

"PAGE-BOY BOKER TO THE RESCUE!" Magnificent COMPLETE Cliff House story inside.

THE SCHOOLGIRL

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EVERY **2^D** SATURDAY

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"SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN"



**"DETECTIVE" BESSIE'S
EXTRA TURN!**

Destined to be startling and dramatic as well as screamingly funny.

(See this week's grand Babs & Co. story.)

A most unusual LONG COMPLETE story of the chums of Cliff House School.



Page-Boy BOKER to the Rescue!

Their Scenery Ruined!



"MABS, has it come yet?" More than a dozen eager voices called that question, as a crowd of Junior School girls swarmed excitedly round the doorway of Study No. 4 in the Fourth Form corridor at Cliff House School.

There were three girls in that study—Barbara Redfern, the blue-eyed captain of the Lower School; Mabel Lynn, her golden-haired lieutenant, and plump Bessie Bunter, who at the moment were hurriedly packing their school books away after afternoon lessons.

Mabs laughed. "Well, cuckoos, how should I know?" she asked. "I've only just been dismissed—classes the same as the rest of you. But it should be here by now. I had a note from the theatrical company, to say it would arrive about three o'clock this afternoon. Let's go and see."

"What-ho!" chortled Jemima Carstairs. "Make way there, troops! Follow the girl from Cooks, and let's all see the scenery!"

There was a laugh at that. The remark was very suited to the occasion. For it was scenery, nothing else, which the Cliff House crowd was so excited about now.

Not, however, the very beautiful and natural scenery of the surrounding Kentish Downs, but scenery to be used in the performance of the Christmas

fantasy, which Mabel Lynn had written and was producing, and which was to be performed in three days' time.

Yesterday the costumes, designed by Marjorie Hazeldene, who was acting as dresser to the play, had arrived, and what wonderful costumes they had proved to be!

And to-night, with the scenery in position, they were going to hold their first dress rehearsal.

Most clamorously eager were all those girls to see the scenery; but none so eager as Mabs herself, or Barbara, her chum, who had designed the sets in the first place.

Out in a crowd they bundled, with

lanky Jean Cartwright a close second, and Mabs breathlessly arriving an easy third.

Eagerly Mabs rang the bell of the porter's lodge, and, thrilling with anticipation, the party grouped on the steps.

The door opened. A boy, just a little older than Mabs herself, and dressed in a new and extremely smart uniform, surveyed them with a mildly amazed, but cheerful grin.

The boy was Boker—Charles Henry Percival Boker—a few days ago the rather obscure page-boy of Cliff House School, but now temporarily promoted to porter during the compulsory

Often mentioned, but rarely featured in these stories, is Charles Boker, the cheery page-boy of Cliff House School. Here, in this delightful story of Barbara Redfern & Co., Boker takes the centre of the stage and rallies round the chums in a way you're bound to love.

a whoop that brought a frown to Miss Bullivant's acid face as they swept through Big Hall, and converged in a chattering crowd on the drive.

"Come on! Race you to the lodge!" Tomboy Clara Trevlyn whooped.

"Done!" "But, look here, you know—" howled Bessie Bunter, blinking indignantly through her thick spectacles.

Nobody, however, paid any attention to Bessie Bunter. Bessie's protesting wail was left to spend itself on the air, as the whole party—even elegant Jemima—broke into a run.

Clara was first, with Babs and the

absence of Piper, who was in the sanatorium with influenza.

Very cheery, very pleased did Boker look, and consciously proud of his position, too. His freckled, good-natured face broke into a beaming smile.

"Good-morning!" he said. "Good-morning, Miss Redfern—"

"Boker, where is it?" Mabs asked eagerly.

"It?" "Our scenery!" Boker's face cleared.

"Oh, you mean the scenery for your play?" he said. "I haven't seen it, miss."

Some of the animation died out of Mabs' face. A little silence fell.

"But—but it must have come!" she broke out. "I had a special note from the people who made it. They said it would be delivered at three o'clock without fail."

Boker shook his head. "Well, miss, I'm sorry," he said regretfully; "but I've heard nothing about it. But wait a minute," he said. "Why not phone the people? You can use the porter's phone if you like," he added generously. "Can I get you the number, miss?"

"Well, that's nice of you, Boker." "Not at all, miss," Boker assured her cheerfully. "I—"

"Wait a jiffy!" cried Babs. "I hear a lorry in the road. Perhaps that's it."

Everyone turned towards the gates. The rattle of some heavy vehicle in the lane grew louder. Then suddenly, with a squeaking of brakes, the lorry from Courtfield Railway Station appeared. A uniformed driver leaned out of the cab.

"Hallo, there! Porter!" he called. "Yes?" Boker hurried forward. "You've got something for Cliff House?"

"I have. Name of—of Miss Lynn," the driver said. "Some scenery—" "Hurrah!" cheered Jimma,—"And faces cleared again; hearts lightened. Enthusiasm bubbled up once more. Mabs, with a laugh, hurried forward.

"Oh, topping!" she cried. "I'm Miss Lynn. But you're late," she said severely.

The driver glanced at her queerly. "Yes; we're late," he admitted. "But it isn't our fault. There was an accident in the siding at Courtfield this morning—a runaway engine crashed into a truck, and—"

"Oh dear! Nobody hurt, I hope?" Babs put in quickly.

"No, miss, as it happened," the driver said; "but—" "Well, blow the buts!" Clara cried boisterously. "Come on, kiddlets, let's have a look at the stuff."

And Clara herself led the way to the tailboard of the lorry, and, without waiting for orders, unfastened the chains that secured the board, and allowed it to fall with a crash.

"Then she gave a whoop.

"Here it is! Come on, Boker! Never mind, driver, we'll unload. We—" And then she gave a violent start. "Oh, golly," she cried, "what's this?"

And she blinked. Her chums gathered round, blinking, too, as they stared into the interior of the lorry.

The scenery was there; true—but what a sight it presented! Smashed battens, splintered woodwork—parts of it, indeed, broken to pieces!

Mabs' face turned white.

"Oh, my goodness! Driver, this isn't ours!" she cried.

The driver coughed apologetically.

"I'm sorry, miss, but it is," he said.

"You see this scenery happened to be in the truck the runaway engine smashed up."

By HILDA RICHARDS

Illustrated by T. LAIDLOR

formed so proud a setting for "The Dancing Fairy."

Most of the other girls, disappointed and dismayed, had cleared off then. With willing Boker's assistance, the wreckage had been transferred to the new garage, which had risen on the ashes of the old structure at the end of the cycle-sheds.

Certainly it presented a most hopeless appearance.

Boker, as upset as the chums themselves, made the last observation, almost as if he had been responsible for the disaster.

Mabs shrugged. "Well, what could you do?" she asked worriedly. "It's just hopeless."

"Well, I think it might be mended," Boker said cautiously.

"But who," Clara demanded, "is going to mend it?"

"Well, miss, I wouldn't mind having a try," Boker coloured modestly. "You see, I know a bit about carpentry, and—and—well, I should hate to see your Christmas play messed up. Some of it isn't too bad," he went on, with a critical glance at the smashed scenes. "I'm no good at painting, of course; but, maybe, Miss Redfern could attend to that."

"You mean," Babs breathed, "you really think it could be repaired—in time?"

"Yes, miss! If—if you'd like to let me have a shot at doing it."

The three stared at him. Boker made that statement quite seriously; in great earnestness—almost with appeal in his eyes.

For long Boker had been a great and silent admirer of Barbara Redfern & Co., and Boker would have done much to lessen this great and bitter disappointment which had settled upon them all.

Hopeless, as Mabs said, to try to get the scenery replaced in three days. Hopeless, indeed, even to send it to an outside repairer—a business which would have been frightfully costly at the best, and uncertain of delivery in time into the bargain.

"But it's impossible, you know," Bessie demurred. "Even I couldn't repair that in three days, you know, so—"

Boker smiled.

"Well, there's nothing like trying," he said cheerfully. "Mind you, I should want some help. But I do know a bit about woodwork."

He coughed modestly. "As a matter of fact, before I took on the job of page-boy at this school, I went through a course of lessons at a joiner's in London. You see, miss," Boker added respectfully, "mother wanted me to be a joiner, but when I left school there were no jobs in that line going, and with mother being ill, and father out of work, and so on.



An Unexpected Offer!



"O H, lawks! I'm awfully sorry, Miss Lynn! I—I suppose I couldn't do anything."

With feelings too deep for words, Mabs, Babs, Clara and Bessie stared at the wreckage of the beautiful scenery, which was to have

"BOKER, will you open that gate?" Rhoda raved. "No, miss," Boker replied. "I'm sorry, but I've got my job to think of." The cheery young page-boy was only doing his duty, but his refusal was to lead to dramatic happenings.

I had to take the first job going. I'm sure it could be managed, miss—with a bit of help."

Mabs brightened a little. "Well, that's an offer," she said. "Boker, you're a sport! What say, girls?"

"Yes, rather, you know!"
"Then when shall we start?"
"Well, miss, I vote we start now." Boker said seriously. "It's going to be a big job"—only he realised how terrifyingly big it was going to be!
"I'll just go and get my tools from the lodge, shall I?" he asked cheerfully.

"But, Boker, won't it interfere with your other work?" Babs asked.
"No, miss, I'll see to that," Boker assured her cheerfully. "I get plenty of spare time one way and another. Shall I go and get my tool-box?"

"Oh, please!" Babs begged.
And Boker, with a cheery smile, ambled off. Clara grinned.

"Good old Boker!" she said. "What a brick! But, come on, if we're going to help. This means cutting the kids, Bessie, you run off to the tuckshop and get something will you? Babs, you'll want your oil-paints. We'd better get Leila and Jean Cartwright along, too—the more cooks the better the broth, or whatever they say."

Boker came in presently, swinging a bag of tools in his hand. He grinned cheerily.

"Right-ho!" he said. "Now we'll make a start. Give me a hand with this wall scene, Miss Lynn, will you, please?"

The wall scene was dragged out. By that time, Babs, Clara, Jean and Leila had arrived. Bessie arrived a minute later, with the tuck.

"Now we're all serene," Boker said. "Ahem!—I—I don't like telling you young ladies to go and get things for me, staff!" Clara said. "Come on, give the orders, Boker. We'll carry them out."

"Well, Miss Trevlyn, would you mind sawing off the broken end of that batten? Miss Carroll, perhaps you wouldn't mind banging back those loose nails. Miss Lynn, if you'll sand-paper those edges along there—so that they'll take the paint again—and if you wouldn't mind just measuring out some new battens to be cut from these laths, Miss Cartwright. I dunno what you can do, Miss Bunter, though that torn canvas could be sewn together," he added doubtfully.

These benches.
"Oh, that's all right! I'll just sit here and keep an eye on things," she said, perching herself on a pile of wood, with a bag of doughnuts in her hand. "You want a forewoman, you know, and I'm jolly expert at telling other people how to do their jobs."

Boker grinned, so did the chums. Deirdre old duffer Bessie!

Cheerfully now they got to work. But it was not easy work. It was, in fact, decidedly hard work. Too late the chums regretted their lack of experience in that direction.

Mabs was the first casualty—Mabs, industriously rubbing a razor-like edge of board, allowed the sandpaper to slip and cut the palm of her hand.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Clara. "That's beastly! You'll have to go and get that dressed, Mabs."

So off ruefully went Mabs. Then ten minutes later came a yell from Leila Carroll, banging away industriously.

"Oh gee!" wailed the American junior.

"What's the matter, Leila?"
"I guess I've hit my thumb with the hammer!"

"Let me look," Babs said.

She looked. Leila certainly had given her thumb a crash. Babs frowned.

"Better go and get it bandaged up," she said, "and for goodness' sake be more careful."

So off went Leila. A quarter of an hour later, Clara Trevlyn, clumsily wielding the saw, hit it against her knee.

Then Jean, who had taken on Leila's job, did precisely the same thing as Leila.

Boker, in the meantime, had been working like a Trojan. He looked rather worried.

"I'm sorry," he said apologetically. "I—I didn't think, of course, that you wouldn't be up to this. P'raps, after all, I'd better get along by myself."

"Meaning," Leila grimaced ruefully, "you'd get on better without us."

"Oh, no, miss, certainly not!" Boker cried, "but—but—"
But—as obvious that that was true. And obviously, anyway, that as time was growing on, work would have to cease very soon.

Except for Babs, who really had made progress with her re-touching of the scenery, none of them had materially assisted, despite their good intentions. Mabs and Clara, who had returned, shook their heads.

"Well, I think the best thing we can do is to clear out," Mabs said presently. "Boker, come along as soon as you've locked up after gates, will you? We'd like to talk to you. And—thank a million for being such an awful big help."

Boker flushed fiery red.
"Pleasure, miss," he said, and picked up a saw.

The chums hurried out. It was nearing call-over then, and dusk long ago had spread over the quad. Not till they were nearing the steps of Big Hall did they meet anyone else, and they all praised as a girl came running rather breathlessly out of Big Hall.

"Hallo!" Babs peered. "I say, is that Rhoda Rhodes?"

Rhoda Rhodes of the Lower Fifth stopped. She looked a little disconcerted.

"Oh, hallo, Babs!"
"I say, you're never going out?" Babs asked.

