Bessie roared.

"Bessie—please!" Miss Primrose said apologetically. "Admit! Eva!"

Yes, Miss Primrose! Mabel answered.

"What have you to say?"

"I say," Mabel stammered out, "that what Bessie says is true! It would still be truth," she added, "if it were Eva. But as I'm not Eva, and as these aren't Eva's clothes, but simply goods belonging to our dramatic society, it will be rather hard for Connie to explain how the pearls came to be in one of the pockets!"

And then, in a flash, while everybody stared in dazed stupefaction, Mabel had slipped out the sponge she carried and quickly ran it over her face. Connie almost roared.

"M-Mabel! Look!" she stammered.

"Mabel!"—Miss Primrose looked dumbfounded—"then you—you weren't to—?" she murmured dumbly. And then, as the significance of it all made her, as she saw the dreadful guilt which the shaking Connie could no longer keep out of her face, she wheeled, "Connie," she cried, "how do you explain this?"

But Connie, almost fainting, could make no explanation.

THE end of that adventure came in the headmistress' study, with old Knock dazedly listening. Connie, realizing at last that her own lips lay in telling the truth, broke down and confessed all. She had not meant to steal the necklace, she said. She had merely "borrowed" it, and, having borrowed it, was keeping it until such time as she could get it repaired, with the intention of giving it back to its owner.

Whether that was true or not, only Connie knew. But Miss Primrose accepted her explanation. Mrs. Conroy, when she reached the school next day, also accepted it. Meantime, Bessie and Mabel ranked off. Finding Eva in the quartermaster's box, they freed her, and, in triumph, brought her back to school.

And her grandfather, if he was harsh and stern in his boasts, was also most humble and contrite in acknowledgment of his mistake.

"And I," Miss Primrose stated, coming into the study at that moment, "have decided to give you another chance, Bessie. I am not sure, after all I have heard, that you have had just treatment from Connie. You will do me one more examination paper. You will do it under my personal supervision, and if it satisfies, there shall be no more talk of your going down into the Third!"

And there was that. For Bessie, next day, put into that paper all she knew. Miss Primrose, so far from relegating her, congratulated her upon it. And so, once again, all was harmonious and smiling in Study No. 4, and all was tranquil in the camp of Gipsy May.

BEGINS TO-DAY

WHEN MORCOVE EXPULSED HER



Brother and Sister

"As long as we can keep those Morcove girls out of the way, we shall be all right. There's a thousand pounds' worth of gold hidden in—"

"Oh! Not so loud, Ralph!"

"Oh, we shan't be overheard. There's only the servant, and she's out in the woodshed."

They went alone together, this brother and sister, in the sitting-room of a pretty bungalow which stood on the edge of the cliffs, only a mile from Morcove School.

Maisie Fender must have done with schooling by now, for she was getting on for nineteen.

Yet she stood at one of the windows to gaze steadily in the direction of famous Morcove, as if her thoughts had much to do, at this moment, with that school.

As for her brother Ralph, being younger than her by a year or so, he was in his last term as a Public school senior—before going on to the "Varsity."

And if any of the girls of Morcove School had been here, they would have known instantly by his cap colours that he belonged to Gramingham School.

Ralph Fender now picked up that cap of his, and, starting to whistle, walked round by the window from which his sister watched, on his way out of the room.

"See anything of those Morcove girls yet, Maisie?"

"The crowd I've invited to tea! They're just coming out of the gates now. If it is them—they can be sure neither a boy nor girl."

Maisie Fender, an extremely pretty girl, was using an uneasy expression as she said that.

"It's absolutely certain, Ralph! at the merest breath of gossip against us Fenders, a stopper would be put upon our friendship with the girls."

He grinned.

"So, as long as Betty Barton and those other kids are allowed to come and go, we can take it that nobody has started to suspect what we're doing!"

"My own idea, that!" she smiled

pleasantly. "Oh, and I'm sure it'll work. The school, so close to this bungalow, and the headmistress—fussy, of course!" He nodded, chuckling.

"And now for me to get on with that little idea I had, Maisie—to help the good work! I'm going along, right now, to get that public footpath blocked up on the quiet. Confounded nuisance, that path being where it is, so close to the school! But it's the only way down, thank goodness, along that part of the shore, so if only I can do the trick, it should help us quite a lot."

