

Brilliant New
Desert Serial

"GUESTS OF THE SHAREEN" Starts In
This Issue

THE SCHOOLGIRL

No. 489 Vol. 18
PUBLISHED
BY SACS, INC.

EVERY
2ND
SATURDAY

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"SH! THERE SHE IS!"

One of many thrilling
incidents in this week's
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House School story, by
Hilda Richards

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Long Mystery Story



MYSTERY MISTRESS at CLIFF HOUSE

How Babs & Co. become involved in the strange and intriguing mystery which surrounds their new Form-mistress, Miss Gilbey, is told in this fine story of the girls of Cliff House School.

"She's An Impostor!"



"MISS GILBEY'S a spook!" declared Barbara Hoffern rather nastily.

"I only wish to goodness she were staying at Cliff House instead of being just a temporary mistress. Now, Bessie, fingers off that jam sandwich! Babs, are those muffins ready?"

"Three minutes!" Mabel Lynn replied, turning a flushed face from the fire in Study No. 4. "I say, Babs, do you think she likes muffins?"

"Of course she likes muffins," Bessie Ruster looks in scornfully. "All the best people like muffins, you know. Really, Babs, I wish you wouldn't look at me like that when I— I'm just breaking the crumbs off the cake, you know. Oh dear! I wish she'd hurry up! I'm starving!"

"Well, starve without sticking bits off that push pin!" Clara Trevlyn advised gravely. "What time did Miss Gilbey say she'd be along?" she added to Babs.

"Half past four!"

"But it's that now—"

"Oh goodness, give the poor woman a chance!" Babs laughed. "You forget, she's new. No doubt Primary or the Hall have got hold of her. And come to think of it," Babs said, "she did say something about having something to do when I asked her to come along this morning. She looked awfully worried for some reason."

"Well, if you ask me, she's looked awfully worried ever since she came

here," Babs reflected. "I suppose it isn't all for being a Form-mistress."

Babs smiled. "It certainly wasn't all fun, especially when the Form in question was the Fourth at Cliff House."

But Miss was right. She herself had noticed it. Miss Gilbey, the new mistress of the Fourth, who was temporarily taking the place of Miss Charmant, did look worried.

Despite her handsome youth, her poise, and, despite kindly gentleness, she gave one rather the impression of having some secret on her mind. Was it due to her new responsibilities?

Perhaps it was. But then, Miss Gilbey didn't seem the sort to take responsibilities with such dreadful seriousness. They had only experienced her for one day, but in that one day she had shown herself alert, well up to her mark, with a thorough understanding of girls in her charge, even though their girls were all strangers to her.

Straightaway she had won Clara's heart, for instance, by asking to be included in the cricket practice which started next week. And she really had been most charming and honored when Babs had invited her to this tea which she and her chums were preparing now.

But, meanwhile, the hours were creeping round the clock.

"Quarter to five!" exclaimed Mabel.

"Hope the boss's forgotten."

"Oh, not she; she's not that sort! All

the same—" And Babs hesitated.

"Do you think I might go and remind her?"

"You! Remember those muffins are getting cold, you know," Bessie said.

Babs smiled. She tripped out. Everything was ready then. It would be such a shame if the muffins were to spoil, or the toast to dry up! Down the corridor she tripped, into Big Hall, and into the mistress's quarters where Miss Gilbey had taken over the rooms belonging to Miss Charmant. She raised her hand to knock at the door.

And then paused.

A rather sweetening girl's voice reached her ears—the voice of Lydia Crossdale, the distilled snob of the Fourth Form.

"And that," it said, "is all you have to say!"

"Yes!" It was Miss Gilbey's voice which replied, quivering a little.

"You deny it!"

"I deny it utterly!" Miss Gilbey's voice came back. "And I think it is extremely important of you to make such a suggestion, Lydia. Please leave the room!"

Babs's eyes clouded. A rather forbidding frown came to her brows. It was like Lydia—mean, spiteful, unkind-spirited girl that she was—to seek an early opportunity of baiting the new mistress. She knocked.

There was a moment's pause. Then Miss Gilbey's voice—rather sharp and faintly alarmed, it struck Babs:

"Who is there?"

"Please, Miss Gilbey, it's Barbara Hoffern."

By

HILDA RICHARDS

"Oh!" Another phrase. "Then please come in," she said.

Babe pushed open the door. She went in, her eyes travelling quickly to the mistress's face. She was quite shocked by the expression upon it. "Was it fear? Was it alarm? Was it amazement that glimmered at her from beneath the lenses of those spectacles she wore? She was standing up, both hands on the desk in front of her. And Babe noticed, all at that moment that she was trembling. Lydia, near the door, cool, inscrutable as usual, wore an expression of faint contempt.

"Lydia, you may go!" Miss Gilbey got out.

Lydia laughed slightly. She seemed to be completely at ease; rather maliciously enjoying herself. Her glance was mocking.

"But you haven't answered my question," she said coolly.

"The answer to your question, as I have told you, is 'No!'" Miss Gilbey said.

"But my sister—"

"Please go!"

Babe blinked. She looked at Lydia. She remembered now that Lydia's older sister, Norma Crossendale, had paid a visit to the school that morning. Babe-like Lydia was sister Norma's—indeed, overbearing, treating with the contempt all those she regarded as her inferiors—in spite of the fact that she was now a full-grown woman.

Norma was an old Cliff House girl. For one brief period of her school days she had been its captain. She never allowed anyone to forget that fact.

"All the same," Lydia asserted, "you wouldn't like Miss Fennimore to get an idea—"

"Lydia, take a hundred lines for impertinence!" thundered Miss Gilbey. "And now go!"

Again Lydia shrugged. She threw an insolent smile at the mistress. Babe, her eyes gleaming, lunged open the door, and, as Lydia walked up to it, she caught her by the shoulder, pushing her into the passage outside. Lydia gave a furious exclamation.

"Look here—"

"Get out!" Babe hissed furiously.

No choice Lydia had in that matter. While she gazed at Babe the door was shut in her face. Babe, looking rather heavily, wheeled round. And then she gave a sharp cry.

"Miss Gilbey!"

For the mistress, deathly white, had sunk into her chair. She was sitting with her head supported upon one hand on her desk. Her whole frame seemed to be shaking. Impulsively Babe rushed forward. She did not hear the door open, nor see Lydia's maliciously smiling face as that girl peered back into the room.

"Miss Gilbey, are—you ill?" she cried.

The mistress drew a trembling hand across her forehead.

"No, Barbara, don't—don't say that faintly. "Just—just a little upset, you know. I—I do not like to punish girls, and—Lydia—"

Babe stared at her. She stared queerly. Her good common sense told her that that was not the reason. Lydia had been impertinent and insolent, but Lydia for some reason had also made this mistress afraid.

Impulsively she bent forward. "Miss Gilbey, is—there anything I can do to help?"

The mistress smiled faintly. "I'm afraid not, Barbara, though it is very unkind of you to offer. I—And then she stopped, looking at Barbara strangely. "I am glad,

Barbara, that there are not many girls in the Fourth Form like Lydia Crossendale. I do so like to feel that all the girls in my charge are my friends. But Lydia— She shook her head, sighing heavily. "Barbara, reproachfully, you overheard certain things in this study. I—I hope you do not believe them—"

Babe dashed.

"No, of course not," she stammered, a little embarrassed. "I—then, I—I came to ask you if you were coming to tea with us, after all. W—"

"You still wish me to?"

"Why, of course, Miss Gilbey!"

"Thank you, Barbara; I'll come along at once."

And she rose. She was all smiles again now. Whatever the fear on her mind, she seemed to have shaken it off. She was smiling as she entered Study No. 4, to be eagerly welcomed by its other occupants. Such a dear she was! So cheery, so jolly, so cheerfully ready to give and take a joke, that there were times when one completely forgot that she was a mistress. And yet, all the time, it seemed there was that faint suggestion of hesitating nerves in her face—what sad wondering look, which, in the intervals of conversation, would come into her grey eyes.

"Well, it's been lovely!" she said, at last. "I declare I've finished every scrap of that cake! I'm only sorry that I am not going to stay with you for always! You know, ever since I was a tiny tot, I've always wanted to be a mistress of Cliff House. I remember when I was in the Fourth Form, and Miss Janssens—" and then for some reason she hastily caught herself up, really blushing. "Dunno! Would you like me to pour you out another cup of tea?"

"But Miss Janssens?" Babe cried. "Miss Gilbey, so had a Miss Janssens

at Cliff House once upon a time! She was mistress of the Fourth Form?"

"Was she?" For some reason Miss Gilbey looked more than ever embarrassed.

"You don't mean, Miss Gilbey, that you used to belong to Cliff House?" Isabel Lyon asked eagerly.

"Oh, goodness," Miss Gilbey broadly, lusciously smiled. "Did you say 'yes, Bessie? Miss, please pass me the milk, will you? And the sugar? There you are, Bessie! I hope you'll enjoy that. Now, I—I really must go!" she added hastily. "I do thank you girls for your really lovely tea. And I do so hope you will all come to my study in a day or two and allow me to return the compliment."

She hurried from them all. They all felt rather embarrassed. For Miss Gilbey, in a whirlwind of suddenness, all at once so rapidly ascended to get away, left them feeling bewildered. Before any one of them could say anything further, she had hurriedly caught hold of the door, with a final hearty smile, vanished through it. Babe blinked.

"I say, what's the matter?"

"And she jolly well didn't tell us whether she was at Cliff House or not, after all! It struck me that she was sorry she ever mentioned it," Clara said. "All the same, she's jolly nice, and—have she succeeded in the door opened, and the supernatural face of Lydia Crossendale intruded into the room—" what do you want?"

Lydia grinned easily.

"Nothing. Just saw the Gilbey birds in the passage—coming out of this room. Has she been to tea?"

"Your business?" Babe pleasantly inquired.

"Well, yes. The whole Form's business, too, if you ask me. An Form



PANIC-STRICKEN, Bessie watched the stone slab slowly rise until a woman's head and shoulders became visible. Bessie didn't pause to think who it might be; she simply yelled at the top of her voice: "Help! G-ghosts!"

captain," Lydia added, with pointed offensiveness, "you ought to be particular about the company you keep. Barbara Redburn!"

Babe's lips tightened.

"And why?"

"Because that woman's a crook!"

"Oh, get out!" growled Clara. "Go and tell your funny stories to Freda Ferguson."

"She's a crook!" Lydia repeated defiantly. "Oh, I know! My sister recognized her this morning—aw-well, never mind. I tell you she's an impostor!"

"And Primmy knows that, of course?" Mabel asked, with an interested nod.

"Eh?"

"Well, I mean, Primmy engaged her. Primmy, I take it, would not marry herself or her creditors, and so forth? She might have overlooked such a trifling matter, of course—in which case she'd be jolly grateful to know from you that she was harboring such a serpent within the old school walls! If you know all about this, why haven't you told Primmy?"

Lydia reddened.

"Because," she retorted, "the time's not ripe to tell Primmy. She's got to be bowled out first!"

"But I thought you knew——"

"Neither, I, do know!" Lydia boasted. "I tell you, it's true! Her name is not Dora Gilbey! She's an impostor! A crook! If by do you think she's wearing a wig!"

"My hat!"

"And why do you think she's using those silly spectacles?"

"Well, why does Juliana Custaine wear an eyeglass?"

"Because," Lydia retorted, "Juliana's got weak sight; but this Gilbey woman hasn't. You examine her eyes, you'll find they're just made of plain glass. That wig and those specs are just a disguise. The real colour of her hair is dark brown."

There was a pause. Clara's hand dropped gently towards the cushion on the chair. Babe, her brows knitted, stared in anger at the confident crook.

"Well, are you satisfied?" Lydia sneered.

"Very!" Clara snapped. "Satisfied, above all things, that you're the biggest mischief maker that ever disgraced this school. And if," she threatened, "you don't get out of this study in one-fifth of a second, I'm going to box this at you—like this!"

And Lydia yelped as the cushion smote her full in the face and sent her staggering back into the corridor!

After Dark



THREE was no doubt that Lydia had her knife into Miss Gilbey! And it seemed there was no doubt that, for some of the things Lydia said, at least, there was some foundation.

Like her as they all did, not one of the chums could deny that there was something rather mysterious about the new mistress. Young as she was, there were times when, catching that strangely worried expression on her face, she looked almost old, despite her glorious crown of fine blonde hair.

Certainly it seemed, though she had dealt with Lydia so far with a firm hand, that she was afraid of her, and Babe could not help but wonder why she had so hurriedly banished that reference to Cliff House School at tea.

That there was a secret in Miss Gilbey's life seemed obvious.

Clara's travels, Gossip, especially of the malicious sort, will always find ready hearers. Velled hints from Lydia that coming in the Commons-room started a lively speculation in the Fourth Form, rather causing the new mistress to be looked at in a new light when she was met in the corridors and Commons-room.

Lydia knew something. Lydia's sister had recognized this woman for an impostor, for a crook! Lydia declared loudly that Miss Gilbey had turned up to disguise for no good purpose, and called upon all the Forns to help her in unmasking the deceiver! Needless to say, Lydia got no support whatever in that last demand. The Fourth knew Lydia too well!

