

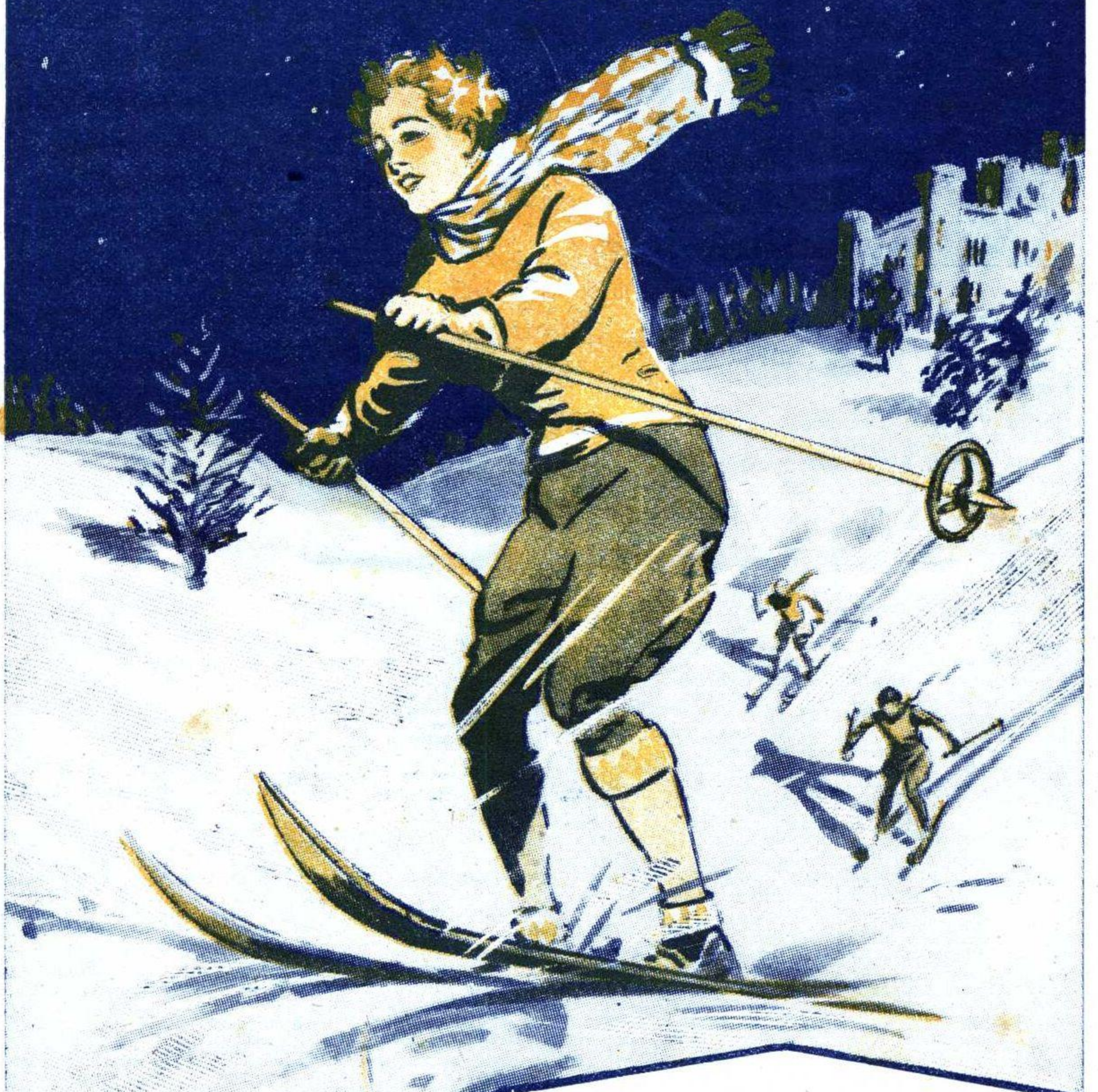
A Merry Christmas To All Our Readers!

# THE SCHOOLGIRL

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EVERY 2<sup>d</sup> SATURDAY

Incorporating  
"SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN"



**Christmas Day in the Highlands!**  
And what a glorious time for Babs & Co.  
See the magnificent Long COMPLETE story of  
the Cliff House chums, inside.



Magnificent LONG COMPLETE Christmas Day story of the thrilling things—



## A Meeting on Christmas Morn!



"COME on, girls!" Barbara Redfern called gaily. "We don't want to be late for Christmas dinner!"

"No, rather not, you know," plump Bessie Bunter said anxiously. "Buck up, everybody! I'm stut-starving!"

On the lake at Glengowrie, where seven happy Fourth Formers from Cliff House School were disporting themselves on the ice, there was a chuckle.

But it was significant, despite their amusement, that seven pairs of eyes were immediately and hungrily raised towards the hill where the picturesquely medieval castle of Glengowrie stood silhouetted against the redly glowing sky of Christmas Day.

Very imposing, very impressive that castle looked, even from this distance, which must have been half a mile as the crow flies, and a very good whole mile to walk.

Rather like a view on the front of a Christmas greeting card, indeed, with its snow-covered towers, its heavy cloak of ivy whose clinging branches were now etched in white, and with, behind it, the towering mountains of the Scottish Highlands.

The seven were all on skates, and for the last hour on that happy Christmas morning had been having grand fun on the ice. Now they were feeling very ready to do justice to the magnificent Christmas dinner which awaited them in the castle.

All wore bright, happy faces, flushed with their exertions and the sharp nip of the Highland air.

"Race you to the path!" Clara Trevlyn, the lighthearted Tomboy whooped suddenly.

"Done!" cried Jean Cartwright.

"But—no, wait a minute," objected golden-haired Mabel Lynn. "If we're

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going to race, let's make a handicap of it. Where's Leila?"

"O.K., Mabs," beamed the American junior from behind her.

"Leila's the best skater, so Leila starts from scratch," Mabs went on. "Jean, you've got the longest legs"—this to Jean Cartwright, the niece of their host, the Laird of Glengowrie—"you have five yards start! Jemima—"

"All present and correct, what?" that worthy chirped, adjusting her monocle.

"You in front of Jean. Clara, you here. Babs, you with me. Bessie, you'd better get over by the tree there. Now," Mabs cried, "when I say go—"

"Rush!" Jemima Carstairs beamed. "Ready, Spartans! Down on your elbows, or however it is you start a race! First to reach the merry old castle gets an extra currant in her mince pie!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

They tensed, waiting until Bessie gingerly skated towards the tree. The dear old plump duffer was a mere beginner, but she reached the tree

safely, stopped, and blinked round through her thick spectacles. Up from Mabs went a yell:

"Go!"

And off with a rush they all went.

All, that is, save Leila Carroll.

For Leila, standing on the scratch mark, did not notice the deep furrow in the surface of the ice just to her front. At that word "Go!" Leila's right foot shot out, her left pushing hard against the ice for a swift start.

And a swift start it would have been but for that furrow, made probably by the freezing on a twig which had since been removed.

The blade of Leila's skate caught in the furrow. Since Leila, at that moment was entirely dependent for her balance upon that one foot, she was flung violently sideways.

Down with a crash went Leila. Almost stunned by the fall, and slithering for a dozen yards, she brought up with a thud against the bole of a derelict tree which had been frozen solidly into the surface of the lake.



—which happen to Babs & Co. at romantic Glengowrie Castle.



By  
Hilda  
Richards

# A HOLIDAY TASK for LEILA

For a moment, while her chums, all ignorant of her accident, skated on, she lay dazed and half-stunned. She was moving one hand up to straighten her horn-rimmed glasses, when—

There was an ominous crack beneath her. Near the edge of the lake at this point, the ice was thin. Quickly she began scrambling up. At the same moment—

"Lie flat—lie flat!" an agitated voice from the bank called out. "Don't move!"

The American junior blinked round. Then, despite the perilous precariousness of her position, she almost leapt to her feet in surprise. For on the bank stood a boy of about her own age.

"Lister!" she cried in astonishment.

Lister Cattermole, Jean Cartwright's half-brother, it was! But what on earth was Lister Cattermole doing in Glengowrie, above all places? Leila's last information of him was that he was enjoying Christmas as the guest of Jimmy Richmond, of Friardale School, who had joined a house party at Tarbet, on Loch Lomond.

Cr-cr-cr-crack! The ominous splintering came from all around her.

Lister Cattermole's panting voice reached her again:

"Don't try to stand, for goodness' sake. Your skates'll go through the ice. Wait a minute." And while Leila watched, she saw him put one foot on the splintering ice, saw him coming gingerly towards her, a regular barrage of crisp cracklings sounding with every foot he took.

"Now!" he panted. "Leila, give me your hands. I'll drag you over here!"

Leila, amazed by the mystery of his appearance in the first place, and still slightly dazed by her own fall, found herself obeying. Eagerly the boy caught her wrists, expertly twirled her aside at the same time giving an outward thrust which sent her slithering out on to the thicker and safer ice several yards away from the bank. There Leila, with a breathless laugh, staggered to her feet.

"Gee, I guess that was great of you!" she gasped. "But—gosh, be careful!" she shrieked next moment.

And bit off the words, her heart suddenly freezing with fear.

For, even as she uttered the warning, it happened. The ice beneath the boy splintered and broke. Leila saw a great

portion of it swinging up out of the water, like the jagged edge of a smashed window-pane, and Lister's foot disappearing into the consequent hole with a splash. Just in the nick of time he hurled himself back—again to meet with disaster. For as one dripping foot came out of the water the rearmost went in.

Impetuously she started forward. But—

"Go back! Go back!" Lister Cattermole roared even in his own moment of peril. "It—it's all right! My hat!" he gasped. "Thank goodness that wasn't deep! It's all right!"

"M'yes, it looks all right!" Leila cried, as the boy floundered to the bank, soaked now from knees to toes. "But you'll freeze!" she added anxiously.

Lister grinned breathlessly. "Oh, don't worry about me! Jolly glad you didn't get the ducking!"

"But you!" cried Leila, choosing thicker ice and cautiously skating to the bank. "I guess we'd better hurry to the

"Lister," she said softly, "let's go wherever it is you're hanging out. I reckon you've struck some sort of trouble, and if you need a helping hand I'm the one to give it."

"But Babs & Co.—" "Never mind Babs & Co. They'll know I'll follow. Come on, lead the way."

The boy gazed at her. For a moment he hesitated, glancing uneasily in the direction of the castle. Desperately as he was trying to hide it, he was shivering now with cold. Suddenly he shrugged.

"Well, come on," he said. "But, Leila, you promise you won't tell the others you've met me?"

"Not a whisper, if you don't want me to," Leila assured him. "I promise."

Without another word, with rather a dumb, beseeching look, that went straight to Leila's heart, the boy led the way. Through the snow they tramped into the cluster of pines which rose by

A Christmas Day to be remembered was that which Babs & Co. spent at Glengowrie Castle. All that they could wish for was theirs for the asking. What thrilling sport, what glorious fun! But there was one girl who, despite all the jollity, was not completely happy, who began to act mysteriously, secretly. And that girl was Leila Carroll, one of their own chums.

castle and dig out some dry socks and things. I guess you were making your way to the castle?"

To her amazement Lister vigorously shook his head.

"No, Leila. You—you go on," he advised. "I—" and he shuffled uneasily. "But—but wait a minute! There—there is something you can do for me."

"Say it," Leila invited. "It's done!" "Well, just—just don't mention to anyone you've seen me," the boy mumbled. "Especially Jean. You—you see—" he stammered.

Leila eyed him bewilderedly. "Call me a numbskull," she said, "but I guess I don't see. What's the matter? Weren't you coming to the castle?"

The boy flushed. "No. You—you see, I'm supposed to be Jimmy Richmond's guest."

"I guess I knew that," Leila told him, and then frowned, as, looking more intently at him, it struck her all at once how white, how worried he looked. She took his arm.

the edge of the lake. A half-ruined watch-tower, a conspicuous part of the old outer fortifications of Glengowrie Castle, reared its bulk suddenly before them. Leila stared.

"Lister, you haven't—"

"Come!" Lister said. He led her forward. Up three crumbling steps he clambered, inserting a gigantic key in a stout oak door. Again Leila blinked. More utterly astounded than ever, she followed him into the dusty, dark, unpleasant-smelling apartment beyond the door.

She stared round—at the bed of straw and leaves in the corner; at the poor, smouldering embers of a twig fire in the grate; at the bones of what had once been a rabbit near them.

"Lister!" she breathed. The boy smiled mirthlessly.

"You asked me where my hang-out was," he said. "I'm sorry, Leila. I didn't want you to see this place, but I was afraid if we stopped outside, Babs & Co. would come back. But this," he added—and sighed a little—"is my present address."



Leila stared at him in horror.

"But Lister—oh, gee! What has happened?" she gasped.

The boy shrugged.

"It's a long story," he said. "Please, Leila, won't you go now? Babs & Co. will be wondering what has happened."

Leila's face became resolute.

"Where's your luggage?" she asked accusingly.

Lister coloured.

"Oh, don't you worry about that—"

"And where," Leila went on, "is your food? What are you eating?"

Cattermole bit his lip.

"Leila, please! Do—do go," he jerked out. "Bother, I didn't mean you to come here. I didn't mean to be seen by any of you, and I—I wouldn't have, if you hadn't got yourself in that mess."

"Quite!" Leila agreed. "And, having got me out of that mess, I'm going to help you to get out of this one, I guess. All right, Lister, don't tell me now. Think it over. But answer me one question—please!"

"Yes?" Cattermole said.

"Have you anything to eat?"

"Well—" The boy looked away. "Well, I'm hoping to snare a rabbit," he said. "I got one the day before yesterday."

"I see. And that's all you've had since the day before yesterday?"

"But, Leila—"

"This won't do," said Leila. "Lister, get those shoes and stockings off. Warm your feet. Don't worry, I'm not going to say anything, but I guess I'm not going to let you hang out in this dreadful spot without seeing you again. I'm going back now, but I guess I shall come here again about three o'clock—with some grubbins, and some dry socks. And then, old-timer, make up your mind to tell me what it's all about," she added, "because while you eat I'm going to ask you so many questions you'll think I'm a district attorney."

At which Lister rather self-consciously grinned.

"Right-ho!" he said.

And Leila, with a friendly nod, left him, calculating that by this time Babs & Co. would already have arrived at the castle.

### Strange Behaviour of Leila!



THEY had!

Not only had they arrived at the castle, indeed, but they had spotted Leila's absence, and everybody was asking of everybody else:

"Where's Leila?"

Not that anyone was frightfully worried. There never was any great reason to be worried about Leila Carroll. A more self-reliant young person than their chum from the U.S.A. it would be hard to find.

But they were all curious—perhaps just a little annoyed. For in the big baronial hall of the old castle, gay with ivy and mistletoe, and holly and gigantic candles and an illuminated Christmas-tree, dinner was waiting.

Round the huge table they stood now, each at her chair, the beaming Laird of Glengowrie, Jean Cartwright's uncle, looking down from the head of the table.

On his right, her sweetly pretty face gay in the glow from the candles, stood his daughter, Flora Stewart, and on his left, next to Bessie, his small granddaughter, little Dorrie Stewart.

From the decorated wall above the carved panels the faces of the Glengowrie ancestors smiled down upon them.

"Oh, dud-dear!" sighed Bessie. "Oh, gig-goodness, you know. I w-wish she'd come. I'm just starving!"

"But where," Clara demanded, "did the chump get to? I don't remember seeing her after the race started. She can't have met with an accident?" she added, with uneasy inquiry.

"Well, what sort of accident?" Jean demanded.

"Och"—the laird shook his head—"sit you down, lassies. As Leila's not here, we'll start without her."

Bending his head, he murmured grace, and then there was a scraping of chairs as hungrily the Cliff House chums sat down.

The soup—real hot, steaming Scotch broth—was served. At the same moment there was a stir at the end of the hall.

A girl breathlessly burst in.

"Leila!"

"Oh, gosh! I'm glad you didn't wait for me!" Leila gasped. "Mr. Glengowrie, please excuse me."

"That's all right, lassie!" smiled the laird.

"But where have you been?" demanded Babs.

"Well, I guess I had a spot of accident. Nothing serious. I won't be a minute."

And up the stairs Leila flew to change her clothes and store away her skates. In four minutes she was with them again.

"Well, here we are, I guess!" she chuckled. "Do I sit here, Mr. Glengowrie? Between Babs and Clara? Well, this is the beans!"

"What was the accident you had?" asked Clara anxiously.

Leila chuckled again.

"Just slipped. You ninnies were so keen on your race, you didn't see me," she said. "I guess I slithered across the ice and hit the old brain canister against a tree. But all right now," she said cheerfully. "Right as the Empire State building! Say, Jean, that's a dandy brooch you're wearing."

Jean Cartwright looked down at the brooch, with a smile.

"Yes, isn't it? I got it this morning—a Christmas present from my mother and stepfather. I love it!"

"And Dorrie's got a Christmas present, too!" the little daughter of Flora Stewart piped from the top of the table. "Dorrie got ever such a lovely dolly from Aunt Bessie, didn't I, Aunt Bessie? It cries, you know, and it says 'Mamma' when you push a little squiggly thing in the middle. Doesn't it, Aunt Bessie?"

"Yes, rather!" Bessie agreed, and smirked. "And it can say other things, too, you know. I sus-say, this soup is grand! Where is the doll, Dorrie? Isn't she hungry?"

"Oh, yes!" Dorrie said eagerly.

"Grandpa, can I get dolly?" "Get what you like," the old laird chuckled; "though I must remind you, miss, it's bad manners to climb up and down from the table! Still, as it's Christmas, and even dollies must be fed, go and get it, by all means. Sandy, you rascal! Hey! Where's that Sandy?" he roared, shouting for the manservant who stood at his elbow. "Oh, here you are! Bring out the Glengowrie wine!"

The chums laughed. While Dorrie scrambled for her doll, asleep in another Christmas-present cradle near the majestic Christmas-tree, a merry buzz of chatter broke out.

The talk, of course, was all of Christmas—of what they had had in their stockings that morning; of the cards they had received; of the ripping prospects for skating, tobogganing, and sliding that the hills and lakes in the district provided.

"Here's dolly!" Dorrie proclaimed eagerly, struggling back into her chair with a very large doll. "Dolly hungry. Aunt Bessie, put a napkin on her!"

Bessie chuckled, then threw a wink at her chums. Very fond indeed was plump Bessie of little Dorrie. It said something for the child's influence upon her that Bessie, hungry as she was, could immediately interrupt her meal to carry out the task imposed upon her.

"Nice Aunt Bessie!" Dorrie cooed. "Nice dolly! Be good dolly while Aunt Bessie pins the napkin!"

Bessie took up the table napkin. Smilingly she wrapped it round the dolly's neck. Then Dorrie jumped.

For suddenly from the doll came a squeak, followed by a shrill protest, and Bessie let the napkin drop.

"Oh, please, Aunt Bessie, you're sticking the pin in my neck!"

"Oo-oo!" Dorrie cried, in sudden flaming-eyed excitement. "Dolly spoke!"

Bessie chuckled. The chums grinned. It was fun to see the enraptured expression on the youngster's face; fun to see the gaping jaw of the laird and the startled astonishment in the expression of Flora Stewart.

For they as yet did not know what the chums knew—that Bessie, if a duffer at most things, was a very clever and accomplished ventriloquist.

"Well, there we are, dolly!" Bessie said in her natural voice. "Now we're fuf-fine, aren't we? Ask Dolly what she'd like to eat, Dorrie."

"Oo! Will she talk again?" Dorrie asked breathlessly.

"Yes, rather, you know—while I'm here! You ask her."

Dorrie gazed with rapture at her new treasure. Almost holding her breath, she asked the question:

"Dolly, what would you like to eat?"

"Dolly like soup!" the doll replied promptly. "Dolly very fond of soup! Dolly love soup like she loves her mammy Dorrie!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the chums at the startled surprise on Dorrie's face.

"But, och, I don't understand!" the laird said. "The thing is haunted!"

"Ventriloquism!" whispered Jean.

"Eh?"

"Bessie!"

The laird frowned; then, seeing Bessie's lips moving slightly, he understood, and grinned.

"Hoots, and that's a gift!" he murmured.

A gift it was—but it was a gift which looked like landing Bessie into some embarrassing situations. For Dorrie, with immense and unshakable faith in her Aunt Bessie, was now insisting that Bessie should feed the doll with the soup; and if Bessie had the power of making the doll speak at will, she was sorely perplexed as to how to make it eat with the same conviction.

It was Jemima Carstairs who, when a spoonful of soup had been plastered all over the doll's face, came to the rescue with a suggestion.

"Too tough on old dolly," she said. "Dolly doesn't like to be seen eating, Dorrie. Put a table napkin over her head, and let Aunt Bessie feed her under that. You'll be surprised at the way dolly will eat the soup then."

"Oh crumbs, you know, but I want to get on with my dinner!" Bessie said.

Jemima chuckled.

"The wages of deceit is hunger!" she solemnly declared. "You started it, old fat Bessie! Can't let the little fairy of the family down—what?" She lowered her voice to a whisper. "Put your own merry napper under the napkin, and drain the soup from the spoon yourself—see? That's the idea!"



So there was Bessie, doomed to exercise terrific gymnastics for the rest of the soup course, while the chums merrily looked on.

Rather unfortunate for Bessie, who, under cover of the napkin, sopped the first spoonful of soup in her own eye, and drank down the next with such disregard for her extended throat that she became subjected to a violent attack of choking.

All good fun, except for poor Bessie, until Babs at last suggested Dolly had had enough, and would like to go to sleep.

The soup was cleared off. The laird raised his glass.