Rhoda Rhodes paused. That question was almost superfluous. For it was obvious that Rhoda was going out.

She was dressed in her new fur-trimmed coat, had on her newest brown shoes and wore the daring little model of a hat which she had bought in London during the week-end leave of absence a fortnight ago.

She bit her lip.
"Well, no—not—not really," she said. "I'm just meeting somebody outside the gates. I shan't be long."

"You know," Mabs said, "we're having a run through after call-over."
"Oh, yes!" Rhoda said.

"And you won't let us down?"

"Oh, no."
Mabs nodded. But she did not look convinced. More than once since she had included Rhoda Rhodes in the cast of the play she had been doubtful, indeed.

Only two days ago Rhoda had been called upon to take the part of the Fairy Prince, in place of Sylvia Sirrett, who most unfortunately had succumbed to a bout of influenza.

Rhoda was a good actress—no doubt about that. She was Mabs' only possible choice after Sylvia Sirrett, but it could not be said, so far, that she had given any great cause for satisfaction.

For Rhoda, haughty, petulant, spoiled, and possessed of a temper which at times was ungovernable, had been in constant

hot water. Most of the time she should have spent in learning her lines had been spent in writing lines as punishments.

Neither a lawful nor a disciplined girl she was in Rhoda. More often than not she was in trouble, and seeing that time was such a desperate faction in the play now, Mabs could afford to run no further risks.

Already Rhoda was miles and miles behind the others—and the tragedy of it was that Rhoda had one of the most important parts.

Mabs' lips came together.
"All right," she said. "It's no business of mine, of course, what you're doing. But you know how things are, Rhoda. You know jolly well we can't afford to take more risks. You had to cut rehearsal last night because you had lines, and you had to curdle it day before yesterday for the same reason. I just want to warn you, that's all! If you go on gathering lines and detentions, you'll have to chuck the part."

Rhoda's face took on a sneer.
"And who," she asked, "will take the part if I don't?"

"Will you?" Mabs said quietly.
"I will!" Mabs' lips came together.

"I know! But I'm the only one who knows the part. I don't like acting and producing at the same time, but if it's necessary I shall do it. So it's up to you, Rhoda. As long as you do your stuff—O.K.! But—if there's any more detentions—"

Rhoda shrugged. She turned away with a little laugh.

Rhoda was not afraid. With all the superiority her majority of one year gave her, Rhoda was rather inclined to look with contempt upon the Fourth Form, classing them mentally as kids.

Mabs wouldn't throw her out of the play! Mabs aren't! And anyway, who was Mabs to question her comings and goings?

She chuckled as she strode on. Blov Mabs! Mabs probably knew that she had told a lie about meeting someone at the gates—and Rhoda had.

Rhoda's friend waited much farther than the gates. She lived, in fact, in Friardale, and Rhoda was going all that way to see her, which meant, of course, that she would not be back until shortly after lights-out.

But Rhoda didn't care. She had arranged with Helen Hunter, who was looking after the Lower Fifth during the absence of Miss Wright, to mark her present at call-over. So what did it matter?

As for the lines in the play—well, dash it, she could learn those up without Mabel Lynn's assistance!

Oh, yes, she had laid her plans very well indeed. Her only drawback was that she had not got a pass-out of gates—yet Helen Hunter couldn't give her that after six o'clock at night.

But anyway, it was only Boker who would be in charge of gates.

Easy enough to bluff Boker. Not so easy if Piper had been porter, though.

She reached the gates, noticing the light in the porter's lodge to which Boker had just that minute returned, to attend to his early locking-up duties. One of the main gates was still open.

Boker was at the door of the lodge. He stepped forward as Rhoda, with a disdainful glance towards him, strutted towards the open gate.

"Er—excuse me a minute, miss," Boker said.

Rhoda paused.
"What's the matter, Boker?"

"You don't happen to be going out, miss?" Boker asked.

"If I am, is that any business of yours?" Rhoda demanded freezingly.

"Yes, miss," Boker said simply. "It's all right if you've got a pass, of course, but I've got my duty to do, same as Piper had his to do. If you just wouldn't mind showing me your pass—"

Rhoda paused. Her eyes were gleaming in the darkness.

"I don't see," she said loftily, "why I should show you my pass. Please stand aside, boy!"

"Sorry, miss, but it's more'n my job's worth!"

Rhoda bit her lip.

"And you think," she said, "I'm going to take orders from a guttersnipe like you? Stand aside, I say!"

Boker's rugged face became a little obstinate. A flush ran into his freckled cheeks.

"I don't think you've got any right to call me names!" he said steadily.

"I'm only doing what I'm paid for. All you've got to do is to show me your pass, then you can go! It's little enough to do, miss!"

Rhoda breathed hard and furiously. She said no more. But suddenly a dis-

sorry, but I've got my job to think of. If I did what I ought to do, I should report you, but I ain't keen on reporting. If the gate is closed you can't get out, I reckon, and that's good enough for me! Good-night, miss!"

And Boker, clinching the argument, walked back into Piper's lodge.

Any girl with a grain of common sense would have accepted that and retired. Any girl would have recognised in the good-natured Boker's retort that he was offering her a chance to get out of the argument gracefully.

But in her present frame of mind Rhoda was hardly likely to be reasonable. Fuming, flaring anger against Boker filled her. She'd jolly well show that ill-bred upstart if he could say no to her!

And if Boker wouldn't let her out—well—

Rhoda did not think. Had she done that she might have thought twice about the feat she attempted to accomplish.

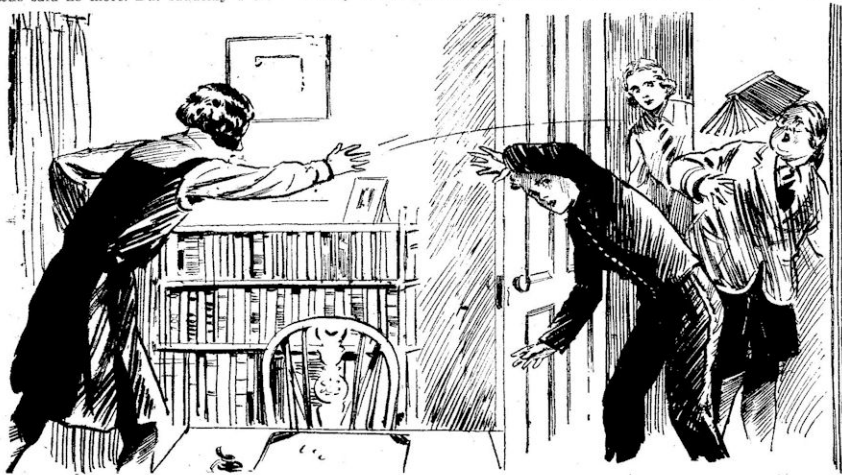
Firmly she caught hold of the gate,

"Then get it—get—!" There came an ominous tearing sound. "Oh, my goodness!" Rhoda raved. "Oh, my hat! I—I—" she gave a sudden, piercing scream as the coat, giving way beneath her weight, tore badly, and, with another terrified yell, she came catapulting into the drive, falling on hands and knees.

If she had been a rubber ball Rhoda could not have bounced up more quickly. For one moment she glared at Boker, and then, fury overcoming her, hurled herself at him, thumping his chest with clenched fists.

"You fool!" she raved. "You—" "Here, hold on, miss!" Boker cried in alarm, as he staggered under the rain of blows. "I didn't—" And then he caught her hands. "Miss, quick!" he cried. "Chuck it! Miss Prim—"

But his well-intentioned warning came too late. For out of the gloom suddenly appeared a figure. It was the figure of Miss Primrose, the headmistress. Behind her, only half seen in the gloom,



GOOD-HEARTED Boker had come to sympathise, but Rhoda's reply was a hurled book. It missed Boker, and brought a howl from fat Bessie Bunter in the passage, just as the captain of the school appeared on the scene. Someone was due for trouble!

dainful arm was thrust out, pushing Boker back. Head-in air, Rhoda strode on.

Not quickly enough. For Boker, recovering with astonishing suddenness, had nipped in front of her. And Boker, catching the open gate, flung it to with a loud clang.

Rhoda stood still, petrified. "You—you dare!" she cried. "Open that gate!"

"Sorry, miss," Boker said grimly.

"Open it, I tell you!"

Boker's answer was to turn the key in the lock.

Rhoda's eyes snapped. If she had been angry before, she was furious now. She glared furiously at the page-boy. But it was obvious that Boker meant what he said. In the light of the lamp over the gate his rugged, pleasing face was pale, but firm and determined.

"Boker, will you open that gate?" Rhoda raved.

"No, miss!" Boker replied. "I'm

with an effort born of consuming anger, swung herself on to the cross rail.

She shouldn't get out, shouldn't she?

Sheer fury took her to the top of the railings, and there Rhoda jerked to a halt, as her fur-trimmed coat caught on the spikes that topped the gate.

And suddenly her foot slipped. She gave a shriek which brought Boker rushing from the lodge as she felt herself falling backwards. "With a jerk, she was caught and held dangling in space between the top of the gates and the ground.

Alas! for poor Rhoda! And alas! for her coat!

The fur collar, impaled on the spiked rail, held Rhoda suspended.

"Oh laws!" Boker gasped. "Oh, you silly!"

"Let me down!" Rhoda shrieked furiously. "My coat, you idiot—"

"Well, miss, I'll have to get a ladder, and—"

were Barbara Redfern, Mabel Lynn, Clara Trevlyn, and Bessie Bunter.

Miss Primrose came to a standstill. Her voice, outraged and scandalised, quivered through space:

"Rhoda! Stop! Stop this minute, I say! How dare you—how dare you, girl!"

More Trouble for Rhoda



RHODA RHODES' jaw fell. Too late she seemed to realise what she had been

doing.

Babs, Mabs, Clara, and Bessie glanced hopelessly at each other.

"I—I—" Rhoda stuttered.

"What is the meaning of this?" Miss Primrose demanded.

"Nothing," Rhoda said sulkily. "Boker!"

Boker gulped.
"Oh lawks! She—she didn't mean any harm, Miss Primrose. She was just sort of excited—"

"Excited or not, I am not going to have my girls behaving like that!" Miss Primrose said sternly. "And as, apparently, Rhoda refuses to tell me what led to this disgraceful scene, I demand an explanation from you, Boker. Why did Rhoda attack you?"

Boker coloured uncomfortably. He looked miserably unhappy in that moment.

"Well," he said—"oh dear. I—I don't like sneaking, Miss Primrose. All right, then"—and he gulped. "Miss Rhoda tried to climb the gates."
"Indeed! And why should she try to climb the gates?"

"Because," Boker said unhappily, "I had to shut them to stop her going out, Miss Primrose. And—and—well, Miss Rhoda wouldn't take my advice, you know, and tried to get out on her own."
"You beasty sneak!" Rhoda quivered.

"Rhoda, enough!" Miss Primrose said sternly. "Boker is only doing his duty. Thank you, Boker. You did quite rightly. I think," Miss Primrose added acidly, "I understand, Rhoda, and I would remind you that Boker has been appointed by me to carry out certain school duties, and, as such, is entitled to as much respect from you as mistresses carrying out theirs. You will take a hundred lines for being discourteous to Boker."
"For trying to break out of school without authority you will be detained for the next half-holiday—tomorrow afternoon—I beg your pardon, Mabel?"

"I said, 'Oh, my hat!'" Mabs muttered. "I mean—oh dear! But—but Rhoda's in the play, you know."
"That," Miss Primrose said sternly, "is no affair of mine!" Rhoda herself should have thought of that. Rhoda, you will come with me!"

And Rhoda, with a bitter, hate-laden glance at Boker, went.

The chums blinked at each other.
"Well," said Mabs glumly, "that's finished it! The idiot! You'd jolly well think, after the warning I gave her, she'd have had sense enough to keep out of trouble—"

Babs glanced at her.
"You won't give her another chance?" she asked.

"No!" Mabs decided. "I'm through! In any case, what's the use? She's got lines to do to-night—that means no rehearsal. She's gated to-morrow afternoon—again no rehearsal!"

Boker coughed.
"I—I'm sorry, you know. But—but it wasn't my fault," he said unhappily.
"Of course it wasn't!" Babs said.
"But—but she blames me," Boker said.

"Oh, stuff! She'll get over it when she's cooled down," Babs assured him. "Anyway, never mind Rhoda, Boker. It's just occurred to us that you missed your tea by helping us—"

"Oh, miss, that's all right!" Boker said. "I didn't even notice it!"

"But we did," Babs said. "And we just want to tell you, Boker, that if you like to look in at Study No. 4 when you've locked up, there'll be a snack waiting for you. Don't forget!"

And as Boker stumbled his thanks, the chums walked away.

Boker gulped.
"Now," he told himself, "they're sports, if you like! It's a real pleasure to do anything for them!"

It was seven o'clock then, and Boker's duties were to lock up all the outside

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gates—excepting, of course, the mistresses' private entrance, which would not be locked until final lights-out at ten o'clock.

Very careful and very conscientious was Boker. He was enjoying his new duties and the new feeling of power it gave him.

At the same time he was enjoying even more the prospect of resuming his task on the smashed scenery in the new garage.

