

"BABS' END OF TERM TRIUMPH!" Magnificent COMPLETE Cliff House Story inside.

# THE SCHOOLGIRL

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EVERY 2<sup>D</sup> SATURDAY

Incorporating  
"SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN"



## A PILLOW RAID ON THEIR RIVALS!

But little did Babs & Co.  
realise what an extra-  
ordinary raid it would  
prove to be.

(See this week's fascinating story  
of the Cliff House Chums.)

Grand LONG COMPLETE pre-holiday story telling what happened to Barbara Redfern & Co. when a party of rival schoolgirls came to stay at Cliff House.



# BABS' end of

## The Girl They Shunned!



"**W**E'RE going to have lots of fun!" And Barbara Redfern, the cheery and popular junior captain of Cliff House School, chuckled in delicious anticipation, while her blue eyes sparkled merrily.

"Rather, Babs!" came a chorus from the crowd of Fourth Formers assembled by the doors of Big Hall.

"We'll lead them a merry old dance!" laughed golden-haired Mabel Lynn—Mabs, whose pretty face was flushed with excitement, and who was Babs' chief lieutenant in Form affairs and her greatest chum.

"What-ho?" supported the Fourth again in anison.

"There'll be japes and rags!" grinned June Merritt, the Fourth's fun-loving prankster.

"Yes!"

"We'll lick them at hockey!" enthusiastically put in Clara Trevlyn, the tomboyish junior games captain.

"We'll show them," shouted Rosa Rodworth, "that the Fourth Form are the top dogs, and no mistake about it!"

"Hear, hear!"

"In fact," chipped in Leita Carroll, the Eton-cropped American junior, "I reckon these Courtfield duffers just don't know what they've landed themselves in for!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

No doubt that the Fourth Form,

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"The missing bracelet!" arose the amazed cry from the pillow-fighters. And Clara Trevlyn had found it in little Thelma Grant's pillow—the Courtfield High School girl who was under suspicion, in whom only Barbara Redfern believed!

always high spirited and lively, were in the gayest and merriest of moods.

No doubt that there was something in the wind to inspire such bubbling excitement in the hearts of Babs and her followers.

There was—not one, but two reasons.

For one thing it was nearly the end of term. At the end of that week Cliff House would be "breaking up," and then—

Christmas, with all its fun and festivities and gaiety and its seasonable good cheer!

Christmas—and how eagerly the chums of the Fourth were looking forward to it.

But Christmas was not for a day or two yet. In the meantime something quite unprecedented was happening.

That very afternoon Nellie Bremner & Co. of Courtfield High School—old rivals of Babs & Co.—were coming to Cliff House; not merely coming, but staying—actually boarding at Cliff House for the few remaining days of the term.

Fire at Courtfield High School had brought about this extraordinary state of affairs.

Only yesterday it had happened. Babs and some of her chums, Christmas shopping in Courtfield, had actually witnessed the fire. The entire junior

quarters of the school—fortunately in a separate wing of the building—had been gutted.

And as a result, the Lower Forms had found themselves without studies, dormitories, class-rooms, or recreation-rooms. It had caused chaos at Courtfield High School.

Some of the girls had been accommodated in other parts of the school. Every spare inch of space had been utilised—and then it was found that there was no possible room for the fifteen or so Fourth Formers who boarded at Courtfield.

Whereupon Miss Primrose, the kindly headmistress of Cliff House, had come to the rescue. She had suggested to Courtfield's very distracted Head that the unaccommodated juniors should come to Cliff House for the few days of term that remained.

And so it had been arranged. Nellie Bremner & Co. were to share studies and class-room and Common-room with the Cliff House Fourth. The Courtfield girls would sleep in the Second Form dormitory, little Dolores Essendon & Co. moving in with Doris Redfern and her satellites of the Upper Third.

Undeniably the arrangements were going to make things crowded at Cliff House—especially for Babs & Co. But who cared? Certainly the Fourth didn't.



# Term Triumph!

They had heard the news with jubilation. Rivalry was inevitable—and rivalry was going to make the affair a grand lark and a boisterous prelude to the approaching Christmas festivities!

Barbara Redfern now consulted her dainty little wristlet-watch.

"Three o'clock," she announced. "They should be arriving at any moment—"

But even as she spoke there came a sound from the drive outside.

"That's them!" cried Clara eagerly.

"That's the coach!"

Babs' eyes danced.

"Come on, girls!" she exclaimed.

And led the rush out into the quad. A large luxury coach had drawn up by the steps, and already a stream of shouting, laughing schoolgirls, wearing the blue and white blazers of Courtfield, were pouring out.

"Hallo, Babs! Hallo, everybody!" cried a merry voice, and there was Nellie Bremner, the Courtfield Fourth Form's cheery captain.

"Welcome, Courtfield!" said Babs, with a grin. "I suppose we must put up with you duffers for a few days."

"Sez you! Don't forget the tone we shall be adding to your Form now we're here!" countered Anta Wayne, another of Courtfield's leading lights.

And then there came a yell from Leila Carroll.

"What the Uncle Sam— Oh, gee, take a look at this, girls! Roll up, roll up for the world's funniest show! Here it is, Courtfield's newest pupil!"

Cliff House looked—and then Cliff House howled.

In the act of descending from the coach was a tall, dark-haired girl, and

beside her was a small, brown-haired chimpanzee. Solemnly he clutched the girl's hand with one hairy paw, gibbering volubly as he strutted along like some awkward human being.

"My hat!" chuckled June Merrett. "One of your relations, Nellie?"

"Don't be silly!" retorted the Courtfield captain. "Linda brought Koko along because we were sure he'd find some of his long-lost sisters here. He'll probably recognise Bessie Bunter—"

Plump Bessie Bunter, standing next to Babs, glared indignantly through her thick, round spectacles.

By

**HILDA RICHARDS**

Illustrated by T. LAIDLER

"Lul-look here," she spluttered, "if you're being rude—"

"Not at all. Must face up to facts, you know, Bessie!"

Bessie blinked suspiciously, unable on the spur of the moment to decide if that remark went against her or otherwise. She contented herself with another glare at the Courtfield captain.

Babs grinned.

"Any more members of the Courtfield menagerie hero?" she asked.

There were. Quite a number of the girls had brought their pets with them—as weird and varied an assortment as the Cliff House chums' own.

"They'll have to go into our Pets' House, of course," Babs said. "Better

do that straight away, and then you must come along and report to Primmy—our headmistress, you know."

A sudden growl made her turn, then. Her eyes softened for a moment, then glimmered angrily.

A large, brown-coated dog had approached Koko the chimp. Koko didn't seem to mind, but the girl who was with him certainly did. She kicked out with his foot viciously, almost catching the dog.

"Get out of it!" she snapped.

The dog growled again. He was a curly coated, golden retriever; and Babs had a golden retriever of her own—Brutus, her adored pet who had won many prizes in various dog shows.

This dog was perhaps not so perfect a specimen as was Brutus, but he looked a lovely chap, with his shapely head and his soft, liquid-amber eyes, and Babs' anger was immediately aroused to see that vicious, and quite unnecessary attack on him.

"Here, steady on!" she protested.

"There was no need for that."

Linda Locke scowled. An unpleasant-looking girl was Linda, and her looks matched her character. She was not a popular member of the Courtfield Fourth Form, and she was, indeed, rather a counterpart of Lydia Crossendale of Cliff House's Fourth. Selfish, snobbish, with an exaggerated opinion of herself—that was Linda Locke.

"None of your business!" she retorted.

"I make it my business when I see anyone kicking out at a dog like that," Babs retorted warmly.



## 4 "Babs' End of Term Triumph!"

"Then I suggest that for a change you mind your own business, and not interfere with other people's," the Courtfield girl sneered.

"Linda," cried Nellie Bremner angrily, "don't talk like that to Babs. After all, we're guests—"

"Oh, shut up, you!" And Linda walked away.

"Pleasant sort of girl," murmured Babs, then went down to stroke the golden retriever. "Hallo, old chap! Now, what's your name, and who's your mistress—"

"Chum—Chum, come here!" called a soft voice.

Babs looked round. The voice came from a distance. Standing some twenty yards away was the girl who had called. She was very small—very smaller than diminutive Marcelle Biquet, the little French junior of the Cliff House Fourth.

She stood there alone, and in that moment Babs thought how infinitely pathetic, how frail and unhappy she looked. There was a wistful expression on her tiny, round face, surmounted by waves of chestnut hair which peeped out from under her wide-brimmed hat.

She wore the colours of Courtfield High School, and yet she was standing there away from the rest of her Form-mates, almost as if she feared to be among them—as if, indeed, she had no connection with them at all.

Babs suddenly felt a queer little tug at her heart. Again it struck her how pathetic the tiny Courtfield girl looked.

"That's Thelma Grant," Nellie Bremner volunteered. "She's the only one to Courtfield this term."

Babs wondered at the suddenly constrained tone that had come into the Courtfield captain's voice.

She said nothing, however. Before she quite realised it, indeed, Babs found herself walking over to where Thelma Grant stood.

Thelma looked up at the Cliff House girl rather uncertainly. Babs' pretty oval face broke into a friendly smile. Chum, the golden retriever, brushed against her legs and whined softly.

"Hallo, Thelma!" Babs said. "You don't mind if I introduce myself, do you? I'm Barbara Redfern."

A rather shy smile came into Thelma's winsome little face.

"How—how do you do, Barbara?"

"No; call me Babs. All my friends do, you know," the junior captain said.

"I say, I like your dog, Thelma. Look! We're friends already," she laughed, as she felt Chum's warm, pink tongue caressing her hand. "I've got a golden retriever, too—Brutus, and he's a darling. I'd like you to see him. And I'm sure he and Chum would soon be great pals."

"I'd love to see him, Barbara—"

"Babs!"

"Babs, then," Thelma laughed a little nervously. "I do so love dogs. They—they're so wonderful. They're always your friends"—a tinge of bitterness came into her voice suddenly—"they always stand by you, trusting you, putting all their faith in you. They—they're more than human in that way. And I—I no one need ever be lonely when they know they have the love of a dog. Don't you agree, Babs?"

Babs glanced down quickly at the Courtfield girl.

Those words, spoken so bitterly, then so poignantly. What lay behind their pathos? What story did they conceal?

Babs, usually so good a conversationalist, found herself rather at a loss for words.

"I—I do agree, Thelma," she said. "Yes, dogs are surely the most wonderful of creatures for their affection and faithfulness. But I say," Babs went on, inspiration coming to her, "won't you come and have tea with us in Study No. 4? You must meet Mabel Lynn and Bessie Bunter—they're my chums—"

"Better be careful," broke in a sneering voice then.

And Babs, looking round, saw that Linda Locke had strolled up. The Cliff House junior captain frowned.

"I seem to remember, Linda," she said quietly, "that you advised people to mind their own business."

Linda laughed unpleasantly.

"Oh, I was just warning you, that's all," she replied, in an insolent voice.

"But if you do invite Thelma Grant into your study you'll be advised to look after your things—especially anything valuable. We do at Courtfield, you know, when she's about. But that's just a warning. Take it or leave it, of course. You'll be the loser if anything is"—Linda paused, her lips wetted in a sneer—"is stolen."

"I don't care. I didn't take them," Thelma cried. "Someone must have put them there—"

"Still the same old lying story!" jeered Linda.

Nellie snapped. "Anyway, Babs, there was never any definite proof against Thelma, and so, as I say, we're willing to give her the benefit of the doubt. It's all very unpleasant. I was hoping you Cliff House girls would know nothing about it—but perhaps, after all, it's just as well that you do know."

Babs nodded slowly.

"I see, Nellie, but—" She broke off, feeling a touch on her arm. Thelma was gazing up at her imploringly.

"Babs," the Courtfield junior said, "say you don't believe I'm a thief. You're so nice—you were so friendly just now. Please say you don't believe these terrible things about me. Not one word of them is true—I swear it. Babs—"

The Cliff House junior placed her arm on Thelma's shoulder. She smiled.

"I do believe you, Thelma," she said simply and sincerely. "And we're going to be friends. And right now, as she added, "you're coming to tea with Mabs and Bessie and me in Study No. 4."

Thelma's eyes shone suspiciously moist.

"Oh, thank you, Babs—thank you!" she said fervently.

And half an hour later, in cosy Study No. 4, in the Fourth Form passage, Thelma Grant sat at tea with Barbara Redfern, Mabel Lynn, and Bessie Bunter.

By that time the Courtfield juniors had settled down in their new quarters. Nellie Bremner had gone into Study No. 7 with Clara Trevlyn, Janet Jordan and Marjorie Hazeldene.

Linda Wayne was in Study No. 8, normally occupied by Jean Cartwright and Gwen Cook. Linda Locke, as was to be expected, had found a temporary home with Lydia Crossendale, in luxurious Study No. 1. The rest of the Courtfield girls had been distributed in the various other Fourth Form studies.

"Would you like to come in here with us, Thelma?" Babs asked that girl, when tea was nearly finished. "We'd like to have you—wouldn't we, girls?"

"Yes, rather!" agreed Mabs and Bessie at once.

"I—I'd love to," Thelma replied.

"Then that's settled," smiled Babs.

"Now, must you go to tea? Bessie pass our guest the cake—that is, if you're left any!"

Babs, recovered from her shock now, looked directly at Nellie.

"But surely there's no doubt about it at all," she said. "You don't believe Thelma is a thief, do you?"

Nellie looked uncomfortable.

"Babs, I'm terribly sorry this has happened."

"Do you?" Babs repeated insistently.

Nellie did not reply at once.

"I think you should know the facts as we know them, Babs," she replied quietly. "There's certainly been an epidemic of petty stealing at Courtfield these last two or three weeks, and it's become obvious that someone in the school has been the culprit—"

"Yes, and obviously it's been Thelma Grant!" broke in Linda harshly.

