

A HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL OUR READERS!

THE SCHOOLGIRL

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Incorporating
"SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN"



THE LAST HOPE!

With Clara's handkerchief tied to his collar the sheepdog vanished into the storm . . .

See this week's wonderful story of the Cliff House Chums.

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 Babs & Co. determine to help, and, with Tomboy Clara Trevlyn taking the lead, vow that—

"The KIDDIES MUST have their CHRISTMAS!"

Clara Leads the Way!



"O H dud-dear! Oh crumbs! How much farther, Babs?" Bessie Bunter panted.

"Ask Clara, old Bessikins," Barbara Redfern answered, her blue eyes twinkling at her plump chum.

"Clara ought to know," added Mabel Lynn, the third of the famous trio of Cliff House School.

"Oh lawks! Clara! I-sus-say, Clara—" gasped Bessie.

"Oh, come on!" Tomboy Clara Trevlyn said, toiling ahead up the steep mountain slope.

"But I've jolly well been coming on for the last twenty miles!" Bessie protested, with indignant untruthfulness. "And I'm tired, you know! I'm hungry! I'm thirsty! Look here, we're not lost, are we?"

That was a question which the majority of the party of Cliff House girls had been asking themselves for the last quarter of an hour.

Besides Babs, Mabs, Bessie, and Clara, there were three other Cliff House Fourth Formers—that strange girl, Jemima Carstairs, the American junior, Leila Carroll, and Jean Cartwright, with whose uncle, the Laird of Glengowrie, the chums were spending their Christmas holidays.

"Of course we're not lost!" exclaimed Tomboy Clara. "How can we be lost when I've got the map? When we get to the top of this hill we're bound to see Glengowrie Castle."

"Than which," sighed Jemima Carstairs, as she vigorously polished her monocle, "there can be no greater optimist, comrades! Sure that's the right map, Clara?"

"Of course!" Clara sniffed.

"But I sure figured," Leila Carroll put in, "that there was a



trackway up this mountain path. — I don't see one."

"Well, chump, the snow's covered it up!"

"And didn't you say," Mabel Lynn asked, "that there was a clump of trees near the top? Where are they?"

"Oh, they're covered up, too, aren't they, Clara?" Jean Cartwright chuckled. "Still, struggle on, girls—though I must say this is pretty steep, even for a Trevlyn breakfast stroll!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Steep it was—if Jean Cartwright was referring to the slope up which they were toiling now. Clara, with a lofty disdain for geographical truthfulness, called it a hill; but reference to the map she was now frowning over would have told her that Ben Renoch was a mountain, and no inconsiderable one at that—though, to be sure, Clara was not feeling so certain about that map herself now.

Something was wrong—no doubt about that. Though the Scottish countryside lay buried in snow, and most of the tracks and paths marked on the map had been obliterated, the clump of trees to which Mabs had referred should have been conspicuous farther up the slope.

But that slope, like the slopes about it, was innocent of anything save snow.

For an hour they had toiled up the mountainside. According to Clara, this way was the shortest cut back to Glengowrie castle, from which the seven chums had issued two and a half hours earlier to enjoy what Tomboy Clara called a stroll.

It was Clara's suggestion, and it was Clara, who rather prided herself upon her map-reading skill, who had chosen the route. Clara had said the walk would be about three miles all told; but Clara was naturally careless on small points, and was rather apt to read an ordnance map like an airman, judging distance from one point to another by means of an imaginary straight line.

"Well, here we are!" she said, as, with a last gasp, she climbed to the top. "Come on, everybody! Don't let old Bessie fall back! She might start an avalanche!"

"Oh, phoo!" Bessie gasped. "Really, you know— All right, Clara! You wait till I've got my breath back! Oh dear! Leila, give me a hand!"

"Have two!" Leila hospitably invited.

And while Babs tugged at one arm, Leila tugged at the other, hauling the almost exhausted Bessie up to the top.

"Well, we've arrived!" Jemima beamed. "Whoa, there! Wait till I get my frosted eyeglass in the ready

By HILDA RICHARDS

Illustrated by T. LAIDLER.

position! Nice!" she said. "All lovely and white, what, as though someone had washed the Highlands in a new patent soap! But where's the merry old stronghold of the Glengowrie clan?"

Clara looked worriedly at her map. "Well, it should be over there," she said, pointing—"on that hillside."

"Then all I can say, I guess, is that there must have been magic at work," Leila chuckled, "or somebody boned the old castle as soon as our backs were turned! Sure looks invisible to me!"

It was invisible to all of them. Round them stretched the mountains—large mountains and small mountains, summits and valleys rolling like great petrified waves into cloudy distance, their rugged grandeur softened by the white mantle of winter they wore.

But there was certainly no castle. "Well," Clara faltered, and again glared resentfully at the map, "this beastly thing must be wrong, you know!"

"Wrong or not—" started Babs, and then paused. "Listen!" she cried.

From down the slope to their right— Wuff, wuff, wuff!

"A dog!" cried Bessie joyfully.

A dog undoubtedly it was. But where? They all stared. Here the mountainside dropped away in a series of great ledges. Such a ledge stuck out prominently fifty feet beneath them, screening entirely their view from what was going on beyond.

"Well, where there's a dog there's life!" said golden-haired Mabel Lynn.

"Come on, then!" said Clara.

"O.K.! But do put that map away," Leila begged. "We don't want to get lost again!"

There was a laugh. Clara reddened a little. With a glare at Leila, she stuffed the map into her pocket. Then suddenly there was a scampering in front of them, a low, eager wuff!

Over the lip of the ledge a black-and-brown shape popped into being.

"That's the dog himself," Mabs cried. "And what a nice looking chap he is. Come on, boy, then!"

The dog—a small sheepdog—cocked his head intelligently as, with fore-paws on the ledge, he surveyed them. Then he gave a welcoming whine.

"Good old fellow, then," Clara said, and coaxingly chuckled. "Come on."

The dog bounded up, tail wagging. That lover of all dogs, Clara, bent and stroked his silken ears.

"Nice boy, then. Where's your master?"

Wuff! the dog said, and obviously recognising the word, looked eagerly the way he had come, and then scampered off to the edge of the ledge and came back again. Wuff! he said invitingly.

"He wants us to follow him," Barbara laughed. "My hat, I really believe he understands, you know. Good old doggie, then. But mind this ledge," she called, as she reached the edge. "There's a drop of six feet or more here."

She slipped over it, the dog, as if it were on springs, bounding before her. She found herself on a broad, snow-covered lip of the mountain, and then, blinking down, gave a glad whoop of joy.

Here at least, the view was less restricted. Indeed, Babs could almost see right down into the valley. And near the valley, about a hundred yards up the mountainside, was a small cottage, a thin spiral of blue smoke rising from its solitary chimney.

"Come on!" Babs cried. "Civilisation in sight. A cottage, kidlets. Come on, everybody."

They all clambered down over the ledge and joined Babs.

"Well, so far, so good," Mabs chuckled. "And the path down to the cottage looks easy enough. We can follow the marks of the dog's paws. Look at him—running for all he's worth towards the cottage, as though rushing to tell his master we're coming. We—but I say, look here," she added, pointing farther along the ledge. "There's a cave or something there."

"Whoops!" Jemima said softly. For Jemima loved caves. In her spare time Jemima was an enthusiastic archaeologist, and she had found many of her Stone Age relics in caves. "What about a spot of exploring, children?"

"Oh crumbs, but I want my lunch," Bessie protested.

"Leave it till another time. Jimmy," Jean Cartwright





counselled. "Let's find out where we are first. We can come back to-morrow, perhaps, armed with torches and things. Hallo, ahead! Somebody's come out of the cottage. Somebody's waving to us. Come on!" Longingly Jemima glanced towards the unexplored cave. But if Jemima was fond of her hobby, she was always careful not to inflict it upon others, and so, with a sigh, she followed her chums.

Eagerly now they pressed forward. It was easier work getting down, though once or twice they had to climb carefully over broken stones and half-buried boulders.

Now they could see the figure outside the cottage—the figure of a woman, with a shawl round her head. A child was clinging to her skirts. She was watching them anxiously.

"Careful, lassies," she sang. "Och aye!" Jemima replied. "Careful's the word—or is it?" she asked ruefully, as she slipped down on her back. "Tut-tut, what a life! Clara, you might pick up my spinal column and bring it along, will you? I think it's fallen out."

"Ha, ha, ha!" They hurried on. Now they had reached the woman, who was waving the child back towards the cottage. A pretty, comely woman she was, but with evident lines of care and worry in her rosy cheeks. She stared at the chums as they came up.

"Och, but what are you doing on top of the mountain in this weather?" she cried. "D'ye not know this mountain is dangerous?"

"Well," Clara explained, "we were trying to find the footpath to Glengowrie Castle, you see."

The woman stared. "Och, then it's the wrong footpath ye're looking for," she said. "And it's the wrong mountain ye're travelling over. If ye want to be getting to Glengowrie now, just follow the valley along," she added, pointing. "It may be a mile or so longer, but there's no climbing."

"Oh crumbs! Then how fuf-far is it?" Bessie asked.

"Four miles maybe—perhaps just a wee bit longer," the woman said.

Bessie groaned hollowly. "Oh crumbs! I shall dud-die before we get there," she said feebly. "Oh really, Clara, you would bring us over the wrong beastly mountain!"

"Well—" Clara said, reddening. "Well, tut!" Jemima said. "What's a mere mountain more or less to our one and only? Still, tough," she murmured. "Jolly tough, especially as it's nigh on lunch-time. Best leg forward, Spartans—that is, if you've got a best leg!"