"I give you a toast, lassies," he said—"a toast to Christmas Day!"

"Christmas Day!" rang out a cheery chorus.

"What-ho!" Jemima chortled. "And here's another, everybody! Let us think for a moment of our absent friends—old Marjorie Hazeldene and Janet Jordan, who would have been here, forsooth, had it not been for the family duties that bound them. Also," Jemima beamed, "to our boy friends, making merry at Tarbet, on the bonnie, bonnie banks of Loch Lomond! To Jimmy Richmond and Lister Cattermole!"

"Hear, hear!"

With enthusiasm the toast was drunk, though Leila looked quickly at Jean Cartwright as that last name was mentioned.

Jean beamed, her face flushed with pleasure, for Jean was very fond of her half-brother.

"Touching which," she laughed, as they all sat down again, and the most enormously plump turkey they had ever seen was put, all crisp and piping hot, before the laird for him to carve, "I'm a bit worried about Lister, you know."

"How come?" Jemima asked.

"Well, nothing! I'm silly, I suppose, but—but it's not like Lister." She

frowned. "But he did promise to send me a card on Christmas Day."

"And it hasn't arrived?" Babs asked.

"No."  
"Oh, well, I shouldn't worry, I guess!" Leila said cheerfully, though she felt the telltale flush in her own cheeks. "Never can trust the post in these parts, I guess."

"But it's funny, all the same," Jean said, "because I did get a card from Jimmy Richmond this morning; and, as you know, Lister is stopping with Jimmy."

Leila coughed. She felt embarrassed suddenly, remembering her promise to Lister Cattermole. She wished she could tell Jean, knowing how the Scots girl was apt to worry about her half-brother.

Not always had Lister Cattermole been the charming and popular fellow he was at the moment. There had been days—dark dreadful days for Jean, when at Friardale School Lister had earned the name of cad and outsider, and had come within an ace of expulsion.

But thanks to Jean all that was gone. Lister was reformed, though it must be admitted that not everybody who knew the black sheep of other days had a great deal of faith in that reformation.

Lister was still careless, still rather liable to do things first and question his wisdom afterwards, and Jean, realising that, was always most frightfully anxious when anything happened which suggested that Lister might have had a slip back.

Babs frowned rather thoughtfully.

"Well, you know Lister promised to send me a card, too," she said. "But never mind. He's probably enjoying himself so much that he just forgot about it. You know how careless boys are about these things. Oh, I say, what a large helping of turkey."

Nothing more about Lister then. The turkey was coming round. And what a monster turkey!

With a keen appetite they ate. And Bessie, of course, had to ask for a second helping. After that they had to pull their crackers—simply immense things, out of which rolled all sorts of toys, and charms and trinkets.

Oh, a great dinner! A simply marvellous dinner! What a merry peal of laughter when they uncurled the mottoes those crackers contained and read them in hilarious voices out aloud. Especially at Bessie's, which read:

"Face your troubles with a smile,  
Let care and worry go.  
Remember this: The more you  
laugh,  
The fatter you will grow!"

"Which means," Jemima sighed, "a sentence of penal servitude for life for poor old Bess. In other words, cultivate the tear habit, old Bessie, and grow slim."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Skinny thing!" was Bessie's elegant and offended retort to that sally.

And so the dinner went on. After turkey, Christmas pudding. What gurgles of delight when the spirit was poured over it and set alight, and the portions served, some still in flames!

There were new silver threepenny-bits in the pudding. Babs bagged three of them in her piece. Bessie one, although, eager to taste the pudding, she nearly swallowed it first!

Oh, a merry dinner, and great fun. More toasts after the eating; then ices and nuts and coffee. In high and festive spirits, everybody behaved with an enormous amount of hilarity and everybody, by the end of the meal, was so riotously ripe for high-spirited fun that it was hard to tell what would happen next.

Leila, apparently, was one of the rest. Her laugh rang out with hearty merriness. With the others she was never



BREATHLESSLY little Dorrie asked: "Dolly, what would you like to eat?" "Dolly like soup," the doll replied promptly. "Dolly very fond of soup." The chums chuckled. There was no doubt that Bessie was clever with her ventriloquism.



at a loss for a joke or a neat retort. But secretly Leila was worried.

And thinking—about that poor boy crouched over the embers of his twig fire in the lonely, bleak ruins of the watch-tower at the back of Glengowrie. And wondering why on earth he was here in such mysterious circumstances.

As soon as the meal was finished she slipped away.

Nobody noticed her absence. Everybody was feeling a little lazy after that wonderful dinner, and a merry yarn round the log fire which was still burning the most enormous Yule log of Christmas Eve, seemed to be indicated.

For half an hour, while the dusk gathered outside and a chill wind with the promise of more snow in its whispers sprang up, they sat and talked.

Such wonderful things to talk about! What heaps of Christmas presents they had all received; how they were looking forward to the sports in the snow and on the ice; of the London band due to arrive that afternoon for a little dancing, and the glorious revels and the masked fancy dress dance the laird had planned for Boxing-night, the day after to-morrow.

Then, all at once, somebody missed Leila.

"I say, where has she gone?" Mabs asked. "I haven't seen her since dinner. Did she go to her room, Babs?"

"I don't know," Babs said. "Anyway, I'm going along to my room now. I'll get the Lexicon cards and we'll have a quiet game in front of the fire. If she had an accident, she might be feeling a little shaken up and is lying down. I'll go and see."

And feeling rather guilty for not having missed Leila before, Babs hurried off.

Up the stairs she went, passing the old minstrel gallery. The chums' rooms were in the Prince Charles wing of the building, near the sleeping quarters of the old laird. To reach her own room indeed, Babs had to pass the room which belonged to the laird. She was in the act of approaching it when the door came open.

Instinctively Babs stopped, wondering. For the laird himself was downstairs chatting to her chums round the roaring log fire.

Who—

And then Babs' eyes opened wide as out of the room came a girl. The girl's back was towards her. She had a small parcel in her hand. Quickly she turned in the corridor, pulling the door to behind her. Then Babs found her voice.

"Leila—"

Leila Carroll—for it was she—jumped as if suddenly stung. Her face turned crimson with sudden confusion.

"Leila," Babs repeated, and wonderingly approached her, noticing as she did so that Leila was fully dressed as if for going out—noticing, too, that she guiltily whipped the parcel in her hand under her coat. "Leila, I was looking for you," she cried. "But—I say, you're not going out?"

Leila bit her lip.

"Well, I guess—I guess—" she mumbled. "Oh, gosh! Well, yes, I am, Babs. I—I've got to, you see. But I—I shan't be long—"

Babs stared at her in frank curiosity. "But what were you doing in the laird's room?"

"Eh? Oh, that!" Leila tried to laugh easily. "Well, you know, I guess—that is to say— But look here, Babs, don't stop me now," she added breathlessly. "I've something to do and it's urgent, I guess. See you in half an hour."

And without giving Babs time to think she bolted into her own room.

Babs blinked, for some reason suddenly unaccountably disturbed. What was the matter with Leila? And where on earth could Leila be going at this time of the afternoon of Christmas Day?

Babs bit her lip a little. She conquered the impulse to follow Leila into her room and question her further. After all, it was no business of hers what Leila did, she told herself. What ever it was Leila must have some good reason for it. But why on earth had she been snooping around in the laird's room? And what was in that parcel which she had been at such hasty pains to conceal beneath her coat?

Well, blow!

Babs went into her own room. There she found the Lexicon cards. Leila was still in her room when she passed down the passage again, and Babs heard the rustle of paper. She frowned a little, and then with a shrug went on, rejoining her chums to discover Mrs. Blackie, the cook, in earnest conversation with the laird.

The laird was shaking his head.

"Hoots, wumman, but half a turkey doesn't disappear into thin air," he said. "You must have put it somewhere and forgotten it."

"But I remember distinctly, Mr. Glengowrie! I put it on the table just inside the kitchen door. There was half a small turkey—cold—a whole mince tart, and some apples and fruit with it. When I looked round again they were gone!"

Clara chuckled.

"Sounds as if our own Bessie has been on the warpath," she said. "If we hadn't had her under our eyes all the time, we might be laying this crime at her door. I suppose you don't know anything about it, Bessie?"

"Oh, really, Clara, as if I should know!" Bessie said indignantly.

"Well, it's a mystery," the laird decided. "Never mind, Mrs. Blackie. You have more turkeys. Och, I'll just be off and stretch my lazy legs," he said. "Will you instruct my valet to put my things out on my bed?"

"I believe he has already done that, sir," Mrs. Blackie said. "But the turkey—"

"Och, never mind the turkey!"

And with an amiable grin at his girl guests, the laird rose to his feet, and trotted off up the stairs. Two minutes later, however, they heard his voice roar along the corridor.

"Malcolm! Malcolm!" he cried. "Malcolm! Where's that valet of mine? Oh, there you are, Malcolm! What have you done with my new socks?"

"They're on the bed, sir!" came Malcolm's voice. "With your other clothes!"

"The other clothes are on the bed, but of socks there are none," the laird grumbled. "Come and see."

And there was the noisy closing of a door. Jemima chuckled.

"What-ho!" she murmured. "More mystery, comrades! Stolen turkey, followed by missing socks! I s'pose you didn't see 'em walking about when you were upstairs, Babs?"

Babs smiled.

"No," she said.

"And apparently," Jemima said, "you didn't find Leila?"

And that strange and shrewd girl thoughtfully polished her monocle.

Babs shook her head.

"Well, she isn't here, is she?" was her non-committal answer. "Anyway,

never mind Leila. Who says a game of Lexicon? Bring the table up, Jean, and let's cut for deal."

And Leila, turkey, socks, and mince tart were forgotten in the absorption of the game, until the laird himself reappeared, kilt swinging, a long staff in his hand.

Jemima looked up.

"And did you," she asked, "find the missing sockie-wookies, Mr. Glengowrie? But, ah, I see you have!" she added, with a critically inquiring glance at his encased legs.

The laird grunted.

"I did not find them," he answered, "neither did Malcolm. These are another pair I've got on. The others have disappeared as completely as if they had been dissolved. Uncanny, if you ask me."

And while the chum smiled sympathetic agreement, Babs sat still. For she was wondering again with a sudden tingling suspicion, whether Leila Carroll's visit to the laird's room had had anything to do with those missing socks.

## The Mission of Lister Cattermole!



"LISTER!"  
Leila Carroll softly breathed that name as she stood outside the ruined watch-tower.

It was dark then, though a golden glowing moon had turned night into day, and the tall pines, shrouded in a winter mantle of snow, looked like so many immense ghosts as they nodded and whispered all around her.

"Lister!" she whispered again, and tapped.

There was a sound of shuffling footsteps from the interior. Then cautiously the key was turned in the lock from the inside. A feeble flicker of light glowed from inside the ruin, and Lister Cattermole, looking rather haggard in the moonlight, peered out.

"Leila, you! I thought you weren't coming. Come in!"

Leila stepped in, breathing a little heavily. She dumped her heavy basket on the floor.

"O.K.!" she chuckled. "Shucks, haven't you got a light of any description? But never mind. There are candles in the basket, and a few pieces of coal. I've also snaffled a chopper so that you can provide yourself with a little more firing. Br-r-r! It's not so hot in here. Unpack the basket, Lister, while I clear a space on the floor to lay your Christmas dinner!"

Cattermole turned red.

"Oh, Leila, what a sport—"

"No time for thanks!" Leila said briskly. "Your job is to do as you're told, I guess. You'll find a blanket among the boodle. That's for the bed. You'll also find some new and thicker socks. Now," Leila said cheerfully, and determinedly set to work to clear the place up a little. "There! Let me lay these serviettes. That's your table-cloth, I guess. Now, let me see you tuck in!"

She seated herself on an upturned pile of wood which the boy had got from somewhere. With the fire blazing brightly, and two candles alight, the old ruin certainly looked different.

On the floor the boy seated himself, turning his feet towards the blaze.

"But, Leila, I say—"

"Say nothing, just eat!" Leila advised. "You can do all the saying when



you've eaten, and then you'll say some, I'll tell the world! Don't mind me!"

Cattermole gulped. His eyes glistened as he saw the good things which Leila had procured. Half a small roast turkey, some cold roast potatoes, some bread, a perfectly enormous mince tart, to say nothing of some apples and oranges and nuts, and a large box of chocolates which Leila had received from Marcelle Biquet as a Christmas present that morning. Eagerly the boy fell upon them.

Leila bit her lip as she watched. For it was apparent that Cattermole was ravenous. There were no forks and spoons—only his own penknife, but the vim and energy with which he attacked the turkey went to her heart, and brought a queer little lump into her throat.

Poor old Lister! What a ghastly time he must have been having!

"Nice?" she asked.

"Yum, ripping!" Cattermole said. "I never knew food could taste so good. But it was ripping of you, Leila!"

"O.K.! Get on with the banquet!" Leila said laconically.

And smiled as Cattermole, with a grateful glance, munched on.

But it was over at last. It did Leila good to see the new health, the new life that flowed into his cheeks. Swiftly she cleared away, packing everything into one corner. After that she made him change into the new thick woollen socks, whose loss the Laird of Glengowrie was at that moment bemoaning. And then she—

"Well, now, fire ahead," she invited. "Spill the beans. I guess I'm just dying to know what it's all about."

The boy's face shadowed a little.

"You won't tell anyone, Leila?"

"I guess not!"

For a moment there was silence. Lister, nursing his knees as he sat in front of the now brightly burning fire, seemed lost in thought.

Then, without looking at her, he slowly began:

"You know, of course, that Jimmy Richmond invited me to his uncle's house-party at Tarbet? You might remember that I didn't go along with Jimmy himself, having to stop behind in London and meet my father, who is working on the new Athenian Cinema there—"

"Yes," Leila agreed.

"I left London on Wednesday night," Lister went on. "I caught the Inverness train. The train, as you know, stops at Crewe. While we were there two chappies got in. I didn't take much stock of them at first, though I had a sort of hunch that they weren't too pleased to be sharing my company. They were just ordinary looking chaps, you know, clean-shaven, and all that. One was a bit taller than the other—"

"Yes, well?" Leila asked.

"They got talking. I was reading. They talked in very low voices, as though they were afraid of my hearing something. Suddenly the tall one sticks his hand in his pocket. He brings out a long, blue-covered case and opens it, and though I didn't see exactly what it was inside, I caught a glimpse and glitter of something, and was pretty sure they were jewels. Still, I took no notice. The chap, I thought, had probably been buying a Christmas present for somebody."

"Sure was a sensible notion," Leila agreed.

"Then I suppose I fell asleep. I awoke suddenly. The chaps were still talking, but, I suppose, thinking I was asleep,

they were no longer talking in low voices. I heard one of them mention Glengowrie. You can bet I took notice then. Then I heard the other one say: 'We shall be there to-morrow, but we mustn't rush things. First get the lie of the land'—"

"Gee!" Leila breathed.

"And then the bigger chap said: 'Once we're in the castle it will be easy enough to get hold of it.' And then, like an ass, I opened my eyes. Because, you see, I was pretty sure then I had tumbled on a plot to rob the laird of something. These chaps were obviously after something in the laird's castle, and obviously making a special journey to Glengowrie to spy out the land before they committed the robbery. Get it so far, Leila?"

"Gee, do I not! Go on!"

"Well, I suppose they must have spotted me at that moment. Perhaps my face told them that I had overheard; I don't know. Anyway, the chap nearest gave me a queer, frightened sort of look, and then turned to his pal and went on talking, but not about Glengowrie. I snoozed again then, thinking of all I had heard, intending to send a postcard to the laird to warn him. Then suddenly the train pulled up. We had reached Carlisle.

"The first thing I noticed was that these two chaps were dozing in the corner, apparently. Wanting a breath of fresh air, I brushed past them to get on the platform. Then all at once the fellow nearest the window grabbed me by the arm. 'No you don't, you thief!' he cried. 'You're not getting away like that.' While he stood there, still holding me, the other chap dashed out to

bring the station bobby on the scene. Well, cutting a long story short, the upshot of it was that these two fellows accused me of pinching a ruby necklace while they were asleep."

Leila stared at him in horror.

"A trap?"

"That's it. Of course, I denied it—until they insisted upon my being searched. And then, what do you think? The policeman found the necklace in my overcoat pocket. One of the rotters had evidently slipped it there as I was pushing past to get out of the carriage!"

"Oh gee!" Leila breathed.

"Well," Lister shrugged, "now you begin to see? I had no proof against them. There I was, accused—the necklace found upon me. At the best I suppose I should have been forced to spend Christmas in custody, while those rotters were getting away with their little scheme to rob the laird. Perhaps I did the wrong thing—I dunno—but I was determined to scotch them somehow, so I broke away from the police and made a dash for it—"

"And you were chased?" Leila asked.

"Wasn't I! For a mile along the line, I should think. Luckily for me there was a mist about. It was snowing a bit, too. Anyway, I got away. All that night I walked, and next day I got a lift as far as Edinburgh. By hook or crook I made my way here."

"But why," Leila demanded, "didn't you go straight to the laird and tell him?"

The boy looked at her curiously.

"You know the laird, don't you? You know he's pretty stern. You know, too, that I've been something of a



"LEILA!" exclaimed Babs. "I say—you're not going out?" Leila hurriedly concealed the little parcel she carried. "Well, I guess—I guess," she mumbled, "I—I've got to, you see." But Babs didn't see—and she was wondering what Leila had been doing in Mr. Glengowrie's room.



rotter in the past. Well, the laird knows that, too." He paused for a moment, biting his lip, and then moved restlessly. "I tell you, Leila, once you've built up a past for yourself it's an awfully hard job to live it down. The laird is one of those who doesn't believe it possible for a bad egg to reform. If I'd gone to him he'd probably have shown me the door."

Leila frowned.

"Well, I sure would have risked that," she said.

"You might! And so," Lister agreed, "I would if only I'd myself to consider. But Jean's there, you know, and Babs & Co. I just daren't risk it. If Jean had known I was in any sort of scrape it would have broken her heart. That would have just ruined her Christmas, and naturally, as you're all so fond of Jean, would have affected yours, too. You see?" he added.

Leila did see, and, seeing, found her heart melting one moment with compassion and pity, and glowing the next with admiration.

Poor Lister—and good for Lister! If he had sinned in the past, he was more than making up for it now.

"And so," Lister said, "I came here. I knew I should be safe in this old tower. The beggar of it is, though, that I had to run like that—no luggage, no food, and now I've paid my way here, precious little cash. I just can't run the risk of upsetting Jean and the party at the castle. Apart from that, I had an idea that if I snooped around a bit—down in the village, for instance—I might find out where these chaps were and spoil their game. Somehow or other they'll get into the castle. I'm convinced of that, and unless somebody does put the kybosh on them they'll get away with whatever it is they're after."

"And you haven't located them yet?" Leila asked.

"No."

"What were they like?"

"Oh, ordinary!" Lister looked vague. "I should know 'em again if I saw them, of course," he said, "but I don't know I can describe them so that you could pick them out if you saw them. But wait a minute; there is one clue," he added. "One of them, the slightly smaller of the two, spoke with a lisp."

Leila's eyes gleamed.

"You mean," she said, "yeth for yes, and thorry for sorry, and all that?"

"Yes. But look here, don't you worry about it. This is my affair."

Leila stood up. Her eyes flashed with determination.

"Old-timer, you're wrong," she said firmly. "If this is your affair, I'm sharing it. I happen to be at Glogowrie. I'm in a position, I guess, to see everybody who comes in and goes out of the place. You did me a good turn, Lister. In any case, I sure figure it's up to me to help you—not only for the laird's sake, but for your own, and Jean's as well."

Lister bit his lip.

"Oh, but, Leila—"

"I'm helping, I guess," Leila said resolutely. "It'll take two to handle this job. Meantime, old Lister, you've got to look after yourself. I'll watch everybody who comes to the castle, and if the crooks are among them we'll have 'em spotted in no time. Now I'm going. I'll come back again to-night and hear any news you've got."

Lister, however, shook his head.

"No, I don't want you to keep coming here, Leila. If you're determined to go through with it, meet me somewhere else. Meet me—"

And he paused. "You know the stone cairn near the

castle, on the slopes of the hill next to Prince Charles' wing?"

"I guess so."

"Well, then, I'll meet you there—eight o'clock. And now," Cattermole said, groping for his shoes, "just wait till I put these on and I'll see you home."

### Jemima Gives Advice!



"NICE band." Barbara Redfern dimpled as she finished a dance with Mabel Lynn. "Jolly nice! But I wish to goodness Leila would turn up. I want some tea."

Clara sniffed.

"Late for dinner, late for tea—" she said.

"Oh, what—oh, what can the matter be?" Jemima blithely chirped. "Jolly old bit of rhyme-whyme—what? Still tough," Jemima affirmed decidedly, "and deeply mysterious—what? What funny game is our one and only Leila playing?"

"You don't think," Jean Cartwright anxiously questioned, "she might have had another accident?"

"Oh, not Leila!" Jemima said. "Two accidents in one day—and Christmas Day, above all, forsooth! No, no, no, comrades! There's an explanation, but the merry old explanation is not an accident. Did you say anything, Sweet Bessie?" she added to the plump one.

"Yes, I jolly well did! I said I'm hungry," Bessie proclaimed. "Where is Leila?"

"Search me!" Mabs grinned.

"Eh? But why should I search you? You haven't stolen anything, have you? Really, you girls, you do make potty remarks when I ask questions," Bessie said peevishly. "I think it's a jolly shame, you know, for tea to be delayed like this. I shall give Leila a piece of my mind."

"On a pin's head—what?" Jemima asked. "What will you do with the other piece, sweetheart?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled the chums.