"It's not true—I swear it's not true!" burst out Thelma desperately, her grey eyes filled with an agonised light. "I've never stolen anything in my life. I'm no thief—I'm not, I'm not!"

Nellie Bremner frowned.

"Someone else's missing things have been found in your study, Thelma," she said.

"I don't care. I didn't take them!" Thelma cried. "Someone must have put them there—"

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LINDA, OH, how can you say that not true."

Passionately, from between quivering, pallid lips, Thelma Grant jerked out those words.

## Next Week's

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Barbara Redfern, utterly stupefied by the dreadful accusation which had just been made, stood in horrified silence.

Linda laughed.

"I do say it—and I say it again, Thelma Grant!" she mocked. "I say that you're a thief, and it's only right that these Cliff House girls should know it."

"Linda, enough of that!" It was Nellie Bremner who spoke curtly, angrily. With a crowd of Cliff House and Courtfield girls she had come up to the scene, having heard Linda's accusation, and Thelma's passionate denial. "That wasn't at all necessary for—"

"But you can't deny that things have been missed at Courtfield!" Linda broke in savagely. "And every time it's been Thelma." "And every time it's been Thelma."

Nellie shook her head; and now a worried expression had come over her frank, open face.

"Certainly, I don't deny that things have been missing, Linda; And perhaps there have been suspicions against Thelma," she admitted. "But nothing has ever been really proved, and I think that most of us, in those circumstances, should give her the benefit of the doubt."

All the Courtfield girls were looking anxious.

The Cliff House Fourth Formers, however, were clearly startled.



And during the last stages of that merry little tea-party, Thelma told the chums something about herself. She had no parents, and lived with an aunt in Essex, when she was not at school.

Her aunt was very poor, and only by winning a scholarship had Thelma succeeded in getting into Courtfield High School. And now she was starting hard for another examination, which she would be sitting for early on in the new year.

Rather pathetically she told her story—of her struggles before she had gone to Courtfield; her first few weeks of loneliness there, and then her utter hopelessness and misery as she had found herself up for another examination, which she would be sitting for early on in the new year.

But Babs more than she cared to admit. Somehow she felt drawn towards the diminutive Courtfield junior. She felt as if she wanted to protect her, to help her.

And then, just when they were all settling down round the fire, Clara Trevlyn breezed in boisterously.

"Meeting in the Common-room, girls," said the Tomboy. "Cliff House only at the moment. Sorry, Thelma, but you can come along later. My idea, Babs." Clara went on, with a covert wink at the junior captain. "Hope you don't mind my calling this meeting—I know it's your job really."

"I'll forgive you this time, old thing," laughed Babs. She could guess what was in the offing. Clara, evidently, had an idea in mind for japing the Courtfield visitors. "Right, coming now. Buck up, Mabs."

Mabs, engaged upon the exciting task of packing Christmas presents, nodded. "Won't be a moment. Like this, Clara?" she asked, holding up a small object which glittered with a thousand dancing pin-points of brilliant colours in the glow of the electric light. "I've bought it for mums!"

"My hat, it's a beauty!" exclaimed Clara, taking the brooch and examining it. "That cost quite a bit, didn't it, Mabs?"

"I've been saving up for some time," Mabs explained. "These stones are only brilliant, of course, but they look sweet, don't they? Righto," she added briskly. "I'm ready."

She placed the brooch on the bureau, with a number of other articles waiting to be packed.

"See you later, Thelma," Babs said, from the doorway. "You'll find plenty of books to read if you feel like it!"

Thelma smiled back gratefully. Babs & Co. went along to the Common-room.

It was half an hour later when they returned to Study No. 4. Babs pushed open the door, and was surprised to find the room in darkness.

"Hallo, Thelma's not here," she muttered, switching on the light. "Wonder where she's gone?"

"Having a look round the school, perhaps," Mabs said. "But I must finish packing these presents—"

She broke off, a gasp on her lips. "I say, Babs, where's it gone?"

"Where's what gone, old thing?"

"That brooch!" Mabs was searching the bureau frantically, moving packages and papers. "It's not here—"

"Oh, but it must be—"

"It's not. Babs, that brooch has gone—and you know I left it here when we went along to the Common-room!"

"Then more fool you!" It was

Linda Locke's voice, and there in the doorway stood the unpopular Courtfield girl. "You can't say I didn't warn you. Something missing, eh? Well, well, so little Thelma's up to her thighs in stealing tricks again already!"

### Under Suspicion!



**A** STARTLED cry left Mabel Lynn's lips as she jerked up her head, staring wide-eyed at the girl in the doorway.

"Linda, what are you saying?" she cried. "You're not suggesting that Thelma—"

"No; I'm not suggesting, I'm telling you!" Linda's voice rose. "Didn't take Thelma long to get going again. My hat, what a disgrace for Courtfield. When your headmistress gets to hear about it—"

But Babs, a red, angry flush in her cheeks, stepped forward then.

"Here, just a minute!" she said curtly. "We're not in the habit of accusing people at Cliff House without first getting at the facts. You're very quick to accuse Thelma—are you definitely suggesting that she took Mabs' brooch?"

Linda's lips curled in a sneer.

"I am—"

"You mean you saw Thelma actually taking it?" Babs questioned, incredulously.

Linda paused for a moment. By now there was quite a crowd of Cliff House and Courtfield juniors round the open

doorway. Gasps went up as they gathered what had happened.

Nellie Bremner & Co. were looking very uncomfortable.

"No; I didn't exactly see her," Linda admitted. "But I saw her hurrying out of this room soon after you left it, and she looked jolly guilty. Anyway, where's she gone?"

There was a stir in the crowd of girls outside the doorway. And then, as if in answer to that question, Thelma Grant herself pushed her way into the room.

Her face was ashen; her lips trembling; but her eyes blazed passionately as she stared at Linda.

"Linda, how can you say such wicked things? If you want to know where I've been, I went down to the kennels to see that Chum was comfortable for the night in his new home."

"And before we go any farther, Linda," Babs put in coolly, "perhaps you'll explain why you're so antagonistic towards Thelma—why you're always so ready to accuse her without a shred of evidence?"

Linda's eyes snapped. "Haven't I reason to be antagonistic? Last week a very valuable gold wrist-watch of mine was stolen, and it's never been found. But that thief took it—I know she did!"

"Oh!" It was a little heartbroken cry which came from Thelma.

"Babs set her lips.

"Well, I still don't see where your proof comes in. Anyway, I for one, am going to make a jolly good search of the study," she said.

Mabs' face lightened.



"BETTER be careful," sneered the Courtfield girl. "If you take that girl into your study you'll be advised to look after your things—especially anything valuable!" She pointed contemptuously at the little newcomer Babs had befriended.

"Yes, of course, Babs. That's a good idea! It may have dropped down behind one of the pigeon-holes."

There and then she and Babs and Bessie and Clara began a quick, but thorough search. All the papers in the bureau were taken out; drawers were emptied.

But no brooch came to light. Mabs' face began to look anxious again. Then Thelma, who had been watching worriedly, timidly touched Babs' arm.

"Babs, do you think it—it might have fallen at the back of the bureau?" she asked.

Babs' face lit up.

"Why, that's a possibility. Let's have a look. Clara, give me a hand."

Together the two girls shifted the bureau forward a few inches, while Mabs peered anxiously behind it. And then she gave a joyful cry.

"Oh, splendid! Here it is!" she cried. "What a duffer I am. I must have put it too near the edge, and it slipped off. Oh, thank goodness we've found it! I'm frightfully sorry," she added, turning apologetically to the girls in the doorway, "that all this fuss was made, though that wasn't quite my fault," she added, with a rather withering look at Linda.

But Linda was in no wise taken aback. "So you've found it," she sneered. "And a little thought of the place where it could have fallen straight away. Well, well, well!" She gazed round at the girls. "Fallen, my foot!" she snapped viciously. "Thelma put it there herself, intending to get away with it later on—"

Babs glared at her angrily.

"Linda!" cried Thelma. "But Linda turned and began walking down the corridor towards Study No. 1. Only her mocking laugh floated back to the occupants of Study No. 4.

One by one the other girls began drifting away. But many were the glances cast at the white-faced Thelma—and in every one of those glances was—

Suspicion!

"Gosh, I'm tired!" said Tomboy as Clara Trevlyn, stifling a yawn as she doffed her clothes in the Fourth Form dormitory that night. "But it's been great fun, hasn't it?" she added, with a reminiscent chuckle.

"Rather!" agreed Babs.

All the Fourth were agreed upon that. Fun in plenty they had certainly had.

Unbeknown to anyone in authority, of course, the Cliff House and Courtfield juniors had had a little pre-Christmas party in the Fourth's cosy Common-room.

Kellie Bremner had brought a box of indoor fireworks with her—which, though leaving the room rather smoky, had caused great excitement and subdued shrieks.

Leila Carroll had supplied a large box of Christmas crackers, which she had had left over from last year, and Clara Trevlyn had promptly organised a most weird and unmelodious band from the assortment of tin whistles and tiny mouth-organs which the crackers had disgorged.

Then Anita Wayne had switched out the lights, and all the girls had gathered round the fire while she told the most hair-raising, flesh-creeping ghost story of her repertoire. The dear old plump duffer, Bessie Bunter, who had been performing the duties of chestnut-roaster-in-chief, had shivered so much that she had shot half a dozen of the chestnuts into the glowing fire before anybody could save them.

Close to Babs Bessie had stuck as at bed-time they ascended the stairs to the Fourth Form dormitory. Undressing, she drew on her pyjamas and carefully placed her precious spectacles on the locker beside her.

Then, turning down the sheet, she clambered heavily on to the bed. Beaming shortsightedly around her now, she commenced to wriggle down beneath the clothes.

But next moment Bessie's beam vanished as if by magic. A piercing shriek left her lips.

"Babs!" she bellowed. "Quick! Help! It's gig-got me!"

"What's got you, duffer?" asked Babs, looking across at her squirming chum.

"Ow-wow! The gig-ghost—"

And with a gigantic leap, amazingly agile for one so unathletic, Bessie suddenly hurled herself from out of the bed.

"Gosh! What's old Bessie up to?" grinned Clara Trevlyn, as she commenced to climb into bed. "Anyone would think that—Ow! What the merry dickens—Ouch!"

And the look on the Tomboy's face was so comical, that Babs burst into a peal of laughter.

But now from other parts of the dormitory were coming many and varied exclamations.

As hastily as they had climbed into bed, the girls were climbing out again.

Bessie still squatted on the floor where she had fallen, still yelping that the ghost had got her.

But Clara, with a grim expression on her face, was hastily flinging back the clothes from her bed, then she gave a grin.

"Just what I thought!" she announced. "We've been japed, girls—japed by those Courtfield chumps! Look at that! That's what I sat on!"

And she displayed a hairbrush that had nestled unseen half-way down her bed.

"And look at these!" yelled Janet Jordan.

In Janet's bed some japester had placed three very, very stale bread rolls with a label attached to them:

"In case you feel peckish during the night."

Babs, going to Bessie's rescue, chuckled as she saw that the "ghost" which had "got" the fat one was a small green toy frog!

Gradually order was restored; and as most of the beds had been "apple pie'd," they now had to be remade, and it was with many threats against the Courtfield japers that Babs & Co. set to work.

Clara was especially grim. Undoubtedly Courtfield had scored. Courtfield was one up on them. Cliff House, far from setting the pace, was falling behind. Their prestige was at stake. It was a state of affairs not to be tolerated for one moment.

"Just let them wait!" the Tomboy vowed, as one more she climbed back into bed. "We haven't started yet, but when we do—which will be to-morrow—they'll get all this repaid—and with interest!"

To which the Fourth returned a fervent and hearty:

"Hear, hear!"

Presently Dulcica Fairbrother, Cliff House's adored head girl, came to settle up the lights. Silence at last settled upon the Fourth Form dormitory, and one by one the girls dropped off to sleep.

But Bessie Bunter, most unusual for her, was not one of those to whom sleep came quickly. Usually she fell into a

heavy slumber, from which she did not stir until rising-bell the following morning.

She dozed off once, but it was an uneasy, fitful sleep. And she awoke suddenly with quite a jerk, to hear the hour of eleven chiming out from the old clock tower.

Bessie stared about her in the darkness, peevishly wondering what it was that had awakened her. She soon discovered the reason; she was hungry.

Bessie became anxious. It was a serious matter. Being hungry might affect a girl of her delicate constitution and play havoc with her wonderful figure—or so Bessie reasoned.

The remedy, of course, was to have a snack, but to obtain a snack—Bessie groaned deeply.

It would mean leaving her cosy bed, creeping downstairs in the horrible darkness—and such an expedition did not appeal to the nervous plump one. She lay and pondered—and the more she pondered the hungrier she felt.

It was always the same with Bessie. Once she decided she was hungry she could know no rest or peace of mind until that hunger had been satisfied.

"Oh dud-der!" groaned Bessie.

"What shall I dud-do?"

She suddenly licked her lips.

That evening Mary Treherne of the Third had come to see her. Mary, who idolised Bessie because it was the plump one who had taken her under her wing when first she had come to Cliff House, had promised Bessie half of a big, delicious pork pie she had just received.

Bessie could visualise that pork pie now. Perfectly tempting, simply scrummy—just what she needed!

Bessie stirred, sat up in bed. Mary wouldn't mind if she had it now instead of to-morrow morning.

"And if I dud-don't have something to eat I sus-simply know I shall dud-do," Bessie mumbled.

She summoned all the resources of the Bunbury plan and clambered out of bed. With trembling fingers she groped for her spectacles, perched them on her snub little nose, and then donned her thick dressing-gown.