The only cloud, indeed, on the horizon, was the little affair in which Rhoda Rhodes had been involved.

For Boker hated to feel that he was in anyone's bad books, and he was sorely troubled in his mind at having been forced to report the tempestuous Rhoda to Miss Primrose.

Frowning a little, he completed his round, returning to Piper's lodge.

Just as a measure of extra caution he flashed his light on the lock of the gates before he turned in.

"O.K.," he said to himself. "Well, now I'm free until ten o'clock. Time to get—Hallo! What's that?"

He moved forward, his eyes on the object which the ray of his torch had picked out for him. It was a piece of skin, Boker found—skin with a soft, skin, Boker found—skin with a soft, long. He frowned a little as he picked it up; then, recognising it, pursed his lips.

"Crumbs, this must have been torn out of Miss Rhoda's coat," he told himself. "I'll bet she's having fits about self. It'd better let her have it back, and

I can tell her I'm sorry she got into a row."

And carefully Boker stuffed it into his pocket.

He went into the lodge. There, in Piper's cupboard, he hung up the keys. Just in case he should be away longer than he intended, he put a fresh lump of coal on the fire, carefully placed the guard round it, and then, extinguishing all the lights except the one over the portico, thrust his hands into his pockets and strode on towards the school.

There, entering by the servants' entrance, he tramped off at once to the Lower Fifth quarters. Rather hesitantly he paused outside the door of Study No. 12. After a moment's pause he knocked.

"Come in!" snapped an irritable voice from the interior.

The voice was that of Rhoda Rhodes. Had Boker only known it, that moment was about the worst he could have chosen for his peace-making mission, for Rhoda had just returned from a visit to Mabel Lynn, in which she had been told flatly and finally of Mabs' decision—and that, if you please, after she had written home, telling her parents she had the biggest and most important part in the fantasy which they, with a crowd of other parents, would witness.

"Please, Miss Rhoda—" Boker said as he entered.

Rhoda was at the table, an impetuous sheet before her. Her eyes flashed when she saw her visitor.
"You'll be greeted." "Get out!"

Boker flushed.

"I—I just came along—"

"Get out!" almost shrieked Rhoda, and in a moment that ungovernable temper of hers was in flames again.
"Get out—and jolly well stop out!"

"But, Miss Rhoda," Boker said hurriedly, "I'd like to tell you how sorry—"

Rhoda jumped up, her teeth showing in fury. She grabbed at the book on the table beside her. Passionately she aimed it. In time Boker saw it and ducked. The book, swishing over his head, crashed through the open door into the passage. And then suddenly came a howl.

"Ow! Ow-wow! Sus—somebody's hit me with a crowbar! Wow-ow-wow! I'm stunned!" bellowed Bessie Bunter's voice. "Sus—save me, someone!"

And Boker, jumping into the corridor, found Bessie Bunter in the act of slithering down the wall, the book at her feet.

At the same moment Dulcia Fairbrother, head girl of the school, came up.

One Good Turn—



"RHODA!" Dulcia snapped.

Rhoda, coming to the door, stared guiltily and furiously.

"Well?"

"That's not the way to speak to me!" Dulcia rapped. "What do you know about this?"

"Ask him!" Rhoda retorted spitefully, pointing to Boker, who was at that moment assisting plump Bessie to her feet. "He started it. He came in to gibe and jeer. I told him to get out. He wouldn't. I thought for a moment that he was going to throw my ink-well at me, and I just acted in self-defence," she added.

"Oh, Miss Rhoda!" Boker gasped. Dulcia's eyes narrowed a little.

"Even temporary porters aren't allowed to pow-wow in junior studies," she said. "You cut off!"

And Boker, hotly crimson, "cut off." Straight back to the garage he went. Thoughfully he took stock of his work. No doubt about it, there was plenty of it to do—tons of it, in fact. But Boker was not dismayed. Not if Boker could help it should Miss Redfern & Co. be let down.

The palace courtyard scene wasn't too bad; that could be patched up. The throne-room scene presented a bit of a problem, however; he'd have to build two entirely new sets of steps for that, and at the same time rig up a new turret. But the woodland scene, that, being of the most fragile—most of it made only of plywood—strengthened by wooden struts—that was hopeless.

But Boker loved solving these problems; he loved all woodwork. Energetically he got to work, and he toiled until lights-out—manfully, earnestly, steadfastly. Lights-out came, calling him to other duties, and, reluctantly, postponing his task, he completed his rounds.

Rather dubiously he collected the Lower Fifth's shoes and placed them in the woodshed. Well, after all, that would give him an extra hour on the scenery to-morrow morning.

Once more he returned to the garage. Until long past midnight he worked, and then, tired out, went to the lodge to snatch a few hours' rest.

And early next morning—
"Come on, you early birds!" Baba whooped in the Fourth Form dormitory. "Mabs, wake Clara! Bessie! Leila! To the woodshed!"

They got up, yawning. Hurriedly and shiveringly they dressed in the raw morning air. Down to the woodshed in a group they trotted, to find that Boker very thoughtfully had lined up the shoes, with black and brown polish and dubbin and brushes and rags.

Babs grinned.
"Good old Boker!" she chuckled. "Right-ho! Off we go! Come on, Bessiekins! Stop yawning, you old grampus! Clara, you start from this one! I'll start from this. Now, backs into it." And Babs commenced industriously. "All for the good of the cause, you know."

All for the good of the cause, indeed! With energy and enthusiasm they set to work. Here, at least, was a job they could do, and materially relieve Boker by doing it. Easy enough to polish shoes—except that Bessie, mistaking dubbin for brown polish, was short-wittedly plastering a pair of brown shoes with it. For half an hour they dabbed and brushed and rubbed.

"Fine!" Leila panted. "Zip up, though, Rolypolykins! You've been on that one pair of shoes since we started, I guess!"

Bessie's already red face grew redder. "Well, I can't get the blessed things to shine!" she protested.

"Use some elbow grease!" Clara advised.

"Eh? I don't see any elbow grease," Bessie said. "And what do you want to use elbow grease on a pair of shoes for, silly? Elbow grease is for elbows, isn't it? Anyway, I'm blowed if I've ever heard of elbow grease!"

Babs chuckled.
"There isn't such a thing as elbow grease," she explained. "Elbow grease is just a slang term. Silly. It means put beef into it."
"Eh?"
"But why," Bessie demanded warmly, "do I want to put beef into it?"

And put beef into what? In any case, there is no beef—"

"O.K.," sighed Leila. "Give it up. You win, Bessie."

"But I don't see—"
Fortunately, the door opened at that moment, and the bright, cheerfully smiling face of Charles Henry Percival Boker peered in.

"Good-morning, young ladies!" he said. "I'm sure it's awfully good of you to do those shoes. I've got the courtyard scene finished, and—and all it wants now is Miss Redfern, in a dab or two of paint. If you'd like to go and have a look at it, I'll take the shoes along to the Lower Fifth dormitory," he added.

"Yes, rather! Come on!" Bessie said. And while Boker gathered up the shoes they went off to the garage—and there, one and all, they beamed with pleasure.

Boker had been as good as his word. Boker, working like a Trojan, had crested the scene in a corner of the garage, and even their inexperienced eyes told them at once he had made an excellent job of it.

As Mabs said, if they hadn't known the scene had been smashed, nobody could have guessed that it had ever suffered mutilation.

"Oh, what a brick!" Mabs breathed, referring to Boker.

Which was precisely what Boker was thinking about them, as, staggering under his pile of shoes, he made his way to the Fifth Form dormitory.

Backing-Up Boker!



"DUBBIN!" muttered Rhoda Rhodes.

"And dubbin to you!" Joan Carson said, good-humouredly. "What's that?"

A new slang word?"

"Dubbin!" repeated Rhoda, and stared blankly at the shapely, expensive-looking leather shoes she held in her hand. "Somebody's cleaned my shoes with dubbin, instead of polish!"

"Flora Cann, captain of the Lower Fifth Form, grinned.

"Somebody with a sense of humour—what?" she remarked. "All the same, I don't see what there is to get peeved about. Dubbin's jolly good for shoes. Keeps the wet out, you know."

"Always put dubbin on my hockey shoes!"

"But these aren't my hockey shoes!" almost shrieked Rhoda. "These are my best brown. I only bought them a fortnight ago. Now look at them!"

A few of the girls in the Lower Fifth dormitory gathered round.

The shoes showed nothing but a dull lustre, and between the uppers and the hand-sewn welts of the soles was a smudge of thick, greasy yellow paste, whose smell was unmistakable.

"Tough!" Genevieve Chaterton sympathised. "Old Boker must have been dreaming, you know."

"Boker?" Rhoda looked up quickly.

"What's he got to do with it?"

"Well, Boker does our shoes, doesn't he?" Lucinda Finch asked.

Rhoda paused.

Boker had done this, had he? Boker! Her eyes glamed a little. A rather cruel smile came to her lips.

"Boker, eh? Yesterday Boker had got her into a row. What a chance to get her own back!"

She put on another pair of shoes—a black pair—and at once hurried off to find Mrs. Carey, the housekeeper, to

whom Boker was responsible for all his duties.

In the hall, however, she met Miss Primrose.

"Miss Primrose regarded her a little coldly.

"Good-morning, Rhoda!" she greeted. "What is that you have in your hand?"

"My brown shoes," Rhoda said.

"Indeed? And what are you carrying shoes about the school for?"

"Because," Rhoda said, glad indeed to have the opportunity of bringing the matter to the notice of Cliff House's highest authority. "I was going to complain to Mrs. Carey. I don't know who is responsible for cleaning these shoes, Miss Primrose, but they are practically ruined. They are new shoes, too. My father paid two guineas for them only a fortnight ago. Somebody has smothered them in grease!"

Miss Primrose frowned.

"Let me see!" she said.

Rhoda handed them over. Miss Primrose took one look at them and pursed her lips.

"Thank you, Rhoda! You need not trouble to go to Mrs. Carey. I will take this matter up myself," she said.

"Boker is the boy who cleans these shoes," she added, or Rhoda's unnecessary information, "and if, as it appears, Boker's manifold duties are growing too much for him, I must make some other arrangements for relieving him. Will you kindly find Boker, please, and send him to me!"

"With pleasure!" Rhoda purred.

"And her heart filled with glee, she went off in search of Boker.

It was not a protracted search. Most of the Junior School, fearfully interested in its Christmas Fantasy, had heard with dismay of the accident to the scenery.

Most of them had also heard of the gallant way in which Boker had stepped into the breach, and quite a considerable number of them had strolled over to the new garage to see how the good work was progressing.

Fay Chandler of the Lower Third directed Rhoda to the scene of operations, and Rhoda, arriving there, found quite a crowd of admiring girls clustered in the doorway.

She elbowed forward.

"Boker!" she called.

Boker admiringly watching Barbara Redfern as she put a finishing dab of paint to the creoper on the wall of the Palace Courtyard, started.

"Oh, Miss Rhodes—"

"Miss Primrose wants you!" Rhoda said, with spiteful relish. "And you'd better hurry up! She's in an absolutely tearing rage—and serve you jolly well right!"

"Oh, laws!" Boker cried, in dismay. "What have I done?"

"You'll see!" Rhoda told him.

"You'll jolly soon see! Perhaps," she added vindictively. "You won't be so keen to mess about in things that don't jolly well concern you when Primmy's dressed you down! It's no wonder that you can't do your own job properly, when you're sticking your nose into Fourth Form affairs!"

"Meaning?" Clara Trevely asked dangerously.

"Well, is it his job to mend your beauty scenery?" Rhoda flared.

"Never mind that—that wasn't the question," Clara retorted. "What Boker does with his spare time is his own affair. What do you mean by saying he can't do his own job?"

"Yes, rather, a murmur. Angry, indignantly and hostile, the faces which glared at Rhoda then.



WHEN Boker arrived Babs & Co. were making short work of the shoe-cleaning job. Boker was helping the chums, so they were choosing this method of helping Boker!

"Well," she returned, "is it doing his own job properly to dubbin a pair of expensive shoes, which were meant to be polished?"

"Oh, crumbs! Oh, I sus-ay—"

stuttered Bessie.

Babs looked at her quickly.

"Is that what Primmy wants to see him about?"

"Oh, let him go and find out!" Rhoda retorted, and, with a scowl, flung off on her heel.

Boker looked worried.

"Cheer up!" Babs gently took his arm. "It's not your fault, after all, Boker. If anything's wrong with the shoes, that's our fault, and you're not going to be blamed for what we've done. Mabs, Clara, Bessie, Leila!" she added. "Come on!"

"But—" Boker stuttered.

"Oh, stuff! We're standing by you," Clara sniffed. "Jean, just keep an eye on the scenery."

And, in spite of Boker's earnest protestations, they accompanied him to Miss Primrose's study. The headmistress stared when they all tramped in.

"Barbara, why—why, bless my soul! Boker, remain here, please; I want you. Barbara, you may retire until I have finished speaking to Boker!"

"Yes, Miss Primrose," Babs said respectfully, "but, as it happens, we want to speak to you about Boker, too. If you're blaming Boker because Rhoda Rhodes' shoes were dubbed—"

"Miss Redfern!" Boker broke out agitatedly.