"But ye can't go on wi'oot a bite of something to eat," the woman said. "And look, poor bairns, ye're all perished with the cold. Come in. Please do come in. It's not much I can offer ye, but if a bowl of real Scotch broth—"

"Gee, did somebody say broth?" Leila murmured.

"Oh, I say, that's jolly nun-nice of her," Bessie said, brightening. "Jolly nice. Hallo," she added, smiling at two small, shy-looking children who had appeared in the doorway—a small girl of about five, and a boy of about six. "What's your names?"

"Please I'm Bobbie," the boy said. "Bobbie Wallace."

"Are you now? And what's your sister's name?" asked Babs, with a smile.

"Please I'se Lisbeth," the little girl shyly lisped. "This is Toonie," she added, as the little sheepdog proudly bounded out of the door, and more proudly still laid a very dirty looking and ancient bone at Clara's feet. "Toonie's our dog," she ventured timidly. "Toonie play with us."

"Good old Toonie," Clara chuckled. "Nice old chap then. And jolly nice little playmates he's got, I'm sure," she added, grinning. "Can we come in, Mrs. Wallace?"

"Please to make ye'selves at home," the woman said. "It's not long I'll be keeping ye."

They went in, and their eyes glowed at sight of the bright, log fire which burned in the wide, old, open hearth. The table was already laid, and Mrs. Wallace was ladling out the broth from a huge cauldron suspended over the blaze.

Bessie sniffed. "Oh yum! I'sus-say, this is ripping. Nice broth," she beamed at Lisbeth. Lisbeth's big eyes showed no enthusiasm.

"Lisbeth not like b'oth," she said. "Lisbeth full up with b'oth. Lisbeth want nice things."

"Lisbeth!" her mother said sharply. "Oh, but you've had nice things, I guess," Leila said soothingly. "What about Christmas?"

"No Christmas," Lisbeth said. "Daddy go away."

"But surely Santa Claus brought you ever such a heap of nice things?" Babs asked.

"But he didn't," Bobbie said. "Santa Claus didn't bring us anything. No toys nor sweeties. Nor anything, you know. Mamma says that Santa Claus got lost in the snow."

"Bobbie!" cried his mother. "Please, my dears—"

But it was obvious then in some way the chums had put their foot in it. Mrs. Wallace had turned scarlet in embarrassment. Bobbie was looking mutinous. Little Lisbeth's lower lip was outthrust in a pout.

"Please, lassies, will ye be seated?" Mrs. Wallace asked, with some agitation. "Lisbeth, here's y'r chair. Bobbie, help her up, laddie. I—I'm sorry I've got nothing better to offer you," she added, with a faltering note in her voice.

"But this is lovely," Babs said. At the same time she glanced quickly at the woman, wondering a little. "But what's this about Santa Claus getting lost in the snow?" she asked, catching little Lisbeth's eye.

"Mamma says so, don't you, mamma?" Lisbeth asked seriously.

"Lisbeth, drink y'r broth!" Mrs. Wallace cried hurriedly.

"But Lisbeth tired of b'oth," the little one complained restively. "Sides, she wants to know why Santa Claus was lost in the snow? Why was he lost in the snow, mamma?"

"Och, goodness!" Mrs. Wallace blinked flusteredly. "You—you see, lassies, my—my husband was called awa' just before Christmas. We—we should have had Christmas if he'd come back in time, but he didn't, and—and—" Her voice broke a little.

Babs was quick to notice the sudden quiver of her lips, and the hasty aversion of her head.

"Everybody else had Christmas," Bobbie said resentfully. "Everybody had Christmas pudding and nice mince pies, you know. Everybody had turkey, too. I know, because Ronnie Fielding told me. But we didn't. We had broth for Christmas dinner, and bread," he added, as an afterthought, "Didn't we, mamma?"

"Bobbie, please," the woman choked. "Lassies, can I get ye some more bread?"

"No, thanks; this is lovely," Babs replied hastily, and flashed a look round. "You don't want anything else, do you, girls?"

"Rather not." For they had all sensed what had happened in this little home. And they all felt rather guiltily and uncomfortably that they were taking food which could ill be spared.

And they all began to realise now the reason for those careworn, worried-looking lines on the face of this hospitable woman. The children's chatter gave the secret completely away.

Evident from that, that the Wallaces had had no Christmas.

"Oh crumbs!" Clara murmured, crimsoning.

She looked down at her plate. She had a sudden feeling as of taking pennies from a beggar. It wasn't right. It wasn't fair. And she wondered, as did Babs and the others, what pitiful story was behind it all? Why hadn't Mr. Wallace returned?

How the chums' hearts went out to the little family in that moment! How they longed to help this woman who, unasked, without even wanting to know their names had, in the largeness of her heart, taken them in.

For a moment silence fell. It was Clara who broke it.

And the Tomboy, with an almost fierce glance of warning round, looked at Bobbie.

"Well—well, what chumps we are! We nearly forgot to tell Bobbie! You don't know the latest news about Santa Claus, Bobbie?" she said.

Bobbie blinked.

"No-o!" "Well, poor old Santa Claus, as your mother said, got lost in the snow," Clara went on. "We know, don't we, girls, because we helped to dig him out. Poor old Santa Claus! He was in such a bad way, you see, that we had to take him to Glengowrie Castle, and pack him off to bed. Didn't we, girls?"

"I sure guess that hits it," Leila murmured; but she stared at her chum.

"And, in consequence," Clara continued, "poor old Santa Claus couldn't do all the rounds. But he didn't forget you, Bobbie, nor Lisbeth. That, you see, is why we've come," Clara explained, "because Santa Claus has sent us."

"Ooo!" Lisbeth gasped, her eyes widening.

"And Santa Claus said to me: 'Clara, old thing, go and see Bobbie and Lisbeth. Just tell them I haven't forgotten them. Tell them I'm frightfully cut-up to have missed them on Christmas Eve. But also tell them,' Clara went on, 'that I still want them to have their Christmas, and I'm coming to visit them to-night.'"

"This night?" Bobbie asked incredulously.

"This night," Clara affirmed, while her chums stared, wondering what inspiration had seized upon the Tomboy's brain now. "This very night," she affirmed emphatically. "And he also said: 'Tell them that I want them to think of this night as Christmas Eve, and to-morrow I want them to think of as Christmas Day.' And, just to prove it," Clara added, as she slipped off the silver bracelet she wore on her own wrist, "Santa Claus told me to give you this."

"Ooo!" said the bewildered Lisbeth. "From Santa Claus?"

"That's it," Clara chuckled. "And he told me, Bobbie, to give you this." And fished out from her pocket a compass. It was the compass which had been intended to assist in her ill-fated map reading. "And he said: 'Be sure to tell those children to hang up their stockings to-night, because I'm going to bring them ever such a lovely lot of toys.'"

"Steady, old thing," Jean whispered. "What are you letting yourself in for?"

"Shrurrrup!" Clara hissed, and beamed at the entranced faces of the two children, staring now at their visitors with rapturous ecstasy.

"But, Miss Trevlyn—" Mrs. Wallace murmured.

Clara deliberately winked.

"And he really will come to-night?" Bobbie asked, breathlessly.

"As sure as eggs."

"Down the chimbley?" squeaked Lisbeth, in high-pitched excitement.

husband out of prison—eh? Mrs. Wallace, I just want to tell you for the last time—I'm getting rather jired of these delays. Your husband is in trouble. I can get him out of it. You want money, I can give it to you, so why keep putting it off? I've got the paper here, and you'll just have to sign it, sooner or later. Why not now?"

The chums gazed at each other, wondering, uncomfortable. They felt rather like eavesdroppers.

"But—but I can't sign it!" The woman's voice cracked a little. "My husband warned me before he went away not to sign anything. Oh, please, please," she cried distractedly, "can't you leave me alone? Wait till my husband comes back."

There was a pause. Clara, nearest the door, felt the blood beginning to mount in her temples. She could not see the man who spoke. Muffled as his voice was, she did not recognise it.

goaded beyond endurance, rapped, as she started towards the door, "you've said enough, you brute? Don't you—" And stopped. "Why, it is you!" she cried, in sudden astonishment.

The Tomboy Rebels!



THE man at the door coldly regarded her. "Yes, Miss Trevlyn. What are you doing here?"

But Clara, for a moment, did not reply to that. She was still gazing at the man. Tall, clean-shaven, dressed in a thick coat, whose fur-lined collar was turned up to protect his face, he gazed at her, not with pleasure, but with impatience. But Clara recognised him at once.

Not, indeed, that Clara had had much to do with him. He was not her friend—or a friend of Babs & Co. As



"AND just to prove it," said Clara, as she slipped off the silver bracelet from her own wrist, "Santa Claus told me to give you this." Tomboy Clara had started the ball rolling in the scheme to give the little kiddies the Christmas they had missed.

"Well, I'm not sure about that," Clara grinned; "but he'll come. Mind you, don't forget to hang up your stockings," she warned, "and be sure you're both fast asleep. Then, in the morning—"

And she broke off as, behind her, came an authoritative rap, rap! on the door, and, from under the table there came a sudden warning growl from Toonie. She looked quickly at Mrs. Wallace. Her face had gone deathly pale.

"Oh dear!" she said. "That will be Mr. White. Excuse me, lassies."

"White," Clara murmured. "Not the White my uncle and aunt—"

"Mr. White; nasty man," Lisbeth pouted. "Mr. White say daddy in gaol!"

The chums looked startled. Mrs. Wallace, trembling now, had opened the door. The rasping, throaty voice of a man came from outside:

"You see, I've called again."

"Yes, Mr. White; but—but I'm busy now," Mrs. Wallace said falteringly.