But in the Fourth Form dormitory that night, while the girls were undressing, and going to bed, Lydia jolly well said she'd here for an good!" Lydia declared. "And I jolly well say it's up to all of us to hound her out and nip her little game, whatever it is, in the lead. If ever a mistress ought to be kicked out of this school, that mistress is Dora Gilbey."

"Thank you, Lydia!" a voice interrupted at the door, and Miss Gilbey herself, her face white and frozen beneath its glittering mass of blonde hair, stood there. The whole Form stood electrified as she stared at the impudent snob of the Fourth. "What does that mean, pray?"

"Well, isn't it true!" Lydia challenged.

"I do not," Miss Gilbey said, with dignity, "feel it incumbent upon me either to deny or confirm any spurious accusation you may make. And I will trouble you," she added icily, "to adopt a more respectful tone to a mistress. Perhaps it is fortunate for you, Lydia, that I have the sense to realize that your remark was not intended for my ears, in which case I shall not punish you for it. Now, please go to bed—all of you," she added, a little wearily.

There was a snigger. Babe felt herself glowing. If she had admired the new mistress before, she admired her even more at that moment. If that had been the Bolk, she! Lydia would have been detained for the next three half-holidays at least.

Silently the girls completed their undressing. Silently got into bed. Miss Gilbey made them a constrained "Good-night" and switched off the light. From Janet Jordan came a shudder:

"Well, what price your naughty old criminal nose, Lydia Crowschuck! I'm blessed if I'd have let you down as lightly as that!"

"Oh rats!" sniffed Lydia irritably.

They settled down. A few more snoring voices, then one by one the girls dropped off to sleep. Babe, however, only fitfully dozing, was awakened by a slight movement.

She turned her head. The dormitory was bathed in the light of the cold moon which shone from outside; in its rays she saw the sharp silhouette of a figure, three beds away, in the act of donning a dressing-gown.

It was Lydia.

In a moment Babe was alert. She watched as Lydia crept towards the door. With a steady glance round the dormitory she opened it. Lydia cautiously she opened it. Lydia and Babe, thinking of her campaign against Miss Gilbey, could neither her destination.

No sooner had Lydia gone out, than Babe hastily thrust her feet into her slippers and donned her dressing-gown. She darted across the floor and slipped

into the corridor. She heard the shuffling steps of Lydia descending the stairs.

She followed.

At the top of the stairs she passed, looking down into Big Hall. In the moonlight she saw the snob of the Fourth cross the floor, disappearing into the passage that led to the mistress's quarters. Babe's eyes glanced there. Silently she tripped down after her, reaching the end of the passage just in time to see Lydia softly turn the knob and slip into Miss Gilbey's room.

"Now, what," Babe muttered, "is her little game?"

Quickly she pulled up the corridor. Outside the partly opened door of the mistress's room she halted. The glimpse she had of its interior showed her Miss Gilbey in bed, her face lit with the moonlight, looking most unworldlyly young and girlish without her glasses, her blonde curls falling about her face. Creeping towards her in a half-crouching attitude was Lydia.

Babe heard the quick catch of her breath, heard her whispering:

"Now I'll jolly well prove whether it's a wig or not! If it is——"

Babe's lips came together. So that was Lydia's little game! Lydia, obsessed with that ridiculous notion that Miss Gilbey was some sort of criminal in disguise, was out to try to prove it. Rather grim was the expression on Babe's face as she tiptoed after the snob. Just as Lydia, passing by the head of the bed, put out her hand, Babe, with a quick step, grabbed it. Lydia swung round.

"Lydia," she cried.

"Neither you! Get out of it! Leave me alone!" Lydia hissed, and fiercely her hand swung back, but Babe deftly avoided the blow, jerking her head to one side. The movement threw her off her balance, however, and she staggered forward, juggling against the bed. In a moment Miss Gilbey was awake.

"Barbara! Lydia, what——"

Favorably Lydia made a desperate grab. For one second her fingers fastened into the billowy web of fine gold which surrounded the mistress's face. Viciously then she tugged. Miss Gilbey gave a cry of pain.

"Lydia! Oh, my goodness! Have you taken leave of your senses, girl?"

"It's a wig!" Lydia moaned.

"What gracious soul! Lydia, how dare you!"

"I tell you——"

But it dawned upon Lydia then that she had made a mistake. Whatever might have happened to Miss Gilbey's hair, it was certainly all her own. So vicious the tug she gave, that if Miss Gilbey had worn a wig glued on, it simply must have come off. But it didn't. Angriest Miss Gilbey jerked her head back just at the same moment as Babe struck down Lydia's hand. Quivering, she leapt out of bed.

"Lydia!"

Lydia gasped.

"Then—then it isn't false?"

"Of course it is not false, you foolish, stupid child. In that reason for this outrageous breaking into my room! Lydia, go back to bed at once! I will deal with you to-morrow." Hastily she caught up her spectacles, got them on, and then, switching on the light angrily, strode to the door, flinging it open. "Lydia, you heard what I said! Barbara, please remain here."

Lydia threw her a baffled glance, but the glow of spite in her eyes showed that she was by no means finished: the snub out of the room.

Miss Gilbey sat down on the bed. She

locked rather shaken. Babe thought, as being her lip, she stood before her.

"Thank you, Barbara!" the mistress murmured. "That was very kind of you. No, do not explain, my dear! I think I can guess what happened, just as I can guess the motive which made you follow Lydia, and try to prevent her disgraceful action." For a moment a rather bitter smile twisted her lips, and she passed her hand across her face. "I hope," she said, "she is satisfied now that my hair is not false."

She paused, saying Babe very sympathically.

"Barbara, would you mind placing, getting me a cigarette?" she added abruptly. "You will find the box on my dressing-table there."

With alacrity Babe jumped up to obey; she crossed the room. The silver box, with the matches, was lying there; also there were several letters and odd-ends of cream and lipstick. As she picked up the box Babe's eyes fell upon one of the letters. It was a letter that was obviously rather old, and it had been opened. She gave a thrill of amazement as she unwittingly took in the name and address:

"Miss Dora Durrant,
Pemberton School."

"Durrant? Then—that—?" For a moment Babe felt just the faintest wave of doubt chill her. Then Gilbey wasn't the mistress' real name!

She took the box back. With fingers that trembled a little she opened it. Something of her feelings must have betrayed themselves in her expression, for Miss Gilbey gave her a quick, sharp look as she took the cigarette. She said:

"Why, Barbara, what's the matter? You look quite startled."

"Do—do I?" Babe stammered. "It—it's nothing, Miss Gilbey."

"No?" And Miss Gilbey's eyes went back toward the dressing-table; then suddenly she bit her lip. "I see," she said slowly. "You saw those letters, Barbara."

"I—I couldn't help it."

"Of course not, my dear. Please do not think I am reproving you." Miss Gilbey lit the cigarette and puffed rather worriedly as she held it between her lips. "I should have known you better than to leave them there. Well, after all, I was hardly expecting this visit. And again she gazed—a long, long gaze this time, as though going over and solving some knotty problem in her mind. "Barbara," she said presently, "you do believe in me, don't you?"

"Yes, Miss Gilbey."

"But, all the same," the mistress gazed, "there is something about me which puzzles you? At this moment, for instance, you are wondering whether there is anything in what Lydia said or not. You are wondering," she said, to Babe's embarrassment, "why I call myself Gilbey, and receive letters addressed to Durrant?"

"Babe had to admit it.

"Well, Barbara, I am sorry I can't tell you that—not yet. But I do ask you, do you want an earnest—not that I think there is any need—to refrain from posturing these letters to anyone. Later, Barbara, I may be able to explain. Gilbey is my name, even though there is that doubt in your mind. Barbara, you have proved yourself a good and trustworthy little friend up to now. This afternoon," she added wistfully, "you asked if you could help me, Barbara, you can. Just by believing in me a little longer! By doing your—your best to contradict the poison which Lydia is spreading. I



SOFT-FOOTED, Lydia crept towards Miss Gilbey's door; for a second she listened, and then her hand gently fastened upon the handle. The door opened silently. "Now, what's her little game?" the watching Babe wondered.

give you my word of honor that there is nothing—nothing whatever to report to. Can I still count upon your friend ship?"

Babe flushed. "Oh, Miss Gilbey, you know you can!"

"Thank you, my dear." And Babe, her head in a whirl, still not understanding, but more earnestly relieved than ever to back Miss Gilbey up, left the room.

Bessie Loses Her Appetite!



"CONNIE, how can I have some more bacon?"

"Not!" Connie Jackson said sternly.

"Oh, dear, but I'm full-finished, you know. How can I have some more bacon?"

"No!" Connie repeated.

"Well, some more bread-and—"

"What you can have, Bessie Bessie," Connie Jackson retorted, "is fifty lines! You will write out fifty lines. I want not be a glutton. Now shut up!"

Bessie Bessie glowered. It was breakfast-time at Cliff House the following morning, and Connie Jackson, in the absence of Miss Gilbey, who was busy preparing lessons, was presiding over the Form-table in Dining Hall. There was no love lost between Connie Jackson of the Sixth and Bessie Bessie of the Fourth.

Long ago Bessie had finished her breakfast, while the rest of the Form was only half-way through theirs. Bessie was hungry this morning—not an unusual state, by any means, but rather hungry than usual. Babe, across the table, smiled her sympathy.

"Close up, old Fatima!"

"How can I close up when I'm so awfully dead-dad with hunger!" Bessie asked petulantly. "That but-but—"

"Leave the room!" came in almost a shout from Connie.

Bessie sighed. She looked about near to tears then. But there was no gazing at Connie. Fastened by the fat one rose-feralry, followed by the sympathetic glances of her class, smiled on.

Hopefully she wandered to Study No. 4. Connie, she'd die if she didn't have something to eat! Eagerly she opened the cupboard door, helpfully she blinked in, but Study No. 4's cupboard, like the famous Mother Hubbard's, was bare. Bessie granted a disappointed.

But when Bessie was hungry; Bessie had to be satisfied. Perhaps, she thought hopefully, Study No. 7 would yield a meal. Off down the corridor she trotted again. Rather guiltily she slipped into Study No. 7—home of Clara Twyn. She opened the cupboard door—and then her eyes glanced happily through her thick spectacles. For there, right in the middle of the bottom shelf, was the unaccounted portion of a tempting pork pie!

"Yum!" Bessie said delightedly.

She blinked. "Crumbs! What wouldn't she give for that! She looked round. Well, how it, Clara knew that she was starving! Besides, it wasn't as if it was a whole one!"

"Yum!" Bessie said again, but this time on a hungry note.

Still she hesitated. Taking things which didn't belong to one was stealing. But—well, borrowing wasn't stealing, was it? As soon as ever she

received her next postal order she could buy Clara a pork pie at least three times as big as this one!

Bessie smiled. She felt almost virtuous about it then. Her conscience comforted, she reached up, lifted the pie down, and, wrapping it in a piece of paper, sneaked out of the study. In spite of the innocence of her action, however, she did not go to Study No. 4 to eat her forbidden pie. After all, if that rat Clara did come along, there was no telling that she might not understand her motives!

Trying to look as if she had not a care in the world, Bessie wandered outside and made towards the quietest and most unfrequented part of the school—the Cloisters, where she opened the entrance to the crypt, under the raised arches, she found a seat. Eyes gleaming, she unwrapped her pie, smiling beatifically as it rested on her knee.

She heaved a rapturous sigh of contentment, and broke off a piece of the crust. Enjoyably, she was in the act of transferring it to her mouth, when—

For a moment she sat petrified and still. Her fat jaw dropped. Eyes dilated under her magnifying spectacles, she gazed at the forgotten heir of the Cloisters.

Suddenly, surely she was seeing things! One of the stones, almost unobtrusively, her feet, was moving! Goodness, it was coming up! A figure like a Jack-in-the-box popped out of the square shaft, now revealed.

Bessie's cheeks turned white. The yell that rose to her throat turned into a feeble squeak of alarm. Out of the very ground beneath her feet a human figure was materializing. It was staring intently towards the god.

And then, even as the figure, sporting Bessie, disappeared again, the stone falling into place behind her, Bessie found her voice.

"Ma-m-y! Ma-m-Miss Gilbey!" she stammered.

Miss Gilbey—yes! Miss Gilbey, popping up like that! Bessie thought. Then, still very nervous and shaken, and somehow all her appetite for that lovely pie completely vanished, she jumped up in a flutter. One bewildered, half-terrified glance she blinked at the daggers and then fled.

And entering the school just as the Fourth Form, dismissed from Dining Hall, was crowding down the steps into the main quad, she ran breathlessly and fearfully right into Barbara's arms!

"Oh, crossroads, Babs!" she gasped.

"Has, hey!" Babs protested. "Hold up, Bessie!"

"Bessie, Miss Gag-Gilbey!"

"Well, what?"

"She—she—"

And Bessie threw a scared look towards the Cloisters. "Oh, crossroads, I mean, hey, you know! I was sitting near the crypt eating Clara's pork pie—"

"What?"

"Oh, dad-dar! I mean, mean, it wasn't your pork pie! It was Lydia Crossdale's!"

"Why, you fat burglar—"

Lydia waddled.