"Ralph! Those are my invited

TESS TRELAWNEY, the gifted artist of the Fourth Form at Morcove School, is the "star" of this brilliant new school-magazine serial which, in its colour and quick action, is as vivid as an ending film. This great new Morcove feature is sold by popular

MARJORIE STANTON

girl," Maisie excitedly remarked, still watching from the window. "They're coming this way. So we can take it for granted—nothing being said about us yet!"

"Splendid! And I'll be back presently," he grinned, "to help you spend the Morcove lark."

"Be careful how you go out, Ralph! Better not let them see you now."

"Careful yourself! I'm playfully retorted, and was soon earnest making for a back way out of the bungalow.

The one servant was just then returning indoors with some firewood. His must have impressed her as being the very best type of Public school "man," with a nice, even charming, disposition.

Yet this was the fellow who could be very crafty in all his actions during the next few minutes.

It was with a heavy staining that he slipped away from Cliffedge Bungalow, in the opposite direction from which

Betty Barton and some of her chums of Study No. 12 at Morcove School were approaching that attractive residence.

Finally, he took his stand in good cover afforded by one of the patches of golden gorse that grew along the cliff-top, and from there he glanced about, most warily.

He wanted to make quite sure that not a soul was anywhere near the spot before he crept half-way down into that deep "cleft" in the cliff, which for ages had served as a pathway down to the beach.

A craggy way it was, at least, affording communication just here between cliff-top and sea-level. There were jutting rocks that looked ready to fall away after being loosened by the winter rains.

Some mischievous priggling with a moss walking-stick could have sent some of the stones rattling down; but Ralph Fender had been cautious enough to provide himself with a short crowbar.

He took it from where he had previously concealed it, amongst the bushes, and started to creep down with it.

As he warily descended, he was able to see more and more of the sea-level below, and he did not fail to look out for anybody who might be about down there.

"Nobody!"

Such was his startled belief; but he was mistaken.

At this very moment, Tess Trelawney, one of the Study No. 12 "chambers" of Morcove School, was reclining in one of those hours she was able to snatch, occasionally, to do some sketching out of doors.

Yes, fully an hour ago, had set up her folding easel at one of the most picturesque parts of the cliff-walled shore. She was such a short distance from the chime, she must have been seen by Ralph Fender when he took his last cautious look just then, only Tess was sitting close to the cliffs.

The young artist of the Study No. 12 chambers always got on best when working alone. But in a few minutes she would have to pack up and make her way to Cliffedge, being one of the girls who had been asked to tea by Maisie Fender.

Suddenly, and just as she was going to put in a careful stroke of her long-brush brush—for Tess was painting in oils to-day—she! And then a prolonged rattle like distant thunder.

And, whipping away the hand that held the brush, before it should make a faulty stroke, startled Tess peered about, agape with wonderment.

"Goodness! What on earth has happened?"

EXTRA-LONG FIRST INSTALMENT

The Meeting on the Cliff

THREE TRELAUNNEY threw down her brush and palette, and jumped up to run in the direction from which the startling noise had come.

Now the weather was as peaceful again as ever; only the splash of waves and the crying of jacksaws that flapped about the cliffs.

But within a few seconds, Tess was giving an appalled cry as she saw what had happened.

"Oh!" she shrieked. "If anyone had been coming down the stairs-path just then!"

For it seemed to her that a small landslide had occurred on one steep side of the vast gully. Rocks, gravel, splintered battens, and tumbrels of granite had heaved down to the floor of the gully, quite blocking the path which had been chosen a minute ago.

She would have gone nearer, to take a closer look at the havoc, but she was aware of a cloud of dust having gone up, and the breeze was drifting it, as it settled, this way.

This was something to make her anxious about her colourful sketch. Always Tess had to guard against dust settling upon a "wet" oil-painting. Whipping about, she started to run back to put the sketch out of harm's way.

Then another wind started her, bringing her to a standstill once again. This time it was a metallic clang that had come to her ears, not at all loudly, across the chasm.

Heading that way once more, she saw no one. However, for the second had been as if somebody, just then, had dropped an iron bar amongst the crags.

A sudden snarling of her eyes warned Tess to be quick if that snarling of hers was not to come in for a lot of the drifting dust.

Back she ran to the spot where she had been sitting to do the sketch, examined the half-finished canvas from its folding easel, and then darted into a nearby cave.

That seemed a very good place in which to put the sketch by.

"I might, in fact, leave it here," her voice bitterly murmured, when the seething walls of the gloomy cavern were about her. "I'm coming down tomorrow to finish, so I can move myself the bag of casting it to the school."