It was dark—inkily dark—in the dormitory. Bessie quavered. But the desperation that only hunger could bring about within her drove her on.

She tiptoed out into the passage, found the stairs, and crept down them. Everywhere was very silent—eerily silent. Bessie suddenly remembered that ghost story Anita Wayne had recounted with such bloodcurdling realism and shuddered violently.

But then to comfort her again that vision of Mary's pork pie rose before her eyes. Bessie steeled herself and crept on.

Now she had reached the passage that led into the Third Form quarters. Only a few more moments, and then she would be sampling the first bite of that delicious pie—

Bessie stopped dead, as if by some magic she had been turned into stone.

A sound had come from behind her. Soft, rattling steps. Something was moving. Something was there in the passage with her. And then—

Something touched her shoulder. Next moment fingers seized Bessie's long plait and tugged. Tugged with vicious force, dragging her head back, dislodging her spectacles so that they dangled down from one ear.

Bessie screamed.

Wildly she spun round. Her dilated and staring eyes, straining through the gloom without the aid of spectacles, saw a blurred, vague figure streak past her and flee down the passage.

Again Bessie screamed piercingly. "Open up! Open up! Open up!" And really scared, Bessie tore blindly back in the direction of the Fourth Form dormitory, the spectacles still dangling from her ear, her yells shattering the silence as she fled.

### Who Scared Bessie?



"SUS-SAVE me!" Upstairs the door of the Fourth Form dormitory flew open. Girls came streaming out. The landing light

clicked on. And Clara Trevlyn and Mabel Lynn and Janet Jordan and a crowd of other startled juniors blinked in amazement as Bessie, reaching the landing, suddenly collapsed in a limp heap.

"Oh, my hat! Bessie, what on earth is—"

"What's the matter, Bessie dear?"

"There was a rush to where Bessie lay."

"Oh, thank goodness you're here!" she groaned. "Sus-save me!"

"Dud-don't let it get at me again—"

"Bessie, what's happened?"

"I've been attacked—sus-savagely attacked!" By the gig-ghost! Bessie

stuttered, her eyes rolling in fear. "It

pip-popped on me, you know. It tried

to kill me—"

"Bessie," said Mabs gently, "it

couldn't have been a ghost. Who

attacked you—"

"It was a gig-ghost! I saw it, and it

jumped on me and pulled my hair—"

And faltering Bessie poured out her

story.

It was a startling, hair-raising enough

by the time Bessie had finished. Now

recovering from her fright in the

comforting presence of her chums, her

imaginative powers soon ran riot.

With many a grin, the juniors listened

—they couldn't help these grins.

Bessie's description of talon-like hands,

leering eyes, clanking chains, etc., they

ignored, but it quickly became obvious

to them that someone whom Bessie

hadn't recognised in the darkness had

followed her, had pulled her hair, and,

in all truth, given her a bad scare.

Whereat Clara Trevlyn frowned a

little grimly.

"I don't know what you girls think

about it," she said, "but it's my opinion

that this was supposed to be a joke. In

which case," she went on bluntly, "I

don't think much of it! It's not a jape

to frighten anyone like old Bessie."

"Hear, hear!"

"You're right, old thing," nodded

Mabs. "It was a mean trick to play.

But who could have done it?"

"That," Clara said, "I intend to find

out. That's why I'm going along to the

Courtfield dormitory!"

"Oh goodness!" Mabs started. "You

think it may have been one of them

who—"

"Who else?" And Clara, a girl of

action, went striding off in the direction

of the Second Form dormitory, where

the Courtfield juniors were accommodated, there and then.

The others went with her. They were

all feeling rather indignant. They liked

the Courtfield girls; they wanted to

make them welcome here during their

short stay at Cliff House; they them-

selves intended to jape their rivals, and

expected japes, in retaliation—but

frightening a girl was not fun, and the

culprit must be told that such tricks

were right off the mark.

On the way to the Second Form

dormitory Clara suddenly noticed the

surprising fact that Barbara Redfern

was not with them. And now that she

came to think of it, Babs had not been

there when they had rushed out on

hearing Bessie's yells.

At that moment, however, even as the

Fourth Formers were wondering at

their Form captain's strange absence,

there were voices from round the corner

of the passage.

Then Nellie Bremner and a number

of other Courtfield juniors appeared in

view. They, too, had heard Bessie's

screams and were coming to investigate.

Clara, in that blunt way of hers, came

to the point without any preamble.

"Look here, Nellie," she said,

"Bessie's just had the fright of her life.

Somebody deliberately scared her down-

"Well, she's the only one missing

from the dormitory," Nellie said un-

comfortably. "But, Bessie, you must

have some idea of who frightened you."

"What was she like—short or tall, slim

or fat—"

Bessie wrinkled her brow.

"I did—didn't see her properly," she

replied, "but she was very small—"

"And so's Thelma!" snapped Linda

triumphantly. "It must have been a

girl—"

She broke off with a little

gasp.

For striding up to the crowd of juniors

came a tall, majestic figure. It was

Miss Primrose, the headmistress.

"Girls, what are you doing out of

your dormitories?" she asked sternly.

No. 18 of our delightful series for Your "Cliff House Album."

## CLIFF HOUSE CELEBRITIES

JEAN STELLA CARTWRIGHT, one of the shining lights of the Junior Sports Club and the Cliff House Amateur Dramatic Society, is the Scottish girl of the Fourth Form. Aberdeen was her birthplace and her home is still there. If there is anything in the jokes we hear about Aberdeenians, it certainly does not apply to Jean, who, despite her rather poor circumstances, is one of the most generous girls in the whole of the school.

Quiet, unassuming, a loyal friend and a staunch follower of Babs & Co., Jean is well liked. She has the distinction of being the tallest girl in the form—5 feet 6 inches—and is always a conspicuous figure by reason of her flaming red hair. She is rather "bonnie" than pretty, but has a healthy Scottish attractiveness all her own with her grey-blue eyes and bright complexion.

Jean is a fine sportswoman. She plays most games well; can swim and run, and is also very good at dancing—particularly "folk" and "Highland" dancing. Her favourite musical instrument is the bagpipes, and though it is rarely she plays them—bagpipes at Cliff House are not popular—she has at school a set of the bagpipes which her uncle, the Laird of Glangowrie, presented to her on her last birthday.

In class, as on the sports field, Jean Cartwright is clever, her position at the moment being third. Though she has no father she is intensely devoted to her mother who, married for the second time, is now the wife of a struggling engineer whose name is Cattermole. As a result of this marriage Jean has a half-brother of the same age as herself—Lister Cattermole, who belongs to Friarale School for Boys, the big-hearted Laird of Glangowrie paying the fees for both.

Jean's great hobby is music, and her ambition is to play in a broadcasting orchestra.



She is very devoted to children, exceedingly fond of all animals—even mice. Though she has a temper which can be truly startling when it is roused, it is very rarely that Jean Cartwright is ever seen in a bad humour.

Her favourite actor is Robert Donat, her favourite film heroine is Jeanette McDonald. She is very fond of reading. Among the classical authors, she likes Sir Walter Scott, and the poet Robert Burns. Her favourite modern author is Baroness Orczy.

Her favourite colour is mauve, and her favourite flower the heather. She likes best to spend her holidays in the Highlands—preferably at her uncle's fine old castle home at Glangowrie where, you will be interested to hear, she is taking a party of the Cliff House chums to enjoy their Christmas holidays this year.

stairs in the darkness. A jape's a jape, but funny—it was one of you trying to be funny—"

Linda Locke, who was standing just

behind Nellie, pushed her way forward.

"There, what did I tell you?" she

said, a note of satisfaction in her voice.

"Looks as if Thelma has been getting

us into trouble again."

"Thelma?" Mabs started. "What

do you mean?"

"I mean that Thelma's missing from

our dormitory, and if anyone's been up

to any funny business, then it's a certainty

you can blame her," Linda said

spitefully.

Bessie Bunter blinked.

"Oh, I sus-say! Surely Thelma didn't

do it—"

"And what was that screaming, I

heard? It sounded like you, Bessie."

Bessie quaveringly admitted that it

was her, and explained what had hap-

pened.

"And we know who frightened

Bessie," spoke up Linda.

The girls there looked at her queerly,

a little disgustedly. Plain it was that

Linda hated Thelma Grant. But, angry

with Thelma though everyone was, if

she had indeed scared Bessie they would

have hesitated to give her away to any-

one in authority so blatantly.

Linda, however, had no such scruples.

"Indeed!" said Miss Primrose now.

"Who was it, Linda?"

"Thelma Grant, of our Form, Miss

Primrose. She's missing from the



dormitory now, and—" Linda suddenly grinned. "But here is Thelma herself," she added, with a pleased smirk.

It was true. Thelma Grant came round the corner of the passage at that moment. A startled look leapt into her eyes.

Miss Primrose frowned sternly. "Thelma, where have you been?" she demanded.

Thelma hesitated. "I—I've been working in Study No. 4, Miss Primrose. You see, I'm sitting for an examination shortly, and I do so want to win it. So—so I've been putting in some extra swotting."

Severely Miss Primrose eyed the Courtfield girl.

"Was it you, Thelma, who played a particularly mean trick upon Bessie in the Third Form passage about ten minutes ago? Did you deliberately frighten her in the darkness?"

"I?" Thelma's grey eyes opened wide. "Oh goodness, no! No, Miss Primrose; I didn't do it. I've just come straight from the study, and I've been in there since ten o'clock."

Miss Primrose pursed her lips. "I have only your word for that, you know, Thelma—"

"And mind, Miss Primrose!" broke in a voice then, and Barbara Redfern came hurrying up to the scene. "Thelma is telling the truth, because I've been in Study No. 4 with her for the last hour."

Thelma smiled gratefully. "You see, Miss Primrose," she explained, "I told Babs I was poor at mathematics, and she said she would help me."

Miss Primrose's frown relaxed somewhat.

"Barbara's action, and your industry, Thelma," the headmistress said, "do you credit. But this time of night, when you should be in bed and asleep, is not the hour to study. Kindly remember this in the future. You will each write me fifty lines for being out of your dormitories. So will every other girl here."

She paused thoughtfully. "Meantime, since Thelma was not responsible, the identity of the girl who frightened Bessie remains undiscovered. I shall make an inquiry to-morrow morning. Now get back to bed, all of you!"

Cliff House and Courtfield Fourth Formers hurried back to their respective dormitories.

On Thelma Grant's face, as she went, was a relieved smile.

But Linda Locke, just behind her, seemed in disappointment. A nasty, unpleasant light gleamed in her eyes.

And Barbara Redfern, glancing back over her shoulders, and seeing Linda at that moment, slowly shook her head in puzzled wonderment.

## "BABS!"

Clara Trevlyn burst into Study No. 4 early the following morning.

"Babs, what do you think's happened?" she cried.

Barbara Redfern, seated at the table, paused in the act of inserting a pretty Christmas card into the envelope which she had just addressed.

"What?" she asked briefly. "Anything exciting?"

"I don't know about exciting," replied Clara grimly, "but it's jolly serious. Lydia Crossendale says her bracelet is missing!"

Babs, having difficulty with tucking in the flap of the envelope, dropped it and sat up with a jerk.

"Missing—Lydia's bracelet! Good-

ness! But what do you mean exactly—hardly likely to take kindly to a baseless accusation against one of her school-girls.

"Well, missing!" said Clara. "Gone! Vanished! Disappeared out of her bureau during the night! Where's Thelma?" the Pomboy added abruptly.

Babs jumped to her feet. She looked suddenly anxious.

"Excuse her dog down the lane. But why do you ask, old thing?"

But Babs, though she asked that question, instinctively knew what the answer would be. It came:

"Can't you guess?" Clara said gruffly. "Lydia's accusing Thelma of having stolen it. My hat, Babs, I don't know what to make of that girl. But apparently fishy things happened at Courtfield, and now they're happening here, Thelma seems all right."

"She is all right, Clara!" Babs retorted stoutly. "But come along. I'm going to see Lydia."

Study No. 1 was crowded. The sensational news had spread, and Cliff House and Courtfield juniors were there asking questions.

"The bracelet was in this drawer," Lydia Crossendale was saying. She stood by her bureau, angry-faced. "It was there last night, but now it's gone. My hat, I'm going to make trouble about this. That bracelet is worth five pounds. Five pounds! I'll see Primmy. I'll tell her there's a thief in this school—"

"And you can tell her who it is, too!" put in Linda Locke, who, temporarily sharing Study No. 1, had been one of the first to learn of Lydia's loss. "It's Thelma Grant—we all know that!"

Babs and Clara arrived at that moment.

"I don't see how we know it at all," Babs cut in steadily. "Look here, Lydia, have you searched everywhere thoroughly?"

"Yes," she snapped Lydia. "And it's not here. The bracelet's been stolen, and I agree with Linda. Thelma must have stolen it!"

"Babs looked angry. "Must?" Why must she have taken it? For goodness' sake be fair! Thelma's not the only girl in this school, and from all the evidence we have any one of us might have taken the bracelet! Is there any real proof against her?"

A few questions soon proved that there wasn't.

It was merely Thelma's reputation against her—a reputation that seemed to have been built up, not on facts, but on mere supposition.

And that was not good enough for Babs, who had taken the diminutive Courtfield girl to her heart.

Barbara Redfern was a shrewd judge of character—even her worst enemies admitted that. And Babs had no hesitation in confessing that she liked Thelma, that she was prepared to stand by her, and that whoever anyone else might and should stoutly maintain her faith in the girl.

So it was Babs who defended Thelma's name now. It was she who, when Thelma returned into the school to face the inevitable storm, stood with her arm around that white-faced girl's shoulder and proclaimed to everyone that she at least, believed Thelma's passionate protests of innocence.