But, all the same, they looked expectantly towards the door.

Leila certainly had been gone a long time. All that Christmas afternoon they had been expecting her appearance, and here it was past time for tea and she had not yet appeared.

On the dais beneath the gallery the band—which had arrived an hour ago from London—played softly. The laird himself, still bemoaning his lost new socks, was absent—gone out to pay his Christmas Day calls.

Then suddenly the front door bell pealed.

"That's her!" Jean said. "Never mind, I'll go!"

She flew across to the door. She flung it open.

Leila it was, standing breathlessly on the threshold, her shoes covered in snow. She cast a curiously hunted look behind her.

"So here you are!" Jean greeted her. "Where have you been, ninny?"

"Eh? Oh gee! I—" And Leila hurriedly stepped in. "Close the door," she said quickly. "I'm sorry if I'm late. I forgot my watch."

"But where," Mabs asked, as they made way for her to come to the fire, "have you been?"

"Oh, out!" Leila said vaguely.

"Go hon!" Clara scoffed. "And where have you been out to?"

"Oh, nowhere!" Leila mumbled. "That is— Oh gosh! Please don't

ask me questions," she said flusteredly. "Shucks! Who are they?" she added, staring at the band on the dais.

"Gaze at their instruments," Jemima murmured; "therein you may find a clue."

"Oh, the band!" Leila decided.

"Now, can you beat that?" Jean asked admiringly. "How the girl does observe things! But, look here, cuckoo—"

But Leila was not looking there. With a sudden interested alertness in her eyes, she was walking towards the band.

The band consisted of eight men—all of them, Leila noticed, with a quick thrill, clean-shaven, except for one. Her eyes widened suddenly, remembering what Lister Cattermole had told her—remembering her resolve to watch every stranger that came into the castle. Once she found the man with the lisp—

"I say, what the dickens is she doing?" Mabs murmured in astonishment.

For Leila, on her way, had snatched up a box of the laird's cigars from a neighbouring table. She had her cue now. If the man with a lisp was among them it shouldn't be hard to make him betray himself.

She approached the band with a smile.

"Like a cigar?" she asked the leader.

"Oh, thank you, miss!"

Miss! If the man spoke with a lisp he would have said "Mith." Not him evidently. She handed the box to the next man.

"Would you like a cigar?" she asked.

"Yes, thank you."

Not him evidently. The next man said:

"I don't smoke."

She turned to the next and the next and the next. In each case she drew a blank.

"I say," said Leila, as she rejoined her chums, "I—I suppose nobody else has been here while I've been away—no new servants or guests or anything?"

"Here, I say, don't you feel well?"

Clara asked.

"Eh? Why shouldn't I feel well? Well, you haven't answered my question."

"But, of course, donkey, nobody else has been here," Jean laughed. "What the dickens is the matter with you?"

"Well, I'll go and change, then," Leila said—and it was so unlike Leila not to return a direct answer to a question. "Don't wait tea. I won't be a second."

And, without waiting for her astonished chums' reply, she flew up the stairs.

She entered her own room. But she did not immediately turn on the light. Quickly she tiptoed towards the window with its little diamond panes, each wearing a garland of snow, and peered out into the moonlit grounds of Glogowrie Castle.

The moon was bright, flooding the whole countryside with radiance. Nothing moved.

"But I sure guess I was followed!" Leila muttered.

She withdrew, tingling at the memory of those soft, crunching footsteps which had been on her trail ever since, at the edge of the lake, she had said good-bye to Lister Cattermole, who had gone off into the village.

No figure had she seen; no movement. But right up the hill those crunching steps had followed her, until at last Leila had broken into a run.

All seemed well now, though.



Well, so far so good! But she frowned as she changed into the pretty frock which she used for afternoon wear. She wondered where Lister was—how he was going on. Thank goodness, anyway, that Jean knew nothing about this! Poor old Jean would have worried her head off. A shame, too, to puzzle old Babs & Co. as she must be puzzling them. So far, however, no harm had been done.

She was her old, gay self when she rejoined her chums in the hall, to find them all chatting excitedly as they took tea around the blazing fire.

"That's about the time," Clara was saying. "It will be ripping then. Jean, you did say there are skis in the castle?"

"Three pairs," Jean answered.

"One for me, one for Jimmy, and one for—Leila, you ski, too, don't you?" Clara asked.

"I guess so. But what's the idea?"

"We've got a wheeze on," Clara said. "Ever skied by night, Leila?"

"No!"

"But you'd like to, eh?" Clara questioned.

"I'll say!" Leila said, and her eyes shone.

"Well, this is the wheeze," Clara explained eagerly. "There are three pair of skis in the castle. There's a toboggan, too, and also," Clara went on, "there's a hill leading down to the lake, which is half a mile long. The big idea is a race. Bessie won't be in it, of course. Toboggan versus ski-ers—with you and me and Jimmy on the skis, and Babs, Mabs, and Jean on the toboggan. Is it a notion?"

Leila laughed.

"I'll say it's a notion," she agreed enthusiastically. "Oh, grand! But I say, what time is the race?"

"Well, eight o'clock."

"What time?"

"Eight!"

And Clara paused there, struck by the suddenly frozen expression on the American girl's face.

For Leila, of course, was thinking of her appointment. That appointment with Lister at the cairn on the slopes of the hill by the Prince Charles' wing.

"Well!" Clara stared. "Isn't it a good idea?"

"Oh, yes, I guess the idea's fine!" Leila mumbled. "But well—won't it kind of upset other arrangements?" she asked. "I mean, the laird's got a party—"

"The party isn't until nine o'clock," Jean put in.

"But—but won't it be cold?"

"Eh? Of course it'll be cold, nunny," Jean said, "but what the dickens has that got to do with it?" She stared in puzzlement at Leila. "What the dickens is the matter with you?"

"Oh, nun-nothing! Just nothing, of course," Leila forced a laugh. But she wondered in dismal dismay how she was going to keep that appointment without arousing her chums' suspicions further. "Just nothing," she said unhappily. "Gee, don't stare at me as if I were something that'd fallen off the Christmas-tree. Of course it's a fine idea, and of course I'll come," she added desperately. "What's that?" she added with a start.

But it was only the laird returned from his Christmas duty calls. He had a bundle of letters in his hand.

"Br-r-r!" he said. "Cold, lassies! But a bonnie night. Jean, take the letters, lass, and hand them out. I called in at the post office to save the postman a journey. They're all for you lassies."

"Oh crumbs! Jean, any for me?"

"Here we are," Jean said, "two for

No. 20 of our delightful series for Your "Cliff House Album."

# CLIFF HOUSE CELEBRITIES

**T**HOUGH she is rarely in the limelight, Janet Jordan is one of the best-liked girls in the Fourth Form at Cliff House. She is not exactly a pretty girl, but her unusual colouring—olive complexion, with fair hair and hazel eyes—make her distinctive.

A staunch and loyal member of the famous "Co.," Janet shares Study No. 7 with Clara Trevalyn and Marjorie Hazeldene, and regards Clara as her greatest friend.

Janet has never been really poor, but she has had to "rough it" during her childhood more than any other Cliff House girl. This is due to the fact that she was born in her father's circus near Falmouth, and until she was the age of twelve travelled with that circus up and down the country. Her education then was looked after by a special tutor—himself an old circus star—and her elder sister Sheila, who is an old Cliff House girl.

If Janet cared to write the story of those early days of hers, it would fill an exciting book. There are few circus feats which she has not, at one time or another tried.

Twice she has broken her arm, once she was mauled, though not seriously, by a performing leopard, and once, when a tiny mite, she almost drowned herself in emulating the feat of the man who tied himself in a sack and dived from a great height into a tank of water. As a result of all this Janet is naturally hardy, is possessed of an adventurous disposition and boundless pluck.

At all games Janet is very proficient. Next to Clara Trevalyn, indeed, she is the best "all-rounder" in the Junior School, and the winner for the last two years of the Junior School swimming championship.



Janet Jordan

Twice she has assisted Cliff House to win the swimming cup, and last year was the captain of the Cliff House junior team which won the All-in swimming trophy for school-girls. In class she is hard-working, but not brilliant, her position at the moment being No. 15.

Janet likes films, her favourites of the screen being Johnny Weismuller and Jessie Matthews. She likes the theatre, too—and especially Sir Cedric Hardwicke and Stanley Lupino. Her favourite mistress at Cliff House is, of course, Miss Charmant, and her favourite prefect Dulcia Fairbrother. Her favourite colour is blue and her favourite flower the dahlia.

Her great hobby, as you may guess, is swimming.

She is 14 years and 7 months old, and takes size 3½ in shoes.



Mabs. One for Babs. Three for Clara—lucky thing! One for Bessie—with a blot. That's from brother Billy, I bet. A Christmas card for you, Leila—straight from the U.S.A. Two for Jimmy, and one for me—a card," she added happily. "I'll bet it's from old Lister, after all."

The old laird, who was being helped off with his coat, frowned a little.

"Ye still think a lot of that young rascal then, Jean?"

But Jean did not reply to that. She was looking in dismay at her card.

It was not from Lister. It was from Douglas Coutts, one of the boys with whom Lister was supposed to be sharing that jolly holiday on the banks of Loch Lomond.

"It—it isn't Lister's," she said, and the disappointment was evident in her voice.

The old laird sniffed. "Most likely he's got himself messed up in some disgraceful scrape," he said with unusual surliness. "Dinna worry about him, Jean."

But it was obvious that Jean was worrying. Obvious that she was hurt, as well as anxious and disappointed. Leila sighed a little. If she could only tell her the truth!

## The Meeting at the Cairn!



**T**EA was over. Little Dorrie, fresh from her afternoon sleep, had come in with her mother. Then, of course, there had to be games—such jolly games, in the old baronial hall—in which Dorrie could join.

Blind-man's-buff was her favourite, and Bessie—"cos Aunty Bessie is so funny"—Dorrie's favourite blind-man.

Then there was "touch"—with everybody, of course, taking very good care to let delightedly screaming little Dorrie never be caught. And finally snapdragon.

And how they all cheered when the plate of raisins was lighted, and at a word from Dorrie's mother they all scrambled for the hot raisins.

And what a scream when Bessie, too greedily eager, tripped over Dorrie's doll and fell, with her hand right in the plate.

After that the Christmas-tree, when the old laird, dressed up as Santa Claus mounted a ladder against it, and threw presents willy-nilly among them.

Great and breathless fun—but greater and more breathless fun to come.

At half-past seven, little Dorrie, worn out with excitement, was packed off to bed.

At a quarter to eight a move was made into the castle courtyard, where the speedy-looking toboggan had been made ready.

And Leila, by that time, had made up her mind. She fancied that she would be able to keep her appointment with Lister, after all.

"Well, here we are, I guess," she said, as she rose to her feet, after Mrs. Stewart had helped her to fix the skis. "Where's my sticks? Oh, thanks! Well, I'm ready I guess. What's the programme?"

"We give the toboggan a start from the gates," Clara explained. "As soon as Mr. Glengowrie sets it going, we go, too. Well, push off!" she cried deliciously, and off the toboggan went,



with Babs, Mabs, and Jean hilariously seated inside it.

Clara, Jemima, and Leila lined up. Above them the moon smiled down at the revellers, shedding a silver glow over the snow.

"Ready!" the laird called from the archway.

"Ay-ay!" Jemima chirruped.

"Then—go!"

And with a push and a scream of exhilarated delight from its passengers, the sled disappeared over the brow of the hill amid a scurrying mist of up-thrown snow.

"Now!" Clara roared. "Come on!"

Into the ground they dug the pointed ferrules of their ski-sticks. Forward they slid. Leila, keen, alert, was slightly behind at the starting-point, and laughed as she saw the steep slope before her.

Then, with a yell, Clara was away; a split fraction of a second later Jemima followed.

They were, however, ten yards ahead before Leila attempted to move.

"Now!" she breathed.

Down into the snow went her sticks. She threw herself forward. Magnificent the taking-off leap she gave, rising on both skis over the little knoll which sat at the top of the hill. With a shriek of breathless joy, she came down again, both skis hitting the snow at the same time.

Oh, lovely—lovely fun!

The cold wind rushed into her face. It roared in her ears. Bright-eyed, she gazed down at the moonlit mountain landscape, the toboggan well ahead, but Jemima and Clara rapidly overhauling it.

Now, she judged, she would be out of sight from the watchers at the top, and suddenly and skilfully went shooting off at a tangent.

Nobody saw. Everybody in that moment was too intent upon the thrilling race.

The cairn of stones lay to her left—a good three hundred yards away, on the steep slopes of the opposite hill.

Down with a whizz she rushed into the valley, shooting up the opposite bank.

Then on the hillside that sloped beneath her she saw the old stone cairn, piled high, like everything else, with a deep covering of snow. No sign of Lister, though.

Curious, Leila decided, using her sticks to retard her speed. Now, steady! And here was the cairn before her. Twisting her feet, she brought herself to a stop, to gaze round in bewilderment.

Lister was not there!

"Hallo!" she breathed, and paused.

"I say—" she called.

And then gasped in relief. A figure had detached itself from the shadow of the cairn and now came towards her.

But—and Leila suddenly tensed as the figure emerged into the moonlight—it was not Lister! It was a man!

He crunched his way across the snow. A youngish man, clean-shaven, wearing a dark overcoat and a felt hat.

He stood before her.

"You are expecting to meet someone?" he asked.

Leila stared.

"Is that your business?"

"It is very much my business!" He gazed at her sternly. "I am a detective from Scotland Yard!" he announced.

Leila felt her head whirl. It had not occurred to her until this moment that the police might actually be on Lister's trail. At the same time, she was not going to give Lister away!

"Well?" she asked carefully. "What is that to do with me?"

There was a crunch in the snow behind her. Then a sudden shout.

Silhouetted against the skyline at her back appeared three figures—the figures of Jemima, Jean, and Babs.

A cry went up from Babs.

"Leila, what on earth—I say, you ninny, we thought you'd got lost!"

Leila gulped. Jean—here! Oh, great Uncle Sam! What was she going to do now? Impulsively she turned as the three slithered down the hill towards her. But the detective from Scotland Yard caught her sleeve.

"Wait a minute, please!" he said.

"Not so fast, young lady! These are your friends?" he added, as Jean and Babs and Jemima came up.

"Perhaps you had better listen, too, to what I have to say. I only came to warn her. Miss Leila, be careful!" he added. "You are meddling in a matter which may have serious consequences for you."

"What do you mean?" Jean asked, in amazement.

"Oh gosh—nothing!" Leila gasped. "I say, let me deal with this."

"Rally round the old fortress," Jemima murmured. "Shall we desert a needy friend in her hour of stress? Keep calm, old Spartan! The clan is at your back, and all the Yards of Scotland, England, and Ireland shall not take you from us. Say on, Mr. Detective."

"I haven't much to say," he said, "except that on Wednesday a boy at Carlisle Station was accused of trying to steal a ruby necklace in the train. That boy was apprehended by the police, but broke away. The police are looking for him, and he has been traced to this district. We have reason to believe that your friend here is helping him!"

"And the boy's name?" Babs asked quickly.

"That we do not know—though doubtless your friend can tell us! He was a boy of about fifteen, with curling black hair and grey eyes, and had a slight mole on his right cheek. He wore a cap—a school cap bearing a badge which unfortunately we are not able to describe. There is no charge against Miss Leila yet, but if she persists in helping him the consequences may be serious. That is all! Be warned!" he added. "Good-night, young ladies!"

And swiftly he turned upon his heel. Leila stood rigid. Jemima, taking her eyeglass out of her eye, polished it thoughtfully.

"Leila," Babs gasped, "what on earth—"

"Oh, stuff!" Leila said gruffly. "The man's talking out of the back of his neck!"

"But are you helping—"

"Let's get back."

"No—no, wait a minute!" Jean's face was suddenly pale. "The description he gave—of that boy. Black hair, grey eyes—the mole on his cheek. That," Jean said, and gulped in her emotion, "that—that exactly fits my brother Lister!"

"Tartan and tadpoles!" Jemima muttered.

"How could it be Lister!" said Leila hurriedly. "He's at Tarbet, isn't he?"

Jean shook her head. She looked almost harassed then.

"Well, he's supposed to be—but it's funny I haven't heard from him. And—and— Oh, great goodness! It would be just like him to get himself mixed up in some scrape. Leila, tell me, please! This is nothing to do with Lister, is it?"

Leila paused. She hated to see that look on Jean's face—Jean, who so loved that ex-scapegrace brother of hers; who had fought so hard for him in the past. She fenced the question.

"Well, if it had been, don't you

think," she asked, "I'd have spilled the beans to you? I guess the detective man was just talking out of the back of his neck. Come on, let's get back!"

And she set the example herself, turning rather abruptly away and digging her sticks into the snow. Jemima, also still on skis, joined her.

"Tough!" she murmured.

"What's tough?" Leila asked gruffly.

"This business—getting mixed up with jolly old criminals and detectives and all that," Jemima murmured. "At least," she added, "if that curious Spartan was a detective!"

Leila glanced at her sharply.

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing!" Jemima shrugged. "Except that Scotland Yard doesn't operate in Carlisle. And Scotland Yard, in any case, would not concern its busy old self with a juvenile crime. Also," Jemima added musingly, "it's not the way of Scotland Yard to give warning to girls they have under suspicion. Apart from which, it was rather unusual, what, that he never insisted upon asking for your full name? Mystery!" Jemima concluded, and frowned again, while Leila stared at her in the moonlight. "Funny game!" she said.

"You mean," Leila breathed, "that man might be a crook?"

"Indications point that way—what?" Jemima murmured. She looked at her shrewdly. "Big job you've taken on, Leila!"

Leila stared uneasily.

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing!" Jemima said blandly. "Just nothing, you know. Far be it from a Carstairs to thrust herself forward, but if you want a hand, old Spartan, just let me know."

"Thanks!" Leila said.

"And meantime," Jemima added thoughtfully, "perhaps 'twould not be a bad idea to ring up Jimmy Richmond and prepare him for Jean's ringing—'cos that, you know, is what she's bound to do now there's a doubt in her mind. I'll just drop back and detain 'em while you go ahead and get on with it! So long!"

And strange, clever Jemima, with a beaming nod, sat in the snow to take off her skis, while Leila, with a wondering, grateful look, pushed ahead towards the castle.

### Plan of Action!



IT was lucky for Leila that Jimmy Richmond was such a staunch friend and admirer of hers. He listened over the phone with amazement to what she had to say.

"Please, Jimmy," Leila said, "if Jean rings you up don't let her know that Lister is not with you. I can't tell you everything now—but Lister is in trouble. I'm helping him, and somehow we'll clear everything up O.K. But you know what old Jean is—you know she'd worry if she found out he'd never turned up at your place."

"Right-ho!" Jimmy Richmond said. "Leave it to me!"

And since there was nothing else to do, Leila did leave it to him. And as Jemima had prophesied, the first thing Jean did when she reached the castle was to ring up Richmond. Anxiously, almost afraid to ask, she put her question.

"Lister?" Jimmy Richmond said in apparent surprise, "but what should be wrong with him, Jean?"

"Oh dear! Jimmy, he's there?"

"Well, not at the moment," Jimmy



Richmond answered cautiously. "He's out now. Still, I'll tell him you've rung when I do see him."

"Oh, thanks!" Jean breathed.

And she laughed a little shakily, thankful that there was no ground for her fears. After a brief chat about the Christmas happenings with Jimmy, she rang off. At the same moment there was a skirl of bagpipes coming up the hill, playing: "Hark the Herald Angels Sing," followed by the lusty voices of the villagers.

Eagerly the laird ran forward. With his own hands he tugged the great doors open, and into the room, scampering and dancing, came many of the lassies and lads of the village, with pipers in their midst.

And then—what excitement! What thrills! What shrieks of delight! Around the panelled walls of the hall the pipers solidly ranged themselves.

"While Shepherds Watched" was followed by "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen," the London band blending to make one with the pipers.

Jean, happy and reassured now, thoroughly enjoyed herself. It did Leila's heart good to watch her later when, dressed in her Highland kilties, Jean danced a breathless terrific fling with the young, good-looking leader of the party.

Then, at the laird's suggestion, they all danced a Roger de Coverley, followed by a whirlwind reel which left the chums almost breathless. After that came the sandwiches and cakes—and finally, amid a terrific uproar, a whole plate of shining silver half-crowns.

"Now come forward, lads and lassies," the laird jovially cried. "According to the custom of Glengowrie I give ye each a shining half-crown to drink the health of this house. At the same time," the laird added, "let me remind ye all that on Boxing Night—Monday—we shall hold the usual masked fancy dress carnival dance in the hall. The dance will start at seven o'clock, and ye're all invited to roll up and bring ye're friends. At ten o'clock the hall will be plunged into darkness for two minutes, and then ye will unmask and we'll ha' as merry a party as ever was seen within these walls."

"But," Bessie asked anxiously after the cheer which followed the laird's announcement, "we'll have a refreshment interval during the dance, Mr. Glengowrie?"

"Ay, and refreshments to go wi' 'em," the laird chuckled, a twinkle in his eyes. "Now, roll up, lads and lassies from Glengowrie. Let's all eat, drink and be merry!"

And eat, drink and merry they were, everybody feeling excited, everybody in the highest of high spirits. Toasts were drunk with enthusiasm. At the laird's suggestion they all stood round the big fire roaring out lusty carols.

Then on came the crackers, some of them so terrifically enormous when stood on end that they were the height of a man, with all sorts of wonderful things like cameras, diaries, pocket wallets pouring out of them when they were pulled.