In search of a suitable place for depositing the canvas, she went a good way into the cavern. At last, where the light was almost giving out, she found a convenient ledge.

Then it seemed such a good idea to be leaving the painting here, she went out and latched to all her sketching gear.

For who on earth is likely to come by, especially now that the nearest way down from the cliffs is blocked?

Yet she had only to go back towards the mouth of the cave—and there was someone, even then, coming in!

Tess TRELAUNNEY saw that he was a well-groomed fellow, wearing the Grangemore cap; but although she instantly knew his school, he was a complete stranger to her.

"Oh, hello!" he stammered, and forced a smile, after looking taken aback at finding her in the cave. "Er—

—are you from Grangemore, then?"

"That's right," Tess smiled.

"Well, I'm Grangemore—"

"Oh, I could tell that by your cap! I say, do you happen to be Ralph Fender? My class and I have Miss Fender, at Cliffedge, and she said something about a brother of hers—a Grangemore senior—being over this way to-day."

"That's exactly who I am," he laughed, pulling himself together. "So perhaps you're one of the Study No. 10 class," he rattled on, at the same time letting fall an iron bar which he had brought with him into the cave.

It fell silently upon the sand, and Tess might never have noticed that he had it, only there had been that rum-like clang just now in the "chime."

"I'm Tess Trelaunney," she explained, "and I've got to go along now to join my class at Cliffedge. I've been sketching, so I'm a bit late. I say, that fall of rock—you were up there when it happened?"

"Er—"

"But I think you were?"

Ralph Fender laughed.

"Am I a liar, then?"

"But what about the crumbar?"

Then he changed colour.

"Oh—this iron bar," he said, looking down at it. "Yes, I— Fact is, I did find it lying about up there, just where the rocks slipped away. You know, I—I fancy it must have come to light through there being a sort of landslide. So I picked it up and brought it along. Might be useful some time."

He took it up again, carried it further into the cave, and deposited it somewhere there. When he came back

he was smiling again; but Tess thought he gave her an anxious look.

"So you really were up there when all that stuff came down?" she insisted.

"Oh, if you must know, I was just coming across from the Barncombe road, to get down to the seafront and chase this way to Cliffedge!" he said glibly.

"But I'm telling you the rocks fell when I say I didn't see the rocks fall. I was there just a minute afterwards, and then I found the bar, I say," he spoke on quickly, walking out of the cave with Tess, pressing out to tell anyone I happened to be there, will you?"

"Is there anything to make it worth a promise?"

"Well—er—yes, there is," he stammered. "I mean—that crumbar. Anybody might imagine that I was fooling about with it, leaving away some bit of rock for a lark, and so that's what caused such a really terrible fall. If a story like that gets to my school, it might mean a row for me. So you will hold your tongue, won't you?"

"Oh, all right."

"Not tell any of your friends, even?"

Tess frowned.

"I'm accustomed to telling my friends anything I like!"

"But I wish you'd promise me, in this case, to be wisehead." "Perhaps you don't realize, but it might mean a row for me."

"Right—er, then," she gave the promise, and became silent, wondering at his having displayed such nervous dread.

It was he who spoke next, when they had gone only a short distance from the cavern's mouth.



TO her sudden horror Tess saw Ralph Fender pitch backwards, and before she could do anything to save him he was hurtling down the cliff.

"I say!"—and he stopped dead. "You said something about your having been sketched. Where—where's all your tackle, then?"

"Oh, that's dumped in the cart!"

"But you can't leave everything in there!" she objected. "I'll pop back now."

"But I prefer to leave everything there!" was her irritated cry. "It's lighter!"

"I don't care— I mean to say," he blustered, "can I'll wish you, I can carry the things. Wait here—"

"You won't see where to find them. It's quite dark where I left—"

"Oh, I've matches!" he cried round to her, already running back to the cart. "Shan't be a jiffy!"

But, of course, she was kept waiting more than a couple of minutes, and Tom frowned rather angrily. He might be a nice, well-meaning fellow, but she did wish he'd not been quite so domineering! Strangely, too, he had seemed to be a bit agitated, so that, perhaps, she should have warned him to be careful about handling the sketch, as the paint was still wet. But it was too late now; there he was, coming away from the cart, bringing all her things.

Another moment and Tom's heart was sinking. He could tell by his looks, as he approached, that he had had time for her about the sketch.

"I say, I'm terribly sorry," he murmured, as soon as he was within speaking distance; "but I-I dropped it!"