And it was also Babs who prevailed upon the angry Lydia to postpone her threat of reporting the matter to Miss Primrose—Lydia having been egged on to do so by the spiteful Linda.

For, as Babs wisely pointed out to Lydia, there was not one grain of proof against her in the Courtfield junior. Miss Primrose, of course, would investigate the matter, but after all, she was

hardly likely to take kindly to a baseless accusation against one of her school-girls.

There was also the fact that Lydia herself would certainly get into trouble for breaking one of Cliff House's most strict rules—that rule being that girls were allowed to possess valuable jewellery.

Even Lydia paused as those points went home.

"Yes, but that doesn't bring back my bracelet," she cried indignantly.

"Oh, I'm sure it will turn up!" Babs reassured her. "Perhaps somebody has taken it for a joke. It'll come back, or we shall find it somewhere. Just leave it for a little while."

And this, to Babs' relief, Lydia finally grudgingly agreed to do.

But no doubt that Babs' staunch championing of Thelma had an effect. Girls who had been ready to condemn her now began to realize that, after all, there was no genuine justification for any such attitude.

Nevertheless they eyed her queerly, and many of them could not help showing a marked constraint towards her. For the Courtfield girls, in particular, it was a distressing situation.

The crowd in Study No. 1 dispersed, Babs & Co., with Thelma in their midst, made their way back to Study No. 4.

There, after a little while, Nellie Brenner and her friends joined them for a before-lessons chat.

And so the normal routine of that day started. Cliff House Fourth and Courtfield Fourth worked in complete harmony, played in complete harmony.

It was a happy, merry day for everyone, except Thelma Grant. Babs & Co. did their best to cheer her up, and Thelma tried her best to respond, she could not forget that she was under a cloud.

Bed-time came. After another merry evening in the Common-room—a long evening, for now end of term was so near, Miss Primrose, to everyone's delight, had excused prep in all Forms—Babs & Co., and Nellie Brenner & Co., prepared to depart to their respective dormitories.

Babs felt quite a twist at her heart as she said good-night to Thelma, watched that forlorn little figure make its way up the stairs.

And Babs' pretty brow puckered in worried thought. The more she saw and mixed with Thelma, the more convinced she became that that girl was no thief.

But if not Thelma—then who was responsible for the thefts at Courtfield, and now this latest most disturbing disappearance of Lydia Crossendale's bracelet?

The more Babs pondered, the more puzzled she became.

But in the Fourth Form dormitory, those worries and reflections became temporarily relegated to the background of her mind.

For there was an air of suppressed excitement about the Fourth.

Clara Trevlyn was grinning broadly. June Merritt was stifling giggles as she undressed. Even Lady Patricia North-anon, duty prefect for the day, when she came to switch out the lights, sensed by the atmosphere that something was afoot.

For, after her cheery "Good-night, girls!" she added a rather amused warning: "No mischief, mind!"

At which there came another stifled giggle from June Merritt.

For the Fourth were definitely upon mischief-scent. The Fourth, in fact, to avenge themselves for Courtfield's triumph last night, had planned a retaliatory surprise for their guests,

It was one hour later, when the hour of ten chimed out from the old clock tower, that Clara's sepulchral whisper hissed through the darkness:

"Everybody awake?"  
"You bet!" came Leila Carroll's voice.

"O.K.! Out you got—and don't forget your pillows," Clara instructed.  
"You ready, Babs?"  
"Rather!" grinned Babs.  
"Then all together—and no noise, mind!"

Ten dim forms climbed stealthily out of bed. Ten pairs of hands stretched out and grabbed pillows.

And then ten raiders silently quitted the dormitory.

On tiptoe they padded along the dark corridors until they reached the Second Form dormitory.

Clara paused with her hand on the knob.

"Now don't forget—we've got to take them by surprise. We'll have them begging for mercy before we've finished!" she chuckled. "Now—go!"

And with a quick turn of her wrist, Clara flung open the door and bounded into the room.

"At 'em, kids!" she whooped exultantly, completely forgetting her instructions for silence.

And then—biff, bang, biff, bang! thudded ten pillows on to the heads of startled Courtfieldians.

It took only a few seconds for Nellie Bremner & Co. to realise what was happening.

"Rally, Courtfield!" yelled Nellie. "We're being raided—Ouch!" This as a swipe from Clara's pillow knocked her sideways.

But in a flash Nellie & Co. were out of bed, and then the fun raged fast and furious.

Someone switched on the light, just so that they could see who were raiders and who were defenders—for in the darkness they had been getting a little muddled on this point.

"Come on, Thelma!" shouted Nellie. "All hands on deck!"

Thelma started up, but before she could take part in the fight, Linda Locke, who slept in the bed next to her, and who had somehow lost her own pillow in the melee, snatched the one from Thelma's bed, and she advanced on Clara's pillow.

Whooosh! went Linda's pillow. Smack! went Linda's, connecting with the side of the Tomboy's head. And then—

"Oh!" gasped Clara, with such a note of sudden pain in her voice that everyone instinctively paused and looked at her. "Oh!" Clara repeated, and tenderly rubbed the side of her head. "Linda, you've got something hard in your pillow—"

"I?" Linda's eyes grew wide with injured innocence. "But this isn't my pillow. I just grabbed it from Thelma's bed, didn't I, Thelma?"

"Why, yes," affirmed Thelma rather hesitantly. "But there's nothing in it, I'm sure—"

"Jolly well isn't there!" grunted the Tomboy. "Here, let me have a look!" And grabbing the pillow which Linda still held, she unbuttoned the pillowcase and inserted her hand between that and the pillow itself.

For a moment she groped. Then a blank expression spread over her face.

"My hat, what's this—"  
She withdrew her hand, clutching the object in the pillow. She held it up and at sight of it a terrible silence descended.

Then came Rosa Rodworth's breathless exclamation:



"LOOK!" shouted Clara furiously. "Look, Babs! If I find out who looked this rotten trick, I'll—I'll—"  
Lying on the floor, utterly ruined, was the once-beautiful cushion Marjorie Hazeldene had made.  
Who was guilty?

"That's Lydia Crossendale's missing bracelet!"

### Another Sensation!



AT those words a quiver seemed to run through every girl in the dormitory. For timeless seconds Barbara Redfern felt her heart stop

beating. Then every eye, accusing, condemning, turned towards the tiny figure of the girl who now sat bolt upright in her bed.

Every vestige of colour had left Thelma Grant's face.

"Thelma! So it was you!" breathed Nellie Bremner.

Thelma shuddered.

"No!" she gasped. "No—" She gazed wildly around at the circle of accusing faces. "You mustn't believe it—you can't! I didn't take the bracelet—I didn't put it in that pillowcase—"

"But it's your pillow!" snapped Linda Locke.

"Yes, it's my pillow. But I didn't put it there—I didn't. I've never seen the bracelet before. You must believe me—you must!" And almost frantically Thelma beat her little hands together, tears starting to her eyes.

Babs jerked out of the horrified daze into which she had fallen.

Never had she felt so shocked as when Tomboy Clara had held aloft

that bracelet. Even her staunch faith had momentarily been shaken. Even she, for one awful moment, had believed that Thelma must be guilty.

But now—she unconsciously shook her head. If ever innocence had shone from a girl's eyes, it had shone from those of Thelma.

With swift strides she was across the room, kneeling at the side of Thelma's bed, hugging the shaking girl consolingly.

"Thelma, dear," she said compassionately, "don't cry like that. You'll make yourself ill. I do believe in you—really, really I do. However that bracelet got in your pillow, I know you didn't put it there."

"You don't believe it!" cut in the jeering voice of Linda Locke. "It doesn't matter what you believe now. The fact remains that she's been proved a thief now without any doubt!"

"Yes, rather," put in Rosa Rodworth. "Dash it, I'm always willing to give any girl the benefit of the doubt, but in a case like this—"

And she shrugged expressively.

"Yes, Babs, don't be a chump!" put in June Merritt.

"This is a matter that can only be dealt with by Miss Primrose!" snapped Linda Locke. "I vote we tell her now. The sooner this thief is thrown out, the better for us, and the better for our valuables!" she added vindictively.

Nellie Bremner sighed heavily. She was looking very worried.

"Yes, I suppose we ought to tell her. But it's awful—"

Babs straightened quickly. "Nellie, no; there's no need to do that. After all, the bracelet's been found," she said in desperation. "Lydia Crossendale will be quite happy that she's got it back—"

Linda's lips curled. "Oh my hat! Are you starting that again? You seem so jolly anxious for her not to be reported!"

"Yes, as anxious as you appear to be to get her reported!" returned Babs spiritedly. "Look here, girls—"

And anxiously her blue eyes gazed at them. "What's the good of reporting it? It's only going to make things frightfully unpleasant for all of us. What will you gain by telling Primmy? Nothing! Dash it!" she continued, all the sincerity of her nature in her voice, "it's nearly Christmas, after all. This is supposed to be a season of good will, and all the rest of it. Surely in those circumstances you don't want to see a girl getting in fearful trouble."

"Babs' voice quivered with emotion.

"And whatever any of you think, whatever's happened, she went on vehemently, "I still believe Thelma is innocent. Anyone could have put that bracelet in the pillow. It still doesn't prove Thelma guilty. Girls, what do you say?" she pleaded.

Nellie Bremner shuffled a little uneasily.

"Well, naturally, for obvious reasons, I don't want it to get to Miss Primrose's ears," she said uncomfortably. "But—oh, I don't know!"

And that was the indecisive attitude of most of the girls. Clearly they were all of the opinion that Thelma was guilty; but seeing that the bracelet had been found, perhaps moved by Babs' impassioned appeal, they were undecided as to what action should be taken.

"Oh, hang it!" said Clara, uncomfortably at last. "Let's sleep on it, anyway. For one thing, we can't report it to Primmy to-night, or we shall get a most fearful wiggling for being out of bed. Leave it till the morning."

Heads were nodded; there were murmurs of assent. Yes, this was obviously the best thing to do.

The pillow fight, interrupted so dramatically, was not continued. Courtfield girls began, climbing back into bed. The Cliff House Fourth Formers were only anxious now to return to their own dormitory.

"Come on, Babs," called Clara.

But Babs, impatient, compassionate, was gazing down at the tearful Thelma.

"Cheer up," she said, speaking so that everyone there could hear her. "Everything is going to be all right, Thelma. Whatever happens you know I'll always stand by you. And I'm going to help you, Thelma—"

Deliberately she paused; slowly her gaze swept the dormitory. "I'm going to help you, dear, to find out just who it is who is acting so despicably and doing their utmost to get you disgraced."

And as Babs said that, her eyes were fixed suspiciously upon Linda Locke.

Linda's own eyes glistened. "Dear me!" she mocked. "Quite a touching little scene!"

Babs ignored her.

"Good-night, Thelma," she smiled.

"See you in the morning!"

"Good-night, Babs," whispered the little Courtfield junior. "You—you're so sweet!"

Babs joined her chums then. The ten raiders returned to their dormitory. Thelma handed the bracelet to Lydia Crossendale, and immediately, of

course, there was a buzz of questioning voices.

Gradually it died away, however, and the Fourth settled down for sleep.

But the following morning—

Fresh sensation! Renewed consternation! And such a wave of indignation sweeping the Cliff House Fourth as had seldom been known before!

Barbara Redfern first became aware of it as she was hurrying back to the Fourth Form passage from Big Hall. Babs, with Mabs and Bessie, had been to see if there was any post for them. And, as the juniors round Study No. 7, occupied by Clara Trexlyn, Marjorie Hazeldene, and Janet Jordan—and, for these last few days of term, Nellie Bremner, the Courtfield junior captain.

Everyone was talking at once. Voices were raised on an angry note. From inside the room came Clara's voice, high-pitched and thick with rage.

Instantly it reminded Babs of that scene outside Study No. 1 the previous morning. A wave of apprehension swept over her suddenly.

She broke into a run.

"Here, what's happening?" she cried, pushing her way into the study.

She saw Clara—Clara, whose face was livid with fury. Sitting near by her was Marjorie; and gentle, sweet-natured Marjorie was dabbing with a moist hanky at tear-filled eyes.

"Clara— Babs burst out.

"Look," shouted the Tomboy, and never had she been so angry. "Look, Babs! If I find out who played this rotten trick, I'll—I'll—" She choked incoherently in her fury.

While Babs, following Clara's pointing, quivering finger, suddenly gave a startled exclamation.

Lying on the floor by the window was a cushion—or what had been a cushion.

It was the cushion that Marjorie Hazeldene had been working on for the last fortnight, and finished only late the previous evening—a beautiful thing of blue silk, most exquisitely and elaborately embroidered with gold thread.

Every spare moment, day and evening, Marjorie had worked on it with her dainty, expert hands—a task of love, putting all her craft into it, a Christmas present intended for the mother of her dearest, greatest friend—for Clara's mother.

But now—now that once beautiful cushion lay there completely and utterly ruined.

The silk had been ripped to ribbons; the gold thread that had been woven into it with such perfect craftsmanship, hung loose and torn and shredded about the floor. The soft flock that had filled the cover was scattered everywhere.

"Oh, Marjorie! Marjorie, dear, I'm dreadfully, terribly sorry!" Babs breathed in little more than a whisper, appalled by such destruction.

And that's not all! hooted Clara furiously. "The silver cup I won for running at the summer sports—it was on the mantelpiece. That's gone! Vanished! But I'm not worrying so much about that. It's Marjorie's cushion I'm more concerned with."

"BUT—BUT who could have done it, Clara?"

Barbara Redfern asked that question slowly. She asked it with apprehension in her heart, sensing, fearing, knowing what was to come.

The Tomboy's eyes blazed.