"Busy—eh? Too busy to get your

She understood still less the business which had brought him here, but she understood very well that he was threatening and bullying, and anybody who threatened and bullied a friend of Tomboy Clara Trevlyn was inevitably going to find trouble. She rose from her chair.

"Your husband," the man said harshly, "will never come back, if this paper is not signed, Mrs. Wallace. You ought to know that. It was at my order that he was arrested. It is my evidence which will send him to gaol. Come, now," he added coaxingly, "be sensible. Sign the paper, and there's fifty pounds for you right away, and my promise, on my word of honour, that I'll get your husband off when the trial takes place. Here we are. Use this pen."

There was a rustling sound. From Mrs. Wallace came a distressed gasp.

"No, no!" she cried. "I can't—I can't! I dinna know what I might be doing. I daren't! Good day to you, Mr. White!"

"But I tell you—"

"And don't you think," Clara,

one of the wealthier landowners in the Glengowrie district, he had visited the castle several times during the Christmas festivities, and there had struck up a friendship with Clara's aunt and uncle, Mr. and Mrs. Ernest and Phoebe Trevlyn, who were staying at the castle for the New Year revels.

Tremblingly Mrs. Wallace laid a hand upon the Tomboy's arm.

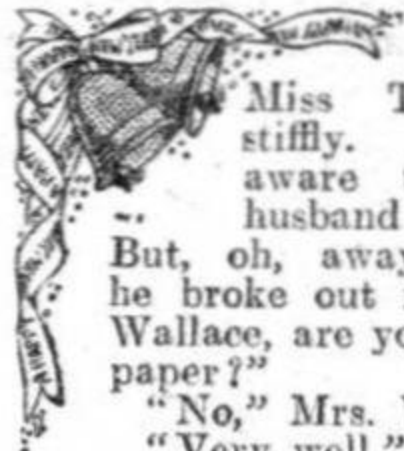
"Miss Trevlyn, dinna get yerself in trouble on my account—"

"Oh, don't worry," said Clara. "Mr. White and I know each other. Though I must say I'm surprised," she bluntly added, "to hear him bullying you like this. It's rather different from the impression you've given at the castle, Mr. White."

The man turned red.

"Miss Trevlyn, would you mind looking after your own business?"

"That," Clara told him, "is exactly what I am doing, Mr. White. I happen to consider it my business to stick up for my friends. Yes, friends!" she repeated, as she intercepted the man's glance of surprise.



"You choose strange friends, Miss Trevlyn," he said stiffly. "You may not be aware that this woman's husband is in prison— But, oh, away with argument!" he broke out impatiently. "Mrs. Wallace, are you going to sign this paper?"

"No," Mrs. Wallace muttered. "Very well." He put the paper in his pocket. "Think it over," he warned. "Think it over. You know what will happen if you don't sign—and you won't be able to say, later, when it's all too late, that I didn't warn you of the consequences. I'll look in again some other time when"—with an angry glare at Clara—"you might be more willing to talk business. Good day to you now. Good day to you, Miss Trevlyn." He turned huffily just as Toonie, perhaps feeling his support was needed in this quarrel, came growlingly towards the door and darted between Clara's feet with a shrill little bark. "An' whoost to you!" he grated savagely.

And from Toonie went up a sharp yelp of pain as the man, thoroughly irate and annoyed, lifted his foot and caught the animal a thudding blow in the ribs with his heavy boot.

Clara's face flamed.

"Why, you—"

"Clara, Clara!" It was Babs, anxiously clutching at her arm. "Clara, no!" she cried, as the Tomboy there and then would have rushed out into the snow after the man. "Don't, old girl! Leave him alone. A nasty-tempered cad like that just can't help doing those sort of things. Toonie—Toonie, old chap!" she added, as Toonie, fur bristling, looked after the surlily retreating form as if debating a reprisal. "Come here!"

Toonie came, a low growl in his throat. Mrs. Wallace, openly weeping now, shut the door as Babs dragged her hasty chum back.

There was a moment's awkward silence. Then, from little Lisbeth:

"Mamma, don't c'y! Nasty Mr. White gone now."

"Och, I'm a silly thing!" Mrs. Wallace said, and, hastily drying her eyes, tried to smile. "Now, lassies, dinna let the broth go cold," she said. "Eat it all up, and have some more. Bobbie, go and put the kettle on, so that we can give our friends a cup o' tea to help them on their way. Miss Trevlyn, it was nice of you to help me out."

Clara coloured a little.

"Well, I didn't do anything," she protested. "But, Mrs. Wallace—"

"Yes, Miss Trevlyn?"

"Please, don't—don't think I'm being nosey," Clara said uncomfortably. "but I—we—that is—oh, bother! Well, you've been so jolly nice to us, you know, that—that if we can, we'd like to do something to help you. It's pretty obvious you've been having a dreadfully thin time over Christmas, and—and—well, we'd be just a lot of fools if we couldn't put two and two together and see who was at the bottom of it. But I was thinking," Clara said. "My aunt and uncle, at Glengowrie, have some influence with that White man—"

But the woman forlornly shook her head.

"Nay, lass, I'm afraid that when Mr. White has set his mind on getting a thing he'll have it. It's a' thanks to him that my husband, Robin, is in gaol now," she added, biting her lip. "An' he, puir laddie, who has never done a wrong hand's turn against anybody in

a' his life. Ye see—" And she blinked round a little pathetically. "But och, why should I worry ye lassies wi' my troubles?"

"No, please tell us, Mrs. Wallace," begged Babs. "If we can possibly help—"

And, after some little persuasion, the story was told—with little Lisbeth and Bobbie sent into the next room.

A sad and pitiful little story, it was, in all truth. White, a wealthy man, had long rested a covetous eye upon this little farm, with its seventy or eighty acres, which had been handed down from one generation of Wallaces to another for centuries and centuries. For a long time he had been trying to tempt Robin Wallace to sell out.

"An' Robin always turned him away," Mrs. Wallace went on. "For a while we had luck. We made the farm pay. But this last season we were not so lucky. There was an outbreak of disease amongst our livestock. Then there was the great storm just before the harvest, which laid the wheat fields in ruin."

"Oh, I sus-say!" murmured Bessie.

And she went on to tell them how Mr. Wallace had gone to a firm in a distant town for assistance, not knowing at the time that the firm was actually owned by Mr. White. Arriving there, he had met White, had hot words with him, and marched out. The same night Mr. Wallace had been arrested on a charge of having stolen fifty pounds from Mr. White's office—the amount Mr. Wallace had wanted to borrow!

"Mr. White cause Robin to be thrown into gaol," went on Mrs. Wallace. "And—"

"What a cad!" Mabel Lynn indignantly broke out. "But surely your husband could prove—"

"Robin could prove nothing," Mrs. Wallace said sadly. "It was his word against Mr. White's. There was nobody to stand bail for him, and so Robin was forced to spend his Christmas in a cell, waiting for the courts to open in the New Year. Only one man there was who could ha' got him out. That was James White himself. He could ha' withdrawn the charge."

"But he won't, unless you sign his paper—unless you sell out?" Clara asked.

"No."

There was a little silence. A silence of sympathy, but of indignation, too. Clara, next to Mrs. Wallace, was looking savage.

"But dinna worry," the woman smiled. "It's grateful good of you to listen to a silly woman who should know better, and I'm sure I'm much obliged for all ye've done already—especially," she added, "for giving the bairns the gifties. That's been the hardest part o' Christmas—seeing the bairns without Christmas dinner and presents!"

"But that, at least, can be changed!" Babs said.

"Yes, rather! And at the same time," Jean Cartwright put in, "something else might be done, Mrs. Wallace. My uncle, the laird of Glengowrie, and Mr. White are friends of a sort. There can be no harm in mentioning it to my uncle."

"Well, if ye would," Mrs. Wallace said doubtfully.

"I will," Jean vowed. "We shall be coming back to-night. I'll let you know then. Meantime, cheer up," she added softly. "Remember, 'tis the darkest hour, etcetera. Now, kids, I think we ought to be getting a move on. Mrs. Wallace, will you direct us?"

Directing them was easy. All they had to do, Mrs. Wallace explained, was

to walk along the valley. Goodbye was said to eager little Bobbie and bright-eyed little Lisbeth, the paw of Toonie was solemnly shaken all round, and they set off on their long tramp, heartily and enthusiastically discussing plans to bring back Christmas which Clara had suggested.

Easy enough that would be, in all conscience. Back at the castle there were heaps and heaps of toys and presents left over from Christmas. Each of the chums had had several surprise Christmas presents—many of which had been duplicated, some even triplicated.

Easy enough, too, to get hold of the old Christmas-tree and cut it down. They had only to speak to the generous-hearted old laird to receive the complete freedom of the larder and all the good things it contained. Then there would be decorations—must have those, of course, to give the real Christmas atmosphere.

They laughed as they chattered. It was good to feel they could make others happy. That very fact brought happiness to themselves.

Dear old Bessie then came forward with the bright idea that she should play the part of Santa Claus—an idea which was applauded.

"And," Babs cut in eagerly, "that's given me a wheeze."

"Oh, whoops!"

"You know the big toboggan—what about using that to take the stuff—and Bessie—along? We can all pull it—"

"Sort of rain-deers in the snow, what?" Jemima chirped. "Hem! Joke there! Send me a postcard when you see it! All the same, nifty notion, Barbara beloved."

"Jolly good," applauded Mabs, and they all voted it jolly good.

In great high spirits Glengowrie Castle was reached. They passed over the old drawbridge of the castle, under the portcullis, and Jean tugged the huge bell which sent its echoes clanging inside the hall. Macpherson, the butler, opened the door. His eyes quickly roved over the group.