"Yes," she bitterly answered him, as he let her see the state the sketch was in. "And, of course, it fell three down-wards in the mud of the cart!"

"I just can't say how sorry I am!" he grovelled. "Will you ever forgive me? The match went out, you see. That's such a lovely painting it was going to be; but—but not worth finishing then."

Tom, after a hard sigh that most repressed anger, said they had "best get on." The sketch was absolutely ruined.

Then, as they walked on together, she began to retreat towards him. There was the feeling that she was only obliging him because he had spoiled her sketch, and that was not fair.

By word and look he was doing his best to mollify her; and, after all, it had been a pure accident to the sketch in the darkness of the cart—or hadn't it?

That sudden doubt! It was due to her suddenly remembering that he had looked a bit awkward when she told him of the sketch being in the cart. He had rushed away to get it, as if the idea of its being there worried him!

So, what if he had deliberately dropped the painting because it didn't suit some secret purpose of his, that she should be done here again tomorrow to complete the sketch?

No mistake, about the fall of off and her making use of that one, he had been most peculiar!

Yet it was only a few minutes more and she was feeling quite assured of suspecting him of treachery.

He and she had got to that other passage up the cliff which was known as the Cliff-edge Zigzag, because it was so very close to the bangalore.

Tom, during this walk along the sands, had unconsciously carried her sketching materials. Now he begged her to let him have them during the sketch. Her vague answer was suddenly changed away by her companion, too. She was accepting it only as the most common-sense answer, as he must have known, when she said:

"Well, don't drop the palette, anyhow!"

But he did! That was the very thing he did do, half-way up the zigzag.

She was going slightly in advance of him, when she heard that a clattering came upon the rocky path, and then his sudden cry of laughter.

Tom dashed round. Angry—oh, how angry she was with him now! The palette was lying bent upon upon the crags, and tubes of paint were widely scattered. Her palette had fallen two steps down.

"Sorry, Tom!"

"I'd do it!" she stigmatised him furiously. Then, as she saw him stand as one of a couple of tubes of paint. "Mind, can't you? Paints cost money!"

"All right!" he checked. "It's only that I feel such a silly ass, to go and drop the palette! I'll pay for everything. Good!"—as he saw that upon the palette, spilling it—"there I go again, cheap!"

"Get out! Get away!"

"Sorry, Tom! Let me pick up—"

"No, I'll do it myself! I tell you," she said passionately, "out of my way!"

"Oh, I say, do forgive a cheap—"

But she wanted to be done with him, and, in her infuriated state, she pushed him to get out of her way. Until he did so, she herself could not stoop to recover the scattered things. It was only a light push she gave him, and no level ground it would have gone unnoticed, except as a sign of protest.

But it took him in a cramped position on that steep, uneven pathing. A foot of his slipped from the edge of one step, and he lost his balance.

Tom saw him fall to right himself. For his sudden horror she saw him pitch backwards, with a sharp cry; his arms flailed the air as he tried to regain his balance, and then he was gone—tumbling and crashing down the steep descent.

First Suspicions

THREEK was a habibah of lively chatter in the sitting-rooms of Cliff-edge Bangalore, now that Betty Barton and her chums had arrived. Aristocratic Paula Drost's elegant dress mingled with Nazam's sari and her ornate jacket, while Miss Minto's always-in-question dress was almost forgotten.

Benny Trevor and Polly Linton were talking to Maudie, when suddenly Maudie's reading broke off with an excited cry as she glanced through the window:

"Here's Tom!"

"At last—Aurrah!" laughed Betty Barton and a few others; and Polly was instantly joined at the window from which she had been watching.

"Cheers!"

"Hullo, now p'haps we can have tea!"

This, from Nazam Nikara, would certainly have caused Polly to glare round upon the dusky girl, in rebuke for such a remark in somebody else's house! Fretty Maudie Fender, who had asked all the cheame to tea, was with them, and must have heard.

But Polly, like the rest at the window, had become suddenly excited over the fact that Tom Trevelyan, making her belated arrival, was not alone.

"It's a Grangerouse fellow with her!"

"Oh, that'll be my brother Ralph, perhaps!" came the loud, "Betty, please!" came the loud, "Betty, please!" "Yes, it is Ralph," she said, in delight, after a glance out of the window; and she hurried away to admit both late-comers.

"Good, though," Polly gasped; "but

what's happened to him? He keeps a hard to his forehead as if he's got a shocking great headache, anyhow!"