"Boker, please!" Miss Primrose looked angry. "Barbara, I refuse to allow you to interfere in matters that do not concern you," she said. "Leave the room at once!"

Babs, however, stood her ground.

"I'm sorry, Miss Primrose, but you see, this business does concern us. Because," Babs added calmly, "it wasn't Boker who cleaned the shoes this morning. We cleaned them!"

"What?"

"Oh, Miss Redfern—" Boker said perspiringly.

"We did," Babs repeated. "Because Boker is helping us to put our scenery right, we thought we'd do a good turn for Boker."

"I see!" Miss Primrose's face cleared a little. "And you knew this, Boker?"

"Y-yes, Miss Primrose!"

"But it wasn't his fault," Clara put in. "We insisted—"

"Thank you, Clara, I am not speaking to you!" Miss Primrose's lips compressed a little. "It was Boker's duty to clean the Lower Fifth's shoes. Boker should have asked permission before delegating that duty to anyone else. What he does in his spare time is his business; but his hobbies most certainly must not be allowed to interfere with his school work. You hear that, Boker?"

"Oh dear! Oh, yes, Miss Primrose!" Boker said unhappily.

"Very well! Then take it as a warning," Miss Primrose said, not unkindly. "I have no objection to your assisting these girls, but see that such assistance does not interfere with your own work. You may go. You girls, too!"

Rather dismayed, they went out, Boker red to the ears with embarrassment. In the corridor they paused.

"Well," said Babs, and heaved a sigh. "Oh, Boker, I'm sorry!"

"That's all right, miss," Boker said cheerfully. "No harm done, after all!"

"But you can't get through all that on your own, you know," Mabs added.

"Oh, dash! I'm bothered if I know what to do. One thing's certain—we can't let Boker go on getting into trouble for our sakes!"

Boker stiffened.

"Please, Miss Lynn, no!" he said seriously. "Let me carry on! I can do it—I will do it, and—after all, I've earnestly, haven't I?" he added earnestly. "I can manage all right—you leave that to me. And it would spoil your play, wouldn't it, not to have the scenery?"

"Well, of course!"

"Then," Boker said finally, "you shall have it! I give you my word on

that, Miss Lynn. And—and don't worry about me," he added gallantly. "I'll manage somehow!"

Bessie Plays Her Part!



AND manage, somehow, Boker was determined.

While Babs and Mabs strolled off to the Common-room, there to await breakfast-bell, he went back to the garage.

He had no thought for breakfast—he could fit that in later. His next duties would be to take the newspapers and the letters round—but they wouldn't arrive for another half an hour yet, and in half an hour Boker could do a wonderful lot with that hammer and saw of his.

The girls, expecting breakfast-bell, had vanished from the garage when he reached it. Boker was relieved to find that. Cheerily he dragged out some new lengths of battening—if only he got those sawn into lengths, it would save time.

He whistled as he worked, never heeding the breakfast-bell which at that moment rang, and too utterly absorbed in his task to notice the girl who was coming across the lawn from the direction of the school.

That girl was Rhoda Rhodes. And Rhoda, at that moment, was in anything but a good humour.

Boker had not got into the row she had planned for him. Boker had been saved by Babs & Co.

Bitter was Rhoda. Vengeful was Rhoda. Every atom of spite in that venomous nature of hers was concentrated now upon the page-boy.

Long before she reached the garage she saw Boker, steadily sawing away, his back towards her.

Then suddenly she chuckled.

Well, here was a chance to have her own-back on Boker! Boker, unaware of her proximity, whistled cheerfully and untidily as he sawed away. Whistle and saw

drowned the noise of her approach—though, to be sure, Rhoda was making hardly a sound.

He never even heard the faint squeaking of the heavy door as Rhoda pushed it to, but he became suddenly aware that the garage had darkened, and stopped, turned, saw in hand, towards the door.

"Then he cried out:

"Here, I say!" The door slammed home. Boker, staring in flabbergasted dismay, heard the metallic rattle outside as the lock was thrust through the staple, making him a prisoner!

"BOKER! Has anyone seen Boker?"

Sarah Harrigan of the Sixth asked that question, as she intruded her rather sour face into Study No. 4, where Babs and Mabs had just returned from breakfast.

Babs stared.

"Boker? Why, what's the matter?" "The matter," said the amputational prefect humbly, "is that Boker is missing. Miss Primrose wants to know why her morning paper has not been delivered. Rhoda Rhodes has been complaining that the letters aren't posted up. You seem to be having a great deal to do with Boker—perhaps you know where he is?"

But Babs shook her head.

"No, Sarah!" Sarah sniffed. She went out. The two chums looked uneasily at each other.

"Oh, my hat! What's happened to him now?" Babs muttered. "Mabs, you don't think he can still be in the garage? Perhaps he's forgotten his head."

"Mabs, however, shook her head. "No, Boker!" she said. "Boker's keen on mending that scenery, but he's also keen on his job. He's in the school somewhere, you can bet—doing something else, probably. Come on, let's go and see if we can find him."

And off at once they trotted, anxious from the depths of their hearts that no further trouble should come to the generous-hearted lad, who was so maternally assisting them out of their troubles.

While Bessie, who had saved a few scraps from her breakfast for her pet Pekinese, Ting-a-ling, was rolling along outside in the direction of the Pets' House.

Bessie was very fond of Ting-a-ling, and Ting-a-ling, on his part, was fond of his mistress.

There was a fat beaming smile on her face as she pushed open the gate that led to the pets' house, to be immediately greeted with noisy barks of welcome from the forty or fifty dogs which had their kennels there.

"Hallo!" Bessie beamed. "All right, Peter—don't make so much noise, you know. Hallo, Pluto! Hallo, Brutus! Hallo, Pedro—" This to the bloodhound, one of the latest newcomers to the kennels, and the property of Christine Wilmer of the Lower Fifth. "I say—say, don't make such a fuss, you know, I haven't got anything for you at all—only for Ting. Ting! I say, Ting—"

"Yowp!" yapped Ting-a-ling, and sat up on his hind legs, cocking a bright and cheekily expectant eye at his mistress. "Wuff!" he said.

"Nice old Ting, isn't he?" Bessie said. "Did um's love um's tickle mistress? Look what I've brought, Ting!" And she unfolded a napkin, whereat the barking grew louder. "Ting likes kidneys, don't you, old boy?" she added. "Here we are, then, take it into your kennel, and don't tell anyone I gave it to you, you know."

Bessie smiled as the little fellow eagerly took the kidney. Dear old Ting! Well, that was that, and turning with an absent-minded pat for Pedro's glossy head, she trotted out again.

Carefully she closed the gate behind her, paused, casting a doubtful eye at the clickshop, and mentally wondering what she could buy with the remaining three-halfpence she had left over from yesterday's pocket-money. And then suddenly she jumped.

For from the new garage across the drive, where the smashed scenery was stored, came a muffled thumping, accompanied by an unmistakable voice.

"Here, I say, lemme out! Lemme out! I'm shut in!"

"Boker!" Bessie cried.

"Let me out!" yelled Boker again. Bessie blinked. Then she ambled across to the door.

"Crums! I say, is that you, Boker?"

"Oh, is that you, Miss Bunter? Yes; it's me," Boker said.

"But how did you lock yourself in there?"

"I didn't lock myself in," Boker objected. "Somebody else did. Please, Miss Bunter, let me out!"

In great wonderment Bessie blinked at the padlock. She took it out. Boker, red-faced, almost panting, confronted her.

"Oh, laws! Thanks, Miss Bunter!" he said. "I say, have you had breakfast?"

"Why, yes; ten minutes ago! But what—Here, I say, come back!" Bessie called. "Come back!"

But Boker did not come back. Boker had suddenly, and most apprehensively, thought of the letters and newspapers which would be awaiting his attention in the lodge.

A glance at the school clock showed him the hour, causing his heart to jump.

Nearly half-past eight, and these letters and newspapers supposed to be delivered at eight o'clock!

Hastily he vanished into his lodge, gasping with relief when he found them on the table. He hoped to goodness nobody had missed them.

But that hope was doomed to be dispelled when he reached the school. A crowd of girls were collected in Big Hall, surrounding the empty letter-rack, some of them looking peeved and impatient indeed.

There was a roar as Boker was seen.

"What, my hat, here he is!"

"Why, have you been doing, you slacker?"

"Oh dear! I'm sorry, young ladies!"

Boker gasped confusedly. "I—I was in the garage, and somebody shut me in."

Rhoda Rhodes, who was among the group, broke into a loud laugh.

"That's a good story," she scoffed.

"You mean you were in the garage, and just forgot the time. Too jolly busy meddling about with that silly scenery to attend to your real duties."

"Oh, be quiet!" Clara Trevlyn snapped.

"Rats!" Rhoda returned. "What the dickens is he paid for? What a yarn! Who the dickens could have shut him up in the garage? Tell the truth, Boker!"

"But that is the truth," Boker said, a little nettled. "Miss Bunter will tell you the same, because it was she who let me out."

"Yes, rather, you know," Bessie said, rolling into Big Hall at that moment.

Some fearful cat did lock Boker in.

If it hadn't been for me, you know,

he might have stopped in the garage and starved to death."

"Meaning," Rhoda sneered, "you're just backing him up. Don't tell lies, Bessie Bunter!"

Bessie reddened.

"Look here—"

"Meaning, more likely," Clara Trevlyn scornfully put in, "that you locked him up, Rhoda. Oh, don't glare. We all know you've got a down on Boker, and it would be one of your tricks, wouldn't it, to try to make him late because he's helping us, you rotten!" "You"—and then Clara stopped as Miss Primrose rather angrily rustled upon the scene. "Oh crumbs! I'm sorry, Miss Primrose!"

"I should hope you were," Miss Primrose said disapprovingly. "You will take twenty lines, Clara, for calling Rhoda such names. Ah, Boker—there you are! I thought you understood, Boker, that my letters and papers were to be delivered at eight o'clock."

Boker reddened.

"Yes, Miss Primrose; I'm sorry—"

"Why weren't my letters delivered?"

"Oh, laws!" Boker looked appealingly at Babs who, with Mabs, had just strolled upon the scene. "You see, Miss Primrose, I was working in the garage—"

Miss Primrose's lips compressed.

"I imagined I had already made it clear to you, Boker, that your work in the garage was not to impinge in any way upon your own duties."

"No, miss—I mean, y-e-s, ma'am," Boker stammered. "But it would, ma'am, if I hadn't been shut up in the garage in the didn't mean to be late, you see, and—I was only using my own breakfast-time, after all."

Miss Primrose stared hard.

"You assert somebody deliberately locked you in, Boker?"

"Yes, ma'am," Boker said indignantly.

"And that's tut-true, you know, Bessie put in indignantly. "Because I was the one who let him out, you know, Miss Primrose. Sus-somebody had fastened the padlock on the door."

"Oh!" Miss Primrose's eyes rested for a moment upon Rhoda. "In that case," she said, "you are excused, Boker. But the matter cannot end there. I am aware," Miss Primrose added warningly, her gaze glimmering round, "that some of you girls might have thought it a joke to imprison Boker in the garage, but I may tell you all that I do not consider interference with school servants in executing their duties in the nature of a joke at all. If the girl who shut Boker in the garage is here, I ask her to come forward, here and now!" "Were any of you responsible for this?"

There was a silence. More than one eye looked towards Rhoda. Rhoda stood still.

But the eyes of Bessie Bunter, who was standing near Rhoda, suddenly gleamed. Bessie was still red. Inwardly Bessie was wrathful. Bessie often romanced and admitted it, when caught out in her romancing object. To be called a downright fibber—especially when she had been telling the truth, and that scornful!

"Don't tell lies, Bessie Bunter!" of Rhoda Rhodes was still rankling.

Unseen, Bessie's lips pursed themselves into a little round "o."

"Well?" Miss Primrose's eyes glimmered. "I shall not ask again if any of you girls were responsible. Who, if she is among you, shut Boker in the garage?"

"I did," said Rhoda Rhodes.

Or, at least, Rhoda appeared to say that. Actually her lips never moved, and she looked as astounded as the rest when she heard that reply, never guessing that it appeared to emanate from her own lips, and never suspected, a few yards away, that Bessie Bunter was playing a ventriloquist trick.

For Bessie, if she had not a great many other accomplishments, was an expert ventriloquist.

"Rhoda!" Miss Primrose thundered. "Eh? Oh, yes, I'm here," Rhoda stuttered.

"Go to my study!"

"But—but what for?"

"You are perfectly well aware what for," Miss Primrose said, with great asperity. "Have I not just heard your own confession? Please, Rhoda, do not try to look so bewildered, it is too late to withdraw now! It is perfectly obvious," Miss Primrose went on, "that you have a grudge against Boker, and that this is another of your many schemes to bring him into disfavour!"

"But—but—" Rhoda's eyes were wild. "I didn't—"

"That is enough! Go!"

And while Rhoda, the most furiously amazed girl in the world, stumbled away, Bessie gave a quiet, fat chuckle.

The Blow Falls!



"**F**ALL in for dress rehearsal! Fall in! Fall in!" Clara Trevlyn's stentorian voice roared into the Fourth Form dormitory. "Put a jerk in it, slackers!"

It was Thursday, the day before the production of Mabs' fantasy.