It was all so gay, so overwhelmingly high-spirited and good-humoured that nobody for more than two minutes at a time could keep a straight face. Nobody was caring. Nobody was giving a thought to anything—except Leila!

Leila, to be sure, joined in the fun and the gaiety with the rest, but all the time Leila was alert, and Leila was busy.

Most of the faces there she recognised from Christmas Eve. There were a few new ones, however, and to the owners of those she made it her business to talk.

But always with the same result. Nobody among them, apparently, spoke with a lisp!

Eleven o'clock came; half-past eleven. Still the fun waxed fast and furious, until midnight, when the guests departed and the Cliff House chums, tired out with that long Christmas Day, which had been one gay excitement after another, went to bed.

The next day was Sunday—a day of peace and quiet and rest.

Nobody, of course, that morning felt like getting up early, and nobody did—with the exception of Leila. At six o'clock, however, while even the servants were asleep, Leila crept out of bed.

One hasty visit to the pantry to fill the basket she had procured, and she hurried down to the ruined tower on the banks of the lake.

The door opened instantly at her tap. Lister's face, excited, glowing, looked out at her.

"Leila, you! Good, come in—quickly. I've news—"

"Oh!" Leila cried.

"Yes, listen! Oh, in the first place, forgive me for not turning up at the cairn last night. At least," the boy added, "forgive me for not speaking, because I was there all right. Everything O.K. your end?"

"Except," Leila said with a rueful smile, "I don't seem to have made great headway, I guess. And last night—at the cairn—but tell me what your news is," she added.

And then excitedly Lister Cattermole told her. His story started from the moment he had left Leila at the end of the lake yesterday. Somebody had followed him.

"Gee! Yes, and I guess somebody followed me, too!" Leila said.

"I know! They're both here—the two men, I mean," Lister said. "It was the other johnny who followed me. I heard him without seeing him. I didn't let on, but when I neared the end of the village I found somebody else walking in front of me, and I promptly hid behind a tree. The chap who was following me, not knowing I was hidden, and fancying the chap in front of me was his quarry, went on."

Leila chuckled.

"Following the other man?"

"Yes!" Lister smiled grimly. "Well, naturally, as soon as the chappie following me had passed the tree, I nipped out and followed him. I won't make a long story of it, but I tracked him to the inn in Glengowrie. There I saw him meet the other fellow, but naturally, as they were inside and I was outside, I couldn't hear what they said. I spent a long time hanging round the inn before I decided it was time to make a move towards meeting you."

"Yes?" Leila breathed.

"Well, somehow, they had got on my trail again. No sooner had I left the village than I heard footsteps behind me. Lucky for me, as I was approaching the cairn the moon went behind the clouds. For a few minutes it was all pitch darkness. Well, I know that cairn. That pile of stones, as you might have found out, is hollow, and I knew something else, too—that there's a secret way into it. The luck was with me. It was still dark when I reached the cairn. I popped inside it."

"Sakes!" breathed Leila. "And you were there when—when I came?"

"Yes," Lister said; "and I heard everything. But, Leila, tell me before we go any further, what happened



"IN you come," whispered Leila. "And don't make a noise." Lister Cattermole, in his Guy Fawkes costume, slipped in through the window. Now for the fancy dress carnival—and now to seek for the man with the lisp.



about Jean? She sounded frightfully upset."

Leila told him. The boy breathed relief.

"Oh, topping! Leila, what a sport you are!" he cried. "Well, now, listen to the rest of it! I can tell you, when I heard Jean, I badly wanted to break out of that cairn, but I didn't. I kept my head. I went back to the inn in the village, and this time managed to get in and hide behind a settee.

"Presently those two crooks came in. They started talking. I won't give you the whole of the conversation. I didn't hear every word of it, but I did hear enough to find out that it's during the masked dance at the castle to-morrow night that they're going to make the attempt to pinch whatever it is they're after."

Leila stared.

"Gee, you mean—"

"I mean," Lister said tensely, "that they'll be at the dance—both of them in fancy dress."

Boy and girl stared at each other.

"But," Lister added, and his lips came together, "as they'll be masked nobody will recognise them—until it's too late."

"Wait a minute!" cried Leila. "I've got a brainstorm, I guess. If I dance with them, and talk to them while I'm dancing—"

The boy smiled.

"You mean find the man with the lisp, and then watch him? Well, that's all right, as far as it goes. But there will be thirty or forty men at the dance, Leila, old thing. You can't very well dance and talk to each one of them, can you? Two of us might manage it," he added thoughtfully, and then looked at her quickly. "Leila, I've got an idea, too," he said. "Could you get me a fancy-dress costume?"

Leila blinked.

"Well, I guess I could, but—"

"Then I'll be there, too!" Lister said eagerly. "Between us we ought to be able to bowl them out. In any case, I'm not too keen on being outside while this is going on inside. This is really my show, you know, old Leila, and I hate leaving everything to you. Look here, get me the costume! Trot it down during the day. I'll be here all the time. I don't think either of those crooks suspect I'm actually staying here. To-morrow night when the dance has started, you can let me into the castle through one of the windows. Is it a go?"

Leila nodded. She was thrilling with anticipatory excitement then.

"O.K.!" she said. "I'll be down after breakfast—while the others have gone to church. It's settled, Lister!"

### The Boxing Day Carnival!



AND after breakfast Leila returned, with a Guy Fawkes costume which had been sent up from London with a pile of others before the holidays. All Leila was hoping was that the costume wouldn't be missed.

It wasn't. After tea that day the Sunday evening was spent by the chums in altering and fitting their chosen costumes.

Great fun that, with dear old Bessie actually plumping for the costume of a fairy queen—a concession to little Dorrie, who, because she was going

to be dressed as a fairy for the early part of the evening, felt that Bessie should be attired similarly.

And as the evening passed; so the night went with it. And so Boxing Day dawned, with its usual high-spirited frolic and fun out-of-doors.

And eventually, with the moon shedding its rays over the mountain-topped countryside, night fell.

All excitement then, with Leila perhaps the most excited of them all. She had seen Lister again during the day, and made arrangements for letting him into the castle.

In honour of the occasion, great garlands of ribbon and rosettes and tartan had been added to the Christmas decorations in the old hall, and the big glass case which contained the Glengowrie heirlooms, beneath the picture of Flora Glengowrie, the patron saint of the family, had been floodlit for the occasion.

A most beautiful case of relics, that. Included among it was the great Glengowrie diamond, which was said to have been given to Flora Glengowrie by James the Second, and the small gold dagger, in its jewelled sheath, with which, in defending the honour of Flora, a clansman had met and killed three fully armed enemies.

Festive the scene; gay the spirits. What fun dressing up! What screams and gurgles of laughter and excitement when, finally dressed up, and with masks donned, the Cliff House chums tripped down to meet other masked dancers, already arrived.

Already the band was playing; the laird, with his daughter, Flora Stewart, by his side, was standing in the middle of the great hall, greeting the guests as they came in.

A colourful, motley gathering in all truth, with costumes of every period, profession and nationality represented, and many that belonged to none of those categories.

Buccaneers of old brushed shoulders with modern pierrettes; gay cavaliers were chatting with Red Indian chiefs; solemn Greeks and Romans were already dancing with milkmaids, and Marie Antoinettes.

As the chums descended upon the scene the laird bore down upon them; and Leila, taking advantage of the moment, quickly slipped up the stairs. Like a wraith she flitted along the minstrels' gallery, went down the short flight of stairs on the other side, which led to the small room known as the writing-room.

She did not turn up the light; there was no need to, indeed. The brightly glowing fire on the hearth gave all the illumination required.

She crossed to the window. Quickly she opened it, peering out into the moonlit night. A cloaked shape in a tall hat and a long cloak rose before her.

"Lister!" she breathed.

There came a soft chuckle.

"Leila! Good egg! Everything O.K.?"

"Yes," Leila whispered. "In you come, and don't make a noise." And, as he scrambled over the sill, she closed the window after him. "It's impossible to recognise anybody, I guess, in the masks," she said. "Perhaps you'll spot them, though. Let me know if you do. In the meantime, I guess I'll dance with everyone I can. If there's one with a lisp among them I'll let you know. But wait a minute. A spotlight waltz will be on in a ticklet. That's your chance to mix with the crowd."

They stood together, listening to the

strains of the music which came from the great hall. After a few moments Leila nodded.

"Come on," she said. "Be careful of that mask, though."

"Trust me!" Lister breathed.

He followed her as she led the way out and up the stairs. The spotlight dance was on. The upper regions were in darkness. Easy enough to get down among the dancers without attracting attention, and once there they whirled away together in the waltz.

The dance came to an end; the lights went up. Leila smiled.

"Thank you!" she said, and Lister slipped away.

"Hallo!" Mabs cried—Mabs, looking extremely pretty in her Dolly Vardou costume. "I say, it's grand, isn't it?"

"Dandy!" Leila agreed. "But come on. Here comes the Roger de Coverley again."

She looked round, and then smiled as she caught the hesitant eyes of a young man.

"Sure I'll dance with you!" she said, almost before the invitation had fallen from his lips. "You like dancing, I guess?"

"Well, now and again," the young man said, with a laugh.

"You've been here before?" Leila asked.

"Well, no."

"But you like it?"

"Oh, yes!"

And he wondered after that why Leila fell so suddenly silent. He never guessed that all Leila had wanted in the first place was to trick him into betraying a lisp—if he had one. And now, having drawn a blank, she was impatient to try her scheme on someone else.

The next dance was a fox-trot. Leila took that with a tallish young man dressed as Charles I. Again she drew blank.

The next was a Paul Jones. Here she managed to get hold of no less than five partners—but again drew blank.

Then a waltz, this time with a gentleman who spoke with a decided Lancashire accent, but most certainly did not lisp. Then a tango. Very few taking this, but Leila took it with a Spanish matador, who was so completely intent upon his dancing that he said not a single word during the whole time. By that time it was nine o'clock.

"My hat!" Babs said. "What's the matter with Leila to-night? I don't think she's missed a single dance."

"Enjoying herself, what?" Jemima remarked.

Leila was—on the surface. With zest, with joy, she seemed to be throwing herself into the spirit of the thing. Rather amazing that, for though Leila was moderately fond of dancing as a rule, she usually made a habit of dancing only every other dance, and was renowned, too, for keeping to the same partner.

"Well, she's certainly enjoying herself," Jean said. "So jolly good luck to her! Hallo, she's going over to uncle now. What on earth is she talking about—and what's he laughing about?"

The laird himself raised his voice at that moment.

"Lads and lassies," he cried. "I've just had a suggestion. The suggestion is that we have a sort of spoon dance. But instead of spoons the ladies will be supplied with crackers. Y'see the idea? If the lady offers a cracker to the gentleman, he must crack it with her and then dance with her. There are crackers in plenty on the table yon. Lassies, help yourselves!"



"Well, that's a jolly good idea," Mabs applauded. "Come on, we're all in this."

A good idea it was, and a beeline was made at once for the crackers. The dance took place, interspersed with many bangings and merry laughter. But although by this means Leila was able to choose a new partner, she again drew blank. After the dance Lister sidled near to her.

"Any luck?" he whispered.

"No. You?"

"Not a scrap."

Leila bit her lip. She was feeling rather tired then. But time was going on. Still her mission was incomplete. Then, in the middle of a dance, she saw two men dressed in identical pierrot costumes near the picture of Flora Glengowrie. Neither of these men had she danced with yet.

The dance was over. Leila approached them with a smile.

"Excuse me," she said to the taller of the two, "but is one of you Mr. Robinson?"

"No," said the taller of the two.

"You, perhaps?"

"No," the other man said.

Leila shook her head.

"Then I'm sunk," she said. "A Mr. Robinson—he was dressed as a pierrot—asked me to have this next dance with him. That means I haven't got a partner."

She smiled brightly at the two men, plainly asking them to fill the unknown Mr. Robinson's place.

The two exchanged a glance. Neither, however, seemed ready to fall in with her wishes.

Leila took the bull boldly by the horns.

"Please will you oblige?" she asked, touching the arm of the smaller man. "I'm so desperately anxious to have this dance. I so love waltzing. Here we are—they are starting, you know." And, almost against his will, she led him on to the floor. "Are you fond of dancing?" she asked.

"No, not much," the man said.

"Do you belong to Glengowrie?"

"No," the man said.

"You are a visitor here, then?" Leila asked.

The man merely nodded.

Leila racked her brain. Was the man, perhaps conscious of that lisp, forming his replies so as deliberately to prevent giving himself away?

She tried him again, but his answers were brief and never included a betraying "s."

The dance came to an end. She touched his arm.

"Please let me have the next one," she pleaded. "It will be the last before unmasking. Shall we?"

"If you like," the man said indifferently. "But on one condition."

"And that?" Leila asked.

"Would you mind not talking? I find I can get more enjoyment from it that way."

"Oh!" Leila said.

She felt a little dashed, but that didn't matter. She had a queer feeling, though not a scrap of proof, that she had the right man now. And, in spite of his wish, she did ply him with questions—to which he returned a stony silence.

Huntedly her eyes sought for Lister, dancing now near Babs & Co., by the picture of Flora Glengowrie.

The dance came to an end. The lights went up. And then the laird, his face beaming with delight:

"There will now be a complete black-out, in which all guests will unmask," he said. "Sandy, the lights."

A stir arose, some giggling, some laughing. Then suddenly the lights went out, plunging the hall into complete darkness, except for the glow from the brightly burning fire. There was a rustle as the masks were removed. Then:

Crash!

And from by the case which contained the Glengowrie heirlooms a sudden scuffle and a shout:

"Help, help! Somebody's stealing!"

Another voice:

"No, you don't! I've got you!"

"Get him!"

"He's got away!"

"Lights!" the laird roared. "Lights there! Guard the doors! Stand still, everybody!"

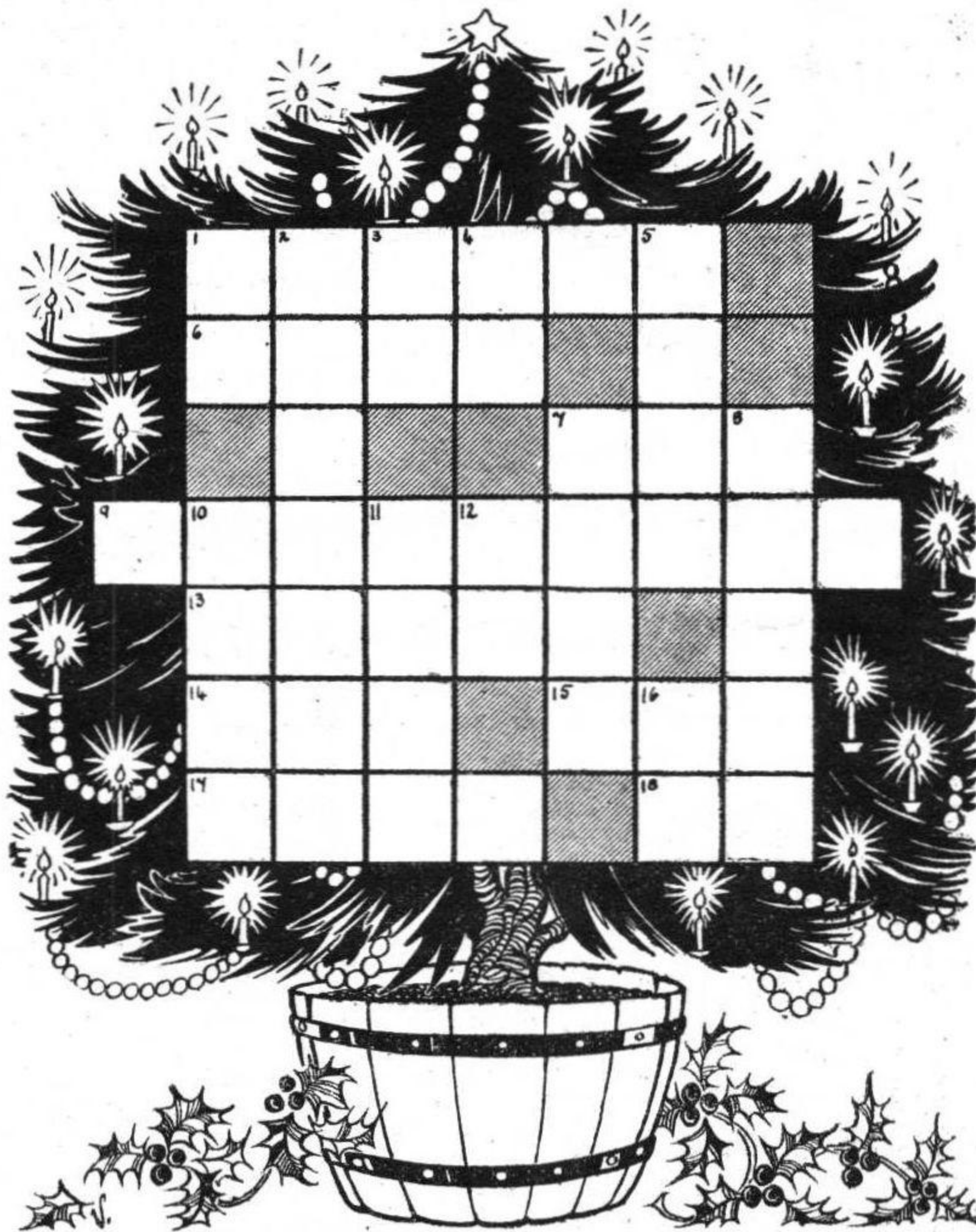
Up went the lights, and for a moment everybody stared in blank, dumb-founded bewilderment at the scene presented to their gaze.

And then—what a gasp went up!

For beneath the Flora Glengowrie  
(Concluded on page 16.)

## A CHRISTMAS X-WORD FOR YOU!

And here's a lovely idea for a party Competition if several of your friends have brought their copies of *The SCHOOLGIRL*. Start them all trying to solve the crossword at the same time, and the one who first produces a correct solution, or a solution which has the fewest mistakes, gets a prize. But—no looking at page 28 first for the solution!



### ACROSS :

1. Certain to be some of these relations at your party.
6. This present will make for cleanliness!
7. Thus says Uncle George when the pudding is brought in.
9. A popular Christmas decoration.
13. Christmas Hymn.
14. The day before Christmas.
15. "People"—but without any vowels!
17. An action.
18. Belonging to me.

### DOWN :

1. You and I.
2. "Evasion"—reversed.
3. First half of "Card."
4. Second half of Seven Down.
5. There's one missing at "Musical Chairs."
7. Mother will need your — when she's preparing for Christmas.
8. A plant whose branches are much in demand at Yuletide.
10. Christmas cakes are usually this.
11. The presents may be hung on this.
12. Behold!
16. After Noon.





# IN MERRY CHRISTMAS MOOD!

Your friend PATRICIA has changed the title of her "Out of School Hours" page for another week in honour of Christmas. So, of course, it is filled with seasonable chatter and suggestions.

AT last, Christmas—for which we've all been waiting so excitedly for weeks—is here!

Are all the presents you are going to give ready packed and labelled?

Have mysteriously bulky, and intriguingly thin, parcels been arriving with almost every post for you—to be tucked away, "not to be opened until Christmas Day"?

I hope so.

I—your Patricia—have received several already, and one was from a friend I had forgotten, I'm ashamed to say.

So I had to dash out and buy a last-minute present to send off to her!

You'll have been wise to have bought all your presents in good time, but just in case you haven't, here are a few suggestions for gifts that are always popular.

## ● Last-Minute Gifts

Shoe-trees covered in velvet or silk—sixpence a pair. A packet of day-by-day powder puffs for a grown-up friend—price sixpence, too. A pair of carving-rests for the table, made of glass—sixpence.

I also saw a most fascinating little box containing no fewer than twelve teeny-weeny reels of coloured cotton (all colours different, of course). This costs ninepence, but is wonderful value. Just right for tucking into a week-end case!

Hankies are always useful last-minute favourites—particularly coloured ones these days. Packets of tiny tablets of soap are inexpensive luxuries. So are bath salts and bottles of toilet eau-de-Cologne (intended for use in the bath). All these gifts, which cost sixpence, can be made to look very gay if a bow of cheery holly ribbon is tied to them.

## ● Pat's Presents

Now, I wonder if you'd like to know what presents I'm giving?

My big brother, Brian, and I are giving mother an early-morning tea-set between us. It's so bright—a gay blue with white spots on it.

Then for father I have knitted a long-sleeved jacket for golf. My brother already has more scarves than there are week-ends to wear them, so I bought him a torch. A jolly big one it is, too.

My dear Aunt Monica (who is my small brother's godmother, you know) particularly asked me for a photo of myself. So I'm giving her a very modern glass frame for this.

To my friend Esme, who has nearly everything, I'm giving a little mirror and comb case I made. While my friend Joan, who is not nearly so well off, is to

have a pair of fur-lined gloves from me.

There's also our r'Olive (our maid, you know). I'm giving her two pairs of silk stockings, and the rest of the family will give her presents, too, of course.

Last—but very important—is my small brother, Heatherington, or Heath for short.

Perhaps you've guessed what I'm giving him—you will if you look at the picture.

Yes, it's the tiniest, dearest wee kitten you ever saw. There's only about a pennyworth of it, but I paid five shillings for him from one of the pets' departments of a big London shop, where they are keeping him until Christmas Eve.

I'm going to take him into Heath's nursery on Christmas morning, and we shall christen the new addition to the family together. I'm afraid I haven't thought of a name for him yet, but I expect it will be quite a foolish one!



## ● Party Fun

Young Heath and I have already been to one party. It was for kiddies only, and I suspect I was only asked in order to help look after the babies.

We played all the old favourite games, such as "Ring o' Roses," "Oranges and Lemons," and "Cobbler, Cobbler, Mend My Shoe," and then had all the thrill of a bran tub.