"He isn't carrying Tom's sketching things for her, either. Betty gazedly noticed. "She looks a bit white, too I say—an accident, coming up the zigzag!"

"Where?"

"And there was a rash for the hall, where Maudie Fender already had the porch door wide open. By now, she had noticed something amiss and her shocked cry went up:

"Ralph! Why, what ever have you been doing to yourself?"

"Oh, nothing, Maudie!" he feebly grinned. "Just fell over, on the zigzag steps and bumped my forehead."

"Not cut?"

"None!" He took his hand away, to let them see underneath; but it was blue and lumpy. "Tom ready?" he asked; and Betty & Co. admitted him for a moment's light of face here. "Afternoon, all!" he graciously greeted them. "Sorry, I'm late. Tom and I came along together!"

"And I caused the accident," Tom gloomily announced, creating a great sensation. "I pushed him, and he fell."

"Tom?" gasped her horrified chums.

"But!" Ralph laughed. "Look here, all! I'm not dead, or so inquired. I'll just get a wash, Maudie, and then I'll be with you all."

This pretty sister of his, as he walked away, made a swift excusing sign to the girls and then went darting after him. It meant that Tom was left alone with her chums, who still gaped at her.

"I was in one of my tempers," she said, with tragic candour. "It was when he was halting up the zigzag. He'd dropped my palette and everything was all over the place. He was going to pick it all up for me, but I—I wouldn't let him."

"Wouldn't let him?" staved Betty.

"But surely, Tom—a mere politeness like that!"

"Nice enough fellow, isn't he?" Judy Cudrow admitted, knowing that brother and sister were out of earshot.

"Oh, I know!" Tom nodded. "I'm—I'm in a bad mood, that's all! I wouldn't have come along to tea, only I felt bound to let his sister know that I was to blame. He would have liked me to say nothing."

"Well, that was nice of him," Pam observed.

"Perhaps it was!" Tom conceded easily. "Oh, I'd better go away now. I must stay, after all, to tidy up the party!"

But now Maudie Fender came running back to them all from where she had been in brief talk with her brother. She bestowed a most forgiving smile upon Tom, and this, after what Tom had been saying, increased the other juniors' good opinion of Maudie.

"You're had an upsetting time, I know," said that very ladylike girl of eighteen. "And now I've got to see a specimen of your clever painting after all—such a shame!"

Then, to Tom's chums, while taking these back to the sitting-rooms:

"You'll hear all about a fall of cliff there's been!" Ralph has just been telling me. But do find seats for yourselves!"

She had no sooner seated herself, to start pouring out, than Ralph came in considerably unamused up. Tom did not know whether it was her own personal prejudice, or whether her chums would think the same; to her, the big Grangerouse sister received a bit too thick now—"oh!"

He began about the fall of cliff, as being the cause of his having encountered Tess, down on the seashore.

As for the account he gave of the strange occurrence, it sounded plausible enough. He held to the theory that winter rains had been disintegrating a part of the cliff along there at the "chime."

"And you say the fallen stuff has choked the gully down which the path goes?" Betty enquired as he finished.

"Jolly good job it didn't happen on the path. That's just outside the banglow! It's your way down to the private boat-cave that goes with CliffEdge, isn't it?"

Then, talking to part in the flow of chatter, gave a sudden start. Just then Betty had mentioned the boat-cave that "went" with the banglow of the banglow. Since the Fenders had the private use of that cave—didn't Ralph Fender's attitude about the other cave even all the more unreasonable, not to say mysterious?

She studied him as the quiet, realising that he was making the very best impression upon her charms. They might be thinking him a bit of a "cavey knight," his drawing-room manners were perfect. But then, he was a scolar. And although their preference was for something more shock-headed and rough-and-tumble, at any rate this great fellow could talk games, and had plenty of hobnob.

Now did he seem inclined to look down upon Morocco as being a school for "mere girls." This was fully proved when at least she always remembered that they must be going now.

"I'd like to walk across with you to your patio," he suddenly offered. "I want to get a look at Morocco—although it's too late now for doing that. But look here, though; I'm going to fix up to come over again pretty soon, from Strangeway. And I'll make it O.K. for those brothers of yours and their chance to come along with me?"

"Nice of him! That, Tess could tell, was what her chance was thinking.

And later, when they had parted from him at the Morocco gateway, she noticed how slowly they rustled up the drive, discussing him and his sister with enthusiasm.