And everybody in Junior School was wildly, tumultuously happy. For the fantasy, which had been so seriously threatened two days ago, was in full and hearty swing once again.

Mabs had taken Rhoda Rhodes' place—and everybody agreed from the outset that Mabs made a far, far better fairy prince than even a far, far better fairy prince had made. Everybody was bubbling with eagerness, with good will, with happy anticipation.

But, best of all, two of the three sets of the scenery were again intact.

That was due to Boker—and how everybody's heart was going out to Boker—Boker who had not spared himself; who had never spent a minute of his own time away from the garage!

All day yesterday he had worked like a slave. Far into last night he had worked, too, and, with Babs' artistic assistance, had managed completely to repair the palace courtyard scene and also the throne-room scene.

And there had been no further mischief from Rhoda Rhodes. Not that she had had much opportunity! For the previous afternoon she had spent in detention, and the rest of her spare time had been spent in writing lines!

In fact, Rhoda was finishing the last of a big batch just as the second act of the rehearsal came to a very, very successful end in Big Hall.

Sulkily, still bitterly determined to get her own back on Boker, Rhoda looked into Big Hall. She knew that the page-boy had been asked if he would like to attend rehearsal.

Ah, there the little upstart was, standing with Babs & Co., and a crowd of interested girls who had witnessed the rehearsal. Very charming, very dainty, the chums looked in their costumes, and Mabs was just saying:

"We shall have to rehearse the third act on a plain stage. The scenery's not

finished. Boker's done his best, but even Boker's not a miracle man. Boker, you're sure the third scene will be all right for to-morrow?" she added anxiously.

"Oh, yes, miss!" Boker earnestly assured her.

"But you've got a terrible amount of work to do."

"That's right, miss," Boker cheerfully announced, "but I can do it, you know. What I don't finish during the day I'll make up for to-night. I shall have plenty of time after lights-out."

Rhoda heard that. She scowled, and then, as the information digested in her mind, she started.

"After lights-out!" she muttered to herself. "That means the idiot's going to work half through the night! That means—" And then she laughed softly, gleefully. "Thanks, Boker, for that tippet of information," she muttered. "Thanks very, very much! After lights-out, eh? I think I see at last, my lad, a way of getting you the sack!"

BOOM! Eleven o'clock struck from the clock-tower of Cliff House School.

Like a wraith in the moonlit darkness Rhoda Rhodes stepped from her bed.

Rapidly in the darkness she dressed, hurriedly thrust her feet into rubber-soled gym shoes. Then, with a final look round, she left the room.

Without mishap she reached the lobby window near the Sixth Form quarters, without a sound forced back the catch and gently threw up the window.

She shivered a little in the cold gust of air which rushed at her.

But Rhoda did not mind that. She was hardly conscious of it, indeed. Her face, full of determined purpose, was

hard and vindictive in the darkness, her eyes glowing viciously as she slipped over the sill, dropping, with a soft thud, on to the flagstones outside. Then she gave a little gasp.

"Oh, bother!" she cried irritably. For some unseen projection—an over-looked nail, perhaps, in the woodwork of the window—caught on the thin gold chain of the wrist-watch she was wearing, temporarily holding her back.

Rhoda paused. She rather cherished her wrist-watch—a birthday present from her father. In the darkness she carefully detached the chain, shaking the watch on her wrist to make sure that it was still secure, and never guessing that she had opened one of the links.

Darkness, with the sharp bite of frost in the air, surrounded her. Except from the garage, where a dim light showed, and where the dull, muffled thud of a hammer testified to the labours of the industrious Boker, there was not a sound.

Rhoda flitted down the drive in the direction of the porters' lodge.

She tried the door. That, as she had also expected, was locked. Boker, ever careful, ever cautious, believed in running no risks.

Rhoda smiled, however, as she withdrew a key from her pocket—a key which she had taken care to possess herself of earlier in the day from Dulcinea Fairbrother's study—a key which, as she knew, fitted half the locks in Cliff House and was kept by the head girl for emergencies.

The lock snicked open.

Rhoda stepped inside and tiptoed across the little living-room. She did not switch on the light—that would have



"**W**HO shut Boker in the garage?" demanded Miss Primrose. Rhoda Rhodes was responsible, but what a shock for everyone when that spiteful girl said: "I did it!" Or rather, she seemed to say it. Actually Bessie Bunter had taken command of the situation with her ventriloquism!

been too risky, but the pale moonbeams gave her all the illumination she wanted.

In the corner by the mantelpiece was the small cupboard in which Boker kept all his keys. She opened it, and, careful not to let them jingle, took them down. Then, with a vicious grin, she set off towards the school again.

But this time Rhoda did not enter by the window. Very deliberately she unlocked the main door, throwing it open. In Big Hall she paused, glancing quickly to right and left.

Rhoda's actions in the next few minutes would have astonished beyond reason anyone there to see them. For Rhoda approached the case in which the Cliff House cups and sporting trophies were contained, inserted one of Boker's keys in the lock, and opened it.

Next she took out the cups, placing them gently on the floor. Then again she paused.

"Now where," she asked herself, "to hide these?"

Her eyes fell upon the stage, freshly erected by Boker that afternoon. She crossed to it. As it was only destined to fulfil a purpose for one day, it had been erected in haste. It was no hard matter for Rhoda to prise up one of the floorboards, and in the cavity revealed, stowed the cups. As she did so, there came a faint metallic ring.

But Rhoda, working against time, and with a feverish energy, was too busy to notice that. In the trophies went. Then quietly she dragged the floorboard into place, fitting the nails into the holes of the supports beneath, and standing on them to force them home again.

That done, she rushed off to the servants' entrance. There again she opened the servants' outer door, at the same time throwing wide several of the windows.

"Well, I think that's done the trick!" she muttered.

Down to Boker's lodge she bolted. Carefully she placed the school keys where she had found them, and, locking Boker's door, made her way back to the schoolhouse, entering by the main door.

With a fast-beating heart she crept back to her dormitory, cautiously entering in case any girl should be awake.

None was. With a quiet, satisfied chuckle, Rhoda Rhodes crept into bed.

Well, she thought, let Boker get out of that mess now, if he could!

"**P**oor old Boker! He must have had to work half the night if he has finished the Woodland Scene," Mabel Lynn said. "We really must club round and buy him something, just to show how we appreciate what he's done. I wonder how he's feeling?"

Quite a number of girls in the Fourth Form dormitory were wondering that, on this bright, sunny morning. Quite a number of girls, anxious about the play, had got up extra early.

One and all were grateful to Boker—and anxious, at the same time, to see the work he had done, just to assure themselves that there should be no last-minute hitch. Even Bessie was awake.

"Well, let's go," Clara said. "There may be something we can do for him. Coming, Babs?"

"Yes, rather."
 "And—here, I sus-say, wait for me!" Bessie yelled as she struggled into her clothes. "Look here, you cats, don't go without me. I want to see old Boker, too!"

"Well, come on, ninnie!"
 They waited while Bessie dressed. Then in a group they quitted the dormitory. In great good-humour they

raced down the stairs into Big Hall. Then Babs paused.

"Hallo—there's Primmy, and Miss Charmant!" she said. "They look upset about something!"

"Miss Primrose and Miss Charmant, their adored Form-mistress, stood together in Big Hall. One or two other girls were there, too, looking with rather wondering curiosity towards the Head and the Fourth Form mistress. As Babs paused, scenting trouble in the air, Miss Primrose observed them.

"Barbara!" she called. "Have you seen Boker?"

Babs stared.
 "Boker, Miss Primrose? Isn't he in his lodge? I thought—"

"Boker," Miss Primrose said angrily, "is not in his lodge. I have already been there. Boker has not even slept in his bed at the lodge."

"Oh, my hat!" muttered Mabel.

"I beg your pardon, Mabel?"

"I mean—Mabs coloured. "In that case," she said, "Boker must have been working in the garage all night, Miss Primrose. He was most frightfully anxious to get our scenery fixed for us. I—I hope there is nothing wrong!" she added anxiously.

"There is something most upsettingly wrong," Miss Primrose returned. "If what you say is true, Boker apparently was much more concerned about your scenery than his own duties. Boker," she added, "neglected last night to close either windows or doors, and as a result, a theft has taken place!"

She pointed to the case which usually contained the cups and other trophies, and the chums, noticing the absence of the usual adornments, started.

"Not only," Miss Primrose went on raspingly, "did he leave the main door of the school open, he left every door in the servants' quarters open, and several windows as well!"

The chums stared. They stared in blank consternation, in utter dismay.

Boker! Had Boker so far neglected his duties?

"Oh, but, Miss Primrose," Babs cried, "I—I'm sure Boker wouldn't!"

"No, Miss Primrose said, "is the only one who has possession of the keys, isn't he? Who else could have been responsible? Boker neglected to lock up. The result is that this burglary took place. Meaning," Miss Primrose added, "that I have had to call the police. You say Boker is in the garage, Barbara?"

"Oh dear! We—we think so, Miss Primrose!"

"Very well, I will come with you!"

In a crowd they crossed to the garage, opened the door. And then they all stood still.

Boker was there, fast asleep. He lay huddled on the floor, still dressed in his apron, a hammer in his hand.

But behind him, erected and every part in its place, was the Woodland Scene—as fresh and perfect, with the exception of a few scratches in the paint, as when it had left London.

For a moment silence settled upon them all.

Mabs fell a queer choking sort of lump in her throat.

Boker—dear, gallant, willing Boker! Easy to see what had happened. Boker, desperately determined to keep his promise, had just worked and worked until Nature refused to allow him to work any more. Sheer determination had kept him going through the night to finish that scenery, and at the end of it, his job accomplished, he had fallen into a sleep of utter exhaustion.

But the promise had been kept. The scenery was there. At whatever sacrifice, Boker had kept his word!

"Boker!" Miss Primrose rapped.

Boker opened sleepy eyes.

"Boker!"
 The boy sat up with a jerk, staring bewilderedly for a moment at the figures in the doorway, and then, red-faced and confused, scrambled to his feet.

"Oh laws!" he murmured, in dismay. "I—I must have dropped off. Oh dud—dud! I'm sorry! I had no idea—But—but it's finished," he added proudly, "and—and—". Then he became aware of the coldness of Miss Primrose's expression. He stared. "Oh, laws, Miss Primrose, I—I hope you're not vexed with me! After all, I couldn't let Miss Redfern and her friends down!"

"But you have let the school down," Miss Primrose said acidly. "Thanks to your neglect in failing to lock-up last night, the school cups have been stolen!"

Boker's eyes opened wide.

"But, Miss Primrose, I did lock up!"
 "You could not possibly have locked up. I found doors and windows open. Where are your keys?"

"In—in the lodge, Miss Primrose. But—but I did lock up! I swear I locked-up," Boker said earnestly.

"Then how do you account for the windows and the doors being left open?"

"Boker couldn't. Plain to see he was swept utterly off his balance. Vainly he protested his innocence, vainly protested time and time again that he had made a complete round of the whole school before returning to his lodge and putting the keys away for the night.

The only suggestion he could offer was a suggestion which had already occurred to Babs & Co.—that somebody had got hold of his keys.

But even that was ruled out when, arriving at the lodge, he took the key of his own door out of his pocket to unlock it.

"As this door was locked all the time you were in the garage," Miss Primrose said, "it seems hardly possible that anybody could have interfered with your keys, Boker."

"No, ma'am!" Boker mumbled.

And when they entered, there were the keys, in exactly the position Boker had hung them last night. Miss Primrose's face was stern then.

"Thank you!" she said. "The proof is conclusive, Boker! I am sorry, but I warned you, did I not? If you will neglect your duties you must expect to pay the price of that neglect. Tomorrow, Boker, you will leave this school for good!"

From Babs went up a cry.

"Miss Primrose—" she cried, in horror.

"Barbara, please! This does not concern you! Boker, you hear what I say?"

"Yes, but—but—" Boker looked dazed. "Miss Primrose, I—I didn't!" was all he could protest. "I didn't!"

"Miss Primrose, give him another chance!" Mabs pleaded.

"Mabel, please do not interfere! There can be no question of another chance!"

"Bib—but, Miss Primrose—" Bessie cried, almost on the point of tears.

"Please go back into the school, all of you!" the headmistress said sternly. "My mind is made up. You may carry on with your duties for to-day, Boker. Meantime, I will see about getting someone to take your place."

"We've got to do something!" Barbara Redfern made that announcement almost fiercely in Study No. 4.

There were six girls in that study—Babs herself, Mabs, Bessie, Clara Trevlyn, Leila Carroll, and Gemima Carslain.

And all nodded.

"Boker," Babs went on, "says he did lock up, and I for one jolly well believe him! It seems a pretty big coincidence, anyway, for a burglar to arrive when the windows and doors were open. Apart from which, I do remember myself that one of the servants' doors was locked before we went to bed, because I went along to Mrs. Carey to ask for a piece of sticking-plaster. If you ask me," Babs went on, "somebody somehow got hold of those keys after Boker had locked up, and unlocked after him."

"Oh crumbs! But—but why?" asked Bessie.

"Well, just to get Boker into trouble."

A deep and uneasy silence fell.

"But—but well, blow it, you're not suggesting that someone stole the cups to get Boker into trouble?" Clara demurred.