Each kiddie plunged a hand into the tub and brought out a present; those for boys were wrapped in blue paper and those for girls in pink—so some of them had two dips!

This made them all very excited, as you can guess, so the kindly hostess had a perfect brainwave of a quiet game. (You know how difficult it is to prevent children from dashing around and tiring themselves out so that they get cross?)

She disappeared and came back into the drawing-room with a large portion of—dough!

This was divided up among the small guests, and for a quarter of an hour they

all sat like little mice, looking very earnest and making funny shapes with the dough!

There was a small prize for the winner—which wasn't young Heath, for all he could make was a "man," which no one could recognise.

A little girl named Priscilla won the prize—and the next I saw of her she was being kissed by my young brother under the mistletoe, the scamp!

When I teased him about it, he looked very indignant.

"I didn't kiss her—she kissed me!" he said wrathfully. "An' you said I was to be a little gentleman and do the things the girls wanted!"

So I gave in. For definitely Heath had scored a point!

## ● So Original

And now here's a perfectly adorable present that you could make in two ticks—even on Christmas Eve itself—for someone who loves you quite a lot. I can imagine a favourite granny liking it particularly.

First you must choose a really nice snap of yourself. Next cut a piece of cardboard just bigger all the way round than the snap. Cover the cardboard either with silver paper or with cretonne. (Glue will do the trick.) Then paste the snap securely over this, so that it is prettily framed.

Now stab two holes at the bottom of the frame and slip ribbon through these. Glue the ends to a little purse calendar—price a ha'penny—and attach another loop of ribbon at the top.

There, isn't that rather sweet? And very original!

Here's a little joke for you to tell father; he and mother will certainly enjoy it.

"I don't know what's the matter with my razor this morning," said the newly-married husband. "It simply won't cut."

His very pretty wife looked up from setting the breakfast.

"But, darling, it was quite all right last night when I sharpened that pencil with it!" she said, in surprise.

I'll leave father to tell you what the husband said!

Next, a riddle for you to guess.

"Why is a wool jumper like a piece of orange peel?" Because they're both easy to slip on!

And now again I must thank you all for the perfectly sweet cards and greetings you have sent me—you really are dears!

Every possible good wish to you for a very happy Christmas.

from  
Your friend,

Patricia



# YOUR OWN CHRISTMAS PARTY

*Patricia helps you to make it a grand,  
not-to-be-forgotten success.*



**I**F mother has been a perfect darling and has said you may have a party of your very own this year, then it must certainly be a roaring, glorious success.

Of course, you'll help mother as much as ever you can with the preparations, and also with the "programme of events."

You'll want it to be a little different from the others you attend, so that your chums will always feel that your parties are just that spot better than all the others they go to.

And this isn't only a matter of having expensive goodies and luxurious presents, I assure you.

The big secret of a really successful party is to have all the preparations made beforehand, and a programme of games and events all ready prepared so that everything goes with a swing. There's nothing more fatal than a dreadful pause when the hostess—you—looks vaguely around and says: "Oh, what shall we do now?"

So, having finished lecturing you, we'll get on with the party, shall we?

## PREPARATIONS

In the ordinary type of house, I think the ideal number of guests is about a dozen. Any number over ten and up to twenty make a very jolly number—but you and mother will have to decide this, naturally.

Unless you know a lot of boys, then I think it's better to keep the party to all girls. For just one or two boys can so easily be "out of it." But if you do know more, then by all means try to invite about the same number of boys as girls.

The main event of any party—especially at Christmas—is the "feast," isn't it? If there are many of you, and not too young, I suggest you have a "buffet" table, where everyone helps themselves.

Jellies, trifles, iced cakes, sandwiches, fruit, nuts, raisins, dates, figs, and so on, are decorations in themselves on a table, you'll agree.

## A FESTIVE TOUCH

But if you have plenty of room, you might like to make a pretty "centre-piece." A layer of cottonwool with little Christmas figures arranged over it is most effective.

Can you imagine a Father Christmas pulling a sledge with baby crackers on it? A few chirpy robins, some comical gnomes sitting on logs, and one or two tiny fir-trees? The whole sprinkled over with "silver-dust" would look lovely. (The tiny figures are not expensive to buy, and can be put away for another year afterwards.)

But perhaps the table isn't big enough for this. In which case I should make a centre-piece of nicely arranged crackers. Lay these at the corners of the table as well. There should be at least two for each guest.

## A JOLLY PROGRAMME

Now as to times. Say you invite your guests to arrive at half-past four, the party would probably be over at half-past eight or nine. (It may sound a little early for Christmas time, but remember some mothers like their daughters to get their full beauty sleep all the year round!)

When planning your programme of events beforehand, I want you to open with a "breaking the ice" game—one that will make all your guests feel they've known each other for years.

## "POSTCARD PUZZLE"

"Postcard Puzzle" is a new game that I'm sure your guests will enjoy.

For this you must cut up some picture postcards into four pieces—all squiggly shapes, of course. Then hand one piece to each girl as she arrives and tell her she has to find the girls who have the rest of the card, and they are to make up their complete postcard picture between them. The four girls to complete their postcard first are the winners, of course. No prizes for this game.

Then have another high-spirited game before a wash and tidy—and the big event—the "feast!" with paper hats, masks and noisy toys.

A quiet game is indicated after the meal, either with pencil and paper, or a guessing game. Then for more noisy games again, say, a balloon-blowing-up competition. The girl who is first to blow up her balloon until it bursts is the winner.

Any variation of the popular game of "Musical Chairs" is always a success.

"Musical Hankie" is a new, and quite boisterous, way of playing this. You must arrange a pile of hankies in the centre of the floor—just one hankie less than there are players.

Now to the music of the gramophone, or piano, all the players march around the room. When the music stops, there's a grand scramble to grab a hankie. The player who is unlucky and does get one is Out. For the next round you remove one of the hankies, and so the game goes on until there is only one girl left—who deserves a tiny prize, I think.

Dancing would be popular when the dance music is on the wireless, I'm sure—or to the gramophone. Then an interval for fruit and sweets and lemonade about eight o'clock.

If you can manage to give each guest a tiny present costing not more than three-pence each, it would be lovely. But if not give each a balloon and a mask or hat from the crackers that are left.

With these to take home, she'll feel it's been a grand party—and long for next time!

# THOSE "THANK YOU" LETTERS

—that simply must be written

**"SUNDAY, the 26th"** isn't Bank Holiday this year; that's on the day after.

So Sunday will probably be rather a quiet day for you—though no less happy for that!—and the ideal day for writing those "thank-you-for-the-lovely-present" letters.

These needn't be long, so don't worry yourself over them. But they can be difficult.

## SO EASY

Still, it must be done. I know it's simple when you've received a fountain-pen or one of our Annuals that you've been dying for.

Then you can so easily make your letter sound really keen, for you do love the present and can write: "There's nothing I would have liked better, aunty dear.

I shall love reading every word." Or: "I've always wanted a fountain-pen, and this is a beauty. I'm writing with it now and shall take ever such care of it."

## MUCH MORE DIFFICULT

But when it comes to writing "thank you" for calendars, and you already have four, or for a diary, which you never have been able to keep—then it's harder. For you must still write—and with enthusiasm.

"The calendar is so pretty. Thank you very much for it, Janet. I'm going to hang it in my bed-room, where it'll be awfully useful as well as ornamental—for I'm always forgetting the date." Or: "Thank you very much for the dear little diary. I've never kept one before, but I really do mean to try this year. And I know I shall find all the information in it very useful at school and at home. . . ."



The rest of the letters is easy. You can say what other presents you received. Tell about your trip to the panto, or the pictures, and end again on a note of thanks and best wishes for a "Happy New Year."

So now you'll have to excuse me for worrying about those "thank-you" letters—and putting them off "because you don't know what to say"!



(Continued from page 13.)

masterpiece stood the case containing the Glengowrie heirlooms, its glass front smashed to atoms! And from their position in that case, the Glengowrie diamond, together with the jewelled dagger, had gone!

"Oh!" breathed Jean. "Uncle—"

Her uncle's face was like flint.

"Someone," he said, "has staged a robbery! Someone—" His eyes swept round. "Stop that man!" he called sternly, as a figure in Guy Fawkes costume, still masked, was edging towards the door. "Quick!"

Jean and Clara were already rushing forward. One of the pierrots was rushing, too. Too late, Leila saw, too late, trembling with horror, she rushed to intercept.

But before she could reach him, the man in the pierrot costume had caught the Guy Fawkes by the arm—with his free hand had ripped the mask off. From Jean there went up a cry that was almost a scream. From the laird came a shout. For the face—

"Lister!" the laird cried. "Lister—you! Lister—"

And then he gasped as the man in pierrot costume suddenly darted out a hand and plucked out something which had been concealed by the flowing folds of Lister's cloak.

It was the Glengowrie dagger in its jewelled sheath!

### Sensation Ends the Dance!



**L**ISTER CATTERMOLE'S face was deathly white. Jean, head swimming, was caught by Babs as she reeled backwards. But Leila, desperate, was still in possession of all her faculties.

"Lister!" the laird cried.

And then Leila saw that the man who had caught Lister was the same man who, the other night, had presented himself as being a detective from Scotland Yard. He, at least, she knew, did not speak with a lisp. But where was his companion?

Was his companion the man she was in search of?

She didn't know. But she did know in that moment she had got to follow up her hunch. She had got to take a chance. While everybody was staring in stupefaction at the dazed boy from Friardale School, her own eyes were swiftly roving round, and she saw her quarry, unmasked now, standing near the open window. Instantly she took a step forward. Deliberately she trod upon his toe. The man, with a howl, span round.

"You clumsy fool!"

That was enough. Something seemed to snap in Leila's brain all at once. Such a surge of exultation ran through her that she could have yelled aloud. But she didn't. To the man's amazement, to everybody's amazement, she suddenly grabbed the man's hand. She cried:

"Help me—help me! Mr. Glengowrie, don't make a mistake! This is the real thief!"

"Let me go!" the man roared.

"Help!" cried Leila. And, as the man jerked up his hand towards the open window, she desperately clutched at it. "Help!"

But there was no need for help, for by that act alone Leila accomplished her foe's undoing. The hand, jerking towards the window, and opening as it

jerked, was caught in midair by Leila. Something dropped from its palm and rolled amongst the feet of the guests.

While everybody stared in spellbound surprise, Jemima darted forward. She picked it up. The Glengowrie diamond!

"Sandy, hold this man!" Leila cried to the laird's burly, ginger-headed manservant. "Keep him here! Catch that other man, too!" she added, while the pseudo detective gave back a pace. "I think," she added excitedly, "that I can explain this. And I guess Lister is the one who's going to be thanked!"

"But what—what—" the laird stammered. "Hold those men! McNab, phone up the police station! Now, Miss Carroll—"

And then Leila told. While the amazed guests stood around, she told everything. She told the story Lister had told her; she told of her meetings with Lister, of his and her efforts to detect the crooks.

The laird blinked. He turned in astonishment.

"And, Lister, are these the two men ye met in the train?"

"They are," the boy said.

"Ye rascals! What have ye to say?"

The taller of the men shrugged.

"Nothing," he said.

"But I have!" Lister cut in. "I can tell you now how it was worked. These precious two must have spotted my disguise somehow. When the case was smashed, I felt someone grab me round the waist. This fellow played the same trick on me then as he played at Carlisle—that is, planting a portion of the loot on me while his pal got away with the diamond. You saw the scene. While

you were all busy grabbing me, this fellow with the lisp was edging towards the window to throw that diamond out of it—in case I turned round and accused him."

But that now was apparent. It was more apparent than ever when the inspector from Glengowrie Police Station arrived and put forward his suspicion that the two men were well-known London criminals. And this suspicion was later to prove correct. Handcuffed, they were taken away, while Lister, the erstwhile outcast, became the hero of the hour. The laird shook his head.

"Och, Lister, but I always disbelieved that story of your turning over a new leaf. Now— Thank you, lad—thank you! Ye did right, an' ye did well, and I'm glad, Lister; ye found such a fine friend as Miss Leila to help ye! Weel, thanks to you and thanks to Leila, the Glengowrie heirlooms are still intact! Lads, lassies, ladies, gentlemen," he roared, "fill up your glasses, and let's have a toast! Here it is! To Lister Cattermole—"

"Hurrah!"

"An' to his plucky friend, Miss Leila Carroll!"

And, amid cheering and congratulations, those toasts were drunk, while Lister and Leila stood on the platform, hand in hand, and Jean Cartwright and Babs & Co. cheered to the echoes from their privileged place in front of it.

A right merry and gratifying ending indeed to the Cliff House chums' Boxing Day festivities!

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

A lonely little farm in the Highlands, where a mother and her two kiddies have had none of the glorious Christmas festivity and fun!

No wonder the Cliff House chums, golden hearted as ever, set out to bring that tiny family last-minute joy and happiness.

## BABS & CO. TURN FATHER CHRISTMAS!

The KIDDIES MUST  
have their CHRISTMAS!

by  
Hilda  
Richards.



That is the theme of next Saturday's magnificent LONG COMPLETE story of Babs & Co., still on holiday in Scotland. And it "stars" popular Tomboy Clara Trevlyn. Hilda Richards has excelled herself. You'll revel in every word of this dramatic yarn. Order your SCHOOLGIRL well in advance.





Further thrilling chapters of our wonderful adventure story—

# AT SCHOOL IN THE SOUTH SEAS



## FOR NEW READERS.

**NORMA LANGTON**, bright spark of St. Wanda's School, on holiday with a party of the girls and two mistresses, is wrecked on a tropical island. With her are her chums,  
**BELINDA MALTRAVERS**, pretty but dull, and  
**KIT TURNER**. While gathering fruit, they come upon a little native girl,  
**TALIA**, whose father is chief of the island. Her father insists that she joins the school. As a rival for the chieftainship insists that his daughter joins also, the school splits in two, with  
**MISS CHATTERTON**, an unpleasant mistress, in charge of one section. To please the bushman father of the other native girl,  
**BORKI**, the chums pal up with her. When one girl steals a carving, Norma & Co. climb a volcano to offer a "sacrifice." The volcano erupts, and Belinda gets lost in the smoke.

(Now read on.)

## Heart-broken Talia!

"**B**ELINDA!" cried Norma, and, with no thought for her own safety, she staggered back up the rocky face of the volcano to seek her friend.

The thick, choking fumes and smoke gathered about her like a dense London fog, and she could see only a few yards in any direction. Kit was not far away, for Norma could hear her voice.

"Look for Belinda, Kit. She may have fallen."

"I saw her just below, Norma!"

At the very same moment as this, Belinda, a few yards farther down, was looking for Norma.

"Norma—where are you?" she gasped.

And she turned back to search for Norma. Frail though she was of build, and lacking Norma's resolution and strength of character, Belinda had plenty of courage.

With a handkerchief pressed against her nostrils to keep out the choking fumes, Belinda, her heart throbbing, scrambled back up the face of the volcano.

Norma had reached almost to the top, halted, in the intense heat, for a moment, and then turned back.

"Oh golly—more likely the poor kid slipped and went rolling down," she told herself.

That was such a terrible thought that Norma, heedless of the risk to herself, went hurrying down, looking frantically in every direction.

From the smoke a figure advanced, and before she could stop, crashed into her.

"Belinda—"

"Norma—"

With a squeal of delight Belinda flung herself at Norma and hugged her. Norma, laughing in relief, clasped her.

**THE ISLAND CHIEF SAID THAT A GIFT TO THE VOLCANO WOULD END THE CASTAWAYS' TROUBLES—BUT IT MERELY SEEMED TO MAKE THEM WORSE THAN EVER.**

"Thank goodness you didn't go crashing down—but where's Kit?" asked Norma. "And Talia?"

"Here! Both of us," said Kit, and stumbled forward, coughing. "And the fire's dying down, I think."

"Not worth chancing," decided Norma. "Come on, let's get back just as quickly as we can."

Linking arms, they went down the side of the volcano, picking their way carefully. They had done all they possibly could to please Talia's father.

By

**ELIZABETH CHESTER**

"All is well," said Talia. "For the sacrifice was made in flames. Now we go back along. Yes?"

"Yes, it is," said the three English girls.

And as quickly as they could, with safety, they went down to the lower ground, where the smoke was already beginning to thicken, curling down in a writhing mass.

"Wonder if anyone on that ship saw our signal!" gasped Kit.

"Doubt it" grimaced Norma. "Most likely they'll just think that the volcano has erupted, or whatever it's called, and that a tidal wave may follow."

"Oh golly—then they wouldn't come ashore if they thought that," said Kit.

"No. They've probably gone full speed out to sea," sighed Norma. "So good-bye to the rescue-ship."

When they had gone another half-mile they found that the air was freer and cleaner, almost to the point of purity. It was like moving suddenly from the heart of London, in November, to glorious, sunlit country; and their alarm went with the smoke.

"Look at our faces, though," said Norma, with a laugh. "Am I covered in smuts? You are, Belinda."

"Am I? How awful! What luck I wasn't wearing my best frock."

"Luck? Sense," said Kit. "You don't usually put on your best frock to climb volcanoes, do you?"

"I don't know. I've never climbed one before," admitted Belinda.

"And never again for me," said Norma firmly.

Talia was strangely silent, and Norma, glancing at her presently, saw that tears shone in her eyes.

"Talia, dear, what's wrong?" she asked. "Oughtn't we to have left the volcano?"

Talia stopped, and looked up at Norma, her sad eyes searching her through brimming tears.

"Oh, Norma not like Talia any more," she said brokenly. "Talia bad, silly, Norma not like. Talia go away quiet place, not come back."

And to Norma's amazement she dropped to her knees, covered her face with her hands, and sobbed.



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



## BETWEEN OURSELVES

**M**Y DEAR READERS,—To those of you who have managed to get this issue on its day of publication—December 23rd—Christmas is still a glorious joy to come. And therefore, you'll forgive me, I know, if I repeat my wishes of last week and say very, very sincerely that I hope you all have

### The Loveliest Christmas of Your Lives!

(And if kind Mr. Printer will give that special type and a space all to itself, I don't think I need say any more. Thank you, Mr. Printer! A Merry Christmas to you, too!)

Now here's a novel thought for this festive season. How would you like to be a Father Christmas? I mean, of course, in spirit—in bringing happiness to one or two people who might otherwise find Christmas an unhappy time? A thrilling thought, isn't it? But far, far more thrilling in actual fact, as the Cliff House chums discover next week, for—yes! Babs & Co. become Father Christmases, way up in the picturesque, snow-clad highlands of Scotland.

They take under their wings a poor family who expect very little gaiety to come their way—and between them the chums of the Fourth set out to make those humble folk remember this Christmas as the grandest of their lives.

You'll love every moment of this magnificent story. It is entitled:

#### "THE KIDDIES MUST HAVE THEIR CHRISTMAS,"

and when I tell you that Tomboy Clara Trevlyn plays a most important part in it, of a more serious nature than her share of the chums' combined "good turn," you'll realise something of the treat in store for you.

If you like thrills, excitement, and pathos—which all of you do; of course—then you're bound to revel in every word of Hilda Richards' latest masterpiece.

As usual, next Saturday's issue will contain further topping instalments of our grand serials, another delightful COMPLETE "Gipsy Joy" story, and all our other attractive features, including Patricia's useful and interesting pages. So, readers all, be sure to order your copy well in advance.

And now, before I say au revoir for another week, here are some

#### REPLIES IN BRIEF.

"An Admirer of Christine" (Canada).—I am very much afraid it is impossible for you to do as you suggest, but you can always write to me whenever you like—and Miss Richards, too, for that matter.

Jean (Edinburgh).—Many thanks for your delightful letter, Jean. You must never be afraid to write to me again. After all, I want you to look upon me as one of your friends now, you know. Yes, I will see what can be done regarding your suggestion.

"Interested" (Devonshire).—By this time, "Interested," as you will have seen, I expect, all the characters you mention have appeared in our Celebrity Corner. But thanks so much for your enthusiastic interest. Be sure to write again whenever you like.

Barbara (Birmingham).—By all means write to the author in question. She will be only too delighted to hear from you, I know. Lucky Barbara! Your wish regarding Jean Cartwright has already come true. I expect you have discovered that for yourself by now. Best wishes.

And now, readers all, I must say good-bye until next week.

Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.

Norma looked at Kit and Belinda questioningly. But it was as much a mystery to them as it was to her, why the little Polynesian had suddenly been overcome by this fit of misery.

"Talia," said Norma, stooping and trying to lift her gently by the shoulders. "We're not upset, you know. And you didn't make us climb that volcano."

"Of course you didn't," Kit said. "We came because of Millicent. It's her fault entirely—and she's the only one to blame."

But poor Talia was convinced that she had lost the girls' love; that they thought her native customs were silly, and that she had flung them into danger.

It was nothing the friends had said, only Talia was highly sensitive, and she knew that they thought her tribes' tabus and beliefs were absurd.

Yet to Talia, since she had been brought up with them, they were real. And she quite believed that the volcano had some evil power.

"Millicent bad," she muttered, as

Norma raised her gently. "She brings badness alonga you."

"She did; but it's over now," said Kit. "The sacrifice has been made, and all's well."

But all was far from being well, as they learned when at last, tired and weary, they were met by Virginia and one or two other seniors amongst the palms.

"You are all safe?" asked Virginia, anxiously.

"All safe," nodded Norma. "Hope you weren't worried, Virginia—and hope Miss Manders wasn't, either."

"It's a faint hope," said Virginia, sternly. "Naturally we have been worried, Norma. You had no right to go."