For reasons that did her credit, she kept her own delicate opinion of Ralph Fender to herself. It looked as if they would get to Study No. 12, in the Form's upstairs quarters, only to go on talking about him and Maine, as she herself went to the study which she shared with Midge. She preferred to be alone.

One of those rare springtime evenings it was, with a sprinkle of moon shining in a cloudless sky that was still brown-coloured in the west.

Tess, going to the study window, felt that it was too beautiful a scene against which to draw the curtain. Her artistic nature kept her watching the fading afternoon, thinking what a lovely picture it would make.

Suddenly, she saw a dark, marshy figure away on the cliff-top, and she knew instinctively that it was Ralph Fender, going back to the banglow.

Being near the edge of the cliff, he stood out against the last of the sunset light, and that was how she came to see him so clearly.

Beyond him—a mile out at sea—a small boat was moving across the darkening waters. This she only noticed because it suddenly showed a light.

At first she took the light to be that of an ordinary ship's lantern, set up

and reproduction in strictly forbidden.



BETWEEN OURSELVES

MY DEAR READERS.—Now I know quite well what you're all going to say when you see this column! You're going to accuse me of not keeping my promise! "But I thought you were always going to have THIS column!" I can imagine you saying.

Well, I must admit that I have broken my promise—but I really think I can plead a very good cause. For, you see, in this week's issue there is the first instalment of Marjorie Stanton's topping new Morocco serial, and knowing how much you love the Morocco tales I decided that, in order to provide you with an extra-long instalment, I must heroically sacrifice some of my own valuable space.

So you will forgive me, won't you? I'm sure you will—especially when you come to read the opening chapters of Marjorie Stanton's new feature.

Let me know how you like this new story, won't you? I shall look forward to lots of letters, just packed with comments—no please don't disappoint me!

Now I do want to thank all those of you—and there are many! I know—who have recommended Mrs. Strangeway to your friends. Lots of you have written to tell me that you have spoken to your classes about my paper, and so have secured splendid new readers. That's absolutely splendid—and I do hope you'll all carry on with the good work!

NEW STORIES.

That heading, I'm sure, will arouse your great interest. In the near future I shall have some exciting news for you regarding new features. Two of your favourite authors—no names, just jobs—are even now hard at work upon stories which are going to delight you in a few weeks' time.

So keep a sharp eye upon my Chat for further news of these forthcoming treats.

NEXT WEEK'S programme of features opens with a grand, long complete **CLIFF HOUSE SCHOOL** story, the title of which is:

"MAD, THE MYSTERIOUS!"

On no account miss this fine story of poor Fourth Form favourites, written, of course, by ever-popular Miss Richards.

"WHEN MORCOVE EXPELLED HER!" by Marjorie Stanton, continues to thrill you next week, so look out for a further long instalment of this brilliant new feature.

"HAPPY-GO-LUCKY LULU" features again in a lighter-packed complete tale by Ida Melbourne, and Elizabeth Chester continues her vivid and absorbing serial—"MISS MYSTERY" OF CARNIVAL LAND.

Make sure of enjoying all these good things by securing your copy of *The Strangeway*, and make sure of securing your copy of *The Strangeway* by ordering a copy!

Your sincere friend,
YOUR EDITOR.

for the night. Then, to her surprise, it flashed off and on, again and again, as if signalling.

Greater still was her surprise when, a few moments later, she saw that Ralph Fender was using an electric torch.

She did not see it flashing; but he was suddenly at a standstill, facing seawards, and she could tell by splashes of light that fell upon the grass in front of him that he was manipulating a pocket-torch.

And why—why should he be using the torch at all, if not to signal back to the boat? It was nowhere near dark enough for him to need a torch to guide him.

After a minute he walked on again, and then she noticed that no more flashes came from the boat. No more had been an exchange of signals.

Tess knew that she ought to settle down to "prep" now; but, somehow, no!

Instead, she found herself peering at her wrist-watch, wondering if she dare slip out again, late though the hour was.

"But I want?" was her sudden rash remark. "He's a fellow my chance are trusting, along with his sister; but I—I'm not so sure. I want to know if that boat is coming in, where I was sketching to-day? If it is, then he did ruin my sketch on purpose, and squashed my paint-box, too, on purpose. Because he doesn't want me laughing about just there, sketching!"

The chimes of Morocco ding-donged melodiously. Late indeed for a scholar to be going out, when it was a time for all girls to be coming in.

But Tess, before a couple of minutes had sped, was out of doors again, using a gap in the boundary hedge to get beyond bounds.