"Miss Trevlyn," he said.

"Yes?" Clara replied.

"Your aunt and uncle would like to see you in the writing-room."

"Right-ho!" Clara agreed, and grinned at her chums. "O.K. I'll see you upstairs in a minute or two," she said. "What the dickens do aunt and uncle want?"

"I'm sure," the butler said, "I couldn't tell you that, Miss Trevlyn. They gave me no other message."

Clara shrugged a little. Silly old Uncle Ernest and Aunt Phoebe! They were a well-meaning couple on the whole, but since their arrival at the castle they had rather made it their duty to look after Clara, and had exhibited a rather too solicitous regard both for her conduct and her welfare.

The Tomboy nodded gaily to her chums and passed through the curtains which led to the writing-room. Her uncle's voice bade her enter.

Clara entered. Then she stopped, her lips tightening.

For it was obvious the instant she entered the room that trouble was coming. Her uncle, with a rather grim frown upon his face, stood with his back to the fire, facing her. Near him, her inevitable knitting still on her knees, sat Aunt Phoebe, the expression on her face full of unsaid rebuke.

Standing opposite to her, however, was another figure—a tall, thin-lipped figure dressed in rough tweeds. It was James White.

"Clara, come here!" her uncle ordered.

Clara, unconsciously bracing herself, went forward. She stood still, facing him.

"I am sorry, Clara. I have a complaint to make—" He always started like that when about to deliver a lecture. "I am displeased."

"Well?"

"My dear girl, do not say 'well' in that rebellious tone of voice. The complaint, as you may guess, is from our very good friend, Mr. White here. He says that you have been unpardonably rude to him."

Clara's lips compressed.

"Does he?"

"I hope, Clara, you are going to apologise," her aunt opened up.

"Then I'm sorry," Clara retorted. "I'm not. Is that what you wanted to see me about?"

"Clara!"

"I'm sorry," Clara said doggedly. "I don't mind apologising when I'm in the wrong, but this time I wasn't in the wrong. May I go now?"

"Clara, no!" Her uncle's eyes gleamed. More severe and austere her aunt's expression became. James White smiled sneeringly. "Clara, please," he added. "I am your uncle, remember. Mr. White is a friend of ours. As such he is entitled to your respect. I ask you this minute to say that you are sorry for what you said."

Clara's lips came together in a straight line.

"And if I said that I should just be telling fibs," she said. "If Mr. White has complained about me—though by what right he should I'm bothered if I know—perhaps he's jolly well forgotten to tell you why I was rude. And I can't respect a man who bullies poor, defenceless women!"

Her uncle drew in a deep breath. Like an icicle, Aunt Phoebe rose to her feet.

"Really, Ernest, I hope you will not tolerate—"

"Thank you, I can handle this." The man stared into the fuming, mutinous face before him. "Clara," he added more quietly, "I know you have ideas of chivalry. I know that you are rather apt to let your feelings and that headstrong head of yours run away with you. I know all the circumstances of this case. Mr. White has told me of them. But in this you are making a mistake. As your uncle I feel a sense of responsibility towards you, and I really must ask you in future not to have anything to do with this woman. You may not know her husband is in prison."

"No?" Clara's face was flaming. "Well, as it happens, I do," she said. "And who put him there?" Ask Mr. White that. And who," she added quiveringly, "is trying to force his wife into signing something she doesn't want to sign? Who allowed that little family to go without Christmas dinner just so that he could get his way?"

"Clara, the woman is telling you lies."

"Then," Clara said, "they're lies I believe."

"Be careful, girl. You are goading me too far."

"Am I?" Clara was reckless now. Mutiny flamed in her face. "Well, what about me?" she asked bitterly. "Aren't I being goaded, too? This is my holiday as well as anyone else's, and I'm going to enjoy it in my own way. And my way," she added, with a glance at the ramrod-like Mr. White, "is not to make people wretched and miserable, but to try to make them happy. That's all."

"Clara!" her uncle exclaimed. "Clara! Clara, come back!" he cried. But Clara, fearful of losing complete

control of herself now, had dived towards the door. Like an eel slipped through it. Her uncle's voice, vibrant, angry, came after her.

"Clara—"

Clara was deaf.

Too Much Interference!



"A CLOCKWORK train set!" Barbara Redfern laughed deliciously. "Bobbie will love that."

"Yes, rather, you know. And here's a lovely doll," Bessie Bunter beamed. "Lisbeth will just adore that, you know."

"What-ho! And here's a penknife with all sorts of nifty gadgets on it," Jemima Carstairs chuckled.

"And here, I guess, is a magic lantern and some slides," Leila Carroll put in.

"And I've got this topping story-book and photo-album," Jean Cartwright cried.

"And here's a box of paints," Mabel Lynn put in.

"To say nothing of this camera and a cricket bat," Babs said again.

"Where's that toy blackboard and chalks? And, Bessie, what about that Red Indian outfit you took off the Christmas-tree? Then there are all the toys we got out of the Christmas crackers. Oh, what a lovely lot!"

What a lot, indeed! The chums' eyes glistened as, in Barbara Redfern's bed-room they looked at it.

"And there's the Christmas-tree," Jean Cartwright said joyfully. "I'll pop down and get that. We shan't want all of it, of course—I'll get one of the servants to saw the top off. And at the

same time," she added, "I'll dig out uncle, and have a word with him about Mr. Wallace. He must know the family, and I'm sure he can do something for them. Where's Clara, by the way?"

But Clara had, up till then, failed to put in an appearance. Had they only known it, Clara was at that moment engaged in heated argument with her aunt and uncle in the writing-room.

Happily Jean tripped off.

She reached the door of her uncle's study and knocked. Then she frowned as she knocked again. For there was no reply.

Jean opened the door and peered in. The room was empty.

"Oh!" Jean murmured disappointedly.

She closed the door, and then started as a footfall sounded behind her. The sweet face of her married cousin, Flora Stewart, the laird's daughter, smiled into her own.

"Hallo, Jean. Are you looking for father?"

"Well, yes, Flora."

"Then," Flora Stewart smiled, "you're going to be disappointed. He went off this morning, taking little Dorrie with him. He's gone to see some friends in connection with the New Year celebrations."

"Oh goodness! When is he coming back?" Jean asked.

"To-morrow, perhaps—or he may even stop till the next day," Flora said.

"Still, while he's away I'm in charge, you know. If there's anything you want—?"

Jean frowned a little. Flora, however willing she might be, could hardly help to get Mr. Wallace out of gaol—for Flora, like herself and her chums,



"CLARA, I would like a word with you," said Mr. Trevlyn coldly. Clara's lips tightened. She knew there was to be further trouble concerning the little family the chums were befriending.

was really a stranger to Glengowrie, having returned to the castle this Christmas after many years' absence.

All the same Jean told her what she knew.

Flora Stewart shook her head. She knew what suffering was. She had endured more than a fair share of it herself.

"But, Jean, how dreadful," she said. "Poor, poor woman. Take what you like, of course—anything, anything. As a matter of fact, there is a heap of Dorrie's clothes you can have for the little girl. And you'll find all sorts of decorations in the lumber room. You know what's in the larder—just take anything you want there. And there's a lovely big Christmas pudding which hasn't been touched. Put that in, too."

"Oh, Flora, you're a darling!" Jean breathed, and dashed off to tell Babs & Co.

A happy peal of laughter came from Babs' bed-room before she opened the door, and when she peered in she went off herself into fits.

For there, surrounded by her hilarious chums, was Bessie Bunter, with an owl-faced Jemima helping her on with her Santa Claus disguise.

Clara was there, too, giving no indication of the stormy scene through which she had just passed, but laughing as uproariously as any of them. And certainly Bessie was an object for mirth.

For Bessie's Santa Claus' whiskers hung from one ear. From the other hung her spectacles. Around Bessie was draped the red cloak of Santa Claus, but draped in such a fashion that both Bessie's arms were pinned to her sides, and the cowl which should have been on her head was hanging over her chest. Bessie, helpless, just glared.

"Lul-look here, you grinning duffers—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Natty, what?" Jemima asked admiringly. "So daringly and dashingly original! Must say," Jemima murmured approvingly, "that the whiskers do improve her handsomeness. Rather like fungus on a pillar-box, what?"

The chums shrieked.

"Oh, you awful things— Phoo! These beastly whiskers are getting in my mouth!" Bessie hooted. "Come and undo me!"

Jemima—who was the author of the mischief, of course—solemnly "undid" her. Bessie glared round. But Bessie was thrilled and too excited to bear malice for more than half a second, though, to be sure, she haughtily refused Leila Carroll's offer to help her make-up properly. Meantime, Jean was bubbling.

"Uncle's away," she told them. "Sorry about that. But I've seen Flora—she's a sort of lairdess—if there is such a thing—in uncle's absence, you know, and she's running things. She said we can help ourselves to whatever we like, when we like, and as much of it as we like! But come on, now. Let's heave all this stuff down into the hall and get it done up in sacks and things. Hallo, Clara! Finished with nunky and aunt?"

"Yes," Clara said gruffly. "Come on. Let's get this stuff out of it!"

And "out of it" the stuff was got, each of them carrying huge armfuls of toys. Then another trip to the lumber-room for Christmas decorations. Then another journey to the pantry, where many of the good things which had helped the festivities at Glengowrie were raided.

By that time Flora Stewart joined

them, adding a small sackful of her own daughter's clothes to the heap.

Happily they began to pack the things into sacks. Then suddenly there was a step. Mr. Trevlyn, with a disapproving look at his niece, stepped on to the scene.

He smiled.

"Good gracious! You're busy, girls. Going to start a bazaar or something?"