"Oh, dud-dar, I didn't know you were there, Lydia," Bessie said, blinking feebly. "This that was a slip of the tongue, you know. What I ran—really meant to say—was, you know, that one of the daggers came open and up popped Miss Gilbey—"

"What?"

"Babs?"

"I told-tell you it—it's true!" Bessie howled. "I— Oh, crossroads! I mean, Babs, don't pinch my arm like that!"

But Babs, looking sharply at Lydia Crossdale, saw a mischievous grin on that girl's face.

"So that," Lydia drawled smugly, "is how our new mistress spends her time when she's supposed to be preparing lessons! H'm! Methinks this wasn't looking into!"

With a smacking glance at Barbara Hooper, she stroked off. Babs breathed heavily.

"Bessie, you idiot!"

"Oh, crossroads! I mean, Babs—"

But Babs was not listening. She was staring after Lydia. Lydia, obviously, did not intend to lose a moment. She was making off towards the Cloisters, intent upon following up the clue which Bessie had given her without any loss of time.

Mobs passed.

What was Miss Gilbey doing in the crypt? What business had taken her there?

But that didn't matter. Babs was thinking, considering that midnight interview with Miss Gilbey, remembering that promise she had made.

The very fact that Miss Gilbey had used the breakfast hour to explore the crypt showed that she needed privacy. No doubt, by accident, she had struck one of the secret passages with which the crypt was honeycombed. No doubt she had been as astonished as Bessie. Hunter to find herself in the open air. Whatever purpose had taken her there, she was now going to be interrupted by Lydia's prying.

Babs looked at Clara; at Mabel; inclining her head. Bessie blinked.

"I mean, Babs, you don't think—"

"I don't think anything," Babs said.

"But, for goodness sake do a bit of yourself before you about about what you have seen the next time! Now get up to the study, there's a good little polypoly! Clara, Mabel—"

But Clara and Mabel were ready. In a group they descended the steps. Rather grimly Babs led the way towards the Cloisters, passing at the dark entrance to the crypt. Uncertainly they peered into the darkness. From beneath there came a sound.

"Lydia's there!" Babs said. "She's spying on Miss Gilbey. Well, we're just going to step it, that's all. Come on!"

And Babs led the way down the stairs.

Loyally Clara and Mabel followed, as Babs, on a slight descent into the alcove of the underground chambers which had once been the burial place of the old countess of Cliff Abbey. Darker and darker it grew as they went downward, and at last, in pitch darkness, they gathered at the bottom. Far ahead—so far ahead that it looked miles away—a tiny beam of light flicked and wavered in the gloom.

"That's Miss Gilbey!" Babs said.

"But what's she searching for?"

"Look!" Babs replied.

But there was no need for that injunction. They were all staring towards that point of light. And suddenly, between them and it, a black, creeping form intervened. For a moment they had a vision of a girl's head sharply silhouetted against the beam. Mabel got her eye.

"Lydia!" she breathed.

"The spy!" Clara scouted.

"Come on!" Babs said.

She crept forward, Clara and Mabel

at her heels. Ahead of them, Lydia, all unconscious of the trackers on her heels, was creeping on with steady caution, obviously intent upon finding out what the mistress was doing.

Master and mistress they drew. Forward went Lydia. Now they were near enough to see the form of Miss Gilbey. The beam, resting on the floor, showed the profile of her intent face, as she knelt before the base of one of the huge pillars that supported the vaulted arches which held up the roof. She had something in her hand. With that something she was sweeping away at the mortar between the stones of which the pillar was composed.

What was she doing?

But Babs & Co. did not know that. To be sure, it seemed rather a superfluous and eerie business. Their interest, however, at that moment lay not with Miss Gilbey, but with the girl who was so intent on trapping her. Foot by foot, inch by inch, they drew nearer.

Now Lydia was only a foot away from the mistress. She halted, standing stock-still in the darkness. Near her was a door—a stout oak door—which gave access to a maze of a passage that, in three gasp-like, had served as the last resting-place of one of Cliff Abbey's ancestral dignitaries. At the same moment Miss Gilbey, descending from her attack upon the pillar, looked round.

Anxiety, alarm was written on every line of her face. Suddenly she looked in Lydia's direction. Lydia stood still as a stone. Then, as if reassured, the mistress continued with her work.

Lydia, eye gleaming, ceased forward.

Babs & Co. exchanged a grim look. If they had any doubts that Miss Gilbey required complete privacy that startled look she had flung in Lydia's direction, vanished. "Whatever took Miss Gilbey was an engaged spy, was obviously one that called for the greatest secrecy.

A glance from Babs was all the signal Mabel and Clara needed.

They jumped.

Too late, Lydia dashed. Before she had made even a half step, Babs had grabbed her by the shoulders. Clara, with a push that was more boisterous than was perhaps necessary, had seen her staggering into the maze. Quick as thought, Mabel had thrown the door shut and looked it. From Miss Gilbey's room up a startled cry:

"Who is that?"

"Troubling the room."

"You—Barbara, what—"

"What—what to warn you, Miss Gilbey,"

Barbara said.

"You mean—"

"I mean," Babs said, and there an anxious glance towards the maze of a door—"I mean, somebody is spying on you!"

The mistress stood staring at them. For a moment she looked green. It dawned on Babs then that she had not seen what had happened—that she did not know that Lydia was imprisoned in the maze—and, indeed, how could she know, when the whole scene had been enacted in complete darkness? Something in the urgency, the concentration of Barbara's attitude, told her, however, that there was no time to lose.

"Thank you, Barbara," she said, in a low voice. "Thank you all!"

She dashed a rather tremulous smile upon them, nodded, and then, as if not knowing what else to say, disappeared towards the crypt entrance. Babs heaved a sigh of relief as she watched her disappear.

"O.K.," she breathed. She stole towards the door of the manseoline. She turned the key, was in the act of throwing it open, when, faintly above them, they heard the sound of the school bell.

"All right," she called to Lydia, "you can come out now, you haven't any! But, I say, come, all of you! We shall be late for assembly!"

And, leaving the furious Lydia to make her own way, they flew, arriving in Big Hall just in time to take their places in the Form.

But, strangely enough, Lydia Crossendale did not follow them!

Overheard by the Head



"JEMIMA CAR STAIRS!"

"Here," Miss Gilbey answered absently. "All noisy and bright, what?"

"Jemima, please refrain from making unnecessary remarks," Miss Gilbey answered; but she smiled faintly as she looked at the slim girl in the immaculate grey dress, who answered the roll from the ranks of the Fourth. "Greenstocking, Cluck!"

"Here, Miss Gilbey?" Green answered.

"Lydia Crossendale!" Miss Gilbey, calling the roll, glanced up sharply as there was no answer to that name. She called it again:

"Lydia Crossendale!" There was a mutter. Every eye turned to the place which Lydia should have occupied between Brenda Fellace and Frances Frost. But that place was vacant.

Miss Gilbey compressed her lips tightly. She put a tick against Lydia's name, and went on with the roll-call. Once or twice the mistress frowned, looking towards the door. Babs & Co. glanced at each other nervously, uncomfortably, wondering what little game Lydia was playing now. But roll was called, orders read out, prayers said, and still Lydia had not appeared.

Miss Primrose, following the usual custom, came round before dismissal to inquire for absentees. Her brows lifted when Miss Gilbey informed her of the absence of Lydia.

"Indeed," she said, and her eyes cast over the Form. "Does any girl know where Lydia is?"

No reply. Miss Primrose's gaze rested on Babs. "Barbara, you are captain of the Form. Do you know anything of Lydia's whereabouts?"

"I—I—" Barbara stammered. "Answer me, girl?" "Oh, dear! Well—" and Babs crimsoned. "I—I last saw her in the crypt," she said.

"And what were you doing in the crypt?" In any case, what time was this?

"Just—just before Bell, Miss Primrose."

"And is Lydia still in the crypt?" "I—I don't know," faltered Babs. Miss Primrose looked unrepentant.

"Very well," she said. "We will soon find out. Miss Balfour, will you give the order to dismiss, please? Barbara, remain behind! Miss Gilbey, will you remain, too?" And as the school, with every wondering glance towards Babs, filed out, Miss Primrose looked stern. "Frances," she said to the temporary captain of the school, "will you get my trunk, and then go and take charge of the Fourth Form until Miss Gilbey returns? If Lydia is still there

it is just possible she may have met with some accident."

Babs sighed. She thought she saw through the awful little game now. Lydia, knowing she would be missed, knowing that she would be searched for, was just out to make some trouble. She caught a look from Miss Gilbey—a sympathetic, yet stern look, telling her perfectly well that she understood at last why Babs & Co. had worried her out of the crypt.

Frances moved with a jerk, and Miss Primrose nodded to them to follow as she led the way.

They reached the crypt. At the bottom of the stairs Miss Primrose passed.

"Barbara, whereabouts did you last see Lydia?"

"Over there, Miss Primrose, by the door of the manseoline. The—the last time I saw her she—she was inside it."

"Very well, come this way." Torch aglance, she swept ahead. Babs, almost groaning, followed.

Suddenly a hand caught Babs' as they walked across the dark crypt.

came Miss Gilbey's soft voice: "Don't worry, Barbara?"

They reached the door of the manseoline. Miss Primrose knocked.

"Lydia, are you there?" There came a strangled gasp from inside.

"Oh, Miss Primrose, I'm locked in," Miss Primrose gave an exclamation. She tried the door. It swung open as she pushed, and Lydia, blinking in the rays of the torch, stood revealing an expression of utter astonishment on her face.

"Oh, I say, who unlocked the door?" "The door," Miss Primrose said. "It was unlocked all the time, Lydia! It must have been. Are you out of your senses, girl, to go and hide yourself in this place? Why should you assume that you were locked in?"

"Well, Barbara did turn the key, didn't you, Barbara?"

Babs crimsoned indignantly.

"Barbara—you? You locked Lydia in?"

"Not—not exactly," Babs said. "That is, I only locked the door for a moment. I unlocked it before I left."

"Indeed? And why should you lock Lydia up only for a moment?"

Babs bit her lip.

"Oh, dear, something."

"That, Barbara, is hardly a satisfactory answer," Miss Primrose said tartly. "Obviously, you were inspired by some reason. Why did you lock her in?"

"But I unlocked the door afterwards," Babs said desperately.

"That is not the question. Why did you lock her in, in the first place?"

Babs was silent.

"Perhaps," Lydia broke in gently. "I can tell you, Miss Primrose. I—I hope you don't think I'm telling tales, but—and she pointed towards the Fourth Form mistress. "It all started because of Miss Gilbey—"

"Lydia?"

"Yes, Miss Primrose! You see, Miss Gilbey cut breakfast to come into the crypt. She frightened Bessie Hunter by pushing up one of the flagstones in the quad. I—I thought it was jolly funny that she should be here, you know, and—and I came here to see what she was doing."

"Lydia," hinted Babs.

"Barbara, be silent, please! You, Lydia?"

"And I—I came. Miss Gilbey was digging at the pillar over there with a pickaxe. I didn't know that Babs, Clara, and Mabel had followed me. But—

surely they caught hold of me and pushed me in this room, locking the door upon me. Then I suppose they warned Miss Gilbey and Miss Gilbey locked."

"Lydia, please do not use slang," Miss Primrose's face was like fire. "And why," she asked, "should you suspect Miss Gilbey of any atrocious intention because she came into the crypt?"

"Well," Lydia blurted, "in the first place, she was supposed to have been preparing lessons."

"That is not your business, Lydia. All the same—" Miss Primrose's eyebrows lifted contemptuously. "Miss Gilbey, perhaps you can explain?"

"With absolute self-possession the mistress shrugged.

"I do not think," she said quietly, "that there is very much to explain, Miss Primrose. I have never received any intimation that the crypt is out of bounds, either to myself or the girls. Naturally, as I am interested in such an odd place as Cliff House, I got up especially early this morning, so that I could prepare my lessons in advance, and had meant, I am sorry I started Bessie Hunter, but happening upon a secret stairway, I did not know it would lead me into the Cloisters until I found myself there—"

"Thank you, Miss Gilbey, you need not explain further. I think," Miss Primrose added acidly, "that this episode hardly reflects credit upon you, Lydia. You heard that Miss Gilbey was in the crypt. Knowing your nature as I do, you probably crept down here in a moment of malicious mischief to play some foolish practical joke upon her. Barbara and her friends followed you. Barbara turned the joke upon you by locking you in the manseoline, and then unlocking the door again. In order to create this disturbance, you deliberately remained here, pretending you did not know the door had been unlocked. You will do an extra hour's detention to-night after lessons."

"But lock—"

"Lydia, if I hear another word from you I will detain you for the next half-holiday. Let us go back!"

And they got back, Babs breathing intense relief, Miss Gilbey smiling sweetly and Lydia silently vowing vengeance. In Big Hall, Miss Primrose and Frances left them. In sickly silence Lydia followed Babs and the mistress as they wended their way to the Fourth Form class-room.

"Lydia, you may go to your place," Miss Gilbey said quietly.

Lydia, with a bitter look, shook off.

"And you, Barbara?"

Babs went, whispering at Mabel and Clara as she took her place.

"And now," the mistress said, as she went to her desk, "we will commence lessons. Oh, by the way, Lydia. Yesterday, if you remember, I gave you an imposition. I ordered you to have it on my desk this morning. I do not see any trace of it, Lydia. Have you done it?"