"No, I'm not suggesting that," Babs said; but her eyes flashed a little.

"Obviously this is the work of somebody who knew Boker's movements pretty thoroughly. Suppose," she added, "it was a girl—a girl who had a grudge against Boker, and wanted him sacked? Supposing she opened the doors, and, just to make the matter more serious, took those cups and hid them?"

"What—ho!" breathed Gemima Carslain.

"You mean our dear Rhoda Rhodes?"

"Who else?" Babs asked quietly.

The chums looked at each other, digesting that. But they saw the sense of it.

"Well," said Clara suddenly, "let's go and see Rhoda!"

And off in a body they went to see Rhoda. But they might have saved their time. Rhoda, of course, most indignantly and furiously denied all knowledge of the deed.

Difficult to know then what to do. And, in any case, the guests who were to witness the fantasy were already starting to arrive.

Desperately Babs & Co. went again to Miss Primrose, imploring her to change her mind; but Miss Primrose was adamant.

"I refuse, Barbara, to listen!" she said. "I am sorry, but Boker must be punished. I shall not, on second thoughts, call in the police until our guests have departed—that would altogether upset things, on a day like to-day. But Boker will go!"

Disappointed and distressed, Babs & Co. took their departure. It seemed nothing could help Boker, except the showing up of the real culprit. And so Rhoda it must be! The question was, how could it be brought home to Rhoda?

Even Babs was beginning to question her theory now.

But there was one girl who did not question it. That was Bessie Bunter. Bessie had no use for Rhoda Rhodes, but had a great faith in Barbara Redfern's opinion.

Babs had said that it was Rhoda, and so Rhoda it must be! The question was, how could it be brought home to Rhoda?

Bessie liked Boker. She had always liked him. And Bessie, with her unwavering faith in the cleverness of the Bunters, had promptly set herself to bring Rhoda to book.

She had no practical interest in the play, not being a part of it, so Bessie was free. And the first thing a real detective did, Bessie thought, was to question the victim.

Off Bessie hurried to the porter's lodge, to find Boker.

Boker was there, haggard, weary, dejected, wondering how he was to face that dear, hard-worked mother of his, and his still unemployed father with the dreadful news?

Nevertheless, he grinned faintly at Bessie.

"Oh, hallo, Miss Bunter!"

"Kik—can I come in, Charles?"

Bessie said.

"Oh, yes; please do!" Boker said.

"That—that is, if you want to," he added. "I hope you don't think what Miss Primrose thinks about—"

"I know I don't," Bessie said.

"I'm here to help you—really. In fact," Bessie said, "I'm going to help

you."



HILDA RICHARDS' SURPRISE PRESENT

THE "SCHOOLGIRL" OFFICE,
FLEETWAY HOUSE,
FARRINGTON STREET,
LONDON, E.C.4.

MY DEAR GIRLS.—Still your lovely letters come flooding (or perhaps avalanching sounds more seasonable!) in to me. And, oh, how I still enjoy reading every single one of them.

As you know, I have been selecting just one letter each week for the past few weeks and sending that reader a tiny present—just a sort of thank-you to you all.

The present isn't meant as a prize in any way—it's not intended as a reward. It is just a present—given for that simplest and friendliest of all reasons—because I like to give presents. And this is the only way in which I can do it.

MYRTLE JOYCE YOUNG is receiving my little gift this week. Myrtle lives at 15, Greenfield Road, Burwash, Sussex—in Rudyard Kipling's village, so she tells me.

Because it is near Christmas, I am sending Myrtle a TABLE TENNIS SET—which I do hope she'll thoroughly enjoy using, with her family and chums, during the cheery indoor evenings.

Thank you, Myrtle, my dear, for a charming letter. And thank you, every one.

My love to you all!

Hilda Richards

P.S.—That nice young person, Patricia, has asked me to remind you about the party-frock that she mentions on her page. I must say it sounds wonderfully attractive to me—and I adore taffeta for party-wear!

you, so don't you worry any more. But I want to ask you some questions, you know. If I'm going to save you, I must know everything—all good detectives have to. Now, will you answer me some questions?"

"I'll do anything you'd like me to do, Miss Bunter," Boker said earnestly, but without faith.

And answer Bessie's questions he did, though it cannot be said that Bessie derived much benefit from them. Boker himself knew so little.

"H'm!" Bessie said, and repeated: "H'm!" with a terrific frown. "Of course, I've got my ideas," she said cautiously. "I think I know who did it, but I wouldn't mention Rhoda Rhodes' name for worlds! I say, you've dropped something," she added, as Boker at that moment took a handkerchief from his pocket, dragging out something else, which fell upon the floor. "Crumbs, it's a piece of fur!"

"Yes, Miss Bunter. That belongs to Miss Rhodes. She left it on the gates the other night, and—and I meant to give it back to her, except that I forgot."

Bessie was gazing at the fur. And suddenly a brilliant inspiration was illuminating her brain.

That fur had given her an idea. In her time, Bessie had read lots of detective literature, and one detective character for whom she had a secret but glowing admiration was Sexton Blake.

Sexton Blake would have solved this mystery as quickly as anything, with a piece of fur like that. All Sexton Blake would have done was to let his bloodhound, Pedro, smell it, and right to the criminal the faithful and sagacious Pedro would have taken him.

Rather excitedly those thoughts were swarming in Bessie's brain. And rather excitedly the Pedro of Sexton Blake was linking up in her mind with

another bloodhound, Pedro, which at that moment was in the pets' house—Christine Wilmer's latest pet.

Bessie blinked.

"I sus-say, can you let me have that?" she asked. "I—I'll give it to Rhoda afterwards."

"Well, Miss Bunter, if you wouldn't mind," Boker said.

So Bessie took it, and hurried off at once to the pets' house.

Detective Bessie Does the Trick!



AND, meantime, parents were gathering in Cliff House.

All that morning car after car was arriving at the gates. All that morning gleeful girls were greeting joyful parents. All that morning Babs & Co.

(Continued on page 16)

(Continued from page 13)

were busy erecting the scenery on the stage. They never even missed Bessie. But just before the fantasy was due to take place they went and saw Boker.

"Cheer up!" Babs said. "Don't be downhearted, Boker. The darkest hour before the dawn, you know. I hear General Mabbeson, the school governor, is here. He's an awful sport, and if everything else fails, we're going to put him with a petition to let you stop on." So cheer up! In any case, we'll see you first thing after the show."

And Boker, at that, having great faith in Barbara Redfern, and knowing that Major-General Mabbeson had certainly a soft spot in his rugged old heart for her, did cheer up. He smiled.

"Thank you, Miss Barbara! It's awfully good of you, and—I do hope the play's a success," he added.

"Thanks to you, old Boker, I'm sure it will be!" Babs said. "But see you later."

She and her chums dashed off then. Big Hall by that time was crowded, and looking quite festive. Every seat had been taken.

And what a cheer when the curtain jerked back, showing the palace courtyard, with all the fairies and courtiers, men-at-arms, and what-not gathered there. And pretty Doris Redfern, bright, beaming, and in her element, tripping the first steps of the new dance which Mabs had specially taught her for the occasion.

Rhoda Rhodes, with her parents, was in the front row. Rhoda was the only one who did not clap or smile. Rhoda had done some quite anxious explaining to her father and mother as to how she had been forced to drop out of the part because of a bad cold, and Rhoda was desperately wondering if they would try to confirm that story through Babs and Mabs when the play was over.

Apart from that, she was feeling anxious on another count, also. For the gold wristlet-watch which she had worn with such pride since her last birthday was unaccountably missing. A search, high and low, had failed to reveal it.

The play went on smoothly, wonderfully.

And still nobody noticed the absence of Bessie Bunter.

And Bessie, for her part, was not thinking of the play.

For Bessie was having a most dreadfully anxious time. She had found out, to her great dismay and disappointment, that Pedro's penchant for tracking down criminals was not nearly equal to his skill in tracking down cats.

As soon as he had sniffed that tuft of fur from Rhoda Rhodes' coat, Pedro had set off at a fine old gallop, almost dragging poor Bessie's arms off at the end of his leash.

Straight for the clock-tower he had made, with Bessie hopefully following.

But, alas! It was a false alarm. Bessie's "criminal" had turned out to be none other than Waffles, the Head's black cat, who rather spitefully had spat fury at Pedro.

Perspiring, but still determined, Bessie was leading him now into the school via the back entrance.

For Bessie had another idea on which, if obvious to another girl, struck Bessie as a real old brain-wave.

As the suspect was Rhoda, why not start in Rhoda's study?

"Ki-come on, you-you animal!" she spluttered wrathfully, as Pedro showed

an inclination to linger and enter the door of the kitchen.

Pedro trotted on; but he looked back fearfully. For underneath that door Pedro had quite plainly scented Mrs. Carey's pet tabby.

They reached the Fifth Form corridor. It was empty, of course. The whole school was at that moment in Big Hall, enjoying with entranced eyes the spectacle of the "Dancing Fairy."

For a moment Bessie paused outside the door, then softly she opened it. Her eyes gleamed.

"Good God, Pedro! Come on, then!" Pedro trotted in, and Bessie again showed him the tuft of fur.

"Here you are!" she said. "This is the room, you know. Smell it, old boy. No, you chump, don't grab it, and worry it like that. It—it's not a cat, you know."

At the word "cat," Pedro looked up hopefully.

"And nun-neither am I, you know," Bessie said wrathfully. "Look here, I thought you were a bloodhound!"

"Wuff!" said Pedro.

"Well, start smelling, can't you?" Again Pedro sniffed; then he got up again, and suddenly started round, casting a quick, alert look towards the door.

"Oh crumbs, he's got it!" Bessie thought excitedly. "Here, wait a minute; don't go without me, you know"—as Pedro whined at the door, and scratched it with his paw. "Oh crumbs, we're on the scent!" Bessie whooped. "Good dog, Pedro! Wait a minute, let me put this lead on my wrist."

"Wuff!" Pedro said impatiently. He was almost darning now. Bessie, an animated gleam in her eyes, wrapped the end of the lead round her fat wrist several times. She opened the door. Pedro emerged into the passage with a rush that brought her up against the wall.

"Wow-wow!" she yelled. "Oh, mum-my hat! Ow! Stop it, you silly!" she said. "You nun-nearly caused me to break my spectacles, and if my valuable spectacles get—Whow!" Bessie hooted; and, without any volition of her own, went slithering along the polished floor of the corridor. "I sus-say—Wow-wow! Stop him, somebody! The dog's gone mad!"

But Pedro hadn't gone mad. Pedro

had spotted something Bessie had not seen.

That was Mrs. Carey's tabby cat, Minnie.

Down the stairs he streaked, dragging the shrieking and helpless Bessie in his train, along the Third Form corridor, and down the flight of stairs that led to Big Hall.

A curtain loomed up before him; it was the curtain, had Pedro only known it, which hid the back of the stage in Big Hall.

Pedro didn't. Bessie in that moment was too breathless and too perspiringly preoccupied in keeping her balance to know it either. The curtain, falling from the ceiling, just reached the end of the staging, which, seeing that it was not intended to be seen by the audience, had not been boarded.

Under the stage Minnie, with a scuffle, disappeared. After her, with a "Whoo!" shot Pedro. And after him, with another howl, vanished hapless Bessie, slithering along the board floor, and pulling up with a crash in darkness, to find a most terrific yelping, barking, and hissing going on around her.

Pedro had found Minnie—and Pedro had got her in a corner. About Bessie a first-class cat-and-dog fight was in progress. And poor Bessie, wedged securely between the floor and the top of the staging, could hardly move.

"AND THAT, ladies and gentlemen," Barbara Redfern said, "is the end of our little show."

There was a roar of applause, a gust of handclapping, as the cast, standing on the stage, bowed again before the audience. Someone cried:

"Speech!"

"Well," said Babs smilingly, "I didn't intend to make a speech, but now you have asked me I should like to say a few words. You have just witnessed a fairy story. I want to tell you another story—the story not of a fairy, but of a page-boy who acted as a fairy godfather to this play. The story begins—" Babs added, and then broke off, as the stage seemed to lift.

"Oh goodness! What on earth—" For suddenly under her feet came a terrible commotion—a bark, a yell, a scuffling and hissing sound, and above it all a wailing, terrified voice.

(Concluded on page 28)

FIRE AT COURTFIELD COLLEGE brings party of Courtfield girls to Cliff House.

No wonder Babs & Co. are thrilled. What a gorgeous time they'll have—japes, games, good-natured rivalry! And so they do. But there is something else, too. The stigma of theft is upon one of the Courtfield girls; the others scorn her; even Cliff House begins to treat her as an outcast.

But not Babs. Despite everyone else, Babs believes in the girl; stands by her; and finally, when suspicion falls upon her again, sets out to prove her innocence.

It is then that Babs makes a discovery which startles the whole school.

There you have the theme of next week's grand long complete HILDA RICHARDS story, which is entitled:—

Order Your Copy Now.



BABS' end of Term Triumph!

Our magnificent Morcove story—



SCHOOLGIRLS IN SOCIETY

By
MARJORIE STANTON

FOR NEW READERS.