"Babs, I already have my suspicions. A Courtfield girl was known to be out of her dormitory last night, an hour after we did it," she said.

"And—who was it?"

"Thelma Grant!"

"Oh!" Babs bit her lip. "And who says Thelma was out of her dormitory?"

"Linda Locke—and Nellie Bremner!" Clara replied.

"Yes, that's right, I'm afraid," Nellie said from the doorway. "Linda woke me up and pointed out Thelma's empty bed!"

"Oh!" said Babs again. "Linda did? And did Thelma give any explanation, when she came back?"

"She said," came the sneering voice of Linda Locke, "that she had been swooping up in one of the attics. She wouldn't come down to your study, because of the trouble she caused the other night. Most considerate of her, I must say. It's a pity," Linda gibed, "that she didn't show the same consideration when she took Clara's cup and ruined poor Marjorie's cushion!"

Babs clenched her hands. Could this thing possibly be true?

And even as she stood there, thinking desperately, Linda Locke advanced into the study and picked up the tragically ruined cushion.

Babs heard her give an exclamation. "Look at this, girls!" Gloating and triumphant, Linda held out the cushion. "Look! Now who's going to say that Thelma isn't the culprit?"

Babs sprang forward.

"What do you mean, Linda—"

"Look!" Linda said again, and carefully removed something from the silk cushion cover and held it up in the light by the window.

It was a thin wisp of hair—a strand of hair chestnut in colour.

"And that," Linda shrielled, "is the colour of Thelma's hair!"

There was a rush forward. The girls crowded round as Linda still held up the betraying strand of hair. Then an angry murmur.

"Well, that certainly proves it!"

"Then it is Thelma!"

"Primmy's got to know about this—"

"Yes!" cried Clara. "And I'm going to tell her now. I'm going to see Primmy and tell her everything."

"Clara, wait!" Babs caught at her arm. A queer excitement was surging through her. "Are you all blind?" she cried. "Look at that strand of hair again—look at these others on the cushion!"

She had snatched the cushion from the startled Linda's hand. She picked off a number of the other wisps of hair lying on the silk.

"Look at them through your fingers!" Babs intoned. "Feel the texture. Look at them! They're coarse—they're short—they're straight! And you know as well as I do that Thelma's hair is as fine as spun silk. And it's long and wavy—nothing like this. Fetch Thelma! Compare these strands with her hair—and I know just well that you'll find them different! And, in any case, what possible reason could Thelma have for ruining poor Marjorie's cushion?"

"Oh, my goodness! Babs—"

"Am I right?"

"Yes," Clara nodded.

It had taken her only a few seconds' close examination of the hair to realise that Babs was right. Without fetching Thelma, the Tomboy realised that those strands of hair had never come from the tiny Courtfield junior's head.

Clara shook her head hopelessly.

"Then what's it mean, Babs? Who did come here last night—"

"I don't know."

But if Barbara Redfern did not know for positive the answers to Clara's questions, she certainly had her suspicions now.



For Babs did not miss the change that had come over Linda Locke of the Courtfield Fourth.

Sneeringly triumphant that girl had been a minute ago when it had seemed that Thelma's guilt was indisputable.

But now—now that once again there was a doubt—she had become silent and sulky. Hatefully she glared at Babs, and her eyes glittered venomously when, a second or two later, she swept rudely through the crowd and out of the study. Pretty brows puckered in thought, Babs watched her go.

Unshatterable now was Babs' faith in Thelma. But growing ever stronger was her suspicion of Linda. Was it Linda herself who had committed these thefts?

And yet—  
One point puzzled Babs. One big, very important point. It presented a difficulty which had to be cleared up if Babs was to prove her suspicion justified.

The hairs found on Marjorie Hazeldene's ruined cushion cover had been coarse and of a chestnut hue.

Linda Locke's hair, while rather coarse in texture, was jet black!

Which suggested that it wasn't Linda who had raided Study No. 7. Then who had?

There and then Barbara Redfern determined that she would find out!

### To Be Expelled!



ALL that day the junior captain of the Cliff House Fourth Form watched Linda Locke—and discovered exactly nothing.

But Babs did not despair. She went on watching, convinced that Linda merited suspicion.

Meantime, there was a growing excitement throughout the school. Christmas was drawing nearer. The day after to-morrow and Cliff House would be breaking up.

Already girls were packing. Already Christmas presents and cards were arriving by every post. It was all deliciously exciting.

There was little work done now. Lessons in the morning, but the after-

noons were free for the girls to do just as they pleased. So there were expeditions into Courtfield to do last-minute shopping—and Clara promptly took the opportunity to fix up a game of hockey between the rival Fourth Forms.

Clara and her merry stalwarts won—but Nellie Brenner & Co. got their revenge that evening, in the Common-room, by beating their hosts in a table-tennis tournament.

It was all great fun. And, naturally enough, there were larks and leg-pullings practically every hour of the day. And that night Babs & Co. planned another raid on the Courtfield dormitory.

Just after ten o'clock, when the Fourth should have been sound asleep in their cosy beds, there were movements in the darkness of the dormitory.

Clara Trevelyn clambered out of bed and donned dressing-gown over her pyjamas. Other girls were stirring.

"No, wait a minute," Clara said softly. "I've heard one or two people marching around up here, and I think we'd better see if the coast is clear before we make the raid. I'll slip out and scout."

"And I'll come with you, Clara," said Barbara Redfern.

"Good egg!"  
So it was Babs and Clara who tiptoed out of the Fourth Form dormitory and cautiously made their way along the darkened passages.

There was not a sound; they met no one. The coast was clear.

"Good!" grinned Clara. "You wait here, Babs, while I creep back and collect the girls."

Babs nodded. The Tomboy turned and glided off into the darkness.

Crouched against the wall of the corridor, Babs waited. Half-way down that passage was a door—the door of the Second Form dormitory, now occupied by the guests from Courtfield. Babs' gaze switched in that direction. Then suddenly her heart leapt. The door was opening. A figure was emerging from the dormitory.

It was the figure of—Babs strained her eyes through the gloom—of Linda Locke!

Linda, creeping out at the dead of night! What was she doing? Where was she going—

A thrill shot through Babs.

Oh, great goodness, was this proof that her suspicions were right? Was Linda the real thief?

But, Babs, told herself exultantly, she would soon find out. She must follow Linda, see what that girl was up to, where she was going.

Completely forgetting about the projected Fourth Form raid, Babs tiptoed after that dim figure ahead of her. She quivered with excitement. Now she would learn the truth. Now—

Babs started, uttered a gasp of dismay. Careful not to allow Linda to see her, she had allowed that girl to get a good distance in front of her. And now, from a side passage ahead, there came the sound of hurrying footsteps.

A mistress or a prefect!

Babs groaned. If she raced on after Linda she was bound to be seen by whoever was approaching. Of all the beastly luck! But there was no help for it—she must lose sight of Linda, dart into hiding, and hope she could pick up the trail again when the coast was clear.

But in that hope Babs was sadly disappointed.

For when she emerged from hiding, three minutes later—after Miss Bullivant, the acid-treated mistress of the Third, had stalked on her way—Babs quickly discovered that she had lost all trace of Linda Locke.

"Bother and blow!" she muttered in exasperation. "Where the dickens has she got to—"

Downstairs went Babs, desperately hoping that she would retrace the girl she had been trailing. Now, where would Linda be likely to go? To the Fourth Form passage, perhaps.

In that direction Babs went. But then disaster befell her.

Again she heard footsteps—hurrying, agitated steps—coming from the direction of Big Hall. Before Babs could dart out of sight the passage light switched on.

And there was Miss Primrose, the headmistress, herself!

"Barbara!" exclaimed the Head, "what are you doing down here?"

"I—I—" stammered Babs, and broke off, gazing apprehensively at the headmistress.

CERTAIN that there was a chance to save little Thelma Grant from expulsion, Babs rushed to the door. "Barbara!" cried the prefect. "How dare—" But Babs was gone.



Miss Primrose was quivering with anger. Never had Babs seen the usually calm and dignified headmistress so disturbed.

"Barbara, something terrible has happened," continued Miss Primrose, unheeding that Babs had not answered her question. "Someone has been in my study! Something is missing—"

Babs felt her heart leap.

"Missing, Miss Primrose?"

"Yes, Barbara, something extremely valuable! A rare Benares vase, one of my most treasured possessions, has disappeared from the top of a bookcase."

### ANOTHER THEFT!

With Miss Primrose, the headmistress, herself the victim this time! Barbara Redfern gasped.

"Miss Primrose, do you know when it happened?" she asked.

"Only a few minutes ago," the headmistress replied. "I distinctly remember seeing the vase on the bookcase when I left my study a quarter of an hour ago to see Miss Charmant; and when I returned the vase had vanished, and—"

"Oh goodness!"

Babs gasped, rather appalled by her own thoughts, by the suspicions, the possibilities, that flooded through her brain.

Within the last few minutes the vase had disappeared from Miss Primrose's study—and Linda Locke of the Courtfield Fourth was out of her dormitory!

Babs herself had followed her. Babs had lost sight of her—and during that time this incident had happened.

What was Babs to think? What could she help but think? Had Linda Locke taken Miss Primrose's treasure, the Benares vase? And into Babs' brain flashed the answer to her own question. Linda had taken it. Linda was the thief! And to-morrow morning, when the sensational news became known to the school, Linda would at once accuse Thelma Grant of having done it! No doubt at all now did Babs have that that was Linda's game—had been her game ever since the accusations had started.

"Barbara, what is the matter?" The headmistress' keen gaze had noticed Babs' agitation. "And you have not answered my question. What are you doing down here at this time of night?"

Babs flushed. Every instinct within her told her that she should acquaint Miss Primrose with the facts. This was a serious business—dreadfully serious.

Babs, in her own mind, had not the slightest doubt now that Linda was guilty. And Linda, guilty of such despicable actions, must take and deserve what she would have coming to her.

But still Babs hesitated. To tell might savour of sneaking, and Babs had a schoolgirl's horror of doing anything that might even remotely label her as a sneak. And yet she must consider little Thelma.

"Barbara, answer me, girl!" Miss Primrose rapped. Searchingly she looked at the junior captain. "Barbara, do you know anything about this outrage? Someone in the school must have taken the vase—no doubt in a spirit of alleged fun. But it is a misguided sense of humour, which I shall take the most serious steps to correct. Now, Barbara, if you know anything, it is your duty to tell me—"

And at that Babs did tell the headmistress. Yes, it was her duty to tell; she must tell, or in the morning the most terrible accusations would be

flying around, and Thelma Grant—innocent, tiny Thelma—would be blamed, and perhaps held responsible. And if she were thought to be guilty—

Hurriedly Babs told of how she had seen Linda Locke emerge from the dormitory; how she had started trailing the Courtfield junior, and then lost track of her—and left it at that, waiting for Miss Primrose to take the initiative.

The headmistress' brow was grim.

"We will go up to the Courtfield dormitory at once, Barbara," she said. "Linda must be questioned."

She swept off down the passage, Barbara following close at her heels. But as they went above the stairs that led to the Second Form dormitory sounds came from ascending.

There were muffled thuds, the scrape of moving feet, subdued voices, laughs, and gasps.

"Give 'em beans!" came Clara Trevlyn's voice.

"Biff, biff, biff!"

"Rally, Courtfield!"—that was Nellie Bremner's voice.

And reaching the landing, Miss Primrose and Babs arrived just as a pillow fight between the rival Fourth Forms was raging at its height.

Cliff House Fourth, on their way to attack their rivals, had been met halfway by the Courtfield juniors, out bent on the same errand. There, on the landing, the fight had started, and was waxing fast and furious.

"Girls! Girls!" thundered Miss Primrose. "Cease at once! Bless my soul! This is disgraceful! Stop!"

The fight stopped magically. An awed silence fell upon the fighters. Trembling and dismayed, the girls stood there rigid as the headmistress strode among them.

And then from the end of the passage came a fresh disturbance.

"Bang, thud, bang!"

"Let me out! Let me out!" hooted a number of voices.

And again—bang, bang, bang!

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Clara Trevlyn. "It's Linda! She's locked in the wall cupboard there!"

Barbara, standing beside Miss Primrose, gave a violent start.

"Linda?" she asked incredulously.

"But—but—"

"Yes," muttered Clara, an apprehensive eye on the headmistress. "I met her as I was coming along from the dormitory. I—I thought she might give the alarm to Courtfield that we were going to raid them, so I locked her in the cupboard."

"Clara, release Linda immediately!" stormed Miss Primrose. "Goodness gracious, I've never known such outrageous behaviour!"

But Babs' heart was beating wildly.

"How—how long ago was that, Clara?" she asked.

"Oh, about fifteen minutes ago—"

"Barbara, stop asking questions!" fumed Miss Primrose. "Do as I tell you, Clara!"

Yes, Miss Primrose. Hastily the Tomboy obeyed. Babs, however, felt sick with dismay. With this development her theories were scattered to the winds.

Fifteen minutes ago Clara said she had locked Linda in the cupboard. Then Linda could have had nothing to do with the disappearance of Miss Primrose's treasured vase. Linda could not have gone downstairs, but must have made her way towards the Fourth Form dormitory, and so been captured by Clara.

Then—then who could have taken the vase? Who else was it who had been

creeping about the school, bent on that sinister mission?

Babs' brain whirled. She stared down the passage. Clara had unfastened the cupboard door, and out burst a furious Linda.

"You cat!" she raved. "I'll make you pay for this!"

"Linda," rapped out Miss Primrose, striding forward grimly, "enough of that!"

"But she locked me in that cupboard! She attacked me!" hooted the Courtfield girl wildly. "I demand that she should be punished!"

Miss Primrose frowned angrily.