The chums felt that they were really back at St. Wanda's again when they heard a perfect rate them in this manner. And yet Norma knew that Virginia's outburst was natural enough.

"We had to do it," she said. "And anyway—it's done now, you know. So according to the theory, Millicent won't get fever."

"All I can say, then, is that there is something sadly wrong with the theory," said Virginia, "because Millicent is down with fever!"

Talia gave a strangled cry.

"Fever!"

"Yes, fever," said Virginia. "You can't go near her; Miss Manders had decided to keep her away from the others. I don't think it is anything highly infectious, but if it's malaria it's bad enough."

Talia was quite pale, but her anxiety was not so much for Millicent as for future happenings. For it seemed to her that despite their sacrifice and brave effort the gods were still angry.

That was how Talia reasoned in her simple way, and it seemed to her that an even greater sacrifice was needed.

"Don't look so worried, Talia," said Norma. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," Talia said, forcing a smile. "I go see father—go see if he know way to make girl well from fever. Go find out how he tink."

And before Norma could stop her Talia slipped away through the trees. To follow her when she was so fleet of foot was quite hopeless, and Norma had too much sense to attempt it.

"A good thing she has gone," said Virginia sternly. "And I think in future you girls had better discourage the natives—either Borki or Talia. It does not pay."

Norma did not argue. She knew that that suggestion had come from the headmistress, who chanced at present to be worried and upset.

But Norma had no intention of neglecting her little native friend, of wounding the sensitive Talia just when she was feeling most miserable and cast down.

Yet at the same moment Talia was making a resolve similar to Virginia's. White girls and natives should not mix. To keep apart was safest, wisest, for there was so much that Talia felt she did not know—and so much, too, that Norma and her friends would not believe.

"I will go away. I will hide. They will forget and not care any more," she murmured, sadly but resolutely.

### Someone with a Sailor's Hat!

"**P**OOOR Millicent! If only there were something we could do for her."

Norma, worried and concerned, uttered those words to Kit and Belinda as she returned from the shack



where Millicent lay, racked with fever. There was little that could be done to help her, although Miss Manders was now certain that the fever was not contagious and that it must run its natural course.

The headmistress had a few medicines that she had brought in her large bag, and fortunately there was quinine, which helped Millicent considerably.

There was no dearth of amateur nurses, and they were all taking it in turns to look after Millicent.

Norma's great hope had been that Talia would come back soon with some special native medicine, for that had been almost the last thing she had said to them—that she would ask her father, the chief.

It seemed strange that on so lovely an island, where all seemed blissful and happiness could so easily be obtained, a thing like fever could possibly exist.

But in these islands it was common enough, and the natives had learned to endure it as something inevitable, like wind and rain and the occasional thundering and rumbling from the volcano.

It was now only a few hours since the volcano-top had been befogged by thick smoke, but already it was clear.

The flames had gone from the top, so Norma's fear that the whole volcano might suddenly erupt was proved groundless.

"You don't think that Millicent's fever has anything to do with the volcano?" asked Belinda thoughtfully.

"Nothing at all," said Norma. "It's a common thing here. Perhaps Millicent got it through going into the native place. There are mosquitoes there, but practically none, for some reason or other, just here."

"And they carry the fever," nodded Kit. "My uncle told me that. Phew, I wonder if I shall ever see uncle again!" she murmured.

"Is he ill?" asked Belinda.

"He? No; jolly fit and well," said Kit, in surprise.

"Well, why shouldn't you see him again?" asked Belinda.

"Because," answered Kit, "how do we know we shall ever leave this island?"

Belinda sighed.

"It's lovely here, but it would be awful to think we might never, never go back home and see our people!"

"Oh, sooner or later a ship will come!" said Norma confidently. "No sense in worrying about that. When we've been here six months we can start fretting; but, after all, even if we were still on the ship, we shouldn't be homeward bound yet."

"True," said Kit. "What matters at the moment is curing Millicent. But there's nothing we can do except take our turn nursing!"

And that was exactly what the girls did.

"**P**HEW! Is it hot?"

Norma lay on the side of the lagoon, with her ankles splashing lazily into the water. Belinda, just behind her, was using palm-leaves as a fan for her, while Kit was peeling some luscious fruit—for herself. All the girls were in bathing costumes.

It was French lesson the following day—French! Just in case, as Kit said, they might suddenly meet a girl dressed in the latest Paris fashion.

Talia had not yet returned, but the girls were not worrying, thinking she was probably seeking medicinal herbs for Millicent.

"Moi je suis trop chaude," murmured Belinda. "It is not bon. Nong."

Norma shaded her eyes and read to herself about someone who was crossing the Channel. In English it was a dull recital, but in French, when there were words she could not understand, it became a kind of mystery story.

It was not a book she was reading, but a sheet of paper, one of the few remaining pages from a French primer. It had drifted ashore, and Miss Manders had had it fixed with tree-gum to some stout canvas.

"In years to come, you know," murmured Norma, "this page will become a kind of heirloom. I dare say we shall have forgotten all about French when we are eighty, and will think it is something frightfully mystic."

"It's mystic to Belinda now!" chuckled Kit. "Most of it, anyway."

"In a hundred years' time it won't matter," opined Belinda languidly. "Because the French will be speaking English then. I wonder someone didn't think of that earlier, you know. If everyone spoke English we shouldn't need to learn French or German."

"Gosh! She's got an idea like that, and here we are miles from anywhere, and we can't broadcast it to the world," said Kit in shocked tone. "Shame!"

Belinda yawned and lolled back, muttering French irregular verbs to herself—although no French verb was ever so hopelessly irregular as Belinda seemed to suppose.

Now and again Miss Manders would move amongst the girls, offering comment, or asking questions.

But the sun seemed to be filling the girls with drowsiness, and they were not giving all their mind to the work. More than one girl, nodding off peacefully, had to be awakened.

"Girls, please take this lesson seriously," said Miss Manders after a while. "Unless you really exercise your brains, there is every chance that you may become like the natives, who want to do nothing but lounge about in the sun, bathe, and eat fruit. I'm sure none of you want to descend to that level—do you?"

Belinda sighed.

"How lovely!" she said.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Belinda," said Miss Manders sternly, "do you really want to become just a simple savage, intent on nothing but idle pleasure and luxury?"

Belinda had to be honest.

"Well, it would be rather nice," she admitted.

"Nice! I am shocked! Have you no thought for the future? Think of the day when the rescue ship comes and we are all taken from this island," said Miss Manders. "What will you do then?"

Belinda wrinkled her forehead, not quite grasping the question.

"I shall borrow an iron directly. I get aboard," she said. "Every frock I have is most fearfully creased, and they all want ever such a lot of ironing—really they do, Miss Manders."

Giggles came from most of the girls: and Miss Manders, compressing her lips, turned away.

Kit put up her hand.

"Well, Kit?" said the mistress.

"Please, Miss Manders, can I have a dip? I'm frightfully hot, and it is my turn."

"Very well. Hurry!"

Kit stood up, dived into the cool water, swam half a dozen strokes, and then swam back and clambered out.

Because of the heat Miss Manders had agreed that the girls should be allowed a dip in turn at reasonable intervals, provided their conduct merited it, and the girl who was due for the next dip after Kit became thrilled with anticipation. The dips were all too short, but while they lasted they were delicious.

But presently a new, more serious note was introduced.

"I wonder when Talia will come back?" said Norma, sitting up on the sandy beach. "I know she said she



**T**ALIA'S quaint little brother handed Norma some rolled up leaves, in the middle of which was a white powder. "Powder go chase fever far away," he said simply. The chums exchanged looks. Talia hadn't failed them, after all.



would get something for Millicent, but there was something funny about the way she went. She seemed hurt, or offended."

"My goodness!" exclaimed Kit. "Now you come to mention it, I thought that." She bit her lip. "I suppose—I suppose we couldn't slip away and look for her."

Norma looked about her. Miss Manders was busy; and so, too, was Virginia—and they were the only ones likely to raise objections.

"All right—we'll go," said Norma softly. "But better slip some clothes on."

The three friends, waiting until opportunity presented itself, moved swiftly amongst the trees; and Kit and Belinda put on tunics, while Norma got into shorts and blouse.

"Now," said Norma, "what shall it be? We can go to the chief and ask to see Talia; or we can go there, anyway, and ask if he knows a remedy for fever—and just hope that we run into her."

"Better not go too far away," said Kit warily. "We might get lost."

"Well, a little farther on we can call for Talia," said Norma.

They wandered through the trees, and blazed the way by looping leaves and entwining flowers in a noticeable manner so that they could see which way they had come when they made the return journey.

But, although they called Talia again and again, no answer was heard, until Belinda suddenly halted and exclaimed: "Hark! A voice from the bush over there!"

She moved towards a bush, and there came a faint, scuffling sound.

"That you, Talia?" called Norma.

No reply.

"Perhaps a wild pig," suggested Kit. But Belinda, who was nearest, gave a sudden squeal.

"I can see a sailor's hat!"

"A sailor? Can't be!" said Norma.

"Why—Hullo! Look!"

A figure ran from beside the bush, tripped, and fell flat.

So comic was that figure that the three girls gave peals of merry laughter.

"Why," cried Belinda, "if it isn't a little boy!"

### Thrilling Discovery!

A QUIANT-LOOKING boy rose from the ground, ashamed and sheepish, wearing an officer's peaked cap that balanced on top of his head and was at least four sizes too big.

His eyes were large and round, and he stood blinking anxiously at the girls as though half-frightened. Like Talia, he was wrapped in a pareu.

"How old is he—seven?" said Kit.

"Not more," smiled Norma. "Here, sonny, who're you? And where did you get that hat?"

The boy stood blinking, and then shyly stepped forward.

"Me," he said, indicating himself with his thumb. "Brudder Talia. Sister her belonga me."

"Talia's kid brother. Well, my goodness!" said Norma, amazed. "What luck!"

The small boy stood shyly where he was and refused to move. He was quite slight and small and—at the moment, anyway—looked as though butter would not have melted in his mouth.

"Can you tell us where Talia is?" asked Norma. "Where am Talia?" she added.

The boy grinned, showing gleaming white teeth.

"Me—not know," he said.

"Well, you're not much good, then," said Kit. "When did you last see her, anyway?"

The boy took off his large cap, and Belinda smiled indulgently.

"What a polite little chap!" she murmured.

But Talia's little brother had taken off the cap for a purpose. There was something hidden inside.

"Me come alonga you bring dis," he said.

And he handed to Norma a rolled up bundle of leaves, in the centre of which was one large leaf enclosing a mysterious-looking powder.

"What's this for?" she asked.

"Sister me Talia, her say—powder him go chase fever alonga by far away," said the small boy.

"A cure for fever?" said Norma quickly, her eyes lighting up. "Er—let me see," she pondered. "Dis," she added, pointing to the powder. "Put in mouth? Um? Bymbe—all fever gone?"

And she gave a demonstration of fever, holding her head and mopping her brow to make the small boy understand.

His large solemn eyes were fixed steadily upon her.

"Take um powder," he said. "Fever him go. Yes."

"Did Talia send you with this?" asked Norma.

"Um. Her say you gib me nice ting me bring powder," hinted the boy.

Norma had to chuckle at that; for Talia's little brother was rapidly losing his shyness, and gave promise of being a cheeky imp.

"Oh, you want a present for bringing the powder? Well, tell Talia it is nice of her to send it," said Norma. "And please ask her to come back alonga us, say Talia—white girls say go back alonga dem plenty quick!"

He shook his head.

"Her no. Not come back no time."

"She must—we want her," urged Norma. "And you come now, and we will give you some nice ting."

The three girls turned towards the camp, and the small brother of Talia followed. There were various things he could take as a gift, and the three debated the subject of what he would like most.

But they need not have wasted their time.

As soon as Talia's brother saw the camp, with the dozen or more girls, he gave a squeak of fright.

"Me go now—please—tanks!" he said anxiously, and made to dart away through the bushes.

But Norma, laughing, caught hold of his arm.

"It's all right, sonny," she said reassuringly. "There's nothing to be afraid of. They're friends—understand? Friends"—she pointed to the rest of the castaways, in the distance—"of us." And then she indicated herself and her chums. "We'm sisters—very happy—"

But Talia's brother did not seem at all convinced. His big brown eyes had been growing wider every second with alarm, and suddenly he twisted out of Norma's grasp and bolted.

"Hi, come back! Kit, stop him!" Norma shouted.

As though they could. Like an eel, he dived out of sight, and was gone.

"He can have his reward later," said Norma.

She took the powder at once to Miss Manders, explaining that it was a gift from Talia.

"A native remedy?" said the head-mistress anxiously. "I'm afraid, Norma, that I would not dare to use it. But give it to me and I will try to find out what it is. Poor Millicent is nearly delirious, and if there is some safe remedy I shall be greatly relieved."

"Could I possibly go in and see her?" asked Norma eagerly.

"Yes, Norma. Take some water, but do not give her too much. Bathe her forehead, and see that she is comfortable. There is enough medicine for her to have another dose if she is at all feverish."

Leaving her friends to their French, Norma went towards the hut where Millicent lay. A comfortable bed had been made for her—as comfortable as any bed can be on which anyone lies for hours at a time. Millicent, lightly clad, covered by some torn frocks sewn together to form sheets, looked up as Norma entered.

Her eyes were burning, and she seemed thinner. There was something almost fierce in her manner, too, and she spoke in a low, mumbling tone, rambling her words together.

"How are you, Millicent?" Norma asked. "Want anything?"

"A ship! A ship!"

"A ship," said Norma. "Oh, one will come soon, you know!"

Millicent struggled up, covered her face, and rocked to and fro.

"I want to get away from this beastly place—I must get away. It's getting on my nerves. I won't stay here!"

She made a furious, wild attempt to get up from the bed, but was so weak she flopped back, panting.

"It's no good!" she said, with a broken sob. "I'm finished, Norma. I shall die here. I know I shall. Oh, who said the South Seas was all holiday and pleasure?"

Norma, sitting beside her, soothed and cooled her burning forehead.

"So it is when you're well. But you are ill, that's all. When you're better you'll love it again!"

"Love it? Love it? I hate it!" said Millicent fiercely. "Hate it! When is a ship coming—when—when—"

Then she turned over and stared through the thick leaves that served as a screen beside her bed. Through a small gap in them she stared at the trees and then beyond. Now she was shivering instead of burning hot, and her teeth chattered.

"Norma—I can see a ship! It's coming this way!"

"Yes—yes!" said Norma. "It's the same one that you saw yesterday and the day before!"

"I'm not dreaming it this time! It's real—real!"

Norma turned her head, then blinked, rubbed her eyes, and stared.

For, unless her eyes deceived her—unless she was dreaming, too—there was a ship out at sea—a sailing ship. And it was coming ashore!

Norma sprang up, the water splashing from the coconut shell in her hand.

"A ship—my golly—a ship! Look—look!" she shouted. "Miss Manders, Kit, Belinda—a ship—a ship!"

**THRILLING** moment indeed for the castaway schoolgirls! At last—a chance to get home—a chance to make sure of being able to leave the island when they want. But—there is a big surprise in store for Norma & Co. as you'll see next week.



COMPLETE this week. Another sparkling fun-story featuring lovable—



# GIPSY JOY

*The Rich Girl  
• Romany •*

When Joy Sharpe—disguised as Nakita—delivered the Christmas orders for her butcher boy friend, she did more than perform a good turn. She had fun and freedom galore!

## Nakita to the Rescue!

“O H, look, Miss Retcham! Slides! What fun!”

Joy Sharpe touched her governess’ arm to draw her attention to the fact that the local pond was frozen over, and that various lads and lasses were taking advantage of it by sliding across its surface.

Miss Retcham turned her head.

A roar of merry laughter arose.

“There—they are laughing at us!” said the governess frigidly.

“They’re laughing at a boy who has just gone a purler,” said Joy, with a smile.

Miss Retcham came to a halt and jerked the dog, Tinker, to a halt, too.

“Good gracious me!” she gasped. “I have never heard such an expression! Tell me, Joy, where did you hear it? To—to come a burler?”

“Purler!” said Joy. “Well, matter of fact, Miss Retcham, I heard Boko, the butcher’s boy, use it.”

At once Joy knew that she had said the wrong thing, and she wished that she could have recalled it. But it was too late.

Miss Retcham almost swooned. She certainly tottered. For although she knew that there were such creatures as butchers’ boys, she tried to forget the painful fact.

“Joy!” she said, in weak, shocked tones. “You do not really mean that—that you converse with a butcher’s boy, and call him by his—er—Christian name?”

Joy tried to look impressed.

“I’ve only said ‘It’s a nice morning,’ or ‘it’s raining,’ or something, and I’ve heard him called Boko. He’s got such a nice grin.”

Miss Retcham breathed hard. A pink spot came on to her cheeks, and she strode on past the frozen pond, with Joy, a yard behind, looking wistfully at the merry crowd of village girls and boys enjoying life.

Ten yards beyond the pond, when it was completely concealed by trees, Miss Retcham halted again, and turned to Joy.

“If ever I catch you speaking to this boy again I shall report the matter to your grandfather, and you will be sent to stay with your Aunt Gertrude!”

She knew what an alarming threat that was, and it gave her pleasure to see Joy’s jump of alarm.

A boy, riding a carrier cycle so slowly that he had to wobble it to keep going, was approaching them close to the kerb. He was whistling shrilly, and, not being possessed of gloves, had his hands in his pockets, to keep them warm.

He saw Joy, and his mouth spread out into a broad grin. In passing he gave her a nod, and then, with a meaning sort of look at Miss Retcham, grimaced and winked.

It was Boko.

Joy flapped a hand behind her back in acknowledgment of his greeting.

“We are going into this shop. Come!” said the governess sharply.

Joy entered the chemist’s with her and Miss Retcham took her bag from under her arm and changed the lead loop from one hand to the other. She picked up a card of toothbrushes, and in so doing dropped the lead.

At the same moment the door of the shop opened and a woman with a wire-haired terrier looked in.

Tinker rushed to the door.

“Hey—whoa!” called Joy.

Miss Retcham turned.

“Tinker—come back! Joy, fetch him!”

But Tinker, finding himself free, and in company of a sporting dog, dodged Joy and bolted off with his new pal.

With Joy racing only a yard or two behind, Tinker reached the ice. It was just bad luck that he went on to the slide.

His feet whizzed from under him and he shot on at speed. A tall boy, sliding just behind, tripped over him and fell sprawling.

“Tinks! Oh golly! I hope he’s not hurt,” Joy muttered.

She went down the slide to rescue her pet, and at the same moment the tall boy recovered.

He was a boy known locally as a bully, and his reputation was well

founded. Grabbing Tinker, he lashed at him with the flat of his hand.

“Owowowowo! Ywowow!” yelped Tinker.

“Stop!” gasped Joy. “How dare you—”

“You stand back,” said the boy. “I’m going to lam him good and hard.”

He fended Joy off, not intending to push her, but she slithered on the smooth slide, and went down bump.

From the roadside Boko, who had been resting after the strain of rushing about at wild speed, delivering orders, saw what was happening.

Propping up his machine, he dashed on to the slide and charged at the tall youth, sending him sprawling.

Tinker, released, slithered away, and Joy scrambled up.

“What’s the idea of pushing a girl over?” demanded Boko. “If you want to push someone, try pushing me.”

The tall lad scrambled up, his face

By IDA MELBOURNE

dark, and it looked as though there would be a fight.

Joy, Tinker clutched in her arms, put her hand on Boko’s sleeve.

“Don’t fight,” she begged, “even though he is a cowardly bully. But thank you very much for saving Tinker. It was sweet of you, Boko.”

Boko, who had never been called by his name by Joy before, went pink, and doffed his cap.

“Nothing, miss,” he said. “Sall right! Any more trouble from him, just tell me.”

No one could have behaved with more gallantry than Boko had done, but Miss Retcham, arriving at the edge of the pond, was there white-faced with horror.

As she saw Boko doffing his cap and beaming at Joy, who was smiling at him, she rushed blindly on to the ice, to drag Joy away.

Naturally, the last thought Miss Retcham had in mind was working up a run for a jolly little slide. But that was what she did.

Whizzing down the slide, the governess waved her arms like flails, and, with her knees bent forward, threw her head back.



"Look out!"

"Lumme, it's Bluebird!"

Miss Retcham turned completely round, bumped into Boko, went ten yards on one leg, and then ended in the piled-up snow which had been arranged as a buffer.

FULL LENGTH Miss Retcham fell, and lay gasping. She was unhurt, but never in her life had she suffered such humiliation.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

One face seemed to stand out beyond all others—a face that was one wide grin, surmounted by a prominent nose. Boko! He had been sent flying when she banged into him.

Joy was suffocating with inward mirth; for, sorry though she was for Miss Retcham, the sight had been excruciatingly funny. She rushed to

the rescue, brushed down her governess, and helped her up.

"You ought to lean forward for sliding, Miss Retcham!" she said. "Next time——"

"Next time!" stormed the horrified governess. "Do you suppose, Joy, that I went on to the slide deliberately? You may have done so!"

"I didn't, Miss Retcham. I came here to rescue Tinker."

"Rubbish! And as for you——" added the governess, turning. "Stand there grinning like an ape!"

His grin died.

"Boko—I mean, the butcher's boy!" faltered Joy. "He——"

"Silence! I was a witness to what happened!" said the governess, who had witnessed only the end of the scene. "This lad is employed by Mr. Bestend?"

"Y-yes," said Joy. "But——"

"I shall report this! I shall ask him how much he pays you to slide on the pond, and whether we have luncheon at four o'clock in the afternoon!"

Miss Retcham walked off, but Joy loitered, biting her lip, and looking sorrowfully at Boko.