Babs laughed. She knew nothing of the trouble between Clara and her uncle, or she might have taken warning. Clara, characteristically determined to go her own way, had said nothing of that.

"No," she said; "this is for two poor mites and one poor woman who haven't had Christmas, you see. It was Clara's idea," she added, dimpling, "that we should give them a happy Christmas with all the stuff left over from the castle."

"Clara?" He looked sharply at the Tomboy. "And who," he asked, "are to receive them?"

"A Mrs. Wallace, sir. She lives at Craig Farm, you know," Babs answered; and then she stopped, sensing in the sharp, almost furious, glance that was flung at her Tomboy chum that something was wrong. "Oh dear, I hope—"

"Thank you, Barbara. That is all right," he said, with cold dignity. "I cannot, of course, interfere with your arrangements. At the same time— Clara, I would like a word with you," he added.

Clara stiffened.

"Why—"

"Would you prefer to speak to me in private or before your friends?"

There was the hint of a threat in those words. While her chums looked wonderingly, Clara bit her lip. Hot words trembled upon her lips. That fierce flame of mutiny, fanned at once by the hectoring tone, bubbled up fiercely within her. But she paused.

For if Clara was angry, and Clara was irritated by this interference, she had her chums to consider. An open row with her uncle in front of them would, at this moment, seriously upset the happiness of the enthusiastic adventure upon which they had embarked.

She shrugged.

Then, without a word, she strode across to the writing-room, leaving the chums looking rather uncomfortable and apprehensive.

"Trouble in the Trevlyn camp, what?" Jemima murmured. "What's the feud between Clara and her nunky? He looked cross, methought."

Babs was staring towards the writing-room door, which had now closed behind the two.

"Oh, my goodness, I hope there's not going to be trouble!" she breathed.

A feeble hope, indeed. For at the moment Clara and her uncle—her aunt, fortunately, was out of the room, and Mr. White had gone—were facing each other with stubborn hostility.

Steely determination glittered in the man's eyes. Obstinate and red-cheeked mutiny glowed in the face of the Tomboy.

"You understand, Clara, I do not approve of this?"

"I understand."

"And yet you persist in going on with it?"

"Yes!"—defiantly.

His lips came together.

"Clara, have you no respect for your elders?"

"I have every respect for my elders." Clara told him, her eyes blazing. "I have every respect for you, Uncle

Ernest. But I also," she added, "have respect for my friends and a respect for my promises. Mrs. Wallace, whatever you may say about her, is my friend, and this is a promise I made to her. And I am going to carry it out! And— Oh, but uncle," she added, her voice dropping and suddenly a look of beseeching entreaty replacing the rebellion in her face, "why must we wrangle about it? After all—"

"That will do, Clara," he said stiffly. "Do not try to wheedle me into your way of thinking. If you must help the woman, why not let me give her a five pound note and have done with it?"

"Because," Clara said, "that wouldn't be the same. I'm sorry—" She paused, conscious that she had done her best. "Have you anything else to say, uncle?"

"Only that, in spite of all you have said, I still most emphatically disapprove."

Clara sighed wearily.

"Then, in that case," she said, "there isn't a lot of sense in arguing, because I'm just going on with it. If you're a Trevlyn, uncle, so am I. And, like you, I stick to my point of view. Good-bye!"

She turned towards the door. Her uncle glowered angrily as she passed through. But he did not attempt to detain her further. Perhaps he was mentally digesting that last thrust of hers: "If I am a Trevlyn—"

Red-faced, Clara rejoined her chums. Babs looked at her.

"Clara, is anything the matter?"

"No," Clara said gruffly.

"But your uncle—"

"Oh, blow my uncle!" Clara said crossly. "Come on, let's get these things put into their sacks. It will be tea-time in a few minutes, and we'll have to start directly after tea."

So into the sacks the things were bundled.

Christmas Comes Twice!



"GEE up, Clara, my old horse!" sang Jemima Carstairs cheerily. "Whoops there, Bessie! Mind the bumps!"

"Oh crumbs! Oh, rur-really!" Bessie Bunter gasped. "Dud-don't run like that, you know. If you bump me again, my valuable spectacles may fall off, you know, and they might get lost with all this snow about."

But the cheery chums from Cliff House were not worrying about Bessie's apprehensions. The chums indeed were thoroughly enjoying themselves.

For they were out in the snow now—a good three miles from Glengowrie Castle. Above them a golden moon shone, and the snow, catching and reflecting back its light, gave a brilliance that turned night into day.

Keen, cold, and freezing was the air, but all of them—except perhaps Bessie who, in her Santa Claus disguise, sat amid the piles of toys and decorations and goodies in the sled—were glowing with warmth.

Attached to that sled were two guide-ropes, and with six energetic girls pulling at the ropes, they were making really record progress, especially as the valley ran slightly downhill most of the way.

For the chums, of course, were on their way to Craig Farm.

It had been half-past six when they started out, but thanks to the swift, energetic run, it was only a quarter-past

seven when the lights of the cottage came in sight, and eager Toonie, who perhaps had scented their approach, came frisking up to them with glad barks.

"Here we are then," Leila Carroll chuckled, as they shot up to the cottage. "And, phew, do I feel warm! Out of that sled, Roly-polykins! And you'd better take off the old disguise, I reckon, in case Lisbeth and Bobbie see you. You'll want that for after they've gone to bed."

Bessie beamed. Though she was rather colder than the rest, she was in her element. Assisted by Babs she took off her disguise, storing it in the sled. At the same moment the door flew open.

Mrs. Wallace's face peered into the gloom.

"Och, good-evening, lassies!" she said. "My, what a lot of stuff ye ha' brought!" she cried, her eyes bright. "I saw ye coming, so I shut the bairns up in the kitchen. They're just wild with excitement, as it is."

Babs laughed.

"Well, we're here," she said. "And I don't know who'll get more fun out of this—us or Bobbie and Lisbeth. But half a ticklet," she said. "Bessie, don't take that sack inside. That holds the stuff for the kiddies' stockings, and we don't want them to see that yet. Mrs. Wallace—"

"We can put it in the brew-house, lassie," Mrs. Wallace said, opening the door of that building. "Ye can get it later. Now, let's bring the things inside."

"And while you get the supper ready," Mabs said, "we'll hang up the decorations and do the Christmas-tree. Let Bobbie and Lisbeth out now, though."

Oh, great fun, great fun! It was good to see the radiant happiness on Mrs. Wallace's face. She, poor woman, was so terribly grateful and excited that she could hardly speak when the sacks were emptied on the table. And Bobbie and little Lisbeth almost had a fit in their ecstatic delight.

While Toonie, scenting in the thrilled happiness of the atmosphere something to be really glad about, barked and frisked and worried his bone from one end of the room to the other.

"Now, get busy," Babs said. "Lisbeth, and you, Bobbie, you're going to help me dress the Christmas-tree. Bessie, will you give Mrs. Wallace a hand with the supper? You help, too, Jean. Clara, Jimmy, Leila, and Mabs, will you hang up the decorations? Now, Bobbie, don't blow that trumpet—yet. That's for the Christmas-tree, and remember it's not your Christmas Day until to-morrow. Now, scissors, please. Bobbie, up with that box, young man. Lisbeth, give me that string of fairy lamps."

"Oo—ooo—oo!" was all the quivering, eager little Lisbeth could say.

While Bobbie:

"I'll bet this is a better Christmas than Ronnie ever had," he said stoutly. "Ronnie didn't have a Christmas-tree like this. Isn't it a whopper?"

"A whopper it is," Babs laughed. "But wait till we've got it decorated and lighted up. Now, where are those scissors? Lisbeth, shall we put the fairy doll on top?"

"No; Lisbeth wants fairy doll," Lisbeth said. "Lisbeth like fairy doll."

"Well, to-morrow then," Babs laughed. "We'll take it off then, and you shall have it for keeps. Whoa! Toonie, you rascal, don't worry my shoes like that. It's the only pair I've got to walk home in."

And so the happy preparations began—and what fun it all was! And when it was done—

No. 21 of our delightful series for Your "Cliff House Album."

CLIFF HOUSE CELEBRITIES

IF a vote for the most unpopular prefects could be taken at Cliff House, you would probably find the result something like this: Sarah Harrigan, Connie Jackson, Rona Fox, Grace Stanforth Gregory, and Helen Hunter. But easily the most unpopular among these seniors would be Sarah Harrigan.

I wish I could find some nice things to say about Sarah. But except to tell you that she is really a superb character actress I find it difficult.

Short, thin, and angular in stature; sallow in complexion, with straight, dull-coloured hair, invariably parted in the middle, she is not even pleasant looking. Perhaps the old-fashioned pince-nez glasses she wears do not help her appearance.

A would-be tyrant, Sarah never fails to "come down heavily" even for the most trivial offences. Like Miss Bullivant, upon whom she most studiously models herself, she has a sour, embittered nature and is very prone to jump at conclusions—especially when those conclusions affect girls she can bully, which means all juniors.

Her sourness is probably due to the fact that while Sarah has expensive tastes she has very little money—a fact which has often plunged her up to her ears in secret debt and, in consequence, a continual fear of being found out. Her bitterness is probably due to the fact that, while she is the oldest girl in the school (18 years and 9 months), she has not yet succeeded in becoming its captain. Perhaps it is this reason that Sarah regards Dulcia Fairbrother as her worst enemy.

But though Sarah is such a strict martinet where other girls' discipline is concerned, she is by no means above breaking the rules when it suits her own purpose. Always in need of money, she is rather liable to toady to the wealthier girls of the school, and is not above accepting "bribes" as a reward for cancelling punishments.