"Silence, Linda! Kindly remember to whom you are talking. Clara and every girl here will be punished for this disgraceful disturbance. Now, Linda, apparently you took no part in this—ahem!—raid, yet you were seen leaving your dormitory a short while ago. For what purpose?" demanded the headmistress.

"I—I—"

Very apparent it was that Linda was thinking furiously. "I thought I heard someone outside in the passage, and I got up to see who it was," she answered.

"That was not the impression I gained, Miss Primrose," put in Babs steadily. "Linda made no attempt to search the passage."

Furiously Linda looked at the Cliff House girl.

"So, is this you who sneaked?"

"Silence, Linda!" Miss Primrose's eyes glimmered coldly behind her pince-nez. "There is no question of sneaking. A very serious incident has happened to-night during the last half-hour. A valuable vase is missing from my study, and I intend to discover who is responsible."

The girls, hearing that, gasped. Faces turned pale.

"Linda, did you go downstairs at all?" demanded Miss Primrose.

"No, I didn't, and no one can accuse me, because I've been locked in that beastly cupboard," Linda replied in protest. But then, at that moment, a gleam came into her eyes. Suddenly she laughed. "But it's obvious who is the thief, Miss Primrose. Look!"

Everyone swung round, following the direction of her pointing finger.

At the end of the passage stood a little figure, rigid and pale and frightened.

"Thelma!" gasped Babs, in horror.

Thelma Grant it was. Now she came running up to the group.

"Miss Primrose, I heard that!" Thelma panted. "It's not true. I know nothing—"

"Thelma, where have you been?" Miss Primrose asked grimly.

"Upstairs in one of the attics. I've been studying," Thelma cried desperately. "Look, here are my books." She took them from under her arm for the headmistress to see.

"How long have you been upstairs, Thelma?"

"For about three-quarters of an hour, Miss Primrose."

"That's what she says. She hasn't got anyone to back her up this time," put in Linda, with a sneering laugh. "She's taken the vase—of course she has! We all know Thelma Grant's a thief—"

"Linda!"

"Well, it's about time you knew what sort of girl she is!" Linda's voice was vindictively triumphant now.

"Linda, what do you mean?"

In a torrent of words Linda Locke came out with her accusations, telling of all the other incidents that had happened previously, how Thelma had been suspected.

The juniors stood there, silent and

rather contemptuous, appalled by the malice in Linda's voice.

But Miss Primrose was listening in growing horror.

"Linda!" she exclaimed. "Why haven't I known of all this before?" "It's not true! Oh, it's not true, Miss Primrose!" burst out Thelma passionately, the tears springing to her eyes.

"Miss Primrose, you mustn't believe Thelma guilty!" Babs broke in desperately. "There's never been any evidence—"

Miss Primrose held up her hand. But now there was a peculiar look in her eyes as they rested upon Thelma. Plainly Linda's accusations had startled her.

"Enough! This matter must be thoroughly looked into. Now go back to your dormitories, all of you, at once!"

Mutely Thelma looked up at Babs, and the Form captain, seeing the misery in the small girl's eyes, gave her arm a reassuring squeeze.

"Cheer up, Thelma," she whispered. "Everything will be all right—"

"Barbara!" snapped Miss Primrose. "You heard what I said. Go immediately."

Scarlet-faced, Babs and Thelma glanced up at the headmistress. And in the headmistress' grey eyes, as they were fastened upon the Courtfield girl, was a searching, wondering look—a look which said plainly: "Is this really the guilty girl?"

CLANG, CLANG, clang!

Bell for the morning lessons echoed throughout Cliff House School.

Barbara Redfern & Co., a little heavy-eyed, made their way towards the Fourth Form classroom.

The Fourth was feeling somewhat subdued that morning. They were still fazed from that incident of the previous night. But nevertheless there was an undercurrent of excitement.

For no one could forget that Christmas was nearby here. Morning lessons would be the last for this term.

"Oh, well, let's get them over quickly," said Tomboy Clara Trevlyn, with a grin. "Don't suppose we'll do much, anyway."

No, rather not, it put in Mabel Lynn. Then she paused, staring round wonderingly. "I say, where's Bessie? I haven't seen her since brekker."

Barbara Redfern, beside her, who so far had been engrossed with thoughts of her own, looked up with a start.

"Eh? Bessie?" she said vaguely. "No, I haven't seen her. Where is she?"

"Well, that's what I'm asking, chump!" replied Mabs, as they turned into the Form-room. "Hallo, Nellie," she called out gaily. "You here already?"

Most of the Courtfield girls, indeed, were in the class-room, gathered round the big fire. Apart from them, already sitting at her desk, was Thelma Grant, red-eyed and weary-looking, as if she had not slept all night—as, indeed, she hadn't.

Babs felt her heart contract as she saw that little figure. But before she could cross over to speak to her, there was a rush of heavy footsteps down the passage.

The girls, still clustered in the doorway, went staggering in all directions as a red-faced, breathless figure burst in among them.

"Why, you clumsy—" began Clara wrathfully.

"I s-s-say! I s-s-say, you girls!" Gasped plump Bessie Bunter.

"Gee, where's the fire?" asked Leila Carroll.

"Dud—don't be silly, Leila," replied Bessie witheringly. "I didn't say anything about a fire, you know. But—but I've just heard—by accident, you know—that Sally has fuf-fuf-fooned Primmy's missing value!"

Everybody turned to stare at Bessie. "What?"

"Where?"

"It was fuf-fuf-fooned," Bessie continued in an avowed voice, "in Thelma Grant's suitcase!"

As those words left the fat one's lips, a silence fell upon the Fourth Form class-room—a silence so intense that plainly could be heard the gasping intake of Thelma Grant's breath.

"And—and that's not all!" Bessie went on dramatically. "P-Primmy's phoned the headmistress of Courtfield and—and she s-s-says Thelma is to be expelled immediately!"



## HILDA RICHARDS' SURPRISE PRESENT

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

MY DEAR GIRLS.—I'm feeling just a tiny bit sad this week. Do you know why? Of course, you don't.

It is because this is the last week that I shall be selecting one of your letters to give the writer a little how I have loved, week by week, reading your really charming letters, and then wondering what present I should send just one of you. (How I wished I had a hundred to send. And also a hundred secretaries or so to send them!)

This, my last present, I am sending to FREDA LOCKWOOD, who lives at Syke-Houses, Denby Dale, nr. Huddersfield, Yorks, and the present is a BOX OF MIXED GAMES—as it's near Christmas.

In thanking Freda for her interesting and very chummy letter, I want to thank you all again. I do most sincerely feel that I cannot do this too often.

I knew, when I started this little scheme, that you would not regard your letters in any way as "competing" for a little present. And I was right! I very real—and that my presents have been—not prizes—but just presents, given for that best of all reasons, because I like to give, because we are friends.

My love and many thanks to every single one of you, my dears!

P.S.—There will be one more letter from me, next week—a Christmasy one, so I shan't say good-bye this week.

*Hilda Richards*

### Babs' Race Against Time!



A HEART-BROKEN little cry rang out, and Thelma Grant collapsed limply at her desk.

In a moment Barbara Redfern was at her side.

"Thelma!" she cried. "Oh, my dear, this is dreadful. It can't be true. Let's go along and see Primmy—"

"You'll stay where you are, Barbara and Redfern!" put in another voice, and into the room strode Sarah Harrigan of the Sixth.

"I heard what Bessie said as I was coming down the corridor. I can assure you it's perfectly true—though you, Bessie Bunter, can take twenty lines for listening at Miss Primrose's door."

"Oh, rur-really, Sarah—" began Bessie indignantly.

"Get to your desk. Be seated, all of you," snapped the unpopular prefect.

"I'm taking class this morning. Miss Charmant," she added grimly, "will be otherwise engaged. She is taking Thelma Grant to the station!"

Desperately Babs gazed at the prefect.

"But, Sarah, what happened? Please tell us," she begged. "Oh, there must be some terrible mistake—"

Sarah's thin lips pursed.

"There's no mistake," she said sharply. "Sally, the maid, who was clearing up the Courtfield dormitory this morning, found Thelma's suitcase open on the floor. She was about to close it when she saw, among the contents, Miss Primrose's missing Benares vase. That's all. The thing's as clear as a pikestaff. Thelma must have taken it, and she deserves to be expelled."

She broke off, glaring in the direction of the door.

"And where have you been?" she snapped. "You're late!"

Linda Locke, who had just hurried in, looked suitably repentant.

"Oh, Sarah, I'm so sorry. But I've just been across to the Pers' House. I do hope I haven't held up lessons," she said hypocritically.

Sarah's sour face relaxed a little. "Oh, all right. Sit down. Well, my goodness, anybody else coming in to disturb this class? And what do you want?" This time it was Boker, the page-boy.

"Begging your pardon, miss," said Boker hastily, "but Miss Primrose sent me to fetch Thelma Grant. She's to go along with me."

"Thelma!" rapped Sarah. "You here?"

As one in a daze, Thelma rose. All eyes were upon her as she staggered rather than walked down the aisle, leaning heavily on the desks for support—

(Continued on page 16)



(Continued from page 13)

so tiny, so pathetic, her eyes like saucers in her paper-white face, her lips colourless.

In silence she made her way to the door, which Boker held open for her, his usually cheery face now grave and sympathetic.

With agonised eyes Babs watched. She wanted to say something—to call out some cheering words to Thelma, to tell her that she still believed in her. But no words would come—that choking lump in her throat prevented her from speaking.

Thelma had reached the door now. Then suddenly she turned, holding herself erect, just the ghost of a smile coming to her tear-stained cheeks. "Good—good-bye, Barbara!" she breathed.

And then was gone. Babs sat rigid, never before so near to tears as in that moment.

Thelma was gone—was leaving in the direct disgrace. And she, who had promised to help her, had failed—pitifully failed.

With downcast head she sat, her mind full of bitter thoughts; and even Sarah, realising how upset she must be feeling, left her alone.

Desperately Babs forced her brain to think. She must—must save Thelma! But how—how when, in a matter of minutes now, Thelma would be taken away in charge of Miss Charmant?

"But there must be some way—there must!" Babs thought frenziedly. "As sure as I'm sitting here, I know that Linda somehow is at the bottom of the whole business. Linda—"

Yes; of that she was convinced. And yet Linda herself could not possibly have taken Miss Primrose's vase. That fact stood out clearly, indisputably. Then how—

As if she had uttered those thoughts aloud, there was a movement in front of her.

Linda Locke, her face alight with sneering triumph, grinned into her face. "Well," she mocked, "that's the end of Thelma, isn't it? And serve her right—"

"Linda!" thundered Sarah's voice. But Babs hardly heard that. Babs' gaze had suddenly become riveted upon the shoulder of Linda's Courtfield blazer.

Incredulously Babs stared. Then into her eyes suddenly shot a light of tremendous excitement. The colour surged into her cheeks.

Quickly she bent forward, her slim fingers plucking at Linda's blazer.

"Here—" began Linda.

But Babs paid no heed to her. Babs, positively thrilling, was on her feet now, eagerly gazing at something concealed in the palm of her hand.

"Goodness!" she exclaimed. "Oh, my goodness—"

"And she suddenly made a rush towards the door.

"Barbara!" positively shrieked Sarah. "How dare—"

Babs had reached the door. She flung it open.

"Come back!" hooted the prefect furiously.

But only the slam of the closing classroom door behind the fleeing Babs answered her.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Clara Trevlyn. "Where's the fathead gone?"

"She sure looked excited," opined Len Carroll.

"Silence!" shrieked Sarah. "My goodness, has everyone here gone mad this morning?"

But for once the juniors were not

heedling Sarah. In amazement they were eyeing each other. In amazement they had watched their captain's extraordinary dash from the class-room.

Then there came a splutter from Bessie Bunter.

"I sus-say! Look, there she is!" And one podgy finger quiveringly pointed out of the window.

Every head craned to see. In the distance they saw Babs' flying figure, making its way across the quadrangle.

"Where's she going—"

"Girls! Girls!" hooted Sarah. "My hat, look! She's going to the Pets' House!"

"But what—"

"The Pets' House!" Linda Locke almost shrieked those words. Suddenly she jumped to her feet, a sickly pallor overspreading her features.

Fear seemed to possess her suddenly. She remembered how Babs had plucked at her shoulder, and instinctively Linda looked down at her blazer.

Then she gave a violent start. In a blinding flash, realisation came to her.

Next moment, Linda, too, was tearing down the aisle!

Sarah's eyes goggled. She tried to shriek Linda's name; but before it finally came the class-room door had opened en shut.

And Linda was flying frenziedly, panic-strickenly in the wake of Barbara Redfern.

**B**REATHLESSLY, PANTING with excitement, Barbara Redfern fumbled at the entrance gate to the Pets' House.

Her blue eyes were shining; her cheeks flushed.

"Oh, come open!" she exclaimed impatiently, her excitement making her fingers seem all thumbs.

Another jerk. Ah, that was it! She swung the gate back, dashed down the alleyway between the dog kennels.

Now where—

Hastily she gazed about her. Then her eyes lightened.

Again she started forward. But even as she did so, there came a clatter of footsteps from outside.

"Barbara Redfern!" shrieked a frenzied voice.

With a start Babs flung round. And then her eyes narrowed, as she beheld the fear-distorted face of Linda Locke—Linda, who was just entering the Pets' House.

Madly she came rushing forward, hurled herself upon the Fourth Form captain.

"Come out of here, Barbara Redfern!" she panted. "You interfering cat, come out!"

And desperately she began tugging at Babs' arm, trying to drag her back to the entrance.

Babs' face was grim.