"No," Lydia said furiously.

"Why?"

Lydia's eyes glittered. She was in her wildest, most furious mood.

"Because," she shouted defiantly, "I don't take orders from crooks!"

There was a murmur. Miss Gilbey flushed.

"Lydia!"

"Well, it's true!" Lydia flared out. "Oh, yes, you can deny it. You think you can get away with it just because Barbara Rodden & Co. are banking you up, but I know—I know!"

"Lydia, be silent!"

"You shut up!" cried Clara Tremaine. "Sit down, you cat!"

"Three minutes at least!"

"Girls, please!" Miss Gilbey looked very pale and very shaken, but she was surprisingly self-possessed. "I think, Lydia, you are one of the most spiteful girls I have ever been my mistresses to encounter," she said quietly. "Now, listen! I've prepared to forget all about what's happened. Won't you—this with such open appeal that the hearts of the whole class were won—won't you drop this silly idea you have in your head and let the lines with the rest of the girls?"

"Well, that's sporting!" Margaret Latham exclaimed.

"Yes, rather!"

"Won't!" Lydia cried. "I won't let you go! Why would I to a woman who won't even tell the school her real name? Why don't you tell the school the truth?" she added. "Why don't you tell them that your name isn't Gilbey—that it's Durran? Why don't you tell them that you were expelled in disgrace from this school six years ago? Yes, and why don't you—"

And there she stopped. There everyone sat up in astonished silence. For suddenly the door had swung open, and there, standing on the threshold, her shocked and scandalized face showing very plainly that she had heard every sensation which Lydia had made, stood Miss Primrose herself!

Miss Gilbey's Confession



IN the middle of the afternoon the headmistress rustled into the room. She did not even look at Miss Gilbey. But she glared at Lydia.

"Lydia," she rapped, "step to the front of the class!"

Lydia, her eyes gleaming defiance, did so.

"Lydia, I overheard your remarks as I came in. I cannot," Miss Primrose said weightily, "allow them to pass. What you said, Lydia, was a most dangerous slander—remarks for which, if you were older, Miss Gilbey could sue you in a court of law."

Lydia stood defiantly upright. Bala, quivering herself, noticed that Miss Gilbey was trembling.

"But," Lydia said, "she couldn't sue me if they were true!"

"Lydia, do you insist—"

"I insist!" Lydia said sternly, "that they are true!"

Miss Primrose hit her lip. Her eyes clouded a little as she looked at the mistress.

"Silence," she said sternly, "this has been brought to my notice in such a fashion it is my obvious duty to make inquiries. I cannot," she said, "allow such an unprovoked attack as you have uttered, Lydia, to pass without punishment. And as you have uttered the slanders in public it is only fair to Miss Gilbey that they should be cleared up in public. Lydia, you must have some sort of reason behind your obvious spite."

The class sat breathlessly listening. Miss Gilbey seemed to brace herself.

"I have every reason, Miss Primrose. Six years ago you expelled a girl named Durran."

"That is true!"

"You expelled her," Lydia went on, "for deliberately burning some of the school records."

Miss Primrose's brows came together.

"A most despicable action—an action born of jealousy and spite. That is also true!"

"Then," Lydia said triumphantly, "sue Durran again. That is the girl, Miss Primrose—a girl who has returned to this school in disguise and under another name. My sister was here when she was expelled. My sister happened to meet her yesterday morning, and recognized her at once. Now ask her!"

"Lydia, please!" Miss Primrose looked upset. "Ahem! Miss Gilbey," she said, "I hate—yes, I hate, in front of the girls, to ask you questions, but—"

"She stared at her. "There is a faint resemblance, yes. But—no, I remember now that Dora Durran had brown hair."

"That's branched!" Lydia cried. Miss Gilbey smiled faintly.

"I am afraid," she said, "that Lydia has some very foolish ideas in her head. Miss Primrose. Last night she thought my hair was a wig, and visited me in my bed-room for the purpose of proving it. Today it is branched."

"You deny that your name is Durran?"

For answer, Miss Gilbey reached towards her forehead. She fumbled inside it. Then she handed Miss Primrose a strip of paper.

"That," she said quietly, "is my birth certificate."

There was a buzz. Miss Primrose's lips compressed. Very quietly the mistress smiled. Miss Primrose, amid dead silence, unfolded the sheet. Then her lips compressed. Very quietly, very apologetically, she handed it back to the mistress.

"Thank you," she said. "That, I think, completely disposes of the matter. Your sister, Lydia, has made a mistake. You will be interested to hear that Miss Gilbey's name is, and always has been, Dora Gilbey. Miss Gilbey, I am deeply pleased that you should have been cleared this afternoon. I have no hesitation in telling the class that not an atom of support has behind those dangerous utterances which Lydia has made. Lydia," she added sternly, "you will come with me!"

Lydia smiled.

"But you—"

"Come with me!"

And Miss Primrose almost angrily caught her by the shoulder, twisting her towards the door. As she went out a chorus of "wot up, followed immediately by a cheer."

"Thank you, girls—please!" Miss Gilbey said, but she looked pale and shaken, as though she had been through some very trying ordeal. "We will go," she said, "got on with the lesson."

It was a good while afterwards that Lydia came back, pale, burning-eyed, and furious.

What had happened to the ill-natured mob of the Fourth in Miss Primrose's study no one knew, but whatever it was the Fourth felt that it could not be too loud. Cauterous indignation of Lydia was very, very much apparent in the Fourth-room that morning and Lydia, putting all her toes down to the new mistress, ground her teeth. There was a look on her face which suggested that Lydia had by no means finished with Miss Gilbey.

Bala saw it, and Bala frowned. It was obvious that Lydia had not profited by her lesson. At break she accented her.

"Satisfied, Lydia?"

Lydia flung her a bitter look.

"No. I'm fully well satisfied! I still think that Miss Gilbey's a crook. And I still think that her name is Durran! Oh, yes, I know all about the birth certificate. But birth certificates are as easy to forge as anything else!"

And Lydia, with a glare, flounced off. The class grinned.

Only Bala looked after her, uneasily wondering.

"Penny for 'em, Bala?" Clara said cheerfully, and dropped a hand on Barbara's shoulder. "Wake up, old girl! What about a knock at the nets before dinner?"

"Good idea!" Bala voted.

A good idea it was. The cricket season was not so far away now.

While Clara started off to arrange about the nets being put up, Bala ran off to rattle up members of the sports club. Bala, remembering that Miss Gilbey had expressed a desire to be included in the early practice, wandered round to her study.

She entered the mistress's corridor, and then passed, quickly glancing back. Before the door of Miss Gilbey's study a girl was standing—a girl who had the knob of the door in her hand, who stood with one ear pressed to the panel, intently listening. It was Lydia.

What was Lydia up to? Bala knew the best minute. For Lydia, with a stealthy glance to right and left, pushed the door open and slipped into the room.

Balher grim the look on Bala's face then. She understood. Lydia, still parading the pretence of the mistress, was spying on her during her absence from the room. Lydia, obviously, was in search of proof. Bala thought of these letters. If Lydia got hold of those—

Bala's eyes glared.

Quickly she stepped forward. In a moment she was at the door. She flung it open.

Lydia, stooping towards the desk beneath the window, wheeled round with a start to the glared.

"What do you want here?"

"I want," Bala said grimly, "you, Lydia Crossdale! What are you doing here?"

"In that your business—" she began, and then stopped as they were footsteps in the passage and Miss Gilbey herself came into the room, to halt in freezing amazement at the sight of the two.

"Oh!" she said, and stared from Lydia to Bala. "What do you want?"

Bala bit her lip. Lydia scowled.

"Nothing," she muttered.

"No," Miss Gilbey looked at her strangely; looked at her desk.

The expression on her face showed then that she understood. She hit her lip a little. "In that case, Lydia, you may go. In that case, please do not, in future, enter my room until you have been given permission! Barbara, remain behind," she said. "I want to talk with you."

Lydia heaved a deep breath. She slunk towards the door. Bala, looking uneasily, sidged while the mistress showed her out, and, shutting the door, came back.

Most amazingly she put both her hands on Bala's shoulder, and stared long and intently into her sunny face.

"Barbara, thank you," she said quietly. "No, please do not explain. I understood perfectly what Lydia came here for. I understood, too, why you followed her in." She removed her hands and, going to her desk, nervously took out a cigarette from its box and lighted it. Then she took an agitated turn up and down the study.

"Barbara, sit down," she said suddenly. "On the sofa, please."

And as Bala wonderingly obeyed, she drew up another chair so that she sat facing her. "Barbara, I want your help," she

said: "There is something I must do—and something which you can help me to do. But first I am going to tell you something. You heard Lydia's accusation; you heard her tell Miss Princess that I was once expelled in disgrace from this school in Dorset Durrant's class."

Baba smiled.
"Yes, Miss Gilbey, but I don't believe it—"

"No!" Miss Gilbey looked at her. "Then," she said, "prepare yourself for a shock, Barbara. Because," she added, "it is true! I am Dorset Durrant, and I was, six years ago, expelled from this very school!"

A Fall for Four



FOR a moment Barbara reddened just out and stared.

"But—but—but you said your name—"

"I said that my name is Gilbey. It is." The mistress smiled. "I did not tell an untruth, Barbara. It was not generally known in those days that I was an adopted girl, and that I went, not under my own name, but under the name of the man who was taking care of me. His name was Durrant, you see."

"Oh?" Babs said rather faintly.

"But, Barbara, I want you to believe this. I was expelled unjustly. I did not do the thing for which I was expelled—that, indeed, is the main reason for my return. Fortunately, when I was turned out of here, I had a school-fellow. For six years I have been earning my living under my own name as a school-teacher in various schools in England. That is how I was able to return."

"Yes," Babs said wonderingly.
"I have returned," the mistress went on quietly. "I'm try to prove my innocence, Barbara. In this school—in the crypt, I believe—there is something which will enable me to do that. That is why I was searching there this morning—why I must search there again. But you can see how difficult my task is becoming."

"This capital persecution of Lydia's—there is a reason for that, too, though I will not go into it here—in happening as early; movement Barbara, I am afraid of that girl!"

Babs hit her lip, her eyes smouldered with anger.

"And that is what I want to see you about now," the mistress said. "That is why I have told you all this, Barbara, this afternoon in a hall-holiday. If I can spend that afternoon unimpeded and uninterrupted in the crypt, then I think I shall get the evidence I want. But Lydia, as you see, is watching me."

"Now what I want you to do is to keep Lydia out of the way. Whatever happens, do not let her get near the crypt. Will you do that?"

"Would Babs do it? The mistress had the answer in her eyes. Barbara believed her! In that moment Babs would have risked expulsion to help her!"

She rose.
"If Lydia interrupts you, Miss Gilbey, it won't be my fault!" she said.
"Thank you, Barbara!"

And Babs left. She went straight to the rats. There she found Clara and Helen, and, drawing them upon one side, told them as much as she thought necessary. The two blinked.
"Oh, my golly aunt!" Clara

whispered. "But how the deuce are we going to stop Lydia?"

"Well, suppose we invite her to cricket practice?"

"Would she come?"
"Don't know. We can try, anyway. In any case, we wouldn't let her out of our sight?"

And that was the plan made of all three of them from that moment. Not

the stairs. Babs took one arm, Clara the other. Lydia stopped, glaring.

"Look here—"

"I am," Clara said hurriedly. "Lydia, I just want to tell you that we've washed out the cricket match. We've got another idea."

"Then take it away and hurry!" Lydia wanted. "Let me go, bother you!"



TERRIFIC was the clatter as the four girls pitched down the stairs, colliding with the pedestal, which crashed to the floor. And at that very moment, who should appear but—Miss Princess!

at the moment, that they could do anything about it, for the dinner bell was ringing.

After the meal, however, they caught Lydia straggling off down the corridor.

"Oh, Lydia!" Clara cried.
The mob of the Fourth turned with a snarl.

"Well!"

"I've arranged a practice game this afternoon," Clara said. "I've got you down to play in the Possibles team. You won't be too bad in some of the games you played last season, you know. Like to join in?"

"No," Lydia said definitely.
"You mightn't get another chance," Clara pursued.

"Thanks, I'll risk that!"

And Lydia, with another snarl, headed off.

Clara breathed hard and heavily.
"Nothing doing," she said. "I have to think up something else. Er—Lydia—I say, Lydia," she called, as that girl turned the angle of the corridor.

But Lydia did not stop. She hurried on.

The chums exchanged glances. They gave a nod. Off in Lydia's wake Babs sped, catching up with that girl just as she was in the act of descending

"In a minute, honey, in a minute!" Clara said anxiously. "Now how would you like a lovely walk from here to Pegg?"

"I wouldn't!"

"With a boat out as the other end!"

"Oh, perhaps," Babs suggested, "you might like to go to the pictures! I hear Robert Montgomery is on in Cowfield. You like Robert Montgomery, Lydia."

Lydia grimaced her teeth.

"And why?" she asked. "This sudden interest in me?"

"Oh, nothing! Just thought you'd like to come, you know," Clara murmured. "So bad for you, shuffling in the school on a lovely afternoon."