She is not good at games; hates all forms of exercise, but is really passionately fond of maths. Her great ambition, she declares, is to take her mathematical degree when she leaves Cliff House so that, like Miss Bullivant,



Sarah Harrigan

she can carve her future career as a specialist in that subject. (Secretly Sarah would like to be a great actress like Sarah Bernhardt, but even she realises that her looks and disposition are against this.)

Naturally fond of the stage, Sarah has many theatrical favourites, though she pretends to despise the screen. Apart from her maths and her theatricals, she has no other hobbies. Her favourite colour is yellow; her favourite authors Shakespeare and Bernard Shaw; her favourite flower the marigold, and her favourite holiday centre, London.

She was born in Birmingham, where she still lives, her father owning a small business in that city. She has an elder brother Ronald, as different from Sarah as Miss Bullivant from Miss Charmant. Strangely enough, Sarah is frightfully fond of him. But perhaps she ought to be, for it is Ronald Harrigan who pays her fees at Cliff House!



What a transformation the neat little living-room of the cottage presented!

Garlands of ribbons and tartan hung from the rafters. Holly and mistletoe decorated the pictures. Gaily coloured lanterns were suspended from the beams, and the Christmas-tree, a blaze of lights and illuminated toys, glowed like a fairy forest in the little bay window.

Meantime, Mrs. Wallace, Bessie, and Jean, busy as bees, had laid the table and prepared the food.

"And now—supper!" Clara cried. "Where's that Glengowrie home-made wine, Babs? Fill up the glasses and let's drink a toast before we start. And here's the toast," Clara beamed. "To Lisbeth and Bobbie Wallace's Christmas."

"Hear, hear."

With enthusiasm that toast was drunk. With cheery chatter they all sat down to the meal. At the head of the table Mrs. Wallace, with a funny little contraction of the lips and eyes that were rather moist, was trying to smile.

Under the table Toonie worried and growled over a juicy venison bone which Jemima had thoughtfully included in the treat, though he seemed rather annoyed by the bow of ribbon Bessie had tied round his neck.

Bobbie and Lisbeth were so excited that they could hardly speak, never mind eat.

Fast and furious the fun began.

Crackers had been included—the big crackers of which the laird had ordered such huge quantities and which contained toys, jewellery, and fancy paper hats.

What gurgles as they cracked them together—what barks from Toonie as each went off bang, showering its contents over table and floor. Each of them had a paper cap and each gaily wore it.

"Ooo, lovely C'istmas!" Lisbeth sighed. "Lovely. Did Santa C'aus send it all?"

"Just all," Jemima beamed. "Topping old Spartan our Santa Claus, what?"

"I like him," Lisbeth said.

"And Santa Claus is coming to see you to-night, you know," Bessie said. "Nice Santa Claus bring you ever such a lot of presents. Santa Claus is up the chimney now, waiting for you to go to bed, you know. You listen. Santa Claus—Santa Claus!" she cried.

"Yes, Miss Bunter, I'm here," came a muffled voice from the chimney.

"Have you got a nice lot of toys for Lisbeth and Bobbie?"

"Yes, rather. Miss Bunter, I've got the best and biggest lot of toys I've given to any children this Christmas."

"Ooo!" gurgled Lisbeth, and stared in awe, while Bobbie's eyes almost popped out of his head, and Mrs. Wallace blinked in bewilderment. But the chums chuckled. There were times



when they appreciated Bessie Bunter's wonderful gift of ventriloquism.

And after that, of course, Bobbie and Lisbeth were anxious to get to bed—with a most astonishing eagerness, considering, as their mother said, what a job it was to get the bairns off on any other night.

So off to bed they were then packed, with Bessie helping Mrs. Wallace to undress Lisbeth. Then, when that was done, Babs cried:

"What about doing the washing-up, kidlets?"

"Och, but I couldn't think——" Mrs. Wallace protested.

But in that she was immediately overruled. Eagerly the chums pounced upon the table. While Mrs. Wallace carefully stored the remaining good things away, Babs & Co. carried the dishes into the kitchen. There they heated the water, and while Mabs and Clara helped the farmer's wife to tidy up, the washing-up was completed. By that time it was nine o'clock.

"Time for Santa Claus, I guess," Leila chuckled. "Come on, Roly-polykins, present yourself before the make-up committee. Somebody go and grab the disguise."

Clara it was who went into the brew-house to grab the disguise. With great glee they all started dressing the eager Bessie.

With great care they fastened on her whiskers, draped her red cloak about her. Then Leila hoisted the sack of toys on her shoulders.

"Arty, what?" Jemima murmured. "Just like Old Moore in his grandmother's red flannel nightie, what? Still, off you go, Bessie, and mind you don't trip over the whiskers as you roll up the stairs."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You're jealous!" Bessie sniffed.

She hoisted the sack upon her shoulders. Towards the door she strode. The chums, grinning, followed her, anxious not to miss any fun that might be going. On tiptoe Bessie ascended the stairs, groping her way in the dark.

There came a sudden smothered "Ow!" of agony.

"Now what's the matter, chump?" Clara hissed.

"Nun-nothing. I stubbed my beastly toe on the stairs," Bessie said. "I sus-say, which is the door?"

"On your right, duffer!" Leila said.

"Oh, really, Leila——"

"Shush!"

Bessie drew a deep breath. For a moment she stood listening. Then softly she opened the door.

While the chums stood peering in at the doorway, Bessie heaved the sack off her back, setting up a smothered howl of agony as it thudded down on to her foot.

In the old-fashioned iron bed, side by side, Lisbeth and Bobbie slept with suspicious silence.

Bessie beamed as she opened her sack. Working in the moonlight, she took the stockings the kiddies had hung up, filled them, and then arranged a series of toys round the foot of the bed.

Putting a warning finger to her lips, she caught up the sack and tiptoed back towards the door. And then suddenly she gave a gasp.

"Wow! Sus-somebody's pulling me back——"

"Silly! It's your whiskers! They're caught on the knob of the bed," Babs hissed.

Bessie glared as she went back, un-

fastening the whiskers. In doing so she dropped the sack, and in groping for it lost her spectacles. The chums giggled.

"Oh, my hat, what a Santa Claus!" Clara whispered.

"Look here, I've lu-lost my valuable spectacles——"

"Shush!"

"Well, how can I shush when I can't see? I mum-mean—— Oh crumbs!"

Bessie said unhappily, as she bumped her head against the bottom of the bed and sent a toy train clattering on to the floor. "Oh crumbs! Are they awake, Babs?"

"Well, I guess it's not your fault if they aren't," Leila said. "Awake, Bobbie?"

"Oh, no!" came the ingenuous answer from Bobbie.

"Well, thuth-thank goodness for that!" Bessie said. "Oh dud-dear! Here are my spectacles. Shush, now, everybody!" She ambled to the door. "Nun-not a sound, girls," she added thrillingly. "Won't it be a lovely surprise for them when they wake up? Go quietly down the stairs."

And solemnly the choking chums followed her down the stairs, stifling their merriment until they should reach the kitchen again. But that merriment, alas! was destined never to be realised. For when they reached there——

There was Mrs. Wallace biting her lips. And there in the doorway, looking grim and forbidding, were two men. One was James White; the other——

"I think," Mr. Ernest Trevlyn said freezingly, "this nonsense has gone far enough, Clara! I have told you before that I utterly disapprove of your association with this woman, and it is obvious that it is this association which is leading you to defy me and at the same time to insult my friend here. As you will not listen to reason, I regard it my duty to enforce my authority. I have a carriage outside! I order you to come home at once, Clara."

Clara's face turned deathly white.

"And if I refuse?" she asked.

"I shall consider it my duty to take you—by force, if necessary."

Clara's hands clenched. But it was Mrs. Wallace who intervened then. She came forward.

"Please, Miss Clara," she said, "the gentleman's ye'r uncle, and he's entitled to look after ye. I'd just hate that you and your friends should get into trouble because of me. Please do as he asks."

"But I'm bothered——"

"No, Clara, please," Babs pleaded. For even though she felt nettled at this high-handed treatment of her chum, she saw very plainly what the upshot was likely to be if the two stubborn Trevlyns forced each other's hands. "We—we've finished, anyway," she said. "There's nothing else we can do. And we'll all come. Besides," she added in a whispered aside, "we shall only upset Mrs. Wallace."

Clara paused at that. Humiliating indeed it was for her to give in. But if she was in earnest it was obvious that her uncle was in earnest, too. She bit her lip.

"All right," she said, "we'll go."

And rather crestfallen and very anxious they went, Mr. Trevlyn leading the way outside. But James White did not go with them; he stopped behind. Harshly he faced the trembling Mrs. Wallace.

"You see," he said, "I do not boast in vain, Mrs. Wallace. I think," he added sneeringly, "that I can promise

you that will be the last you will see of your friends. And take warning, Mrs. Wallace, that the whole countryside does not turn against you as they have done."

Mrs. Wallace sobbed.

"Ay, but ye're a hard man, Mr. White."

"Hard? Maybe. But only when I want what I want. Give me my wish, Mrs. Wallace, and you shall see how generous I can be. Listen, now, for the last time! You would like those girls to come again, wouldn't you? You would like to feel that in a day or two your husband would be here to join you—instead, as might happen if I do not withdraw the charge, of his being sent to prison for a year or two perhaps?"

Mrs. Wallace gave a groan.

"Oh, please, please!"

"And all you have to do to be happy again is to sign this paper," the man added. "You sell the farm, true. But what good is it to you in your present condition? Will you sign?"

"I—I can't. I can't," the woman gasped. "Mr. White——"

"All right." He straightened up. "Well, never mind. I won't be hard. I'll give you a few more hours to think it over. To-morrow morning I shall call again. Then you will have your last—your very last—opportunity. If you don't sign then, Mrs. Wallace, I shall not come again. Understand that? Good-night!"