"No, you don't, Linda Locke!" she said tersely. "I'm going to show you up—"

"You won't! You won't!" shrieked Linda, and, almost sobbing with rage and fear, she violently wrapped her arms around Babs, as if she would carry her bodily back into the quadrangle.

But Babs was strong. Fiercely she resisted. Backwards and forwards they swayed, banging against the wire doors of the kennels, setting all the dogs frenziedly barking.

The noise was deafening, but neither Babs nor Linda seemed to hear it. Then—

"Oh, my giddy goloshes! What's happening here?"

It was Clara Trevlyn's voice—Clara who was staring in wide-eyed amazement at the struggling figures in the alleyway.

"Clara, help me!" panted Babs desperately.

"Yes, rather!" said Clara, springing forward. "But look here, Sarah's sent me to fetch you two back."

"Never mind that now!" snapped Babs. "Grab hold of Linda!"

"Keep off!" shrieked Linda, and lashed out savagely with her foot.

"You idiot!" said the Tomboy grimly, her fighting blood aroused by that cowardly action. "You'll have Primmy hearing you if you keep on shrieking like that!"

"Primmy?" Babs' head jerked up. She and Clara had the struggling Linda in a firm grip now. "Clara, where is she?"

"Just going down to the gates with Thelma and the Charmer!"

Babs' eyes blazed.

"Then fetch her, Clara—quickly! Fetch them all here!" she cried. "No, don't argue—go!"

And obediently, if amazedly, Clara went.

Face distorted with rage and fear, Linda redoubled her efforts to get away.

(Concluded on page 20)

## Jemima's Christmas Secret

By  
Hilda Richards



IN NEXT WEEK'S  
EXTRA-SPECIAL  
CHRISTMAS NUMBER  
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Friday, December 17th

### Fun and Excitement with Babs & Co, at Romantic Glengowrie Castle!

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# SCHOOLGIRLS IN SOCIETY

## FOR NEW READERS.

BETTY BARTON and her Morcove chums, POLLY LINTON, NAOMIE NAKARA, FANN WILLUGHBY, 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 a chaperon,

MISS LESTER, a charming lady they adore. At Morcove, during the preparations, a valuable concert frock is ruined. Betty & Co. seek the miscreant in vain—never suspecting that it is actually Miss Lester! Later, in London, an influential lady cancels the party's engagement. Betty leaves to demand an explanation.

(Now read on.)

## Suspicious!

**T**R-R-RING, ring! Betty's right forefinger was stabbing at a bell—press now that she had ended her five-minute run round to Lady Mountmerry's great town house in Bedford Square. There was a striped awning across the pavement, and the stone steps were carpeted—in readiness for the great social occasion due to begin in an hour's time.

During the moment or two that she was kept waiting, panting to get her breath back, Betty felt herself being spurred on all the more by the thought of all the money she and her chums might have collected to-night, if only their engagement had not been cancelled—so unjustly, and at such short notice!

Directly a footman opened the door, she began:

"Is Lady Mountmerry at home, please?"

The footman first asked her in, then asked for her name. He would inquire, he said, but he feared her ladyship would be dressing.

It proved to be so. "May I wait then?" Betty pleaded. "Oh, no, miss. Her ladyship will see you, if you will go up. This way, please."

That was better! "So much for Miss Lester's idea that nothing was to be done," Betty could not help thinking, whilst being taken up a magnificent staircase to the second floor.

Special floral decorations adorned the first flight of stairs, for the drawing-

room and ball-room were on the first floor. What a party it was going to be! And so—oh, if only Lady Mountmerry could be made to see what an injustice the cancellation was. One would protest, but at the same time one would be prepared to plead also. Never mind the humiliation! For the sake of the cause, a lot was worth putting up with.

The servant who had conducted Betty upstairs tapped at the chief door in a carpeted corridor, and a French maid showed her charming self.

Then Betty was in a wonderful boudoir-like dressing-room, where her middle-aged ladyship was standing to have the finishing touches put to her evening toilette. The Mountmerry jewels shimmered, but their brightness was not half so dazzling to Betty as was their owner's unexpected smile.

"So you, my dear, are Betty Barton—the leader of the concert party? I hope this doesn't mean a hitch—your not being able to come?"

## The traitor in the Morcove Concert Party now tries to bring a rift between the Chums!

"But, Lady Mountmerry!" gasped Betty. "I'm only here because—because you said we mustn't turn up!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"This note, please,"—offering it.

Lady Mountmerry, having glanced it through for a first time, went closer to a table-lamp to scan it again. Her smile had vanished. Betty was aware of the French maid looking suddenly very solemn, as if anticipating an upset.

"But this, my dear girl, is abominable!" cried her ladyship at last. "I never wrote this note—nor did my secretary. 'Unbecoming conduct'—you and your chums?"

"That could only mean," Betty burst out laughing, "a joke we had with our 'property' horse, round at Mrs. Willoughby's, last evening. But"—and she frowned perplexedly—"if you didn't write this note, Lady Mountmerry, then I can't imagine who did!"

"On my club's notepaper—if that is

a clue?" murmured Lady Mountmerry. "Of course, club notepaper can be got hold of quite easily. But what are you suddenly thinking of?"

Betty only shook her head. She did not like to say that she was suddenly thinking of—Miss Lester.

Madness, it seemed, to start suspecting her! But Miss Lester had been to lunch to-day at that club. And at home at Mrs. Willoughby's there was a typewriter—

"May I have back that sham note?" Betty suddenly asked. "I—I may be able to do some good with it."

"By all means, my dear—after it has very nearly been the means of doing so much harm! But you will all be along presently, to give your show? That's all right then!" Lady Mountmerry was plainly relieved. "All my guests are terribly keen about it. Did you come here on foot? You must go back in a taxi. Annette," to the French maid, "would you see to it?"

And so, next moment, Betty was making her way downstairs, almost off her head with joyful relief.

A hastily summoned taxi was at the kerb. It whirled her the short distance back to the Willoughbys', where a hall attendant, as she rushed indoors again, told her that she had only been away for fifteen minutes at the most.

But, in those few minutes, black gloom had fallen upon her chums. They were all downstairs now. What use, they had been glumly saying to one another, doing anything more about getting ready? It was all "off" for to-night—Miss Lester had said so.

Such a hopeless note had their official chaperon struck, even Betty's coming indoors again in a joyfully excited manner failed to charm away all the black looks. It was imagined by her chums that she was merely half-amused over the "telling off" of Lady Mountmerry.

"Hallo! Don't you want to give the show?" Betty jollied them.

"Oh, don't be funny!" Polly snapped.

"And, look here, why didn't you take me, Betty, so I could have given her a bit of my mind, too!"

"Bekas, of all ze rotten sweendles, Betty."

"Swindle is right," the captain caught up shrill Naomer. "Only it's been none of Lady Mountmerry's doing. Can't explain now—"

"But, Betty!" the combined yell went up. "You—you don't mean to say—"

"I do, just that! It's O.K. for the show! And now, if we're not to be late, upstairs again, all of us—"

"Rah, rah, rah!" Jack shouted.

"Attaboy!"

By

MARJORIE STANTON

As for the girls—

"Whoopee!" they dinned.  
 "But how marvellous! Only a minute ago, all off. And now—"  
 "Zen come on upstairs, queek!" shrieked Naomer. "What ze diggings, eef we're late—no refreshments before we're ze show!"

Then Betty, left behind in the hall because of this mad dashing upstairs by all who were not out of breath, as she still was, found Miss Lester coming towards her from the library.

"Going to the party, after all, did I hear you saying, Betty? That's splendid! You must have done wonders, considering the way her ladyship wrote!"

"But she didn't write," Betty shrugged. "That typed note was a fake."

"A—a fake?" stared Miss Lester. "Good gracious! I must look into this! Can you let me see the note again?"  
 "I'm afraid I can't," said Betty, who had it in her pocket.

"Where is the note then?" Miss Lester asked anxiously.

"There, again—I'm afraid I can't tell you!"

And Betty, after looking the "official chaperson" straight in the face for a long moment, calmly heeled round and walked away!

### Tremendous Enthusiasm!

"LADIES and gentlemen—"

"Sh, sh!"  
 And the fashionable throng that crowded this grand dining-room at Lady Mountmerry's became suddenly hushed. The hostess was wishing to speak.

"If you will now make your back to the ball-room our young friends who call themselves the Morocco Concert Party will give their entertainment!"

"Ladies and their attendant 'boys' chatted away once more, whilst letting some of the older folk go first back to the ball-room. Titled ladies and their handsome squires talked just as animatedly again, whilst many a costly vanity-bag was secretly looked into by some wealthy dowager who wanted to make sure she had "that money" for the ultimate collection.

"Such a good cause, isn't it?" was the gist of all the agreeable chatter. "To secure that beautiful old mansion, down there at Sandton Bay, as a seaside home for slum kiddies!"

"Capital idea—capital! Great credit to these girls and boys we're going to see," rapped out one retired general.

"H'm! Ha! Fine school Morocco! Fine school Grangemore!"

During the last few minutes chairs had been placed, row behind row, in the vast ball-room. Where there had been dancing such a little while since it was now like the filling up of a theatre for a show.

Beautiful velvet curtains were "down" in front of the temporary stage, receiving at present only a little glow from the footlights. There was a pleasant dimness which gave promise of brilliance to come.

And now, whilst Lady Mountmerry's guests subsided into seats as comfortable as any fifteen-shilling stalls, a young girl suddenly slipped into view near the grand piano, to which she stepped briskly, switching on the screened light.

Madge Minden—"accompanist"!  
 Instantly she was clapped, and so she had to make a pretty bow before sitting down.

Then, with that kind of brilliant "attack" which only a girl with Madge's passion for music could achieve, she began a spirited overture. Up flashed all the footlights suddenly, and then the curtains flew apart, revealing Betty & Co., and the Boys, all effectively grouped for the opening chorus.

"A 'switch' by Madge at the piano, and, with a real heartiness, they sang:

"Good-evening, all, and may we say  
 We hope to do more than make  
 you gay!  
 We want money—pounds, shillings,  
 pence—  
 To help us bear a big expense!"

And a few moments later:

"Some from one school, some from  
 'other;  
 Here's Polly Linton, and here her  
 brother!"

So, by means of musical "patter," the various members of the M.C.P. were introduced to an audience that was already captivated.

Comedy stuff began: at first between Polly and Jack. Then, one after another, other players came back to the stage to help to swell the fun. It was the purest nonsense, keeping old and young alike in fits of laughter.

Another song, a dance, to get the Merry-makers off the stage in jolly two and threes, and then one of the five-minute farces started.

This, a skit on school life, went with a bang. At the finish, there was such a bravo-ing and clapping as held up the entertainment for a couple of minutes.

But, later in the show, there was an even bigger hit. That was when the Concert Party did its "Riding School" stuff.

Commencing with quiet comedy, it developed into roaring fun with "Ginger," the stage pony.

Tom and Tubby did not spare themselves, partnering each other inside the hearthrug "ponykin." At none of the rehearsals had Ginger ramped about as skittishly as he ramped to-night.

And now, for their last item but one, Betty & Co. were going to give something that was, they felt, a bit of a venture. After so much fun—pathos!

It had been Betty's idea, days ago at Morocco, that instead of a little speech being made from the stage, stressing the cause for which the shows were being given, there should be a five-minute play, dealing with the stern realities of life. The scene, a room in the slums, and the characters, poor children, who were motherless, fatherless.

Some stuff, this, for Polly to have to write. But her sense of "theatre" had not failed her.

And so, suddenly on a darkened stage she and her fellow players were trying out this other sketch upon their wealthy fashionable audience.

Polly herself was a "little mother," running the home so bravely; Jack was her errand-boy brother bringing in his few shillings "pay" for her to eke out as best she could. Just enough for bread and scrape! But as for a better home than this, as for a holiday in the summer, goodness! or if it were possible!

Stuff like that, instead of a speech appealing for money towards the "Rock Hill House Scheme," gripped the audience.

No sooner was the finishing-up medley in full swing than down from the stage jumped Betty, to go round with the plate.

Quickly she went along row after row of seats, silver and notes being eagerly bestowed, along with many a nice compliment and smiled good wishes.

The amount of money she was taking up exceeded her wildest expectations. That silver salver, when at last she romped away with it, was heavy with coins, whilst she had to use one hand to hold the stage, paper-money to save it from being wafted away.

By the time the curtain was due to fall, she had the collection totalled up. Back to her place in the lined-up party she ran, joining in the singing.

Then, when it must have seemed to an already clapping audience that she and her chums were going to dance away to the wings, Betty made a sign that meant, instantly, stillness everywhere.

"Ladies and gentlemen, we thank you very much indeed for your generous response—twenty-seven pounds, five shillings! If only we do as well as this on other evenings—"

"As you will!" came the hearty reassurance from all parts of the audience.

And then it was furious handclapping again, and prolonged bravo-ing, whilst on the stage the "comics" went through some last bits of nonsense, to bring down the curtain.

"TWENTY-SEVEN POUNDS, five!" cried Polly, during a boisterous surging away after some taking of "calls" before the curtain. "Whew!"  
 "Oh boy!" chortled Jack. "Rah, rah, rah!"

"So what ze diggings, eef we don't deserve some jolly good refreshments—"

"In the dining-room, Lady Mountmerry said," Bunny gaily set Naomer's mind at rest. "Pouf! But I must cool down a bit, first!"

"Come on, girls!" panted Betty.

"Grangemore pals!" Jack rallied her. There was, in fact, a general desire to get rid of grease-paint and to change out of stage attire before going in to supper.

A few moments more and the girls' dressing-room was in a fresh state of hubbub. They were in one another's way again; they were all jabber-jabber about items that had made a special hit, and about things they hoped the audience hadn't noticed!