Lydia's eyes glinted.

"In other words?" she asked curiously. "You want to keep me away from the Gilbey woman?"

"Oh, Lydia!"

"Well, bother you! I don't want to come, and I won't come! Now will you let me go?"

The three huddled at each other. They were grim looks. Clara's grip on Lydia tightened.

"Come on!"

"But—"

"Come on, I say?"

"I tell you I won't—I won't!" And

Lydia struggled furiously. She raised her voice: "Back you, but no go!" Furiously she lifted a foot. "If you don't let me go I'll kick your arse, Clara Trevils!" she threatened angrily.

"Come on!" Clara retorted angrily. Lydia's eyes flamed. Her feet came up. Just in the nick of time Clara saw the high ceiling—just in the nick of time she kept out of the way. But, alas for Clara—for all of them. Just for the moment the Tomboy had forgotten that she was standing in the middle of the stairs. That sudden leap to one side left her with one foot in mid-air, and when she put it down, there was nothing to put it down upon. There came a fall.

"Look out!"

Too late! Clara tumbled over. Still grasping Lydia's arms, she pulled her over with her. Babe and Mabel went, too. They couldn't help themselves.

Bump! Bump! The four girls, in a heap, went rolling, clattering, crashing down the stairs. With a thud they landed at the bottom. There came a shriek from Janet Jordan in the hall. Too late she saw the disaster which was imminent. Too late she rushed forward. Then it happened. The human whirlwind, striking the pedestal which supported the feet of Socrates at the bottom of the stairs, tumbled against it, threw some Socrates, to smash in a hundred pieces on the parquet floor.

And then—

As they waked themselves out, as they dazedly got up—

"What," a stern voice demanded, "is all this?"

And Babe, blinking up in dismay, met the furious gaze of Miss Primrose!

How Can They Keep Their Promise?



"AND you say, Lydia, that these three girls refused to attend you, despite your protestations?"

"Yes, Miss Primrose!"

"Barbara, do you deny that?"

"Oh cranks! Oh—no! But, you see—"

Babe stammered weakly.

"Clara, you admit it?"

Clara made a grimace.

"I see!" Miss Primrose was still questioning.

"Lidia, you may go?" she said.

"I am satisfied that you are not the culprit, Barbara, Clara, and you, Mabel, you will accompany me?"

"Oh cranks! But—let where!"

Clara stammered.

"To the Fourth Form class-room. I refuse to have these exhibitions of horseplay in the school. If Lydia did not want to go with you, then Lydia had a perfect right to refuse, and you had no right to compel her to obey your wishes against her will. You will, in consequence, spend the afternoon locked in the class-room, and you will each write an essay on decorum."

The three chums exchanged sickly, furtive glances as they followed Miss Primrose to the Fourth Form class-room.

"Well," Clara gasped, after they had been left alone. "What a racket! Here we set out to help Lydia, and all we've done is to jolly well get ourselves stopped. What the dickens are we going to do now?"

"And what," Mabel asked gloomily, "is Lydia doing? If only we could get a word to Miss Gilbey."

"But that was out of the question, Primrose in the Form-room, what could they do? So far from helping Miss Gilbey, they had left Lydia free as the air to break her will. At this moment,

Miss Gilbey, all suspicious of what had happened, would be making her way to the crypt.

And then Babe's eyes turned towards the window. As they did so, they fastened upon the shining form of a girl who, at that moment, was stealing across the quad. The girl carried something in her hand, something which glinted as it caught a momentary gleam of sunlight.

"Clara, look!" Babe breathed.

"Oh, my aunt! Lydia! And—and she's got a torch in her hand."

"She's off to the crypt!" Mabel cried.

Babe leapt to her feet. Her face was purplish now.

"And we," she said, "are jolly well going after her. Narrow mind the imposture. There may be a chance to slink back afterwards. And if Primrose," she added, with a glance in her eye, "has locked the door, she hasn't locked the window."

Even as she spoke she was leaping upon the sill. She threw the window open. It was not a long drop on to the unshathed lawn outside, and Babe, with right foot at the rear, and Babe, with out looking, swung herself over and dropped. At once there came a furdish yell from beneath her.

"Oh—my—oh! My hand!"

"Oh, my hat! Sorry, Freda," Babe said breathlessly. For Freda Fernier, sprawled upon the lawn, had certainly been a factor Babe had not taken into consideration. She had simply dropped without looking where she was dropping—plucking a foot hard and heaving upon Freda's outstretched hand. "Not hurt, I hope?"

But that question was silly. Hurt or not, Freda was making enough fuss about it. She was on her feet now, her face red, wringing her hand.

"Too clumsy cut!"

"Welcome, dearie!" Clara Trevils sang, and dropped, staggering against Freda.

"Sorry, old thing! Want a hand, Mabel?"

"No, I can manage," Mabel replied, and came down—dead!

"Come on!" she said.

"But look here—" yelled Freda.

Babe & Co. were not looking there, however. They had something more urgent to think about than Freda. To watch the Chloisters they rushed, leaving the squeak of the Fourth angrily starting after them.

"The cats!" she muttered, and shook her fingers. "Oh cranks!"

"Why, dear me!" a voice said, and Freda, swinging round, beheld Miss Primrose. "Have you lost your hand?"

Freda pouted.

"No, I didn't. But Barbara Redfern did. She jumped on it."

Miss Primrose's face expressed astonishment.

"Jumped on it, Freda? Barbara Redfern? But Barbara is in the Form-room!"

"Barbara was," Freda corrected. "She and Clara and Mabel came climbing through the window not two minutes ago. They rushed off into the Chloisters."

And her mean little eyes glowered as she saw the expression on Miss Primrose's face.

"Hush!"

"Quiet?"

"There she is!"

In the crypt of Cliff House School Babe, Mabel, Clara, and Janet Jordan of Study No. 7 halted.

It was not part of the Co's programme that Janet should be a member of the party, but they had stumbled upon Janet by accident.

Janet, in fact, had scored them a

very useful turn by doubling back into the school for torches, and Janet, anxious for any sort of fun which would relieve an afternoon for which she had made no plans, had insisted upon joining them.

Moreover, Janet, who had been in the Chloisters all the afternoon, had seen both Miss Gilbey and Lydia Cross-stalk disappear into the crypt.

So Janet had joined them. Janet now was with them. In the concealment of one of the huge pillars which supported the vaulted roof they halted, breathing tensely.

Ahead, a beam of light spilled itself on the floor. From somewhere further away came a faint tap-tapping sound.

"That's the light, tap the light," Babe muttered. "That must be Miss Gilbey tapping."

From their place of concealment they crept out. Abruptly, from ahead of them, Lydia's light was extinguished. There came the sound of a thud, followed by a cry. At the same moment the tapping ceased.

"What was that?" Clara muttered anxiously.

"Never mind! Come on!" Babe cried.

She pressed her way forward. All was quiet, scarcely silent. Forward into the darkness they groped their way towards the spot where they had last seen Lydia's light. Curious that Lydia was not now shining that light.

"Wow, hold on!" Clara breathed suddenly.

"What?"

"Something here," Clara muttered. "I almost tripped over it. I— My hat!" she breathed, as she stirred the object in her path with her foot. "It feels like a sack!"

"Oh, rats!"

"Well, shine a light, then."

Four torches flashed out at once. Four pairs of eyes stared at the floor. Four girls gave a simultaneous jump.

"Lydia!" cried Babe.

Lydia it was, her face deathly white in the torchlight. Lydia, lying prone, her eyes closed, a dark bruise across her temple. Babe bent over her.

"Lydia!"

She shook her.

Lydia's eyes flickered over so little. A hoarse moan came from her lips. She seemed to shudder.

"Something hit her," Janet Jordan said. "Look at that dark mark on her temple."

"Most likely she ran into this pillar here in the dark," Clara grumbled.

"Lydia!"

They shook her again. Again Lydia's eyes opened, dazed and full upon Babe's face, and quickly closed again. At the same moment there came a sound from the entrance to the crypt.

A light glimmered there, waxed in a circle, and then shot straight towards them. Out of the darkness behind it a voice called out.

"Barbara!"

"Primrose!" Babe gasped.

"Primrose it was! The door straight ahead. Across the floor, in a fire old pot, Miss Primrose came, only to pull up with a startled cry as she saw the grotesque form of Lydia in her path. She stared.

"Barbara, what has happened to Lydia?"

"I—I don't know," muttered Babe. "We've just found her here."

"Lydia, my poor girl! Lydia!" And Miss Primrose, in fluttering agitation, bent towards her. "Lydia, my dear!"

Lydia groaned, and muttered faintly:

"It—it was her—Miss Gilbey."

"What?"

"I—I followed her down here. She—"

she jumped at me from behind a pillar, and struck at me with a hammer she had in her hand."

"What?"

Baba & Co. stood rooted.

"Lydia, are you out of your senses, girl?" Miss Prinsrose cried.

Lydia, with a groan, sat up. She looked around her as if hardly realizing what had happened. Baba, watching her keenly, felt her face grow tense. Lydia was acting; acting for all she was worth.

"Oh, I—I'm sorry," she said. "I—I didn't mean to— And then she started. Miss Prinsrose, she gasped, as if in surprise. How—how did you come to get her?"

"Never mind that, Lydia. You have been saying the most extraordinary things. You are not yourself, my girl. Tell me what happened."

Lydia bit her lip. She looked sick.

"It was Miss Gilbey," she said. "She jumped at me. She hit me with a hammer."

"Lydia, how dare!"

"But it's true!" Lydia cried. "It's true! She takes me! She's afraid of me! Miss Prinsrose, you didn't believe me this morning when I told you that her name was Durrant. Well—good Lydia, pressing one hand to her head, plunged the other into her pocket—"I was determined to prove to you that she was Miss Durrant," she said, "the girl whom you expelled. I want to see you just before she came here, and I found this."

And Baba felt her face drain of colour as Lydia produced the handle of letters she knew so well.

Miss Prinsrose looked dazed.

"You—you found them in her study? Lydia, how—"

"Oh, I know I had no right to be there," Lydia answered. "But—well, I

knew who she was. It was my word against hers, and so far, you've believed her, I did it," Lydia said honestly. "It's the interests of the school, I thought—" And she broke off suddenly. "Miss Prinsrose, what is that?" she asked.

"Who's there?" she called sharply.

Miss Prinsrose stiffened as she, too, heard the sound they had all heard—a stealthy footfall, some few yards away in the darkness. Immediately the headmistress caught up her torch.

"Who's there?" she called sharply.

But no need to ask the question. For the torch, which possessed a powerful beam, picked out the intruder at once. And there, blinking in its rays, a hammer in one hand, a thin object in the other, stood Miss Dora Gilbey!

The Secret of the Crypt



"IT'S not?"

"Lies from beginning to end!"

Lydia trembled as she heard the words, and then blurted it out to Miss Gilbey.

"You're Baba, Maib, and Clara. It was half an hour later. In an angry, anxious group they sat in Miss Gilbey's study. Miss Gilbey was not there, neither was Lydia Cosensdale—Lydia, still affecting inquiry, had been taken to the sanatorium and put to bed as not well to-morrow. Miss Gilbey was with Miss Prinsrose.

Baba & Co. had been angrily ordered back to the class-room by Miss Prinsrose. They had not gone. They felt that they could not go until they had learned what had happened to Miss Gilbey.

The door opened. Miss Gilbey, her

face white, drawn and hopeless, came into the room. She did not seem to be surprised to see Baba & Co. there. She merely shook her head.

At once Baba was on her feet. She rushed towards the mistress.

"Miss Gilbey, what happened?"

The mistress dropped wearily.

"Miss Prinsrose is not satisfied."

"You mean—she has dismissed you?"

"Well, no; not exactly! She has given me till to-morrow to make full explanation. But—"she shrugged helplessly—"what explanation can I make? What can I tell her—except the truth? I am afraid, Barbara, that the spoiled Lydia has been too much for me. I am afraid that the game is in her hands. But if only I had found those papers!"

"It says that—another half-hour—"

"Yes, ma'am," Baba hesitated, "some papers were hidden in the crypt?"

"Yes. These were the papers which would have proved an insurance."

"There was silence. Sympathetically, compassionately, the chairs looked at the mistress. She dropped into a chair.

"Barbara, close the door, please," she said. She looked round. "Perhaps at this point," she added, "I ought to tell you the whole story. In any case, it will be all over the school by this time to-morrow. I can't, it seems, deny that since I was known as Dora Durrant, I can't deny now that I had my hair bleached specially to come here."

And she went on to tell her story in a quiet, unassuming manner. Baba knew every bit of it, of course, but she did not know all.

It had happened when Miss Gilbey had been in the Sixth Form, just before she had put up for election for the captaincy. Her rival was a girl named Norma Cosensdale.

"Lydia's elder sister?" questioned Baba.

"Exactly!" The mistress nodded. "Norma very badly wanted that captaincy. At the time I was writing a series of newspaper articles for the 'Courtfield Times.' They were articles about CBE Heavy School, and, to get the facts right, I had to borrow some very valuable and ancient documents from the school library. The documents, as you may know, were very prettily mounted and were not allowed even to be handled."

The three chairs looked at her.