But Mrs. Wallace did not echo the words. She sat there, apron to her eyes, staring in heavy, heart-broken hopelessness at the door as it closed upon her persecutor.

Clara Leaves!



"I'M not going to stand it!"

"But, Clara——"

"I tell you," Clara

obstinately repeated, "I'm

not going to stand it! My uncle is being fooled, playing that man White's game for him. White's just an outsize in rotters—and uncle can't see it."

"But, Clara—— Oh, my hat, look here, you'll spoil everything!" Babs cried. "You can't keep quarrelling with him. Besides, it might not be so bad now the laird's come back."

But Clara rather tempestuously turned away. The time was the next morning—the hour, half-past seven. A dreadful morning, in all truth, and strangely at one with the tempestuousness which filled Clara now. For outside it was still pitch dark. Outside a terrible blizzard was raging, seeming to grow worse with every minute that passed.

It had not been a happy night for Clara. It had not been a very happy one for the chums. For, arriving back at the castle last night there had been a violent scene between Clara and her Uncle Ernest and her Aunt Phoebe—a scene which ended in Mr. Trevlyn phoning for the laird.

Stubbornly mutinous, bitterly resenting interference with her own liberty of action, but still more bitterly raving against the unfair slurs cast upon the name of Mrs. Wallace, Clara was aflame with mutiny.

"Clara," Babs pleaded again. "Clara—oh, you chump! Clara, you can't do any good by going off the deep end! We're all on your side, chumplet. Let's all go and see the laird. Let's put it to him. Let's——" And then Babs stared round, as there came a tap at the

door, and Mrs. McNab, the laird's housekeeper, came in. "Yes?" she asked.

"Is Miss Trevlyn here?" Mrs. MacNab asked. "If she is, it's the laird who would like to be seeing her."

"Thanks," Clara said. "That's just what I want, too!"

"Clara, do be careful—" Babs anxiously began.

But Clara, without a word, strode out of the room.

Straight to Mr. Glengowrie's study she went, and pushed open the door when its owner's deep voice bade her "come in." The laird was there, looking worried and perplexed. So, looking rather grim and angry, was her Uncle Ernest.

"Och, Clara, sit down, lassie. I've just been hearing things which have rather surprised me—and, if I may say so, hurt me."

Clara stiffened.

"My uncle has told you?" she asked.

"Yes."

"But he hasn't told you," Clara said scornfully, "the real truth! He doesn't know it. He hasn't told you that Mr. White is just using him for his own rotten ends!"

"Clara!" the laird cried.

"Well, it's true," Clara said. Never tactful, she always had to say what was in her mind. "Mr. White wants to starve Mrs. Wallace into submission. He was jolly nearly on the point of doing it when we came along—"

"But, Clara," the laird protested, "you realise her husband is a thief?"

"I don't realise it. I've only heard it," Clara said, "and I don't believe it, anyway!"

The laird paused. Her uncle shot her an angry glance.

"Will you listen to Mr. Glengowrie?" he asked. "Now, Clara, be sensible. There is no need to keep this quarrel open; after all, we're only trying to advise you for your own good. You must realise that you're creating a very unhappy atmosphere in the castle."

Clara stiffened.

"In that case," she said angrily, "I'll get out of the castle."

"Clara, no!" The laird sat up sharply. "Dear me, what a fiery-tempered girl you are! Listen to me, now. I know nothing of this case except what your uncle has told me. But I'm trying to find a way of making peace between you and him. Your uncle is willing to let bygones be bygones—"

Clara paused.

"Well, so am I—"

"On condition," the laird said, "that you promise not to see this Mrs. Wallace any more. An' I'm sure—"

"Then thanks!" Clara retorted. "I'm sorry. I don't want to be churlish, but that's a condition I can't and won't accept. My own father wouldn't make it, and I don't see why my uncle should make it! Good-morning!"

She went out of the room. Tempestuously she strode towards the stairs. And then suddenly she paused, remembering the unhappy look of the laird as she went out, reflecting, after all, that he had really heard very little of the case, and reproaching herself all at once for behaving at that interview like a bull in a china-shop.

She stopped a moment, biting her lip. Well, dash it all, she hadn't given the laird a great chance to say much at all. Acting on sudden impulse she turned back.

And then, raising her hand to knock at the door, she paused as the laird's voice came to her.

"Ay, it's a great mess," he was saying wearily. "I'm sorry such trouble should

ha' come. All the same, Ernest, the girl is my guest, and I just can't go on risking upsetting her. Perhaps," he added thoughtfully, "the only solution to the matter is that she should go—"

The door, fanned by the draught, blew to.

But for a moment Clara stood in thunderstruck, incredulous bewilderment. She felt her face turn white. That—from the laird! The solution to the matter was that she should go—eh?

He, fancying she was disturbing his house party, now wanted her out of the way!

Clara's eyes flamed then. That stiff, stubborn Trevlyn pride so strongly ingrained in all her family, flared up afresh. Well, she wasn't the one to

From upstairs came Babs' voice:

"Clara, Clara! I say, Clara—"

Clara, rising, flew to the cloak-room.

Fierce and determined was her face as she slipped on her things, turning her coat collar above her ears. She looked towards the window, and for the first time became conscious of the storm. Black as night it was outside, with the wind howling like a thousand demons, and half-frozen snow pattering on the glass. Well, she didn't care.

"Clara—Clara!" It was Babs' voice in the hall.

Clara set her teeth. She couldn't go back that way. But there was the window. Fiercely she strode towards it and unfastened it. It blew open with such violence that she was almost hurled



"MRS. WALLACE signed," said the man, and mockingly exhibited the envelope. "Here's the document which gives me possession of her farm." Clara's face whitened. So the bully had won, after all! Impulsively she leapt forward.

remain where she wasn't wanted. If the laird would like her out of the way, she'd jolly well see that she put herself out of the way.

By this time to-night she'd be on the road to her own home. First, however, she would go and see Mrs. Wallace and little Bobbie and Lisbeth—for, after all, wasn't this the Christmas Day she had created for them?

And then there was Babs & Co—but, wait a minute. She daren't see them before she went. If she did, they'd do their utmost to dissuade her, and to leave Glengowrie now was the one fixed, dominant idea in the Tomboy's mind.

Fortunately, she had money in her pocket. Fortunately, too, the cloak-room was on the ground floor, and her outdoor things were hanging in it.

In quivering anger she sat herself at the writing-table. There hastily she wrote out a note.

back; but she braced herself, and, hiding her head against the biting fury of the blast, clambered outside. Both hands and all her strength she had to use to force the window into position again.

Then fiercely she strode on, the snow stinging her face, and the wind blowing with such terrific force that she was forced to lean her body upon it to make any movement at all.

Lost in the Blizzard!



"BUT Clara must be somewhere!" Barbara Redfern worriedly cried.

"She must! The servants say that the main doors haven't been opened this morning!"

"Then," Leila demanded, "where?"

That was the problem. The chums gazed at each other blankly.

It was after breakfast at Glengowrie Castle. Upstairs, downstairs, the chums had hunted. But since Clara Trevlyn had left the laird of Glengowrie and her uncle an hour and a half ago she seemed to have vanished into thin air.

Outside it was still dark, though by this time broad daylight should have been reigning. Outside, wind-driven snow and hailstones pelted. Already there was a new six-inch layer of snow upon the mountain surfaces, and the gale, instead of showing signs of abating, seemed to be increasing with every fresh gust that blew.

It had not occurred to anyone yet that Clara might have gone out. With such a terrific gale raging such a notion would have seemed preposterous.

"Mystery, what?" Jemima murmured, and her brow corrugated as she polished her monocle. "Either Clara has turned into a ghost, or— But whoa!" she added quickly, and looked towards the writing-table. "I thought mine eyes spotted something! Look at this!"

"What?"

"A message!"

"From Clara?"

"A message from Clara," Jemima nodded, her usually imperturbable face suddenly serious. "Let me read it out. It's to Babs.

"Dear Babs,—I'm sorry I can't stop to say good-bye, but I know if I did you duffers would only try to stop me doing what I am going to do. I heard just now that the laird would feel more comfortable if I went, so I'm off. Will write you again when I get home. Hope you all have a good time.

"CLARA."

"Oh, my hat!" Babs breathed. "But she can't have gone—not in this storm. Just look at it! Listen to it!"

"Well, there's the note," Jemima observed. "I've never yet known Clara to write or say what she didn't mean. In any case," Jemima added, "we'll soon put an end to the mystery. Even old Spartan Clara wouldn't have fired off without her hat and coat. Go and look in the cloak-room, Jean."

Jean went. She came back, a rather startled look on her face.

"Her hat and coat have gone," she said, "and one of the windows was unfastened."

"Aha!" Jemima said profoundly. "Then there you have it, troops! But whoost!" she added quickly. "Here comes the laird."

The laird it was. He was looking rather worried.

"Any news of Clara, Jean?"

"Well," Jean hesitated, "yes. Clara's gone. She—she left a note. She says—" And she paused, a little pink. And then, taking the note from Jemima's hand, handed it to him.

The laird read it like a man dazed.

"But this!" he cried. "Och, what's the girl talking about? I never told her to go—never hinted at such a thing."

Babs stared.

"Well, Clara wouldn't have said so unless she had reason," she said.

"But I never gave her reason!" the laird cried. "Nothing was farther from—" And then he stopped. "But hist," he said suddenly, "perhaps this explains it. I thought I heard, when the door banged, a movement outside. She must have come back—"

"Come back, uncle?" Jean said.