"I'll explain," she said.

"S'all right, miss!" he said. "I'd rather have a row with my boss than yours any old day! Cheer up!"

But Joy did not cheer up, and she would not feel right with herself until she had made Miss Retcham understand that Boko had acted like a gentleman,

had saved Tinker, and gone to her rescue.

Miss Retcham walked along the street in silence for about a hundred yards, then halted and turned.

"Your friend Boko will rue this day, Joy!" she said. "I shall insist that he is dismissed!"

"Oh, but, Miss Retcham," cried Joy, dismayed, "I heard someone say that he keeps his mother!"

"Then he should attend to his work, and not slack!"

"But he didn't! He only rushed on to the ice to save Tinker!"

"Utter nonsense! I am sorry, Joy, that you have become a liar!" Miss Retcham snapped.

Joy sighed. There was no sense in arguing with the governess until her rage was cooled.

When they had returned to the Gables, Miss Retcham announced:

"I intend to report the matter to the butcher! I shall ask cook to make a note of the exact time when the meat arrives, and I shall telephone and ask Miss Mullins to do the same, and the general. If we all complain at the same time——"

Miss Retcham had taken off her gloves, and now she gasped.

"My watch! Great goodness, it must have fallen off when I fell!"

"You are sure you had it on?" said Joy. "Because I thought I noticed——"



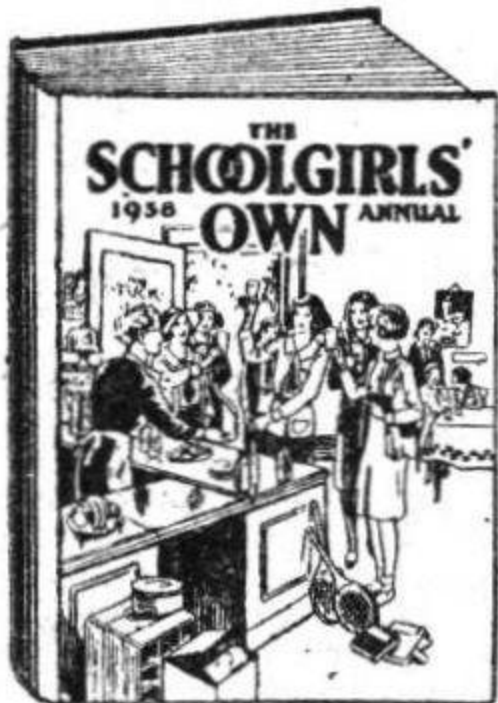
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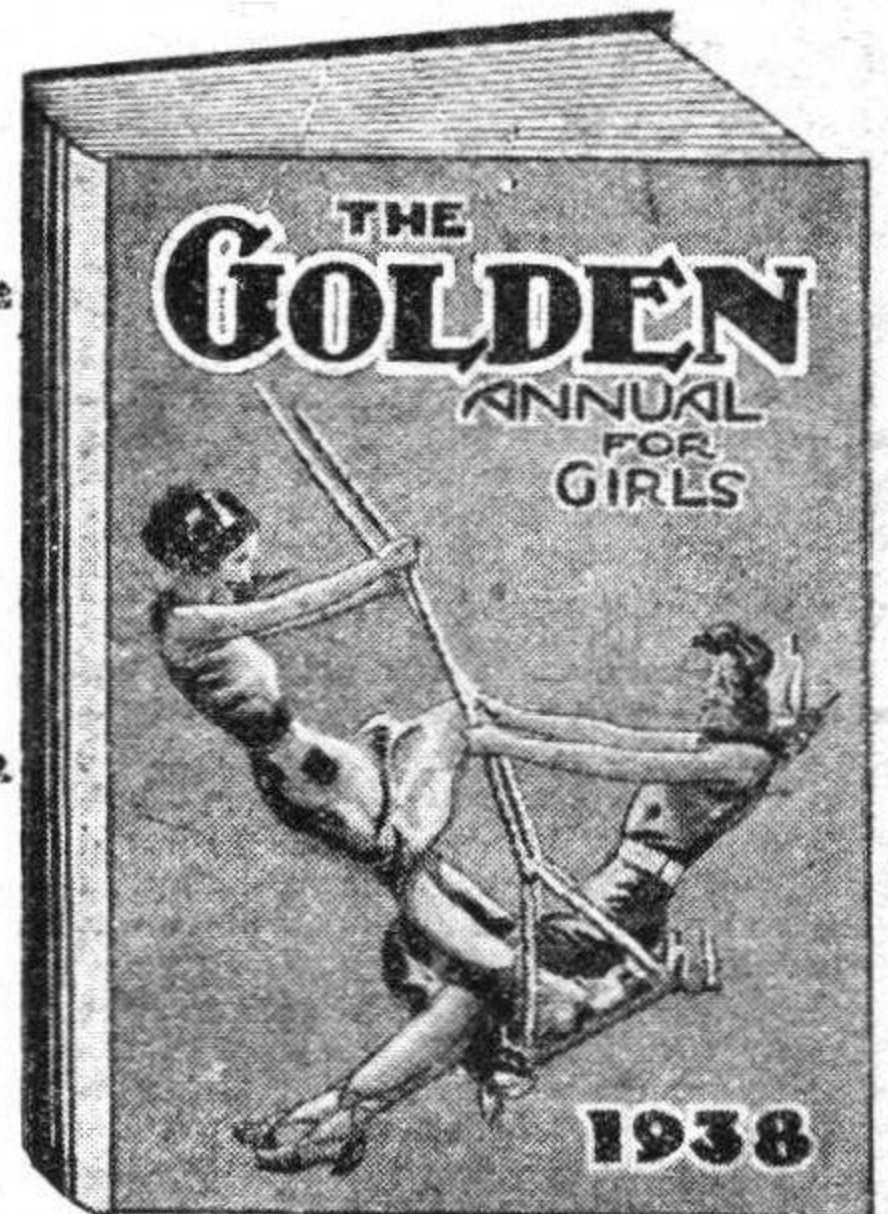
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"Joy, do you regard me as an imbecile?"

"No," admitted Joy, after a pause.

"Very well. I know whether I put my watch on or not. Obviously, it fell, and by this time any one of those young hooligans— Oh dear—oh dear! I must go back at once! Take your things off and go to your room!"

Miss Retcham hurried out into the snow again.

Joy stood in the hall, her eyes gleaming.

"Well, one good thing, she hasn't phoned the butcher!" she told herself, in glee. "Oh, how I hope Boko rushed round at speed! I only wish I could warn him!"

Boko had been a pal, and his loyalty had quite touched her. If she were the cause of his being sacked, she would never forgive herself.

But she could not possibly risk being seen by Miss Retcham hurrying to the pond.

Joy hesitated only for a moment, then she turned and went upstairs to her room, followed by the guilty Tinker.

"All your fault, Tinks!" she said, in gentle reproach. "But never mind. Nakita will get us out of this."

Nakita, the gipsy girl, was Joy's best friend, and she had the advantage of only appearing when she was wanted.

She was wanted now, and she appeared as soon as Joy opened the wardrobe door.

Nakita, the gipsy girl, was only a frock and a jar of face stain! She was not a real girl at all, even though Miss Retcham thought she was. In fact, she was Joy Sharpe, dressed in a gipsy frock, and with her face cleverly stained.

So used was Joy to effecting the disguise that she slipped on the frock and dyed her face in a startlingly short time. Soon, with even her arms and hands stained, she was ready.

Then, leaving Tinker in the room, she went hurrying downstairs, head wrapped in the gay scarf that gave her outfit such a romantic look.

### Found—by Nakita!

**N**AKITA fairly flew to the village, taking the short cut over the fields, even though the snow there was inches thick.

Such was her speed that she reached the pond ahead of her governess, who always walked with prim decorum.

Boko was not there. But near by was another errand-boy friend of his.

"Say, chum," said Nakita, "seen Boko?"

"Boko? Not half! He's just gone off. Got a sprained ankle. Some old gal bumped into him on the ice, and now he can't ride the bike properly. He won't half take an age doing his round! Bet there'll be some complaints!"

Joy's heart sank as she heard that; for she knew that there would be complaints, and she realised that when the butcher heard Miss Retcham's version of the cause it would be believed.

The butcher would think that Boko had hurt his ankle through sliding, instead of working, and out would go Boko!

The boy told her that Boko was making for the Drive, and Nakita dodging her governess, who had just arrived, hurried after him.

Boko was delivering at the Moorlands, and Nakita saw his cycle outside. She waited for him to emerge from the house, and saw, with dismay, that he limped painfully.



**G**AILY enough, Nakita went careering past her governess on the slide. Miss Retcham was too busy hunting for the watch which wasn't really lost to pay much attention to Nakita—and Nakita meant to keep her searching until she'd had her fill of fun.

"Hallo, Boko!" she said. "Ankle hurt?"

He made a wry grimace and nodded. "How do you know my name?" he asked.

"Ah, I've brought a message!" said Nakita mysteriously. "The girl at the Gables—Miss Joy—told me to tip you off that her governess is going to report you for sliding on the ice, instead of working."

Boko puckered his forehead indignantly.

"Why, the nasty old cat!" he said. "I only went on to save the dog, as the girl knows. And she's a good sport, too."

Nakita smiled.

"Poor old Boko; it's a shame! But there's a chance, all right, if you buck up with the things. Give me some to take round."

Boko grunted, and his face became as long as a fiddle.

"I can't make haste, using one foot for pushing the pedal with a free-wheel bike," he said. "How can I?"

Nakita made up her mind.

"Well, give me the bike. I'll take them," she said eagerly. "I can cycle pretty fast, and I know all the addresses, I think."

Boko's face cleared.

"You mean it? No tricks. I know what gipsies are."

"No tricks," promised Nakita.

Boko beamed.

"You're a good sport," he said. "I bet that girl at the Gables put you up to this."

"She did," admitted Nakita. "But come on! Give me the stuff, and I'll go. Collect the bike from the Gables."

A moment later Nakita was pedalling the errand-boy's cycle at speed through the crunching snow.

"About time, too," was the invariable comment; but, before anyone had

time to remark upon the fact that she was delivering, she went, saying as she did so: "The boy's had a slight accident."

It was best fun of all delivering to their own cook at the Gables.

Then, when the rounds were completed, and she had left the cycle just inside the gates, she found that Miss Retcham had still not returned.

Daringly she entered by the back way, as usual, and peeped over the landing to see if Miss Retcham was in the hall. There was no sound of the governess, and Nakita tiptoed along to her room.

Passing Miss Retcham's door, which was open, she peeped in.

"No; hat's not in usual place. House shoes there. She's still out," Nakita decided.

And then she happened to glance towards the dressing-table.

On it was the governess' watch.

"There!" Nakita gasped, and gave a little laugh.

But as she stood there an idea came to her.

"My golly!" she murmured.

And, tiptoeing across the room, she picked up the watch, and put it into her pocket. Then, lighthearted, she went down to the gates, mounted Boko's bike, and rode to meet him.

At last she fancied she saw a way of saving the butcher's boy from the governess' unjust wrath.

### A Little Cunning!

**M**ISS RETCHAM searched and hunted and questioned. There was no sign of her watch anywhere.

So far, she had not explained what she had lost; for she did not want



anyone to find it and keep it. The governess had a suspicious nature, and was firmly convinced that most poor people are naturally and inevitably dishonest.

Miss Retcham had completely dismissed the possibility that she had forgotten to wear her watch that morning.

Moving away from the ice, she stood watching the various skaters, and every time she saw a group whispering she wandered near, in case they might be discussing the finding of a gold watch.

The tall youth who had lashed out at Tinker, had already noticed that she was searching, and now he approached her.

"Excuse me, ma'am," he said. "Have you lost anything?"

"I have," said Miss Retcham coldly. "You are a friend of the butcher's boy, are you not?"

"Me? No fear!" said the tall lad. "Huh!"

"Ah, then perhaps I can expect the truth from you regarding this morning's happening! I may as well say that I intend reporting him for skating on the ice, when he should be working."

The tall lad, who had been promised a "dot on the nose," by Boko when they next met, saw his chance for vengeance in advance.

"That's right, lady; he's always larking about and wasting time," he said cunningly.

Miss Retcham's eyes glinted.

"I see. Just what I supposed," she said. "In getting this boy dismissed, I shall be doing a public service. I shall prevent Mr. Bestend from losing customers, and shall provide a vacant situation for an intelligent, hard-working lad."

"I wouldn't mind the job myself," said the tall lad.

"I shall have pleasure in recommending someone as straightforward, and—"

A voice broke in:

"Morning, lidy!"

Miss Retcham turned and gave a start as she saw Nakita.

"H'm! I might have expected to find you at this rowdy spot," she said.

"Been having a nice slide, lidy?" said Nakita.

Miss Retcham coloured.

"I have not."

"Looks from the back view like you must have slipped down," said Nakita, smiling. "Like me to brush the slush off?"

Miss Retcham nearly ricked her neck trying to see her own back.

"Good gracious, I am covered in filth!" she gasped.

"I'll brush it off!" said Nakita.

And—

Thud—thump!

"Oh! Goodness—don't bang me like that, girl!" snapped Miss Retcham angrily.

"Well, it's off!" said Nakita. "Did I hear you say, lidy, you were going to get Boko the sack?"

"If Boko is the name of the butcher's boy, your eavesdropping has not misled you."

"Oh!" said Nakita coolly. "Well, I think you've got it all wrong."

The governess drew up and glared.

"I am not interested in the opinion of a gipsy girl," she said.

"No? Well, I happen to know that Boko rushed on to the ice to save your dog Tinker from being hurt by a nasty, cowardly, ugly—"

The tall youth cut in angrily.

"Who are you calling names?" he said.

Miss Retcham gave him a sharp look.

"Yes; I mean him!" said Nakita.

"The boy you think is straightforward. He tripped over the dog, and hit it hard and cruelly, and then he pushed Miss Joy over."

"What?" gasped Miss Retcham, gazing at the boy in horror.

"I didn't push her!" he said hotly.

"I tried to stop her from falling over, that's all. And I didn't hit the dog, what's more."

Miss Retcham gave him a hard look, and then turned to Nakita.

"I am hardly likely to be influenced by your view of the matter," she said.

Then the governess turned away, to stand frowning as she saw Nakita take a run on the slide. Another group near by were searching, and one of them found something.

"I demand to see it," said the governess.

"I found it—finding's keeping!" he protested, and slid off.

Nakita, having found the watch herself, could afford to chuckle. She went on with her sliding, while Miss Retcham, now using a stick, prodded under bushes, and generally disturbed the snow.

So long as the governess was here, she was free to slide, and she took full advantage of the fact. Up and down she went, gaining skill every time.

And she yelled and shouted, and did not care.

For, as far as Miss Retcham knew, she was a gipsy girl—and it did not matter what an exhibition such a common creature made of herself.

At last Miss Retcham turned away. Nakita, seeing her go, sighed; for it meant that she, too must go.

Hot though she was, she ran all the way home, and so reached the Gables first. And by the time Miss Retcham entered, she was in her own clothes again.

The governess stamped into the hall, and went at once to the kitchen.

"Cook, has the meat arrived?"

"Oh, yes, Miss Retcham!"

"At what time?"

"About five minutes earlier than usual!"

"Earlier? Impossible!"

"I ought to know," said the cook huffily. She was always at daggers drawn with the governess.

Miss Retcham marched out to the telephone and called Miss Mullins.

"I am lodging a complaint about late deliveries from Bestends," she said. "I think it would be more forceful and effective if we made a joint complaint."

"But my meat arrived early to-day, earlier than I expected, considering the snow."

The general also stated that the meat had apparently arrived in time.

Miss Retcham, baffled, hung up the receiver, and found Joy at her side.

"You're not going to report the boy, are you?" asked Joy.

"I am indeed!" said Miss Retcham.

At that moment, Joy's grandfather appeared in the hall.

"Ah, there you are, Miss Retcham!" he exclaimed. "I was wondering where you were—"

"I've been searching," said the governess.

"The bucher's boy called," said Joy's grandfather.

"Oh, he did? I suppose he is trying to get round me! I am getting the boy sacked!"

Joy's grandfather looked surprised and shocked.

"Really? But in the circumstances

that would surely be a rather unjust thing to do," he said, in gentle reproach.

Miss Retcham reddened. "Unjust? I suppose Joy has explained what happened?"

Joy's grandfather looked puzzled.

"I'm afraid I do not quite understand. You lost your watch on the pond this morning when you were sliding," he said. "You slipped, I understand from Joy—"

Miss Retcham blinked.

"Sliding on the ice? I ran on to the ice, and slid—lost my balance and fell! My watch fell off—"

"And there it is," smiled Joy's grandfather.

He held out the watch, and Miss Retcham gave a little cry of relief.

"Oh, thank goodness! Someone found and returned it? That is splendid! I would rather lose a month's salary than this watch, I really would! Thank goodness an honest person found it. I do not believe in offering rewards, but in such a case as this—especially if it is a poor person—"

"I gave the butcher's boy half-a-crown myself," said Joy's grandfather.

Joy, listening to it all, could hardly control her glee at the expression on Miss Retcham's face.

"The—the butcher's boy!" she gasped.

"Yes, he brought it about ten minutes ago, and the poor lad apparently sprained his ankle when you collided with him. He seems a rather nice, kind-hearted lad. I thanked him for saving Tinker from getting a hiding."

Miss Retcham opened and closed her mouth.

"What a good thing it was Boko found the watch!" said Joy.

"Boko?" said her grandfather.

"The other lads call the butcher's boy Boko," said Joy, with a smile.

"Boko?" her grandfather chuckled.

"A good name for him. He certainly has a noticeable nose. And a nice grin."

"Just what I said," cut in Joy.

The parlourmaid announced that luncheon was served.

Miss Retcham, without a word, turned to the staircase, and mounted it. Joy, watching her go, did not follow her grandfather to the dining-room, but tiptoed to her room, and, taking up the large scarf Nakita wore, stood in the window, and waved it.

Boko, in hiding in the shrubbery, saw the signal, and knew that it meant "O.K., all's well—not reported!" He heaved a sigh, gave his grin, mounted his cycle, and rode away, a light-hearted lad once more.

And Joy, followed by Tinker, skipped her way downstairs feeling, after her fun on the ice, that she could eat the whole meal herself.

The next day Boko delivered the meat on time, and Miss Retcham happened to be standing in the garden—to make sure that Joy did not chat to him.

"Oh, boy!" she said. "Thank you for returning my watch. Here is half-a-crown!"

"Oh, thank you, lady!" he said. And gave his famous grin.

Miss Retcham shuddered and turned away; but from the school-room window Joy waved a cheery hand of friendship.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

**THERE** will be another full-of-fun "Gipsy Joy" story in next week's issue. Don't miss it, and be sure to tell all your friends about our lovable harum-scarum.



Our fascinating story of the Morcove Chums, who have now become—



# SCHOOLGIRLS IN SOCIETY

## FOR NEW READERS.

BETTY BARTON and her Morcove chums, POLLY LINTON, NAOMER NAKARA, PAM WILLOUGHBY, JUDY CARDEW, to mention only a few, join forces with JACK LINTON & Co., of Grangemoor, to form a concert party which, visiting wealthy Society homes, during the Christmas holidays, is raising a fund on behalf of a children's home. They have a chaperone, MISS LESTER, a charming lady they adore. At Morcove, during the preparations, a valuable concert frock is ruined. Betty & Co. eventually become certain that Miss Lester is a traitor! Later, Bunny is accused of breaking a valuable ornament at a wealthy lady's house.  
(Now read on.)

"Hurrah!"

"MRS. DAVISHAM—wait—please!"  
"Girls, I will not listen to you—"

"But you must! Ordering us out of your house like this—it isn't fair!"

Betty Barton, voicing that spirited protest, had eyes only for old Mrs. Davisham, whose hobbling back to the drawing-room had, at least, been checked.

As at school, when suddenly she could be very much the Form captain, handling a crisis boldly, so now Betty was very much the leader of the concert party—its schoolgirl "manageress."

"Please, listen!" she entreated, having drawn the angry eyes of Mrs. Davisham upon herself. "Only one of us was out here in the hall when that lovely vase fell over and was smashed. The rest of us were at tea."

"Then the one who was out in the hall did it," the white-haired lady fiercely insisted. "I don't care which of you it was; only a disgraceful unruliness—"

"But you haven't given that chum of ours a chance to explain!" Betty still protested. "Do be fair and hear her!"

"Oh, Betty, you are uselessly prolonging a painful scene!" Miss Lester now interposed almost angrily. "It can do no good—only upset poor Mrs. Davisham all the more. At her time of life—"

"But it is only fair," poor Bunny now blurted, as the supposed culprit, "for me to be allowed to say—I did not

knock the vase over! I was not fooling about!"

"Rubbish!" said old Mrs. Davisham, emphasising the scornful word with a rap of her stick to the floor. "I warned you all to be careful, because my home holds so many things I treasure greatly—"

"And I was being careful," Bunny declared. "Only as soon as I came out of the dining-room to get my hanky from my coat I seemed to trip over something. I don't know what it was—like a string, or a wire—"

"Ah!" Betty cried out, at the same time making a little dart closer to the fragment-bestrewn part of the hall floor. "What's this, then? Why, look, all of you—an electric light flex trailing about—"

"What!"  
That was Mrs. Davisham herself, as she hobbled nearer with a quickness wonderful for her age. Sudden great excitement was overcoming her infirmity.