"Well, I did a silly thing. I

THE light of Baba's torch showed a figure sprawled upon the floor of the crypt. "It's Lydia!" Clara exclaimed. And even as she spoke, Lydia's eyes flickered open and she muttered something.



borrowed them. Norma found out, and she gave me away. Miss Primrose was annoyed, of course. She came into the study and scolded them away before I had time to finish the article. I had started, and told me that if I could not leave the school things quiet without permission she would have to think of expelling me. But I just had to finish that article."

And she went on to relate how, that night, feeling like a thief, she had crept down to the library again; how she had taken the old manuscripts with her. Half the night she had worked on the article; and in the morning, having finished it, rushed off post haste to the printer's. When she came back—

"Oh, what a scene!" she said. "There was Norma; she declared that I had deliberately burnt the manuscripts out of spite. There was a pile of paper ashes in my grain, which seemed to leave her story out. Well, perhaps you can guess what happened. As the manuscripts could not be burnt high or low, I was expelled. My guardian, overwhelmed by the disgrace of my expulsion, shut his doors in my face, and told me that until I lived down the bad name I had got he would never see me again."

"Oh, I say!" Clara muttered indignantly.

"Then—well, as I have told Barbara, I got schoolmistress jobs. It seemed impossible ever to live down the past. I took my own name of Gilbey, though I was still known as Burnett to some of my friends who had to keep up a correspondence with me. One of those friends—a girl who used to be in the Sixth Form here—wrote me a few weeks ago, saying that she had met Norma Crossendale again; Norma, in a fit of confidence, had told her the truth about those burnt manuscripts. They were never really burned. Norma had taken them out of my study that night and had hidden them in the hollow base of one of the pillars of the old crypt."

"What a frightful trick! burnt out Babs."

"But," Babs said, with a curl of the lip, "so very like a Crossendale!" And, naturally, Miss Gilbey resumed, "having hidden them, she could not restore them. What she did afterwards was to leak in the cavity herself, then walk there up, as she hoped, for ever. When I knew that, I decided to come here to find them. That is why I was searching this morning and this afternoon."

"And—and you did?" Babs breathed.

"I don't know. I think I was hot on the track. I carefully examined the bases of all the pillars in the crypt. I found only one which had traces of plaster that was comparatively new. I was working on that. It is the third pillar in the north end of the crypt, and I was working on that this afternoon, when I was surprised by Lydia Crossendale. Now—" She struggled.

"Hopeless now," she said. "I shall never, never have the satisfaction—"

"But," Babs said, and jumped up, "as will, Miss Gilbey! Wait a minute! Wait a minute! If the manuscripts are in that cavity, then you'll jolly well get them. We'll get them this very night. No, please, don't try to prevent us. The only thing that can save you now is for you to promise that I was expelled unjustly, in the first place. And," Babs added, "it's up to you. In a way we got you into this mess, and it's up to us to get you out—and sink Lydia at the same time. But why," she asked, "should Lydia take all this trouble?"

Miss Gilbey smiled faintly. "Because," she said, "Lydia was put up to it by her sister. I told you that Lydia's sister had a strong reason for wishing to become captain. The reason was that there was a particular prize awarded to captain of Cliff House at that time. Norma was, I believe, the last to get it. Under the will of some

friend of her—Clara and Babs, meantime, went on, leading for the northern end of the crypt. The third pillar was not hard to find, and presently, flashing their torches on the floor, they stopped, with a start; for on that floor, amid a pile of broken mortar and bricks, were a hammer and a coal shovel.

"Hallo! Looks as if somebody's been here before us," Clara frowned. "And, I say, Babs—"

But she did not attempt to finish that sentence. Quickly she had dropped in her knees. Her torch had shown her what it had also shown Babs in that moment—a dark square cavity, which had obviously been bricked up by the broken mortar and bricks they now saw below them.

They thrilled. Obviously this was the place in which those missing manuscripts had reposed for the last six years. Then, as they fished their torches into the hole, they gave a simultaneous gasp.

"Oh, my hat! Nothing there!"

In the yellow beam they stared at each other.

"Somebody's been here!" Babs said. "Somebody's had in—and that somebody is Lydia Crossendale. Come on!"

"Where?"

"Back to school—back to Study No. 1. We've got to get hold of her before she destroys them."

"Then I'm afraid," came grimly from Babs, who had just breathlessly rejoined them, "that you've backed a loser, Babs, because"—and she gulped—"I've been to the top of the stairs, and—and the door won't budge. Somebody must have spotted us come down, and they've locked the door. We're prisoners in the crypt!"

Bessie's Lucky Blunder



"O—MY!" said Bessie Bunter quizzingly, and set up in bed.

Bessie was unhappy—dreadfully unhappy.

It might have been the overloading of her head with that raspberry jam at tea-time. It might have been that sticky toffee she had consumed between tea and prep. It might have been that treacle tart to which she had helped herself before retiring to bed. It might, indeed, have been attributed to any of the vast variety of things she had eaten during the day. But the pain in her face brooded no denial. Bessie really had met agonising toothache.

She blinked miserably towards Babs' bed. Babs was out of it, thank thing! She looked at Babs' bed—to find the same state of affairs existent there. There was no toothache-tincture in the dormitory, but there was in Study No. 4—some perfectly marvellous stuff which Babs had received from home last term.

It occurred that there was nothing for it but for Bessie herself to go. Wearily and a little nervously—for Bessie was not fond of darkness—she clambered out of bed. Rather heartily she found her way down the corridor outside, painfully descended the stairs. In the act of turning into the Fourth Form passage, however, she stopped dead.

"What was that?"

Nervously she blinked up the dark corridor. She had heard a sound—a footstep, and now, as she stared, she saw something—a dim figure cowering towards her. Bessie, for a moment, stood still. Then hastily she backed away, hitting her head against the wall. The next minute:

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ancient benefactor of Cliff House, all girls who were captain in their last year received an annuity of one hundred pounds for life, provided, of course, that their records were satisfactory in every other respect. If this secret came to light now—if it was discovered that Norma had got her annuity by such a cunning trick—the annuity would cease to function."

And that was the whole story laid bare at last. Babs & Co. left the mistress full of fury and so near and yet so far—but what Miss Gilbey had failed to accomplish they would do. They owed it to her. They owed it to their good opinion of themselves. They owed it to Lydia.

But Lydia also had the same idea. And that night when Babs crept out of the school, they little realized they had been overheard by had an hour by Lydia, who had discovered it to be a much easier business to get out of the school premises.

They little realized, as they stole into the crypt, that Lydia, in the act of coming out of it, with the precious manuscripts under her arm, stood hidden in the darkness. As Babs & Co. stood forward, Lydia could have touched Clara by stretching out her arm. So let them go on.

And then, silently, softly, up the main she flew. At the top she paused, putting the manuscripts on the ground. With both hands she tugged the heavy crypt door into place and turned the key in the lock, chattering at the awful squeak it made. Then she checked.

"That, I think, will keep you in your places until I'm ready to let you out," she muttered. "And now to turn these things in real earnest!"

And, dashing through the window into the school, she swiftly made her way towards the Fourth Form corridor.

"WHAT'S THAT?"
Barbara Bothern halted abruptly.

"What's what?"
"I heard a sound," Babs said, "up there." And she turned, flashing her torch the way she and Clara had come.
"Like a key turning in the lock," she panted.
"Scorched," she added, "as though somebody was playing monkey tricks with the door of the crypt. Miss, back back, will you, and have a look! Clara, you and I will go on."

Babs nodded. Without a word she "luzzed" back, shining her torch in

Clang, clang, clang, clang!

The school, from end to end, from roof to floor, was a brilliant mass. Far Beulah instinctively stopping against the wall, had also accidentally clumped against the fire alarm!

AND AS that clanging din set the whole school vibrating, another figure stopped dead. The figure of Lydia Crossendale.

Lydia still had the bundle of ancient manuscripts under her arm. To her great chagrin the fire had almost been out in Study No. 3, and a forcing search for wood to burn it had only revealed that the last bit had disappeared from the cupboard. Several ineffectual efforts had Lydia made to cause the dying embers into flames. All without avail.

So Lydia, hating, palpitated, and impatient, had decided that there was only one safe place in which to burn those incriminating documents—the kitchen boiler fire, which was left burning all night to keep the school supplied with hot water. Lydia speeding on her way towards the kitchen, stopped dead as that hideous clamor filled the air.

Fire!

That was her first thought. She sniffed. No smell of smoke, no sound of burning. Some girl, perhaps, playing a joke? Lydia paused. In a moment the whole school would be awake. In a moment the girls would be rushing upon her from all sides. Even as she paused, she heard a shout in the main.

"This way!"

Too late, Lydia turned. From the opposite end of the corridor three came a swarthy of footprints. She was cut off that way, cut off in front—and here she was with the documents in her hands.

Lydia had to act. She must hide these papers until the hue and cry was over.

She caught hold of the handle of the first door.

That door, though she didn't know it at the moment, was the door of Study No. 7. She pushed it open, breathlessly closed it in, and looked quickly round. Now, where—and then, seeing Clara Trevlyn's hockey bag in the corner, she jumped towards it, feverishly pulled it open. As soon as the hue and cry had died away it would be an easy enough matter to slip back and get hold of it.

She caught the manuscripts, feverishly returned them in, and then—

"Stop!" cried a voice.

With a gasp, Lydia wheeled round, and then her face blanched. The position which had been in its normal place when she entered the room, had now swung forward into the room. Behind it showed a black row of opening eyes which stared Beulah, Mabel and Clara. Too late, Lydia remembered the recent passage that ran from the crypt to Study No. 7—too late—

And there, in a moment, Clara was across the room. She lunged for the bag. Desperately, Lydia snatched it up, desperately ran for the door.

Outside came a gasping of foot-steps. The whole school was rushing to the fire station outside. She flung it open, and precipitated herself outside.

And then—

"Ooah!"

Lydia gasped. The bag in her hand was flying, its locks bursting open, the precious manuscripts flying out, scattering in the corridor, and Miss Pringle, into whom she had cannoned, caught hold of her. For a moment she stared, and then she saw the papers. At the

more moment Beah, Mabel, and Clara came rushing out of the study.

"Lydia!" Miss Pringle almost shrieked. "Lydia, those documents! Where did you get those?"

Beah came forward.

"I think," she said, "that I can answer that question, Miss Pringle. Lydia got them from the crypt."

"What?"

"Where," Beah said emphatically, "they were hidden by her sister six years ago."

"Lydia, is this true?"

But Lydia was staring, frightened, wide-eyed. Her face was ashen now, her jaw dropped. It needed no word of hers to give her away. Her expression was sufficient.

Miss Pringle's lips compressed.

"Barbara," she said, "pick up those papers! Lydia, you Barbara, Clara, and Mabel come to my study now, quietly, this afternoon, to give. And please," she added, "bring Miss Gilbey with you."

And Beah, stooping to pick up the papers, nodded. It seemed that Lydia in the end had been beaten—but by her cousin, to be sure, but by the hand of Fate in the shape of an alarmed Beah Baxter!

HEAR AS YOU LEAVE.

"And that is the story?" Miss Pringle asked.

"That is the story," Miss Gilbey replied quietly.

"I see!" Miss Pringle said. Her eyes gleamed. "Lydia, you have taken part in an infamously wicked conspiracy as I have known! I am not going to lecture you now. That, I think, may be left to your own parents when they know the sort of conspiracy to which you have lent yourself. I make some allowance for the fact that you were the step-daughter of your sister, who, had I known it at the time, would, instead of having been Cliff House's captain, most certainly have been expelled! Lydia, I shall have to consider your punishment! Now go!"

Lydia, looking as if she had been whipped, went.

"Miss Gilbey," Miss Pringle said, with some emotion, "I hardly know how to express my apologies, not only to you as mistress, but also to the girl whom I most justly expelled so many years ago!"

"Naturally, I shall see that this matter is reported in the right quarter. I shall most strongly recommend that the annuity now paid to Norma Crossendale under the bequest shall be stopped. It may be possible to get it transferred to you.

"But even that, Miss Gilbey, is inadequate. I feel that I can hardly do enough—that anything I can do will hardly wipe out that horrible mistake of the past. Naturally I shall summon your position and return him of the facts. Is there anything else I can do?"

Miss Gilbey smiled.

"Miss Pringle, there is. There are no things."

"Yes."

"First, provide me that when the next vacancy occurs at the school, you will consider me for the post."

"That I will most certainly do, Miss Gilbey."

"And, second," Miss Gilbey added, with a faint smile at the clause, "release those girls from whatever punishment they may have incurred on my behalf."

Miss Pringle smiled.

"That," she said, "I had already resolved to do, Miss Gilbey. In fact, just to make up to the girls for what they have suffered in your cause, I have already decided to give them an extra day's holiday. Barbara, Mabel, and Clara, I thank you for what you have done—not only for helping Miss Gilbey to regain her good name, but also for restoring to the school a very valuable set of documents which we all considered as lost! You may go."

And Beah, Mabel, and Clara, shaking, went.

THE END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

SHE STOLE ANOTHER

GIRL'S NAME TO WIN A FORTUNE

SHE was a Fourth Former at Cliff House School—the girl whose name she stole was a servant.

FREDA Barriars was the Fourth Former, Jane Mills the servant.