The Watcher on the Shore

AT the banglow, Miss Fender was alone in the sitting-room.

But somehow told her that Ralph was coming indoors again, and she ended some peering out across the sea, to face round as he entered.

"Yes," he grinned, knowing why she looked excited. "The boat's here again, isn't it great? So I'm far down to the shore, Maine."

"Oh, Ralph," she murmured uneasily. "had you better be about when—when it gets in?"

"I think I had—yes," he said, starting to leave. "I'm not so sure, all of a sudden, about our staying that other cave, instead of the one that goes with this shanty."

"But why?" she asked in sharp alarm. "Everything is all right, isn't it?"

"Just can't say," he shrugged. "But that Tess Trevelyan! She's left me feeling—Oh, I dance-jumpy! I'm pretty sure she suspects me of having used that crowbar, to cause the fall of rock. Anyway, just fancy her being there in that cave, when I got to it! Scared stiff I was, thinking she had perhaps discovered—yes know what."

He changed a dumbfounded frowning. His sister was lighting the standard lamp. As the room lost its twilight gloom, she could be seen to be looking worried.

"It's almost a pity, Ralph, you had that idea about blocking the public footpath!"

"No," he strongly dissent. "It's the path people from the town use, and it'll not be cleared in a hurry. Nobody's job to clear it, not yet. So we

shall be less likely to have people hanging about on that part of the shore. This a wonderful shock upon them. Well, I must be off, and I may even be able to get some of the best cargo straight to my school on my motor-bike. I told that Tealawney girl my machine was in the town, but it left."

"Wait, though!" his sister pleaded. "You say you feel jumpy about her, and—"

"Oh, forget it!" he snapped. "Anyway, I returned her sketch, as she'll not be there to-morrow to finish it. And I smashed her paint-box—beautifully! Altogether, she's stopped for a bit—hanging about where she isn't wanted!"

"I'm not so sure," muttered his sister. "Her claims say she is terribly keen on sketching. And a new colour-box can be bought any day in Harrogate."

"Then I wish she were right out of the way," he said angrily. "But that is a thing that just can't be wished."

"Can't it?"

"Why, how can it, then? She's like all the other girls at her school—used to go out at boards every day after classes."

"A girl may be gated, Ralph."

"Gated!" And he shrugged. "For a week at most, I suppose. And we could easily do with a couple of months, when the best needs to make trip after trip before—before all the gold is here. Still, get her gated, if you can."

"And, from what I've seen of the girl, I do think I can," was Missie's startling rejoinder. She said it with a crafty smile that Betty & Co. would never have believed her capable of displaying. "Sit down for just a minute, Ralph, and I'll tell you."

It was more like five minutes before he went off, in great haste to make up for lost time. But he was in good spirits, for what his sister had said was highly promising.

She had her plan. It was one that would take her across to Morocco School to-morrow morning, making trouble for "that artist kid."

By the easiest path on which he had had the "accident" with Tom's paint-box, Ralph Fender descended to the beach. But it was up the other path, now so badly blocked, that he returned presently to the top of the cliffs.

Then, and not until then, did Tom see him as he kept watch at a time or late for the Morocco girl to be still out of bounds.

She had begun to feel that it was all her meddling—this trifling to her spite to "meet" after him.

The new moon and the few stars did little to lighten that darkness which had now closed over land and sea. From the top of the cliffs, near the chime, she was unable, after all, to make out what, if anything, was going on down below.

If that small vessel which had exchanged signals with him had crept in under cover of darkness, then it was loathed where she could not glimpse it.

And there were no sounds, no voices, coming up from the shore, or they might have helped her to deduce a good deal.

But now suddenly she had to crush amongst some screening grass, aware of somebody being just a great notion by thinking she checked her path.

She had good hopes of being able to see who it was, and sure enough the next minute discerned Ralph Fender in a great state of haste.

It seemed to her that the climb had been made all the more exhilarating for

him, because of something with which he was hindered. The land was a small one, but heaps. She saw him shift it from under one arm to the other as he floundered away over the level ground at the top of the chime. He could not afford to stand for a moment, getting his breath back.

Tom would have started to creep forward, to go the way he went. But she realized that he was looking this way and that in a most anxious manner, as he rubbed across the grass. If he returned from her cover, he would see her.

So she could only remain there, and she had almost lost sight of him in the darkness, when she could tell that he had stopped at a gate-pole.

For a minute all was silence; then the expert of a motor-bike roared to life. It was Ralph Fender's machine that had been "parked" over there amongst the gorse.