BETTY BARTON and her Morcove chums,
POLLY LINTON,
NAOMER NARRA,
PAM WILLOUGHBY,
JUDY CARDEW to mention only a few,
join forces with

JACK LINTON & CO., of Grangemoor, to form
a concert party which, visiting wealthy
Society homes during the Christmas
holidays, is raising a fund on behalf of a
children's home. They have as chaperone,
MISS LESTER, a charming lady they adore.
At Morcove, during preparations, a valuable
concert frock is ruined. Betty & Co.
seek the miscreant in vain—never suspecting
that it is actually Miss Lester! Reaching
Pam's London home, the chums discover
their clothes and props have gone
astray on the train.

(Now read on.)

Miss Double-Face!

"ONLY just got to London then?
But where are all your
chums?"

This was Miss Lester's vivacious cry as she had suddenly confronted Betty and Dave, amidst all the turmoil of the busy railway station.

"Oh, our train got us in an hour ago," Betty answered. "And the others are at Mrs. Willoughby's. But there's some trouble about those theatrical baskets of ours, and so Dave and I taxied back to the station to inquire about them."

"Trouble?" echoed Miss Lester, looking very concerned. "How do you mean, Betty?"

"They've gone astray on the way up from Morcove—we just can't imagine why! I myself sent them off all right."

"How very annoying—serious, isn't it?"

"Well, it is," Betty nodded. "If those baskets are lost, our first performances, anyway, will have to be cancelled. All our stage costumes are in them—lots of properties, too!"

"Dear, dear," Miss Lester deplored, "and at this time of year, when the railway companies are simply swamped with Christmas parcels and holiday luggage! But, there, you two must get back to Mrs. Willoughby's, and leave me to look into the matter. That will be best," she assured them, with her nicest smile.

"Thanks very much," Dave said quietly, "but Betty and I had just made up our minds to get to the bottom of the trouble ourselves. You're going along to Mrs. Willoughby's now?"

"I was, yes; but—"

"Then will you tell them all, please, we're not coming back until we've got hold of those baskets?"

"What! Oh, but that's ridiculous!" cried Miss Lester. "It may be days before anything is heard of them! For what it is worth, I'll inquire—"

"No, we will, thanks!" Dave quietly persisted. "You've been travelling all day; you need a rest."

And Betty became aware of his giving her a "Come along" look.

"Bye for a little while, then, Miss Lester," she said, and stepped to follow Dave as he briskly walked away.

In a moment they were both lost to Miss Lester in the crowd. But, as if their self-reliant conduct had given her uneasy thoughts, she stared the way they had gone. In that transfixed state she was caught by a porter who had charge of her luggage.

"I've got you a taxi, mum!"

"What?" she snapped. "Oh, all right!"

A different woman altogether from the one who had just been so sweet to Betty and Dave, so sympathetic! And, in the taxi, Miss Lester still remained moody, nervous.

All the light that flicked in upon her from the garish streets through which the cab was humming, revealed her handsome face as rather pallid and tense, as she sat thinking hard, at times biting a lip.

"Oh, but they'll never do any good about it this evening!" she muttered at last, trying to banish her guilty fears. "The holiday rush is all in my favour, of course! Only—"

Only—something about Dave Cardew worried her. Plainly he possessed strength of character, an air of shrewdness and efficiency that told her to be more careful than ever, after this.

And the girl who was with him—she, too, came to that, has her head screwed on the right way," Miss

**GREAT TIMES FOR THE
MORCOVE CONCERT
PARTY, UNTIL—THE
TRAITOR IN THEIR
MIDST STRIKES
AGAIN!**

Lester muttered to herself. "Rather a danger. I mustn't forget how she nearly caught me in the act the other night!"

The cab, having crossed the Thames by one of the bridges, was already rushing to the end of its short journey through quiet West End streets. Miss Lester, peering out, knew that in a few moments she would be passing into a great town house teeming with some of the very girls and boys who must never be allowed to suspect. And so she rallied herself by voicing some last fierce words.

"Fool, to be so jumpy! You have only got to pretend as well as you did, down there at Morcove, and they will never suspect. You're their official chaperone, approved by their own headmistress, and by Mrs. Willoughby."

The cab stopped at the kerb. Five seconds later, in the spacious hall of the Willoughby town house, smiling Miss Lester was surrounded by juniors who were showing the keenest delight over her arrival.

"Mother asked me to say how sorry she is at having had to go out, but it was an engagement she just couldn't cancel," Pam dutifully remarked.

"Oh, and Betty and Dave are away for a bit—"

"I ran into them at the station!" cried Miss Lester. "And I was so sorry to hear about those baskets being missing! Anyhow, though, don't worry, my dears! In a few days, perhaps, we shall hear something."

A few days!

Polly and a few others rather wondered at Miss Lester expecting them to be comforted by such a remark as that.

"She simply can't know what our arrangements are—or else she's forgetting," grinned the Madcap, drifting back to the grand drawing-room with Judy Cardew, Madge Mindon, and Tess Trelawney. "We give our first show to-morrow night!"

"And we've some of the dress-making to finish, in the meantime," was Judy's glum reminder. "We ought to be hard at work first thing in the morning."

There came a ring at the front door bell, at sound of which Polly joyfully guessed:

"Betty and Dave, back now—hurrah!"

All who flocked out into the hall found, however, the manservant opening the door to a stranger—an over-coated, black-hatted young man, with a Press-camera slung at his side by a strap. He was proffering a visiting-card, whilst briskly addressing the Willoughby's portly retainer, who next

BETWEEN OURSELVES



MY DEAR READERS,—A spirit of gaiety is in the air! I don't suppose you have noticed it yet—or, if so, not the same spot of spirit as the one I'm referring to, because it's pervading the offices of the *SCHOOLGIRL*—but it's begun to get a grip on Your Editor, all the same.

It's the spirit of Christmas. A little previous, you say, with Christmas still three weeks away? Well, perhaps it is, but we Editorial folk have to think of Christmas a long time before most people in order to get the Christmas Number of your favourite paper ready in time. And we love it, too! You see, when other people are just beginning to get conscious of the approach of Yuletide, editors, authors, and artists are already—in imagination—hanging up holly and mistletoe, throwing snowballs at each other, skating, tobogganing, and sampling turkey and plum pudding. So you really must excuse us for feeling—well, holidayed.

We all feel as if we are about to break up for the longest vacation possible. Naturally, we know we aren't going to do anything of the sort. A couple of days off, perhaps, at the most. But Christmas always seems a holiday apart; an extra-special one, which, coming so near the end of the year, seems to round everything off. In fact, it's just like finishing a term at school, isn't it?

And that reminds me. You'll all be thinking of end-of-term, won't you? What fun and excitement! Prizes, speeches, congratulations, concerts, plays! My word, what a time you'll all have! I really do envy you all. (Wish I were back at school again. And yet—no! That's

moment explained to the juniors, with great dignity.

"A—ahem!—young man on the staff of the *Daily Times*, desiring an interview."

"With us?" was the mirthful chorus.

"Oh!"

"Bekas, gorjus!" capered Naomer.

"Yes, suttinly, and our photygraafs, too; hurrah!"

"Why, yes," said Pam, after the young man had explained, "it's very good of your Editor to want to give us some publicity. We can do with it, of course. The bigger the stir we make, the better the result we'll get. But you couldn't you leave it until some other time, when you can take us all complete?"

"You see, our leader's not here and we really don't care about being photographed without her," Polly was quick to follow Pam. "It wouldn't be fair. Your interview should really go with her—shouldn't it?" she appealed to her companions, who simply vociferated: "Yes!"

"I see," said the pressman, a bit glumly. "Quite understand; but the chief could give you a splash in tomorrow morning's paper that would do you a real bit of good."

"Can't you call back in an hour, say, and yet be in time for going to press?" Polly coaxed. "Do! Our captain is trying to trace baskets of props that have gone astray. Yes, and it's going

Your Editor's address is:—Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Please send a stamped, addressed envelope if you wish for a reply by post.

not right. I shouldn't like to be at school again, for then I shouldn't be Editor of *THE SCHOOLGIRL*, and have so many thousands of loyal, affectionate young friends. I think I'd far rather be as I am, after all.)

Now as the end of term is bound to be occupying so much of your thoughts at this moment, Hilda Richards has written a special story on that theme for next Saturday's issue. Here is the title:

"BABS' END OF TERM TRIUMPH!"

A most unusual—and most fascinating—story! Through a fire at Courtfield College, some of the girls from that school come to Cliff House for a time. Babs & Co. are delighted. They'll all have a gorgeous time, with japes and good-natured rivalry. So they do. But there is something else. Babs notices that one of the Courtfield girls is shunned by the others. Why, she wonders. Then she learns—the girl is suspected of being a thief.

But Babe, shrewd judge of character, believes in the girl's innocence. She stands by her. Only for suspicion to fall upon the girl again in far more convincing form. Still Babs has faith in the girl; still she stands by her, in spite of everyone else condemning her. Moreover, she sets to work to clear the girl's name.

What happens? I'll say no more than this—that Babs makes a really staggering discovery, which creates a tremendous sensation throughout the whole school. Don't miss this grand story. You'll love every word of it.

As usual, of course, next Saturday's issue will contain further instalments of our two magnificent serials, another delightful COMPLETE "Gipsy Joy" story, and more of Patricia's Bright and Useful Pages, together with all our other little features. So, to order your copy now?

An' so on until next week.

With best wishes.

Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.

to be an awful wow for us if we don't get hold of them in time!"

"Eh? Say, that's a headline, that is!" burst out the pressman, instantly throwing open a notebook. "You'd better give me the story about those baskets! Supposing they're really lost, then my chief will have the whole country looking out for them first thing in the morning. We'll get the public talking about you, through those baskets—"

"Phew!" came understanding gasps from Morcove and Grangemoor alike. "Splendid!"

And so, next moment, the pressman's pencil was dashing down a shorthand record of all that Polly had to tell him. She was the best one to explain everything, having been with Betty to send off the baskets from Morcove, early this morning.

Besides, Polly could roguishly impart a tragi-comic flavour to the story that would be just right for the *Daily Times*.

"The public had often heard of people 'all mixed up and nowhere to go.' Here was the reverse case of a juvenile concert party that looked like having plenty of places to which to go, but no dresses to go in!"

"Thanks," grinned the young pressman, primed with a story that should be a real scoop. "And now, singing round the campfire, 'Just in case I can't call back—'on't you get together for a moment?"

"Right—ho then!"

THE SCHOOLGIRL

With much guffawing from the boys, and gurgled laughter from the girls, a hasty shuffling into position took place. Flash! The ignited powder went off, causing a blinding glare which fetched a scared "Ow!" just as the camera clicked.

The pressman, taking his leave, assured the juniors that he had obtained a splendid picture; but Polly's belief was that she would come out with two heads at least.

Then Miss Lester was noticed, at a standstill half-way down the hall flight of stairs.

She was looking so amused, they knew instantly that she must have been there whilst they were being "interviewed." Decent of her, not to have hurried down to offer some objection. That was what they all thought. And so the "official chaperone" went up higher still in their estimation.

But Miss Lester, an hour later, was on the phone to the Editor of the *Daily Times*.

Speaking from the privacy of her own room, whilst downstairs an after-dinner boisterousness was in full swing, Miss Lester used a voice that was very official indeed.

"You understand," she said, "I absolutely forbid you to make any mention of the Morcove Concert Party, in your paper!"

No Triumph for Her!

THERE was a satisfied smile on Miss Lester's face when at last she rang off.

So, after all, there would be not a word in to-morrow morning's paper that would help her dupes to get hold of their lost baskets. A great load off Miss Lester's mind, that! For by now it seemed certain that Betty and Dave had failed.

Miss Lester took a look at her handsome self in the full-length mirror, then went to rejoin the girls and boys downstairs. Some were in the drawing-room, going through a few of their "song hits," with Madge at the piano. Others were in the library, just making all the row they could.

And then, suddenly—r-r-ring, ring! went the front-door bell.

Miss Lester was almost down to the hall again, when the drawing-room door flew open, letting out one skittish lot; while the library-door let out the other riotous batch.

"It's Betty and Dave—at last, hurrah!"

Polly was going to be first at the front-door, with Jack a good second, having "to skate" to stop himself in time, or he would be crashing into his madcap sister. A tugged back latch, a whipping open of the door, and in came the long absent pair.

"Done any good?" clamoured all their chums. "Got on the track of them?"

"The baskets?" laughed Betty. "Oh, yes, here they are—coming in now!"

WHILE no one, for the moment, paying any attention to her, Miss Lester felt herself going into a tremble of baffled rage.

Neither Betty nor Dave was looking the least bit inclined to boast about their success, and yet—what a triumph for them it was!

There was a taxi-driver already setting down one basket at the doorway. And now he and his pals went dashing out to the pavement, to bring in the rest.

"Oh, how—how perfectly wonderful of you!" Miss Lester suddenly hastened

forward to congratulate Betty and Dave. "But where—where were the baskets then? What had happened to them!"

"Down at Clapham—that's where they were," Betty said. "And no wonder. Look at this label—the others had been made to read just the same, too."

Then, with utter amazement, the rest of the concert party saw how artfully the label had been tampered with. The correct address: "No. 15 Somerset Street, London, W." had been altered to: "15 Somerset Street, Clapham, London, S.W."