## ON TOUR WITH THE MORCOVE CONCERT PARTY!

Fun, excitement and thrills,  
with a traitor in their midst

"Well, well!" came from Miss Lester in a tone of mingled astonishment and relief. "Oh, of course, if you caught your foot in that, Bunny—"

"Well, that's what I did do. I was hardly to be expected to look out for electric light flexes—"

Bunny got no further.  
"Hannah!" old Mrs. Davisham was exclaiming at her elderly servant. "What about this flex? Who left it there for anyone to trip over?"

"I'm sure I can't say, ma'am! I simply can't understand it at all," stammered poor Hannah, in great distress. "I'm sure I'm always so careful myself, and always watching others so—"

"Tiresome things, flexes!" Miss Lester offered the consoling murmur.

"Have all that broken china swept up, Hannah," old Mrs. Davisham said in an altogether changed tone. "As for who is to blame—at all events, it was no fault of yours, my dear," she now smiled at Bunny. "I apologise—to you all! If you will pardon an old woman who is, perhaps, a little—"

"Mrs. Davisham, we quite understand

your love for the wonderful things you have in this house," Betty was quick to say. "And if one of us really had been to blame—"

"Eet would have been abominabubble—yes!" shrilled Naomer. "Espesherly after ze grand spread—"

Mrs. Davisham laughed.

"I will write that cheque in payment of your performance at the hospital. Go back and finish your tea, girls and boys. Then, Betty, the cheque shall be handed to you!"

And with that cheque in her pocket, after all, Betty left the house half an hour later with the rest of the concert party.

Along the teeming pavement of Park Lane swarmed the chums in their twos and threes, having decided to walk the short distance to their headquarters at the Willoughby town house. As for Miss Lester, she was going along, she had said, to look up a friend, but would be rejoining them all presently. Meantime, she was so thankful that everything had ended happily.

"The humbug!" Betty fiercely frowned, walking with Polly and Pam. "She did it—of course she did!"

"If only we could have accused her—point-blank!" Polly seethed. "Gosh! I very nearly did, too!"

"It would never have done," Pam declared. "We could no more have proved that than we could have proved those other things. I don't see how we

can even go to my parents to say how we suspect her."

"I'm jolly sure we can't!" Betty still frowned. "But it's all right!" And suddenly a smile chased away the frown. "We've got that lovely cheque to go towards the fund, after all!"

Nor were signs lacking to show how the rest of the M.C.P. were "shaking hands with themselves." Betty and Polly and Pam next moment caught up with a most jovial batch that had stopped on the pavement to wait for them.

"Shame to go in yet," was Jack's cheerful comment.

"Bekas, Tubby knows of a teashop."  
"But," Betty laughed, "we've just had tea!"

"What ze diggings! We can have some more, can't we?"

At any rate, they could and did strike aside into a famous West End street of

By

MARJORIE STANTON



shops, where there were garish emporium windows for the girls to gaze into, whilst the boys bought "all the latest" from kerbstone vendors of clockwork toys, paper flowers that opened out in water, and rubber balloons.

Surprising the amount of pocket-money the boys must have had! They were still in funds when the whole party suddenly found itself in front of that very special pastrycook's.

"We'll come in with you," Betty conceded, speaking for those who never were big eaters. "But we shan't want anything."

"Zat doesn't matter," said Naomer. "You can just watch us."

"Owch!" recoiled the startled girls. "Ha, ha, ha!"

A tin spider ran off the dish and across the table, falling into Judy Cardew's lap. A clockwork dog jiggled about on top of the muffins. An alligator crawled towards Polly, its tail lashing furiously. And there was a miniature rosy-cheeked infant, turning somersaults.

"Hush, children—hush!" Jack sternly attempted to put down all the laughter. "Do you want to be turned out?"

"Into the cold and cruel snow? Oh, kind sir," moaned Polly, to keep the fun going, "any fate but that!"

For it really had come on to snow. The West End streets, through which

It would be like her, they felt, to get up to some trick or other during the day for the purpose of making to-night's show a fiasco.

It was not good enough to be sure that all the theatrical costumes and "properties" were safe. A sense of lurking danger prevented the chums from being out of doors all together, as they would have liked to be.

"Look at the snow, though—how it's coming down now!" Polly said, after breakfast. She was standing with Betty and others at one of the downstairs windows. "And if it weren't for her, we might all be having grand sport this morning!"

Then Pam's mother came in, to offer a remark that instantly made all the difference in the world to her listeners.

"Girls, I think I shall go with you all to Lady Jessington's, relieving Miss Lester for once."

"What!" the delighted cry went up. "Oh— Hurrah!"

"It is one of the very few chances I am likely to have of going with you, and I feel I ought to seize it. Lady Jessington and I were at school together, and we're still great friends."

Such news! It meant the girls looking at one another in secret relief for a few moments.

Then they dashed away, eager to find the rest of their holiday companions.

For Miss Lester not coming to the concert party to-night meant an absolute end to all immediate danger.

And so, less than five minutes later, there were jubilant setting-off cries above and below stairs.

"Come on, girls!"

"Come on, chaps!"

Bobsleighs, toboggans, skis—the Wiloughby town house had yielded up all these from cellar to attic.

And now Morcove & Co. were off up to Hampstead, there to share with thousands of crazy Londoners the joys of the famous heath, under two feet of snow, and more falling all the time.

## In Secret!

ONCE again, several hours after the early winter nightfall, a small fleet of London taxis drew up to the kerb outside the great house that was serving as the concert party's headquarters.

Once again large padlocked theatrical baskets were brought down the snowy steps, to be put on board one taxicab and another in that handy space beside the driver's seat.

Still snowing! Lamplight flowing out from the open doorway gave its own eerie effect to the million flakes, eddying down through the pall of smoke above mighty London. The girls came out, snuggled in fur-trimmed coats, to do their quick scamper to the waiting cabs. Grangemoor, buttoned to the chin, enlivened the snow-hushed street with sham cries of dismay over a pretended falling down the steps.

"Good-night, girls! Good-night, boys!" Miss Lester was calling sweetly, from the shelter of the doorway. "Best of luck!"

"Oh, yeah?" muttered Polly, as she dived after Betty into one of the taxis. "We know all about the luck she wishes us!"

"Been terribly sweet all day, hasn't she?" grinned Betty. "In other words, biding her time!"

"She really can't have contrived anything against us for to-night," was Madge Minden's belief.

"Absolutely impossible. I can guarantee that," Betty agreed, very happily. "We know that the theatrical



## HILDA RICHARDS

### REPLIES

to some of her correspondents.

**Avril Fianman (Thornton Heath).**—I've already replied to your questions through the post, Avril, so I need not do so here, need I? It was a very nice long letter you wrote, and I hope to hear from you again before long.

**Lesley Jackson (Cork).**—You would be in Cliff House, my dear. What a clever dog you have! The answer to your important question concerning Cliff House is "no." Do write again.

**"Admirer of Diana" (Walton-on-Thames).**—You will no doubt have read all about your favourite, Diana, in the "Cliff House Celebrities" Series, my dear, so I need not describe her more. I'll certainly remember your other requests.

**"Freckles" (Pickering, Yorks).**—What an exciting time you have had in Pickering! You must have been very thrilled when Queen Mary came there. You would be a Fourth Former if you went to C.H. Write again, won't you?

**Jean Batchelor (Dundee).**—So you are a new reader of THE SCHOOLGIRL, Jean? I hope you will long enjoy it. You would also be in the Fourth with Babs & Co. if you went to Cliff House. I will remember your chum's suggestion.

**Joan Walker (Newton-on-Ouse).**—You can obtain back numbers of THE SCHOOLGIRL from the Back Nos. Dept., Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Bear Alley, Farringdon Street, E.C.4. You won't be able to obtain any numbers more than three months old, though. I'm afraid you will not be able to write to any of the C.H. chums, my dear. So sorry!

**Marjorie Stamp (Sheffield).**—So glad to hear from you again, Marjorie. I think you are rather like Janet Jordan, of the Fourth. You must certainly be looking forward to camping in Devon next summer, my dear.

**Dawn Dallas (Motherwell).**—What a lovely long letter, Dawn! Of course, I don't mind your writing to me. I love hearing from you. Juno sends a large tail wag to Rover.

**Lillian Highfield (Coventry).**—I liked your little letter very much, Lillian. You are quite a "veteran" reader of THE SCHOOLGIRL, aren't you, my dear? I'm glad to know you are enjoying it just as much as when you started!

**"An Admirer of Diana" (Eden Bridge, Kent).**—Another of the Firebrand's fans! Diana evidently has a very loyal following. I must remember that when thinking of future stories.

**Minnie Wilkinson (Preston).**—Thank you so much for writing, Minnie. I see you are an admirer of Babs, and I'm sure many of us will agree with your choice. You have been very enthusiastic in finding new readers, my dear. Thank you very much for doing so!

**Jean Philpott (Wickwar, Glos).**—The girl who holds top position in the Fourth is Sylvia Sirrett—a very brilliant scholar, Jean. I was pleased to know you liked the snapshot album you were able to get from THE SCHOOLGIRL.

**Peggy (Bude).**—I'm very well, thank you, Peggy, and I hope you are, too. Yes, Juno is a darling Alsatian. I love riding, though I do not seem to get many chances for indulging in it! Mr. Laidler draws all the sketches of the C.H. chums, and I think they are lovely, don't you? Write again, my dear.

**Pauline (Reigate).**—What a very charming little letter, Pauline! So you like all the Co.? Bessie and Jemima are very popular favourites, so I was not surprised to know that you love reading about those two.

**Dorothy (Taunton).**—Juno is very well, my dear, and sends you a special paw-shake for your kind inquiry. Your Cliff House album will be getting very full by now. You must be finding it useful, too.

"Muffins," Jack suggested — not because he personally was as hungry again as all that.

In fact, when presently the covered dish was brought along by a smiling waitress, he airily disclaimed any intention of sampling its hidden contents. And, in his best fatherly manner, he himself took the covered dish to the adjacent table, at which sat Naomer, Polly, and Paula, with Tom and Tubby.

"Ooo, zank you!" sparkled Naomer. "Shall I pass zem round—yes, plis?"

But although her little brown hand eagerly whipped off the metal cover, it was very little passing round that followed. There were muffins—temptingly hot and buttery. But there were also some of those clockwork novelties—in full working order,

the happy-hearted juniors finally made their way back to H.Q., were blurred with the eddying flakes. Dry pavements were already covered.

Next morning, in the picture papers, there were tantalising photographs of the Homeland under snow. The chums flicked over pages showing grand sport that was being had everywhere, even on the outskirts of London.

All very tempting, but—not for them!

The concert party was "booked" for to-night at Lady Jessington's. Wanting to be as fresh as paint when the time came, they knew the afternoon should be passed quietly. So there was only the morning for them to spend a bit strenuously; and, in any case, they had got to be careful—because of Miss Lester!



stuff is O.K. We had that look at it just now."

"Lovely!" was Bunny's sparkled comment on the general outlook. "And this affair at Lady Jessington's is to be such a crasher, even bigger than the Mountmerry one! I guess Miss Lester would just love to be there, apart from all chance there might be of getting one in against us."

"Going to do a theatre, isn't she?"

"That's it," Betty lightly answered Polly. "I heard her ringing up to book a stall."

But although Miss Lester, dressed for a fashionable audience, did go out to a hired taxi, presently, saying: "Duchess Theatre, please!"—that stall ticket of hers was not to be used.

Set down at the brilliantly lit entrance in good time for the rise of the curtain, Miss Lester mingled with the scores of Society people who were just then flocking into the foyer. But, after waiting about for a minute or two—as anyone might, expecting a friend to turn up—she suddenly went out to the pavement and engaged another taxi.

"Number 15, Carlton Square," she instructed the driver.

"Right, m'm!"

And away she was raced again, the taxi soon taking to side streets, where the steadily falling snow meant a most wretched gloom.

At the end of the few minutes' run, Miss Lester's driver had to use all his skill in drawing up to the kerb, for there was a great coming and going of private cars as well as taxis, with a striped awning across the pavement to protect arrivals from the snow.

Miss Lester's taxi stopped, but before she could alight the driver had jumped out, and was whipping open the door, to say bewilderedly:

"You must ha' meant Number Fifteen, m'm—Lady Jessington's, where the hawning's howt? Number Fifteen's standing empty."

"Oh, my mistake!" purred Miss Lester, whilst she very hastily alighted. "Your fare—and you can keep the change."

"Fank you, m'm!"

Then her taxi was gone.

Miss Lester hung back until there was a perfectly quiet moment in front of Lady Jessington's. As she waited on the pavement, she fumbled for a key in her handbag. This key had a linen label tied to it, bearing the printed name of a firm of house agents in the West End, and some pen and ink words.

And, when Miss Lester did move on, without risk of being seen, it was to the front door of the empty house.

For the second time in the last few hours she mounted the neglected stone steps, leading up to the columned porch, and fitted that key into the lock. It was as early as eleven o'clock this morning that Miss Lester had called about the empty house at the agents' office, receiving an order to view, and permission to retain the key until to-morrow.

The door creaked open, and she was in the dark and bare reception-hall. Quickly and quietly she closed that outer door, and was then free to roam wherever she liked.

Darkness and silence were here, yet only next door there was all the extra brilliance, the gaiety of a magnificent mansion thrown open for the evening to Society.

So, whilst Morcove & Co. were already revelling in the delights of Lady Jessington's party, Miss Lester

had come to this empty house in secret.

Why?

For what other reason could it be, than that even to-night she saw a means of ruining the show, as she had been trying to ruin it all along!

### Dancing Time!

"I SAY, I'm awfully glad we're not to give our show until a little later on!"

"So am I, Betty—just too lovely for words!"

"Een fact—gorjus!"

The room where Betty and her chums of Morcove were voicing their special delight, was one that had been assigned to them as a dressing-room—behind the temporary stage.

Their baskets of stage costumes had been brought in half an hour ago,

witheringly informed by Polly. "Go on; find Tubby! The pair of you can start in! Bank away!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But, although the dusky one did at once romp off, she was only a few moments before the others.

There was, however, this big difference. Unlike Naomer, who was certain to gravitate with Tubby to the Jessington buffet, Betty and the rest only wanted to get a danced or two before the band stopped. It would do that about a quarter of an hour before the show started, so as to afford time for chairs to be arranged.

The lilting strains of the string band, playing a Viennese waltz, were in Betty's ears as, last of all to leave the temporary dressing-room, she paused to take a business-like look round.

Her critical eyes finally assured her that everything was in perfect order. Over the backs of chairs and couches were spread the concert party frocks.



WHEN it seemed that the concert party must leave in disgrace, Betty darted forward and picked up something from the floor. "Look!" she exclaimed excitedly. "Wire—trailing over the carpet! That's how the vase was broken!"

and now Betty, who had the keys, was unlocking one after another.

As fast as she unpadlocked the hasps, and threw back a wicker lid, just as fast did some chum or other pounce upon the contents, to get them carefully put out in readiness for quick changing by-and-by.

"That's the idea!" Betty gaily approved these activities. "We'll leave everything quite ready, and then go away and enjoy ourselves until the time comes."

"Cheers for Lady Jessington, for the way she has planned everything," Bunny chattered. "It's more than we ever expected."

"Much nicer than Lady Montmerry's, even."

"And the people here to-night—twice as many as then."

"Wheech means ze refreshments will be twice as many, too. So, queek—everybody! Can't we go now?"

"You can go, kid," Naomer was

On a big dressing-table, in front of the curtained window, combs and brushes, and some necessary "grease-paint" were set out. And what a fine dressing-table that was, with its wing mirrors, enabling you to see yourself at all angles! In addition, there was a full-length mirror. Really, Lady Jessington must have given most minute instructions, so that all might be perfect.

So, switching out the light, Betty left by a doorway that emerged upon the temporary stage. One light was burning behind the lowered front curtain, and it enabled her to see again, with vast delight, what a roomy stage it was.

On the other side the boys had their dressing-room, and now, as it chanced, Dave came away from that room. Like Betty, he had lingered to do some looking round, to make sure that all was O.K.!

"You free, Betty?"



"Can I have the dance after this with you?"

"Depends what it is," Betty smiled. "Another waltz—but I don't suppose it will be."

To-night's gathering was a very youthful one.

Lovely society girls were having a really grand time, dancing with eligible fellows not much older than themselves. Every frock was a creation; every masculine counterpart of such feminine loveliness was immaculate—the latest thing in white ties and waistcoats, the latest cut in "tails."

The band struck up again—a fox-trot. Betty, jumping down from the stage, all but lost her bunch of violets—another that Dave had conferred, in that nice quiet way of his, a few hours back. She made the bunch quite secure, and then was ready.

Fox-trot! Her eyes sparkled "Yes!" and he and she moved off.

As the floor quickly densed, they saw first one pair of chums and then another going round.

Naomer and Tubby—no! But here were Polly and Jack, just shuffling by, and over there were Madge, Judy, and Tom. And Pam and Jimmy—surely? Yes, there they were—and, as usual, Pam was being much admired. Some bright young things—themselves not so long out of the school-room—were wondering "Who is that girl?" Others could knowingly whisper their partners: "It's Mrs. Willoughby's Pam—Morcove, you know. In to-night's show—"

Betty began some talk with Dave.

"Sprung floor! And there's such heaps of room, Dave, even though they've rigged up that stage for us at the top end."

"Isn't many people who can still keep up a fine house like this," he said. "The one next door's to let."

"I know—and didn't it look gloomy! Fancy—the difference!" And again Betty's eyes roved over the kaleidoscopic scene. "What do you say we'll get to-night—another twenty-five pounds, Dave?"

"Oh, it'll be more than that!"

"Well, we can do with it," she sighed. "Five hundred pounds we're aiming at—by the end of the hols!"

### SOLUTION TO CROSSWORD

on page 13.

ACROSS:

1. Uncles. 6. Soap. 7. Hah.  
9. Mistletoe. 13. Carol. 14. Eve.  
15. Ppl. 17. Deed. 18. My.

DOWN:

1. Us. 2. Noisave. 3. Ca. 4. Lp.  
5. Seat. 7. Help. 8. Holly. 10. Iced.  
11. Tree. 12. Lo. 16. PM.

Then, with a laugh: "But we'll manage it!"

And her heart was as light as air for the rest of that dance.

She was to have him again, after being rushed at by Jack for a one-step. Dave, somehow, was "handy" the moment she became free; not wanting to be greedy, but simply at hand, in case! And Betty could see Pam dancing again with Jimmy, and so she thought: "Why shouldn't I—with Dave?"

Betty and Dave were, in fact, more "pally" than ever these hols, owing to her having so much to do with the business side of the great "stunt," whilst he always did take life seriously.

"And this time next week we shall be down in the country, staying a night to give our show to a house-party," she presently murmured. "Wonder if the snow will still be about, Dave? If so—"

"Oh, it's come to stay, I reckon. But now"—as the band abruptly ended its latest encore, "you must have something, Betty, before we all start to get ready."

"Just a lemonade."

Then it was, in an ante-room fitted up as a buffet, they found Naomer and Tubby, doing themselves well at one of the little round tables.

Sandwiches in variety were upon that table, and mixed pastries; tumblers that had held soft drinks were now empty, and the dusky one and her schoolboy chaperon were just starting to spoon away at rose-pink ices.



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"Hey!" said Betty. "Don't forget you've got to sing and dance, kid! And you, Tubby—"

"Disgracing the old school tie again!" butted in Jack, making his jovial appearance along with Polly and others. "Tom, you're Ginger's front legs. Why don't you keep an eye on the other pair? But what'll you have now, you others? Glass of milk and a bun? Come on, the Diehards!" he rallied his Grangemoor pals, as if the buffet were to be stormed. "And see what's left!"

Polly, as she and the other girls sat down, was fanning herself with a handkerchief.

"Warm, in the ball-room!"

"That reminds me, though," said Betty, amidst all the pleasant hubbub of the buffet. "I left the dressing-room window open so that we won't get stuffy. It had better be closed a few minutes before we all go along to get ready."

Back came the boys, with laden trays, skilfully writhing between all the vivacious couples who were now giving the buffet a look-in. And many a society girl forgot her own partner for the moment, finding the antics of the Grangemoor comics fascinating, compelling a brilliant smile.

"Two lemons, a squash, one raspberry, and a vanilla!" Jack droned the order he had had to keep in mind. "And a ham roll for the waiter!"

"Sandwich, Betty?" coaxed Dave, suddenly in front of her with a very tempting array. "Peche-Melba? Meringue?"

"Before the show? Oh, I just couldn't!"

"Sausage roll, Betty?" came Tubby's rival offer. "Chicken patty, then? I don't like to see you—"

"Zen don't stand looking at her!" was Naomer's rather jealous cry. "Over here, Tubby!"

"I must have this and fly," Betty said to Dave, taking her lemonade from his tray. "Soon be time to change."

And next minute she was slipping away through the throng. Dave, nibbling a macaroon, watched her until she was beyond the doorway; then his sister Judy spoke up to him, from where she sat with Pam on a rout-seat.

"Room for you, Dave!"

But he preferred to stand, more attentive than talkative, whilst the two girls finished ices that Jimmy had had the honour to supply.

Jimmy, with a place found for him on the seat next to Pam, was as shy as ever, so really Judy and Pam were doing most of the talking.

Then, just as Dave was going to take his sister's finished ice-saucer, he felt his right sleeve plucked, and he turned round to find that it was Betty.

She had returned in great haste. Her face had lost its healthy colour; her eyes hinted at suppressed alarm.

"I just dread to tell the others, but I'll have to!" she whispered him. "We'll not be able to give our show."

"Eh?" said Dave.

"All the stage frocks in our dressing-room," Betty husked on—"they've vanished! Every one of them is—gone!"

ANOTHER stunning blow for Betty & Co.! Is it another of Miss Lester's tricks? On no account fail to read next week's enthralling chapters of this fine story.