Now he was off and away, and it was for her to wonder whether he had taken that mysterious load with him on the run back to his school, or whether he had hidden it amongst those same bushes.

Too late for her to go across to try to find out. At that very moment Morocco's chimes ding-donged faintly in the night.

And at Morocco School just then all outer doors were being hastily locked; all decorative windows, left open for ventilation, were being closed and latched.

Now, if any Morocco girl was not shown she should be, the headmistress herself would have to know about it.

Of Her Own Choosing

MISSE SOMERFIELD, so popular as the headmistress of famous Morocco, had a nice way, characteristically, of receiving a girl cordially in her private room, even though that might be some rather serious offence to be dealt with.

But Tom "on the sly" at eleven o'clock next morning, found Miss Somerfield making a very bleak and stern commencement.

"First, Tom Tealawney, it is reported to me—most reluctantly, by your Youngmistress—that you got indoors very late last night. No excuse to offer then. Any excuse to offer now?"

"I'm afraid not, Miss Somerfield."

"Very well. For the moment I pass to something else. There is a very serious complaint against you from Clifford. Missie Fender has left bound to come to see you; she has just left. Miss Rollins is that an apology is due from you to her brother Ralph."

"I would like to know why."

"I am told that Missie's brother was kindly saving you the trouble of having to carry all your sketching materials up the Clifford Zigzag yesterday afternoon. Just because he chanced to drop your paint-box you went into a violent rage."

"I lost my temper, it's true."

"Yes, it was far worse than that. I understood you so few at him that you knocked him all down those rock steps. He sustained a severe bruising."

"I gave him a push to get out of my way and let me pick up the things."

"But why give him a push even? Where was the provocation? He was simply offering, in a gentlemanly way, to pick up the things for you, and that's how you treated him. It was conduct, Tom, unbecoming to a Morocco scholar. Have you anything to say in excuse?"

"No, there's nothing I can say," Tom

glacially answered, remembering the promise whispered from her by Ralph Fender.

"Then you will write a letter at midday, tendering an apology."

"I'm afraid I can't do as you say, Miss Somerfield."

Suddenly the room became intensely quiet; it was the silence of a deathbed.

"There must be no nonsense, Tom," said the headmistress at last. "From the little you have been able to say for yourself I am more than satisfied that an apology is due. You will bring a nicely written letter to me for me to see after morning school."

"My time, but to be wanted, Tom, you will I have you staying away any longer from class. You, with your refusal to say why you were out so late, and another refusal to tender that apology when I say that one is certainly due; Go back now, and at half-past twelve I will see that letter!"

"I'm afraid you won't!"

"Either you will write that apology after school, or you will be gated until it is written!"

"Then I look like being gated for the rest of term, that's all!"

"That is not all!" cried Miss Somerfield. "You are in a mischief, Tom Tealawney, and when a girl like that, defying even her headmistress, shows a single one thing to be done, you know what I mean?"

"Expulsion, I suppose."

"That is exactly what I do mean. Be now be careful, girl! Go away and think it over."

"I don't see how I can be sent home, Miss Somerfield; my parents are away, and the house is shut up."

"If I decide that you must go, then go you will, Tom Tealawney! Somebody will have to have you if I, the headmistress, am to meet this challenge to my authority in the only way left open to me."

Again that nothing had pointed to the door, implying that Miss Somerfield had said her last word. But now Tom was ready to raise her decision.

It was not that she considered herself to be unfairly treated by the headmistress, or that she would suffer less than any other girl forced to leave the school the lives.

Agonizing enough, a good-bye to Morocco, if only because it meant means good-bye to many a dear theme. Ah, and what their feelings would be when one told them!

But, she was fiercely thinking, there were times when, if one had any spirit at all, one must make a stand.

There was, too, such a thing as being under compulsion from a guiding instinct.

And all her spirit had been roused somehow to make a stand where that fellow Ralph Fender was concerned. Every instinct that could warn her to beware of trickery, treachery, danger even, had warned her by now in regard to him.

So in this fatal moment Tom's choice was already made.

"Apology, or expulsion?" she asked that better choice with which she had been left. "All right, then—expulsion!"

And, after having as a scholar should, she calmly walked out, knowing herself to be, of her own choosing, expelled!

RATHER than give in, Tom Tealawney has chosen to be expelled—his, of her own free will, decided to accept the sterner of all punishments! Another dramatic installment of this powerful new serial next Saturday.