Polly and others found their tongues at last.

"Oh, what a rotten trick for somebody to have played upon us!"

"Disgraceful!"

"Yes," Betty fiercely agreed. "Of course, the baskets were put off the train at Clapham Junction, and so they knew absolutely nothing about them at Waterloo. But they were awfully obliging; went to no end of trouble for us, didn't they, Dave?" In the end, we heard that there were baskets like ours at Clapham Junction, wrongly addressed. So we dashed down to there and got them."

A few moments more and the street door was closed against the bitter night.

Then the Grangemoor roysterers had grand fun, portering the baskets upstairs, with a jubilant pack of Morcovians in attendance.

"You must be nearly dead," Miss Lester sweetly sympathised with Betty and Dave. "A shame that such a trick should have been played upon you! Some girl belonging to Morcove, I suppose?" Miss Lester suggested. "Trying to be funny?"

Betty only nodded, whilst going away with Dave to the dining-room to get a belated meal. But when, presently, some of their chums came in to talk with them, it became a time to discuss the altered labels freely.

"Can you imagine how the whole thing was worked," Betty said to Polly and the others. "At Barncombe Junction, where the baskets would have to go from one train to another, there must have been some spiteful Morcove girl changing trains at that time. She saw

the baskets on a platform-truck, and whipped out a fountain-pen."

"The Denver sisters?" frowned Polly. "They went off very early from the school!"

"Never like to jump to conclusions," sighed Betty. "But, really, who else could it have been? Hallo, though!"

And all in an instant there was an end to any lingering feelings of anger about the cruel trick. The dining-room door had opened, to let the concert party's stage pony come ramping in.

Already Jack, Tom, and Tubby had got their school-made gee-gee out of one of the baskets, and, with Messrs. Tom and Tubby inside the skin, he was proving very fresh indeed.

"Whoa!" Jack sought to control the frisky steed, which he himself had mounted. "A bit of a tartar, after being cooped up all day!"

For Jack's mount was doing a sudden gallop all round the dining-room.

"I dare you," sparkled Bunny, "to take him all round the nearest square!"

"Yes, queek, queek! Bekas, grand advertisement!"

"Well, some of you come with me," stipulated the rider. "To look out for cops."

Hilariously the idea was debated. Should they? Yes, they would! So, after the freakish pony had been granted a suitable time for some quiet feeding, at the sideboard, Jack steered him out to the front door.

The reckless, excitable things, like Bunny, Polly, and Naomer, were not the only ones to go out to the pavement to signal the O.K. if the street should be suitably quiet.

They were all in this prank—even Pam, although the escapade was beginning at her parents' front door!

A grand limousine purred by, and then the street was empty, except for a lot of tittering youngsters, who daringly signalled: "Come on then!"

Snubbed

JACK dug his heels into the imaginary ribs of the pony, and one heel must have hit Tubby in the face, for there was a protesting bellow from that stout fellow, doubled

down as he was inside the "hide," in his capacity of hind legs.

As for the front legs, belonging to Tom, they got away in fine style. Jack's mount became a high-stepper, in keeping with the best traditions of Mayfair.

Nor was Jack at all ashamed of the way he kept his seat. Allowing for a certain floppiness in the middle of the pony's back, he reckoned he was doing everything in Rotten Row style.

Perhaps his jovial "Voieks!" and "Tally-ho!" was a bit out of place in this fashionable West End street. But the spirited hunting cries at least kept the stage pony in fine fettle.

Trouble began at the street corner, on account of a Belisha beacon. In vain Jack struggled to keep his seat whilst his mount whizzed at the beacon and waltzed around it. Suddenly he came off, whilst at the same moment one of the "scouts" spotted a policeman. There was a hasty abandonment of all idea of going round the square, and there should have been an equally hasty galloping back.

By now, however, the pony was whinnying loudly in its resentment of the beacon. Neither the front legs nor the hind pair caught the many urgent but guarded warnings. Jack turned "coward," and bolted back for the house, and there were not a few who acted on his rascally advice: "Come away, chaps!"—meaning the girls as well.

"Oh, Tom—Tubby!" bleated Betty, hardly able to speak for laughter.

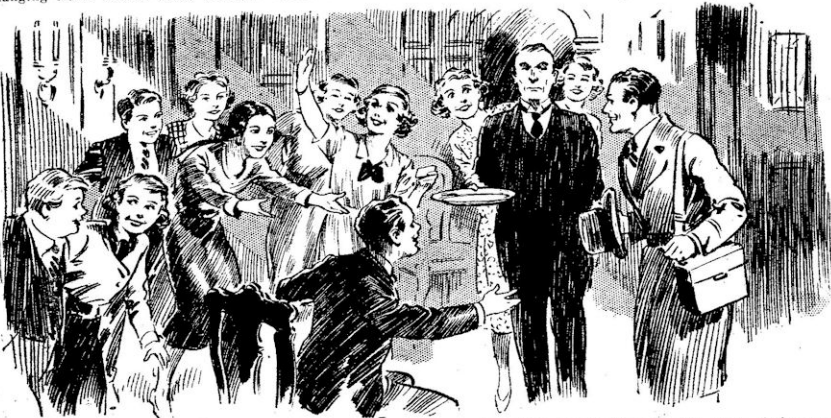
"Quick!"

"Eh?" came two voices from inside the rather-involved steed.

"Bekas—here's a bobby coming!" squealed Naomer.

Promptly the pony fell down, as it were, in a fit. With the policeman only a couple of hundred yards away, significantly brisking up his step, Tom and Tubby had to extricate themselves from the suffocating folds of the "skin" with lightning speed.

If, a few seconds later, the startled policeman was starting to run, so also were those two breathless, tousle-headed rascals, taking along the deflated pony with them. And away scooted Betty



"AHEM," said the butler, with a cough. "A young man from the 'Daily Times.' He—ah!—desires an interview." With cheers of delight, the Morcove Concert Party surged forward.

and a few others who had stayed to the last.

"Slam! went a certain street door, just as the now bewildered policeman was getting to it. After that the 'cowardly' runaways were discovered, by those who had only just come in, sitting very innocent-like round the drawing-room fire, with chocs in circulation.

"I'm going to report you fellows," said Jack, "to the official chaperone. Disgracing the old school tie!" he sternly reproved Tom and Tuppy.

"Miss Lester is a sport!" laughed Betty. "She must have kept out of the way on purpose!"

"Yes, cheers for Miss Lester!" cried Bunny.

Then they all talked of other things. The recent escapade was just one of a hundred bits of impromptu fun they were likely to get during the hols. Tomorrow it would be forgotten, especially as both morning and afternoon the girls were booked for a very busy time, finishing their stage frocks.

But the following evening brought its sharp reminder of that prank with "Ginger," as the stage pony had been named in the programme.

As late as six o'clock, when Moreove & Co. were all prepared for their first performance—to be given at Lady Mountmerry's house in two hours' time—a letter was brought to Betty.

As she took the stylish-looking missive from the silver salver on which it was offered to her, she formed a thrilling belief that here was another invitation to the "M.C.P." to give its show at some Society gathering or other. And then, having opened the typed letter, she read:

"Ladies' Embassy Club.
(And the address and date.)

"Lady Mountmerry regrets very much that she must cancel the invitation to the Moreove Concert Party for to-night.

"To avoid painful correspondence, Lady Mountmerry must add that this last-moment cancellation is due to her having only just heard of conduct that can, at best, be considered most unbecoming."

There was no one to see Betty turn deathly pale as she finished reading this shattering note

on a thin gold chain, one link of which was broken. "Oh, my goodness!" she cried. "Rhoda Rhodes—"

And Rhoda scowled that, gave a violent, frightened start. Too late she rushed forward, just heard of conduct that

"Wait a minute. That's mine!" she cried. "Give that to me!"

But Mabs did not give it to her; she handed it to Miss Primrose. And Miss Primrose, after one startled look at the trinket—

"Rhoda, if this is yours, kindly explain how it came here!"

But even Rhoda had no reply to that.

While Babs her eyes flashing with contempt—

"Perhaps," she added, "Rhoda can now explain who opened the door last night, and who took the silver from the case!" she said. "Rhoda perhaps will admit now she did it to get Boker into trouble and earn him the sack."

Miss Primrose's lips compressed.

"Rhoda, realising then that she was utterly cornered, that the eyes of the whole school were upon her, broke down and confessed.

And that night, at the end of a day of surprises, there was a little celebration in Study No. 4. That was when Babs & Co. handed Boker the silver watch they had purchased for him.

"Just to show you, Boker, of the brick we all think you are," she said. "It was you who really saved the play."

"Yes, rather!" Bessie put in, while Boker, red-face! and misty-eyed, stood looking with dazed wonderment at the treasure in his hand. "And if anybody is going to be rewarded for being a real old Sexton Blake, you know, that reward should go to me!" Bessie added seriously. "Because if it hadn't been for my jolly clever detections and my well-known knack of tracking awful criminals to their doom, we wouldn't be having this jolly party, you know."

A little Bunter conceit, which, for once, passed without argument.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

She was all by herself in the Willoughby's entrance-hall. Upstairs, in their various rooms, her chums of Moreove and the Grangemoor boys were even now getting ready to go round to Lady Mountmerry's.

"Unbecoming conduct!" she gasped to herself incredulously. "What does that mean?"

Last night's bit of nonsense with the stage pony? It was the only thing of which she could think, and yet—how could Lady Mountmerry mean that? It was no worse than the pranks which would be school by thousands of schoolgirls and schoolboys during the Christmas hols!

"Any trouble, Betty dear?"

She flashed round.

"Oh, Miss Lester—yes, just look at this! I simply can't make it out!"

Betty hotly protested. "You know what I feel like doing?" she rushed on, whilst Miss Lester glanced at the letter.

"Going round to Lady Mountmerry, and telling her that we were such a dull lot as not to have a bit of fun in us, then there never would be a Moreove Concert Party to get money for a deserving purpose!"

"Pity!" Miss Lester sighed, handing back the note. "I wish there was something I could do—"

"Oh, but you can, can't you?" clamoured Betty. "Get Lady Mountmerry on the phone; point it to her—"

"The way she writes, Betty, 'to avoid painful correspondence,' I'm afraid that must be taken to mean she's finished with us."

"Then I'm not finished with her!" Betty declared. "We can't take this sitting down, as if we really had done something disgraceful. Does Pam's mother think it was disgraceful? You know how Mrs. Willoughby laughed about it all—wished she'd been there to see us!"

"Mrs. Willoughby, Betty, is not Lady Mountmerry."

Then Betty, who had started to walk away, turned back.

"Mrs. Willoughby is as good as any lady anywhere in London as a judge of what's nice and what isn't."

The smiling silence with which Miss Lester received this rather stung Betty.

But Mrs. Willoughby is not Betty. "And another thing," Mrs. Willoughby belonged to the same club from which Lady Mountmerry wrote this note. She took you to the Ladies' Embassy Club to lunch to-day, 'didn't she?"

"Er—yes," smiled Miss Lester. "But let me have that note, Betty."

"Sorry, but I want to take it with me."

And Betty was so infuriated that three seconds later she was out of the house, putting on her coat as she went down the pavement steps.

"Betty, come back!" she was commanded, in a tone that had all the sharpness of the "official chaperone" at last. "This instant! Stop!"

But already Betty was racing off along the pavement, compelling Miss Lester to return indoors, from the top of the steps, with a face as white as a sheet!

WHY is Miss Lester so anxious to prevent Betty interviewing Lady Mountmerry? And what will be the outcome of that meeting? On account should you fail to read next week's chapters of this magnificent story.

PAGE-BOY BOKER TO THE RESCUE!

(Concluded from page 16)

"Wow-wow-wow! Help! Help! I'm being suffocated, you know!"

"Bessie!" gasped Babs.

"Under the stage!"

Everybody stared. The stage was visibly heaving now. The audience blinked surprisedly; and then from them all went up a great yell of laughter. For suddenly two floorboards jerked bodily up from the stage. A red, unhappy face peeped into view.

"Oh crumbs! Oh dud-dear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the audience.

"At that moment from the unseen depths beneath Bessie there, came a metallic clatter.

And then suddenly the audience broke into another roar as up from the hole below a terrified bloodhound, and after its spitting fury, shot a tubby cat, which chased the dog up the aisle.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But, look here——" Bessie howled.

"Oh, come on, Fattikins!" Clara shouted. "Trust you to mess things up! Haul her out, Babs."

Together they hauled. Out with a rush came Bessie. Behind her again came the metallic clink.

And then suddenly Mabel Lynn, who was staring into the hole made by the passage of Bessie's body, gave a cry.

"Look!"

And in a moment Mabs was on her knees. While Miss Charmant, Mrs. Primrose, and half a dozen prefects rushed forward, she fumbled in the hole and held up

A silver cup!

"Why, bless my soul!" Miss Primrose cried. "Why——"

"And there's more here!" Mabs cried excitedly. "Look! And look! Oh, my hat! Don't you see, Miss Primrose? Whoever opened the doors last night hid the stuff here. They——"

And then she stopped, as something in the silver bowl she had just brought to light rattled. She plunged in her hand and from it took a small gold wrist-watch