FREDA saw a glorious chance to steal the fortune that should have gone to Jane Mills. So she decided that Jane must be banished from Cliff House—driven out in disgrace.

BUT Freda reckoned without Beah and Co. They were on Jane's side—especially Clara Trevlyn. The result was . . .

DO not miss next week's powerful long complete Cliff House School story, the title of which is:

"A SCHOOLGIRL'S SECRET FEUD"

By HILDA RICHARDS

WHERE IS TESS TRELAWNEY? That is the Problem Which Betty & Co. and the Grangemoor Boys Are Determined To Solve

WHEN MORCOVE EXPELLED HER

By
MARJORIE STANTON



TESS TRELAWNEY has been expelled from Morcove School owing to the scheming of **MAIRIE** and **RALPH FENDER**, who are living near Morcove at Chicker-Beggs-on-the-Moors, the stinking investigations, from discovery that they are smuggling gin. The Fenders, trading Tom's knowledge, kidnap her and make her a prisoner.

BETTY BARTON, one of Tom's school friends and **DAVE CARDOW**, of Grangemoor School, investigate Tom's disappearance. They discover Ralph Fender on the luncheon table suspicious circumstances. Dave intends to question him.

(See next page.)

coming along the shore, and now he was waiting for them to get to him.

"And you have guessed, Dave, that in the last few minutes he has picked up that dropped cycle-lamp from where you had seen it, lying about on the cliff-path?"

"Just a mo', Betty," rejoined this always reserved brother of Judy Cardow. "And if you don't mind—when we get to Ralph leave me to do the talking, will you? Thanks."

Then Betty realized; she must not only be silent, but must not allow Ralph Fender to read excitement in her looks. It would take some doing, to appear perfectly calm, for she was now greatly excited.

The wide-glanced Dave just as they were getting within speaking distance of the tall Grangemoor vicar. If Dave had formed some theory, connecting the Fenders with the disappearance of poor Tom—then how well this attitude had been disguising his mistrust!

Ralph Fender, himself so bland and engaging, would never imagine that Dave was suspecting him. Of that, Betty felt positive.

"Hallo, you two?" Ralph cheerily greeted them. "What's brought you down to the moor-side, then?"

"Oh, just routine," Dave coolly returned. "Suddenly felt I'd like to take a look at that place where there was a landslide the other day. It is a night, too! And then Betty joined me—had some me from the road, just as she was taking back from Harrocombe."

"Ah, of course, you went into Harrocombe," the vicar said to Betty. "Er— you didn't happen to hear any fresh news about Tom, I suppose?"

"I only had it from her aunt, at the villa, that Tom is still missing."

"Oh, ay—really?" Ralph cried incredulously. "Well, I'm hanged! But what's the girl about, to be leading everybody such a dance?"

Betty only shrugged, wanting to leave Dave to handle the conversation. At the same time, soon that he and she were with Ralph Fender, she was bound

to feel that it was unsafe to mistrust him.

Such a really good set he looked, this Grangemoor vicar, who had so charmingly made it possible for Dave and other juniors to come over to Morcove after school to-day.

"And so I suppose you two are now going to walk back together, to Morcove?" Ralph Fender chatted on. "I might come with you. My sister's still at tennis there."

Betty saw Dave give a smile and nod, as if he, a junior, felt quite honoured by the offered companionship of a lovely senior.

"Not I," said Betty, "have a bicycle to stink of. I must go back on the gully path and get it."

"Oh, Dave and I will go up from the beach that way, too," Ralph gaily remarked. "Then you can ride ahead of us, Betty. Jolly evening, isn't it? Dashed shame there is all this worry for you and the other girls, about Tom Trelawney! What's her next doing about it—do you know?"

"Oh, she's going to call in the police—so she said."

"Best thing to do," the senior calmly approved. "Don't you think so, Miss?"

"Rather! By the way—talking of the police; they'll have to be told about a girl's bike that I found lying hidden amongst the gorse, just now, at the top of the cliff." Dave quietly remarked. "Betty has seen it; she says it's Tom's own machine—one that she was riding last night."

"Oh?" jerked Ralph Fender. "The Tom wasn't missing last night! It's only since first thing this morning—"

"I know," Dave nodded. "That, it seems, lost her aunt's house this morning riding another machine—one that had been lent to her overnight by Betty. That machine, like Tom herself, is still missing. By the way, though, Fender—did you find a bicycle-lamp lying amongst some ferns below rocks a few minutes ago?"

"I?" the senior stopped during their stammering along the sands as if such a question as Dave's had staggered him. "Bike-lamp! No, of course not! Why?"

"Oh, I saw it there—and then, when I came back to the spot with Betty, it was gone."

"Is—that-so?" came in a tone of utter bewilderment. "Queer! But I wonder, Cardow, you didn't pick the lamp up when you first saw it?"

"Oh, no!" Dave shook his head. "Best to leave it where it was, I thought. The police, you know; they might have been furious with me for

Ralph Fender's "No!"

BETTY BARTON gave Dave Cardow a startled look.

He had said something, just then, that was so amazing, she went over his words aloud.

"Not surprised that Ralph Fender is down here on the moor-side, instead of being at the Morcove home tonight! And you say, too—you're going to ask him for that cycle-lamp belonging to the missing machine! I—I don't get you, Dave," was Betty's puzzled cry.

At first he only smiled, whilst giving her a helping hand as they both worked over the last bit of difficult ground, at the foot of the obstructed cliff-path.

Then, when they had crept upon the smooth, sandy shore, and were hurrying towards Ralph Fender, a few quiet words were dropped by Dave.

"I was still at the tennis courts, Betty, when Ralph suddenly said he was going to nip across to the bungalow which his people are visiting. No reason why he shouldn't want to do that, of course. Only I happened to notice that he didn't go in the bungalow after all. He rode on past it, to get as far along the cliffs as where you met me just now."

"So, really, you left the courts to follow him in secret?" Betty said, with undiminished amazement.

She was speaking under her breath. Ralph Fender had seen her and Dave

teaching it. All this business of the two bikes has a bearing upon what's happened to Tom, I suppose."

Ralph Feeder gave a few glances. "I suppose it has, come to think of it. But a chap of your age, Cardow, can't be as sharp as they make 'em! Yes, I suppose the police will have to come out this way—and take a look round. And, you know, hadn't I better stay by the discovered bicycle when we get to it, until the police do turn up? I think I will!"

"I thought I had better do that," Dave quietly submitted, "as I found it. A thing you could do, Feeder, if you wouldn't mind—"

"Oh, I don't mind!" he laughed. "You can give your orders, Cardow!" "Well, the nearest telephone is at Cliffledge Garage, isn't it?" As the police watch he told at once about the found bicycle, I thought you might like to go to the hangar—it's your people's place—and stay up."

Betty, in step with both Blows, took a look at Ralph Feeder's handsome face out of the corner of her eye. She was thinking; by now, if he and his sister were in some mysterious way associated with the disappearance of Tom Trevelyan, he should be leading it impossible to keep a fair cut of his looks; but the police being called in. But his expression was simply the half-averse one of a good-humoured rider "taking orders" from a junior:

"O.K., Cardow; I'll do that!" he slightly answered. "And Betty, here—what does she do?"

"Oh, Betty won't just get along to Morocco, that's all. And you see, explain, Betty won't be helping me."

"Right-o, Dave!" Then the talk lapsed. Betty was not simply that they were in the gully-path and were making the awkward ascent, involving a touch loss of breath.

Even though Ralph Feeder was best-voiced so unworldly, he could not help feeling that some of the best-fallen between him and Dave which meant an occasional snarl; snarl; snarl!

Here resumed later, Ralph Feeder was off and away to the hangar, to do the unphoning, and Betty, to please Dave, should have been running to where her bicycle was "parked," to pedal hard for the school.

But she lingered here at this gully life of the cliff-top, where Dave was going to keep an eye upon the discovered machine. She was wanting to ask Dave something, and suddenly she brood the question at him—simply had he got any more of them?

"Dave, are you the Feeder all right? Or are you any other?"

"I may be able to answer that, Betty, in the morning."

It was another of his cryptic utterances, leaving her aghast.

"In the morning, Dave! But you won't be seeing me then?"

"Yes, I shall."

"How can you? You'll be miles away at your school!"

"No, I shan't!" was his smiling assurance. "But keep that, Betty—under your hat!"

Against the Rules!

AND now for an extraordinary proceeding on the part of Study No. 12, taking place at dusk this same evening.

It was the entire Chatterbox, with the exception of missing Tom, making its way very secretly and hurriedly up to the roof of Morocco School!

There was a flight of steps on an attic landing, which girls were not supposed

to use. But Betty & Co. were using those steps now.

There was a skylight above the top-most step, and girls were strictly forbidden to unhook it and push it open. Yet at this very moment Betty herself was doing that!

And the motive?

It could have been easily guessed. Betty was not the only student of the skylight steps who had with her a pair of field-glasses. There had been a sudden eager longing accorded her in many pairs as it could be hoped to borrow from other studies, without exciting curiosity.

As for Bessy Trever, she had a magnificent old-fashioned telescope under one arm.

"Hurry up, Betty!" urged impatient Polly.

And there was Nansom's whisper: "Yes, quick—quick!" from a little lower down.

Whomsoever other girls, who fastened the stop-flights of steps, missed:

"Sh!" Miss Merrick, the Form-mistress, had only to get knowledge of what was happening up here, and there would be no chance, after all, of using the many pairs of field-glasses, and the telescope, from such a fine vantage-point as the flat part of the schoolhouse roof offered.

The roof-leaved skylight, so seldom opened, was stuck down by rust. But as it had Betty—whom being nearly pushed off the steps by Polly, who was trying to head a hand—got it set wide open.

"A level, veritable, and she was first up upon the leads, with the Misses all, all & were, 'snapping up' out."

"Good! Good! Madam Betty!" This being plain, girls! Now to see under the microscope you could learn the study!

"Do you make a mistake; no mistake!" Betty said, "with her pair of glasses at once came into use."

"You see, Betty? Where?" Polly whispered. "Where you left Dave, on the cliff! Here, Bessy—don't telescope!"

"You can't have it yet!" "And I want it—quick!" "Bessy; but so do I!"

This might have meant a set-to between Polly and Bessy, with the telescope as a bone of contention; but Nansom was now with them on the roof, and she had field-glasses.

So Polly, sweeping, took those glasses away from the dusky arg, then directed to where, between two chimney-pots, she would be awkward to get at.

That was Polly to Nansom's pardonable cry of "Sweetie!" Like the Form captain, Polly was having a distant more brought close, and it was all very thrilling.

"Four—five—six, pellonnet! I just fancy, Betty! And there's an Inspector—I can tell by his cap. He's talking to Dave."

"They're being shown the bicycle—just where Dave found it is the game," Betty took up the running commentary. "But what I can't make out, girls, why the police have only just got there! It's more than an hour—much more—since Ralph Feeder rang up from the hangar for the police to come."

"And yet they had a car to come along in from the town," was the cry from Madge Mindon, who had one of the other glasses. "You can see it standing at the roadside."

"I'm just wondering," Betty said, "whether Ralph Feeder didn't get through to them on the phone quite as soon as he might have done."

"Dash!" Polly frowned. "It's getting so dark, even the glass won't help us much longer."

"Dave will be back awfully late at Christmas," murmured the last sister, Bessy.

"Can any of you see if Madie is there with the police?" Betty asked, still using her glasses. "She talked of going back to the hangar, and the lights are coming on there, but they're no indication. They have a search."

"Oh, Betty," laughed Bessy, "are you worrying about Madie again? Still suspecting all sorts of things about her, as well as my brother?"

Polly, perched amongst the chimney-pots, assumed an objection to Bessy's derisive stare of mind.

"Betty usually knows what she's talking about!"

"But in this case—ah, I think!" Bessy laughed on. "You'd never get me to believe that a girl who would come and play sports with us all, as Madie did, afterwards, would be mixed up with a fair of—"

The next word, almost, Bessy finding it necessary to make a lively-skip, or Polly would be falling on top of her.

This was due to Nansom's determined effort to get back the commandeered glasses from Polly.

Nansom had attempted to steal the Madie's, amongst the cluster of chimney-pots, and now one of the pots was showing an inclination to fall over. It must have been loose in the mortar at its base. Nansom should never have embraced it, as a means of getting at Polly; but that was what the trap had done.

Polly, jumping clear, voiced a warning: "Look out, Kid!" But the mischief was done.

Although Nansom kept away as much as a member from a branch, the chimney-pot fell away. It crashed and broke—almost at the feet of pretty Paula Cloud, over whose dainty ankles were upon a lot of soot.

"Ouch! Nans! Look what you've done!" wailed Paula. "My precious! Heep!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Many of these were laughing, in a doubled-down manner, when through the skylight's square frame were the head and shoulders of—Miss Merrick!

Then, if any Study No. 12 girl was still inclined to go on laughing, it was belated a hand winking the mouth. Available incoherence there was none. The field-glasses were all down from pretty pairs of eyes. Bessy slowly closed her magnificent telescope. There was a general waiting for the Form-mistress to speak.

"Betty," said the Form-mistress, "what is the meaning of this?"

"Over!" grinned Betty; "but as though it or came on here on night—see—see better."