Above all, they could not get over that sensational sum of money which Betty, at this very moment, was locking away in the M.C.P.'s cash-box.

Then Miss Lester came in wanting to shower her own praises upon the girls.

"As you said from the stage, Betty dear," was her delighted comment, "if only you do as well as this other evenings! Don't lose that cash-box, will you?" she jested, opening the door to her own room.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed several of the girls; and then, Miss Lester having gone, Betty heard several admiring comments.

"Isn't she a sport?"

"Bekas, some jabberones would have wanted to be in us at supper! Which ze boys will all be scoffing before we get a lock-in eef we don't look sharp!"

"We couldn't have a nicer chaperson—don't you agree, Betty?"

At such a time of hurry-scurry, it was taken for granted that Betty agreed—of course she did! Not one of her chums, in the faintest idea that she was feeling a little less sure about the chaperson's good will towards the "M.C.P."

Lancashire-born Betty was a good one at "saying nowt," whenever a still tongue seemed to be advisable.





WHILE her chums went through the finale, Betty began the collection. Money simply poured in from a wildly enthusiastic audience. The Morcov Concert Party was a tremendous success.

And so, next moment, the "cat" appeared to be just the same as the rest of them—full of exuberant high-spirits.

All by themselves in Lady Mountmerry's dining-room, the juniors did themselves very well indeed.

Chicken patties and smoked-salmon sandwiches; blancmanges and jellies; hot-house grapes and nuts and sweets; fizzing drinks and ices—they could help themselves, although it was the boys who helped the girls with more or less politeness.

Suddenly a most lovely young lady came in, causing the one glad cry from Morcov and Grangemore alike: "Lady Evelyn!"

She was that friend of theirs, ever interested in their activities—Lady Evelyn Knight, daughter and heiress to the Earl and Countess of Lundy, of Barncombe Castle.

"You know, I did try so hard to get here in time for your show," she said, after merrily declining refreshment. "I must see it another time, that's all. I hear it's been a crashing success. How did you get on with Miss Lester?"

"Oh, fine! She's great!" was the chorus. "Just leaves us alone! A topping sport!"

"Are you all coming to the ballroom? They've cleared it, and the band's playing again."

So off the chums drifted to the ball-room.

One of London's finest dance-bands was in the middle of a waltz—the very dreamiest, loveliest thing that ever came from Vienna. Preferring one-steps, madcap Polly would have kept off the floor at present, like Bunny and Naomer. But Dave, as soon as he had seen shy Jimmy secure tall Pam's favour, felt emboldened to ask Polly:

"Couldn't we?"

"That they could, and very nicely, too, was at once apparent."

"But give me something with more of a beat in it," Polly sighed at the finish. "Ah! as a thoroughly modern piece of orchestral acrobatics started, 'that's the stuff!'"

And she darted off to get Naomer for a partner.

Dave saw that Betty was free, but he guessed he'd give her a chance to find someone else. Pam and Jimmy were still together. Bunny now had her

brother Tom. Judy was partnered, and so, it seemed, were all the others. When at last Dave went up to Betty, she seemed to be standing in a dream.

"Not fancying this one, Betty?" "Yes!" she smiled. "But I—I was watching Miss Lester. How she is enjoying herself, Dave!"

There was one of his calm nods as they one-stepped away together.

"Not a bad thing for her, is it, Dave —to be our 'official chaperone'?" Betty softly laughed. "Er—I wish you'd tell me. Do you really like her? I don't feel that I do, now."

"Don't you, Betty?" The band was blaring; the crowded floor was inevitably noisy; and Dave's one thought seemed to be to dance his best, so as not to disgrace himself by having a collision.

"But do you?" Betty persisted, "or don't you?"

"Can't tell you now," murmured Dave. "Here she is, so be careful."

Miss Lester, suddenly within speaking distance, dancing with a man who might have been an officer in the Guards, conferred her sweetest smile upon Betty and Dave.

"Enjoying yourselves? That's right!" she voiced.

"Say, Betty, Dave casually asked her a few moments later, "what have you done with the takings?"

"Oh, the cash is all locked away, and I've got the key," she rather laughed. "And the cash-box I've left with the man in the hall, for him to mind until we go. Why?"

"Oh—I only wondered!"

At last, all too soon, it was time for them to withdraw. As juniors, Morcov and Grangemore knew they must not "wear out their welcome."

So Lady Mountmerry was found, was thanked for having them, and then they were in various taxis, doing the short run back to the Willoughbys' place. As for the "official chaperone"—she had stayed on.

But although Morcov & Co. were late to bed, next morning one of them was down before daylight.

Betty!

What she did, alone in the library with the door shut, was to go straight to a table that held a typewriter. Before sitting down, she took from a pocket

that typed letter which had been falsely sent off in Lady Mountmerry's name, yesterday, from the Ladies' Embassy Club.

With that placed beside the machine, Betty reeled a sheet of paper between the rollers, then sat down to start tapping off an exact copy of the missive.

She was going to see if the letter had been typed on this machine.

If it proved to be the case—then what a terrible thing would be proved at the same time!

### Someone is a Thief!

TAP—TAP—TAP! Betty carried on at the keyboard, and even as she hit off line after line she was looking out for any slight defective lettering in the original to be repeated in the copy.

Except in the case of brand-new machines of the same make, scarcely two typewriters write alike. She knew that as a long-established fact, and therein lay her chance of finding out whether the original note, on paper secretly purloined from the ladies' club, had been typed in this house.

But no; it was not so. Betty never even troubled to finish her copying, being quickly convinced that this machine was not the one to have been used yesterday, for typing the original. The letter "e" in the original was out of alignment, whereas it was quite all right in the copy.

"Good enough!" was Betty's acceptance of such overwhelming proof. "It's just as well I never said a word to Polly and the rest about my suspicions. It couldn't have been Miss Lester's doing, after all!"

Couldn't it, though? Come to think of it, she had not been bound to use this machine! She might have done so, finding it handy, and never dreaming that a detective-like test would be used in regard to the faked note afterwards. But, supposing her to be cunning enough to have worked that trick with the note—the same cunning could have warned her to use any machine but the one in this house.

So Betty, instead of being able to rejoice over the dispersal of a suspicion

which she hated having to harbour, was not done with it even now.

Her mind was so troubled at the end of another ten minutes all by herself in the library, that she felt it would be best for her to find something to do. How about getting last night's collection ready for paying into the bank?

There was a bit of the business side to the "M.C.P." that might very well be dealt with before all one's chums came down to make things lively, as usual.

Mr. Willoughby had put a certain disposal in his knee-hole desk at Betty's disposal. She went to it and took out the bank paying-in book.

Then, because she had got to show the different amounts in silver and notes—not forgetting one cheque—she also lifted out the cashbox.

Into its little lock went the tiny key, which had gone back into Betty's pocket only half an hour ago, after being under her pillow all night. She threw open the cashbox.

First there was the cheque.

Next she took up the currency notes, remembering how much they themselves had totalled. Six ten-shilling notes there were, and four pound notes—

"Or should be!" came her startled murmur, as she counted only two. "That's strange!"

Instantly Betty was spreading the loose silver on the desk, to go over it, counting it up. Twenty-seven pounds five was the total she had to reach. If everything together added up to that, then it simply meant that her memory was at fault about the money notes.

But everything didn't add up to that! The pencil clacked as Betty dropped it upon the paper. She was agasp now, sweeping a hand over her hair.

"Two pounds—missing!" Her lips became pursed after letting that horrified whisper pass. Then they parted again. "Two pounds—gone—stolen!"

Quietly, at this instant, the library door opened, and she flashed round to see that it was Miss Lester, all smiles, as usual.

"Down already, Betty? I thought I was pretty early! But is anything the matter?" came the quick change to sympathetic concern.

"There are two pound notes gone from the cashbox!" Betty husked. "I can't make it out! I'm two pounds short!"

"But that," Miss Lester frowned, "is very upsetting. Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby won't be pleased about that, Betty—in their house! How I wish, now, I had kept charge of the money. As a matter of fact, lying awake in the night, I was rather sorry I'd left it to you. Oh, and, by the way—talking of my lying awake—"

"Yes, what?" Betty staid.

"I am going to ask Polly Linton," said Miss Lester, in a sighing tone of regret; "I feel I ought to, in my capacity of chaperone—"

"Ask her what, though!"

"Just why she came downstairs in the night," was the impressively slow reply. "And why she spent a few minutes all by herself—in this room!"

**STARTLING** indeed is Miss Lester's insinuation! Can there possibly be any truth in it? And even if there is not, how will Betty be able to clear Polly of suspicion? On no account miss next week's issue of the **SCHOOLGIRL**—and remember that it will be on sale one day earlier than usual.

## "BABS' END OF TERM TRIUMPH!"

(Concluded from page 16)

Wildly she kicked out again, catching Babs a vicious blow on the shin.

Babs gave a cry of pain.

And then there came a scandalised cry from the entrance.

"Linda, you wicked girl! I saw you do that!" And Miss Primrose, her brow thunderous, strode angrily down the alleyway, closely followed by Miss Clara and Thelma, and Clara, and behind them Sarah Harrigan and the whole crowd of Cliff House and Courtfield Fourth Formers, who, unable to contain their wondering curiosity any longer, had rushed down from the classroom.

"What is going on here?" stormed Miss Primrose.

"Clara! Mabs!" Babs cried. "Hold Linda! Miss Primrose—"

And while the Tomboy and Mabs held the Courtfield girl, Babs faced the headmistress.

"Miss Primrose," she said again, "Thelma is innocent. I can prove it to you. And that proof," she cried vivaciously, "is to be found in the cage of Linda's pet chimpanzee! I'll show you!"

Wonderingly the headmistress followed, while all the other girls surged excitedly behind.

In front of Koko's cage, where the terrified Linda was now being held by Clara and Mabs, Babs halted.

"Miss Primrose," the junior captain said, "I found some hairs on Linda's blazer. They were the same hairs as were discovered on Marjorie's Hazeldene's cushion after it had been destroyed—supposedly by Thelma. And those hairs belong to Koko here!"

"Bless my soul!" gasped the headmistress. "But—Oh!" And Miss Primrose suddenly gave a little shriek.

For at that moment out between the bars of the cage snaked a long, hairy arm. Before the headmistress could back away Koko's nimble fingers had fastened upon the brooch at the neck of her blouse, had roughly snatched it away.

Back into the cage went his arm, the brooch clutched in his hand.

There came a chinking sound from among the straw. And then a yell from Clara Trevlyn:

"My only giddy aunt! Look! There's my cup that was stolen from the study!"

Even Babs looked a little surprised; but then she laughed triumphantly.

"Goodness, I didn't know that was going to happen," she confessed, "although I fancied something of the sort when Linda tried so frantically to prevent my coming in here! But I did count on Koko doing his snatch-and-grab trick.

"You see, I spotted Koko up to that same trick three days ago, before all this funny business started.

"I saw him snatch a tiepin Linda was wearing," went on Babs. "A tiepin—something that glittered. And everything that's been missed, you'll remember, has been of a glittering nature. But, like a chump, I never for one moment connected Koko with the incidents for which Thelma has been held responsible—until this morning in the classroom.

"Seeing the chimp's hairs on Linda's coat brought it all home. I rushed down here to test out my theories and—well, you know what's happened. It clears Thelma's name completely."

"Bless my soul!" gasped the headmistress. "Incredible! Then—then the thefts have merely been the result of this animal's playful antics?"

Babs shook her head. At that moment her face became very, very grim as she stared at the trembling Linda Locke.

"I hardly think so, Miss Primrose," she replied. "Koko belongs to Linda Locke, and it is my opinion that Linda deliberately coaxed her pet to steal valuable things. Later she recovered them from this cage, or from Koko himself, and then put the valuables where they would incriminate Thelma."

"Good gracious!" Miss Primrose's tone was horrified. "Barbara, this is terrible—terrible!" Her face flint-like, she turned to Linda. "Linda," she said harshly, "you will come to my study immediately!"

AND UNDER Miss Primrose's searching questioning the whole truth did become known.

It became known when Linda finally broke down and sobbingly confessed.

She it was who was to blame for everything—she and Koko, whose weakness for glittering objects Linda had been fully aware of, and had used as a means of disgracing Thelma Grant, whom she hated.

At Courtfield, Linda had started her despicable game, taking advantage of the fact that little Thelma, sweating hard for the examination, was so gormless to win, was in the habit of creeping out of her dormitory late at night to study.

Cunningly Linda had allowed Koko, her chimp, to get into the school, taking him to rooms where she knew there was some glittering article which her pet would instantly claim.

Cleverly, to divert any suspicion from herself, Linda had "stolen" her own wristlet-watch.

And it had been the same at Cliff House. Koko, released from his cage and brought into the school by Linda, had been the culprit concerned in every theft. It was Koko, too, who had frightened Bessie Bunter.

So the truth came out.

So little Thelma Grant was vindicated—her honour established. And it was Linda who was expelled.

Happily came to Thelma—Thelma, who, reinstated once more, spent most of that afternoon laughingly receiving the apologies of Courtfield and Cliff House girls who had been ready to believe her a thief.

And then, after that exciting day, came a day that was yet more exciting—the last day of term, when Cliff House and their Courtfield guests broke up for the Christmas vacation.

Hurry and bustle, laughter and chatter with everybody in the gayest of spirits and thrilled at the prospect of Christmas delights to come.

Little Thelma Grant, with Barbara Redfern, stood in the midst of a joyfully happy throng of Fourth Formers.

"Oh, Babs, I—I'll never be able to thank you enough for what you've done!" she whispered huskily. "And so, Babs dear, I'll wish you the very merriest of merry Christmases you've ever had!"

And the merriest of merry Christmases, as it happened, Barbara Redfern and her chums were very soon to enjoy.