"Oh, I understand that, Betty!"—a little sob. "I'm simply asking—does this mean the thing for a certain to lead others to do?"

"Miss Merrick, please," Polly interposed, "there was no intention!"

"Only excitement!" Bessy giggled.

"Nan," said Miss Merrick, trying to appear very stern, "come down, say one of you, this instant! I make full allowance for your very nervous anxiety about poor Tom. But this does not goad. In fact—"

And a glass at the broken chimney-pot implied full understanding of harm done.

Miss Merrick, however, was a sport. Betty & Co., returning downstairs in various stages of hotbed-up excitement could feel quite sure that they were not to be reported.

Prep, unless it was to be altogether left until before "break" in the morning, was now a matter of some urgency.

So, for the next forty minutes, Study No. 12 held only the rightful occupants, all four of those making hasty desks at the usual time.

An ultimate surge of joy at being finished was somewhat tempered by the knowledge that the last assembly of the day, in Big Hall, was only a few minutes away.

But the others came drifting in from neighboring studies to spend what little time remained in debating about the mystery of missing Tom.

They could be sure that there was still no news, or it would have been known to the whole school. So every voice was as grave as could be—even a little emotional at times.

How could they fail to worry and sorrow over the strange affair to a far greater extent than any other girls in the school—girls who had been Tom's own best friends?

And here, in Study No. 12, there was, too, matter for argument about which the rest of Morrow was in total ignorance. Maizie Fender and her brother! Were they, or were they not, mysteriously implicated?

For once, opinion in Study No. 12 was divided.

Betty and Polly and Judy were of one mind; they had become definitely anti-Fender.

Betty had gathered from Dave's hearing, when she was with him, that he had formed a suspicion against Cliff-edge, and Dave was always so reliable.

Polly was having no share any more than was Betty's, simply because it was Betty's! As for Judy, she was Dave's own sister, and that was sufficient.

But Bunny Trevor and the rest could not get it out of their minds that really, so far, Maizie and Ralph had done absolutely nothing to give rise to suspicion!

On the contrary, theirs had been the behavior of a pair to whom the first news of Tom's disappearance had come as a shocking surprise.

Ralph, at that time, had been at Grandmaster School gradually arranging to come over to Morrow with "the boys" later in the day, for tennis. And this pleasant arrangement had been advised to, because the anxiety about Tom had been temporarily eased.

"So I will say," Bunny persisted, just as the bell for Big Hall was sounding the talk, "it's more than you'd ever get me to believe—that the Fenders knew what became of poor Tom. For Ralph to turn up as he did, with our fellows, for tennis, and Maizie to come across from the bungalow to join in the tournament—"

"But that may have been only an unwise oversight," snapped Polly.

"Rabbits! They'd have to be proper twins to be as double-faced as all that! Oh, no!" Bunny clung to her former opinion. "There was Maizie Fender, all the time we were at tennis, not the least bit fidgety—"

"But her brother did slip away," Judy gravely stated.

"So did your own brother Dave, come to that. Come—a member, had the other—well, he's old for his years, no longer. Fact is," Bunny continued, "they're both boys, and so they fell there was something better to do than play tennis."

Betty opened the study door, and the answering bell sounded much louder.

"Come on, girls!" she entreated. "And those of you who don't feel doubtful about the Fenders—be glad you don't! I, for one, wish to goodness I



"AS quietly as you can!" Betty enjoined her friends, and then, one by one, they began their ascent to the roof, hoping that from such a vantage point they would be able to see what was going on at Cliffedge.

could get the thing out of my head, when it's so horribly vague. Nothing, really, to suggest it—that's admitted. But I just can't."

And, far into the night, it kept her lying awake.

The whole town, in its dormitory, had gone on talking about the mystery long after lights-out.

But Betty's was a special uneasiness of mind, due to her having been with Dave when that bicycle was discovered, and afterwards, when Ralph had been asked if he had picked up the sportsman.

The Grandmaster senior's answer had been an accorded "No?"

Was that a lie? Betty's last thought before she fell asleep, was that everything turned upon the truthfulness or otherwise of Ralph Fender's answer.

If he really had picked up the boy, then there was black guilt in her saying that he hadn't. His reason for a lying denial need have been a guilty fear of some suspicion of having gone to look for it!

Daylight had long crept back to Morrow's rosy world of unclouded, still, and mild sun, when Betty opened her eyes again.

At once she was out of bed, tiptoeing to one of the dormitory's many windows that looked towards the sea. Her intention was merely to form some idea of what the weather was likely to be, and then get back into bed.

But as Moore had her eyes noticed many signs of a hot day in store, then the impulse seized her to get dressed and go down for a ramble round.

They mist covered the sea, for the sun to get by took upon it when it climbed into a cloudless sky.

But from that dormitory window Betty saw the grassy cliff-top, and there was the white-walled bungalow, no smoke rising yet from any of its chimneys.

"Not a word about it!"

Maybe, a sense of this being a chance to, as it were, steal a march upon Cliffedge, had a good deal to do with Betty's sudden resolve to go along the shore. At any rate, she could be caught up in the routine of school life at eight o'clock, and this was a case of *non proceper*.

So, a few minutes later, she was downstairs. As she had rather set the wrong side of Miss Morruck over that unhelpful venturing on to the roof, it was a relief to Betty not to have to do her own unhooking of an outer door to pass out.

Some of the outside work was already done, and mat-walking was being done at the porch.

Then she was feeling distinctly down in the main gate. They had stood open all night, so usual.

Out to the road she passed, still intending to go along it as far as the Cliffedge gateway.

But, a minute later, she thought:

"No! Such hours of time is hard, why not go down the school path to the shore? Then I can go along the sands as far as the gully path that got hallooned the other day, can go up it, and come back along the road."

This seemed to be nothing such a much better use of the time, enthusiasm set her running to get down to the shore. And even when she reached the sands her step remained a lively one.

Random ideas! Heavy slugs to that part of the shore, near the gully-path, where she and Dave had met. Ralph Fender had evening, and perhaps—perhaps one would be repaid for a good look round.

"These sands—so good for footprints and all that," she was thinking, whilst walking close in to the cliffs. "And if Ralph Fender did get both of them yesterday, he must have been pretty quick to hide it somewhere on the shore."

Then she wondered whether Dave, at the time, had looked out for signs of the lamp having been, possibly, hastily buried in the sands? He was a lad to think of everything! But one thing, she felt, was certain—there had been no chance for him to pursue any amateur detective work at a late hour last evening.

"Enough luck on him—to have to follow back in his school as soon as the police had heard all he had to say. And how he will manage to appear over to Morcové again this morning, as he seemed to think of doing. I just can't imagine!"

Such were Betty's thoughts of him just as she was trying to pass round the base of a rocky bluff that buttressed the giant cliffs just there. Her stopping round brought into view another stretch of Jamboree and— She could hardly believe her eyes for a moment, but it was so!

"Dave!" she gasped, straggling in her direction he was—the copy lad of whom she had been thinking as miles away at his school, and not yet to be seen even then, so that she had to do the rushing, to get quickly within speaking distance.

"Hallo, Betty!" he calmly greeted her. "Hi early for you, isn't it?"

"Then what about you?" she laughed back at him, whilst her eyes still stared amazedly. "Goodness! Dave, where—where have you been all night?"

"Oh, at the bungalow!"

"Who-oh?"

"Who-oh?"

"They gave me a bed-room, yes," he roared on. "And so how ago—well, I thought I would get up and come out. By the way," and he started to fish something from a jacket pocket, "I've just found this."

And Betty's eyes grew wider than ever as they beheld the plated lamp of a girl's bicycle.

Out of the Mist

"MORCOVÉ," Betty jerked excitedly. "I can't believe it!"

"Yes," Dave agreed, "this is the one right enough that we wondered if Ralph Fender had found."

"And—had he, Dave? Had he?" she demanded. "If so—"

"Would be a clear case against him and his sister, of course. But Dave's no being certain. Betty. It could have been someone else who hid the lamp away from where I'd not it—can remember—any who just buried it hastily in the sand."

"Really, where?" she asked. "Near where we spoke to Ralph last evening on the shore?"

"Quite near there, yes. But don't look like that, Betty," he admonished her. "No jumping to conclusions will do. The case is far too serious for that."

"You're right," she sighingly responded. "It's the case of a Morcové girl missing! Only, Dave, doesn't it look highly suspicious, anyway? Did you find the lamp just near by striking footprints?"

"As a matter of fact, I smelt where it was," Dave, you know, the staff had got during the night and had found off a lot of gas. I sniffed it as I was sweeping around along there under the cliffs."

"Well!" Betty gasped again. "And this case of your having slept the night at—of all places—the bungalow! How on earth did you work?"

"GUESTS OF THE SHAREEN"

(Continued from page 23)

"Wait," she said to Nook and Sally. "I will copy what my subjects steal. I have gold watches. You shall choose for yourself the best."

She sounded a deep-toned gong. "My goodness," Sally muttered. "If Palina should find it—and be found with it—"

"Just Ah's chance," said Nook, in alarm.

The Shareen had passed from the room, and there was a deep silence.

Breaking it from outside came a sharp, girlish cry—sharp, stifled.

Nook ran to the window and looked down. She stared in horror, rigid, before she called to Sally.

"Palina," she hissed. "Here—and under arrest—"

Sally looked down over her friend's shoulder. Palina, held by a guard on either side of her, a strong band over her mouth, was being dragged away.

"She came here," gasped Nook. "But why—she must have known it was dangerous—"

Sally suddenly pointed. Something was reflecting the sunlight, sparkling. It took her a moment to guess what it was. Then she and Nook found the solution together.

"The watch!"

A white-clothed figure crossed the ground. A shadow fell across the watch. And there was the Grand Adviser Ah, stopping, picking it up.

He called the guards, and held it out. "The villain!" cried Sally in fury. "He's giving it to them—to be used on her. Her's being it on to her, Nook. Are we standing for this?"

"Standing for it! I should say not," said Nook fiercely. "But—"

She looked across the room. She heard the Shareen's retreating steps. Then other steps—quicker—and turning, Nook saw that Sally was rushing to the portal.

Only for a second Nook hesitated; and then, but a moment before the Shareen, followed by a slave bearing a cushion loaded with gold and jewelled watches, entered the room, she ran out, but in pursuit of Sally.

WILL Sally and Nook be in time?

Will they be able to save the hapless slave-girl from the villainy of the overlord Ah? A long and thrilling instalment of this brilliant new serial will appear in the next issue of THE SCHOOLGIRL, on sale on Thursday, March 25th. Make sure of your copy by ordering it at once!

"Oh, I turned up just after dark as if I had come a partner; front wheel of my bike buckled, and ran with a bump. I told them I had made for Cliffside, as that was nearer than Morcové, and I asked them if they could take me in, letting my school know by phone. They O.K.'d all that, and there again—it may mean that they're absolutely innocent, or it may have been more than it ever's open. My the way, Mr. Fender was there. She'd turned up just before I happened along."

"Is she nice?"

"She was very nice to me. But I don't like her. I was having supper with her and her daughter, when the policeman called."

"Really? Them—the police, perhaps, are beginning to—to wonder about the Fenders?"

"Oh, no! It was only to ask them—being the only people living along the cliffs—to report anything that might be helpful. And specially to look out for a girl's bicycle, in case the machine Tom was on the morning she vanished should have been hidden somewhere in the garage, or down here on the shore. Mrs. Fender was all talk of being so sorry about the affair."

Betty stood still suddenly to face Dave and ask him straight out:

"Dave, where is Tom—where is he?"

"Tom is still in this district; that's as far as I can be certain," came the steady answer. "She left her aunt's home yesterday morning, riding a bike. We've found the lamp belonging to the bike, and I go by that. Tom was kidnapped, Betty! It's all I can think."

After she had been taken away, her kidnapper had to see about lifting the blame to prevent her being traced. That was done, Dave felt, while the bike was being lugged away some difficult ground, the lamp left off unnoticed."

"Kidnapped!" Betty echoed Dave's word of a few moments ago. "But by whom, then? And why—why? Even supposing it is the Fenders' doing—why should they?"

After taking a little while for hard thinking, Dave seemed ready to make answer. But the words did not come.

Instead, he suddenly distanced Betty by an arm to draw her with him as he quickly side-stopped, getting behind some seaweed rocks which stood up jaggedly from the sand.

Betty's own quick wits told her that something was happening to make him want the pair of them to escape being seen. Quickly she huddled close beside him behind the rocks.

Somebody about on the shore, belonging to Cliffside—was that it! Yet she and Dave were still liable to be seen by a person treading anywhere above high-tide mark.

Those rocks behind which they crouched were waving to amaze them only from an off-shore direction.

"Look, Betty! Take a peep!" Dave whispered, after peering round, with his head held very low. "Coming out of the mist."

And, looking, she saw a small boat about which, faintly, there seemed to be something suspicious—mysterious. Greeting as it was, quite silently, as if to make a landing at this very part of the lonely shore.

WHAT new mystery is this? Has

the appearance of this strange craft anything to do with the vanishing of Tom Tinselway? These are questions which Betty & Co.,—and "Detective Dave"—are asking themselves. See how they tackle the latest developments in the mystery in next week's absorbing chapter.