"Ay! I was talking to her uncle. We were discussing the matter, you see. Truth to tell," the laird said uncom-

fortably, "I'm not feeling too sure of myself where this matter is concerned. I know White, of course. He's always struck me as being a decent sort of fellow even if he is liable to be a wee bit hard at times. I couldn't altogether believe what Clara said of him, but at the same time I was sore puzzled as to why Clara should have taken up such an attitude if she knew she was in the wrong.

"Well, I was talking it over with her uncle, and I did say, just as that door closed, about Clara going—not from the castle, mark you, but going to see Mrs. Wallace, with me and her uncle for company. You don't think, mayhap—"

But the chums were looking at each other. They did think. Knowing that tempestuously hurt mood of the Tom-boy's, knowing her headstrong, impulsive, fly-off-at-a-tangent temperament, they could all guess then what had happened.

"Och, but I'm sorry!" the laird said. He looked extremely distressed. "If I'd thought for one moment the lass could have interpreted my remarks like that I'd have bitten out my tongue. And to think of her being out in this gale!" he cried, and turned a shade paler. "Wherefore would she be making?"

"Well, the railway station, I guess," Leila replied.

"But the station's miles away!" the laird exclaimed. "The lass could never make it. She'd never find her way in a storm like this. More like she'll lose herself and get buried in the snow." He stared at their suddenly pale and startled faces. "Och, that a thing like this could have happened!" he groaned. "The pair silly bairn! Still, mayhap she hasn't gone far. There may be time to bring her back yet. And as it was me who upset her, it shall be me who'll go to find her."

"You mean," Jean breathed, "you're going out into the storm?"

"What else, lass?"

"In that case," Jean said resolutely, and looked for confirmation at her chums, "we're coming with you, uncle. Because," she added, "we're her chums, and if anything ever happened to the old duffer—"

She did not finish. She was afraid to. But the chums read very well the unspoken thought in her mind, and gravely nodded.

There was a dread in all their hearts.

"OH, MY HAT!" gasped Clara. "Where am I?"

She paused, leaning against the fierce wind. Round her was darkness, broken only by the snowflakes which hissed at her, stinging her face.

For two hours, battling and staggering, she had fought the gale, sure at any moment that she would see the welcoming lights of Craig Farm ahead.

But darkness surrounded her—darkness and the smother of one of the worst blizzards the Highlands had ever known.

A less stout-hearted girl than Clara Trevlyn might have given that long and hopeless fight up long ago. She was tired, stiff, every muscle in her body ached, every joint seemed to be numb and frozen.

Alone in this shrieking world, with not the haziest idea of which was north and which was south, it would have been easy to surrender to that dreadful weariness which was now upon her, and sink into the soft, yielding snow, and there fall peacefully asleep.

And then—

Clara braced herself. No, no; that was not the Trevlyn way. She must keep on—on—on!

Deep and soft the snow lay beneath her, and before her, making every step a plunge up to her knees, making her whole, weary body ache with the effort of dragging it out again.

Clara fought on, dully, resignedly. She felt sometimes that she was descending, sometimes ascending. She didn't know.

Her mind was buzzing, catapulted into chaotic confusion by the hammering gale. But still at the back of it was that frenzied desire to get away from Glengowrie, still that determination, shaken, but by no means uprooted, to see Mrs. Wallace before she went elsewhere.

Dully she wondered what Babs & Co. were doing. Dully she wondered how her uncle had received the news of her flight, and—

Wait—what was that?

Breathless, Clara stood knee-deep in the snow. And then, like a ray, hope pierced her heart. Before her she saw a light—a light which glowed like some small meteor in the storm-ridden darkness.

Clara staggered towards it. Then suddenly, gratefully, she became aware that while the gale still screamed, she was screened from its full blast, and, looking round in bewilderment, discovered then what had happened, and felt a fresh glow of gladness in her heart.

For she guessed now what she had only suspected before. She must be on one of the high mountain ledges of Ben Renoch—those same ledges where yesterday Jemima had discovered her cave, and she and her chums, for the first time, had met Toonie, the sheep-dog.

The sudden warmth she felt to her left was the wall of the mountain here breaking the force of the gale against her.

"Hi!" she croaked.

The light glowed steadily. Quickly now, for the snow here was not so deep, Clara stumbled towards it. Now she saw plainly—yes, a torch, held in the hand of a man, whose coated figure was blackly silhouetted against the snow. The torchlight was blazing on an envelope.

Some sound must have attracted his attention. Suddenly he turned. Clara gasped as the beam of the torch was flooded in her face.

Then—

"Great Scott—Clara!" the man cried.

It was James White!

"You!" Clara exclaimed. She reeled against the mountain wall. Exhausted as she was, she felt the old flame of resentment for this man burn up within her. "What are you doing—here?"

White laughed.

"Same as you, I reckon!" he cried against the howl of the blizzard. "Sheltering from the storm. Like a fool, I thought I could find a shorter cut back to my home along the mountain ridges. In any case, the valley is piled high with drifts. Still, I'm surprised to see you," he added, and the old sneer curled on his lips. "Going to find Mrs. Wallace?"

"Yes!" Clara gasped.

"Must be fond of her," the man commented, and pocketed his torch. "Still, it's all right now. You can go to her. My turn is served, I guess. I

bear neither you nor her malice any longer."

Clara started.
"You mean—"

"I mean," the man said softly, and mockingly exhibited the envelope in his hand. "I've got what I wanted. Mrs. Wallace signed! Here's the document which gives me full and complete possession of her farm." Then: "You fool! You fool!" he suddenly shrieked. "What are you doing?"

Clara herself could not have answered that question then. What Clara did was done purely upon impulse, but a sudden feverish rush of rage seemed to flow through her

She saw before her only the mocking, hateful face of this callous bully. That thing which Mrs. Wallace had been so afraid of doing, he had forced her to do! While her husband languished in gaol, this rotter had tricked out of her his farm—his everything!

Just blind instinct caused Clara to make a grab at that envelope. But as she grabbed the man started back, whipping the envelope into his pocket. Clara's fingers never even touched it.

He, like she, had forgotten the extreme peril of the position to which they were exposed; had forgotten that just behind him was the lip of the ledge with a ten-foot drop to the next.

Too hastily he jumped back.

A yell, which haunted Clara's dreams for many nights, rang in her ears. Then she heard a thud.

Shivering, sick with dread, she peered over the edge.

James White lay in the snow like a man dead, a dark stain trickling from a wound in his head.

Toonie to the Rescue!



HALF an hour later—
"Mr. White!"
Clara Trevlyn muttered. "Mr. White!"
"Mr. White!" and shook him and pinched his face.

"Mr. White—please! For goodness' sake, wake up!" she cried agitatedly.

The reflected glow from the torch she held showed her face, white and worried. It showed the rocky walls of the tiny cave which Jean yesterday had promised Jemima they should explore—that cave into which, after goodness knows how much of an effort, she had managed to drag White to protect him from the storm.

There was no resentment in her face now. No anger. Just great compassion and whole-hearted pity.

For she knew that his collar-bone was broken. With her handkerchief she had wiped the blood from the wound in his temple, and used her handbag to make a rough rest for the shoulder which was injured.

No longer was James White her enemy. No longer, helpless as he was, could she feel any anger towards him. If the Trevlyns were fierce in their fury, they were compassionate in their pity, and James White, to Clara, appeared to be dying.

But now his eyes opened. They fastened upon her with a wondering stare.

"Clara—" he muttered.

"Oh, thank goodness!" Clara breathed. "Mr. White, how do you feel?"

"But where am I?"

"In a cave."

"How did I come here?"

"I dragged you here. But shush, your collar-bone's broken, I think! If

only," Clara said, "I could get help! Why do you stare at me like that?"

"You—you dragged me here?" he muttered incredulously. "You?" He stared at her in an almost awed way.

"How long have we been here?"

"I don't know. Over an hour, I should think."

"But you—you are shivering." He looked down at himself. "You have put your coat on me."

"Yes, I had to. I—I was afraid," Clara mumbled, and hugged herself.

"But that's all right," she said bravely, though her teeth chattered as she said it. "If only I could get help—"

He regarded her grimly.

"That, I am afraid, will be impossible," he said. "It would be madness to venture out in this gale. The snow must be yards high by now, and you'd never, never get back. On the other hand," he added slowly, "we may both rest here and freeze to death. I've known these sort of storms in the mountains to last for days on end. Clara, take your coat."

"No!" Clara cried.

"Funny," he muttered, staring at her, "how we met. Funny that you who were against me should turn out to be my rescuer." He winced in pain as he moved. "Funny the world we live in, that you—"

His hazy voice trailed off.

Clara rose. She went to the opening of the cave. Blackness—a blackness in which the wind screamed and frozen snowflakes flurried and scurried. She returned again.

whose hot tongue was caressing her cheek!

"WHAT'S THE time, Babs?"

"Two o'clock!"

"Oh!"

And Jean Cartwright, who had asked that question, closed her lips, fighting on with the desperation of utter exhaustion.

The Cliff House party was returning from Glengowrie Station.

Seven hours that journey had taken so far, and even now they must be some four miles from the castle.

Fortunate it was for them that the old laird knew so well the countryside. Even in these dreadful conditions his steps never faltered. But it was heavy going, with every step a weary agony, every breath a painful effort.

And the worst, the most anxious, heartbreaking, and despairing fact was that, despite all their efforts, they had discovered no trace of their chum Clara.

It was that more than their own exhaustion which was weighing upon all their minds as they struggled on, until Babs abruptly stopped and cried:

"Listen!"

They listened. In a brief lull in the storm they all heard the sound plainly.

Wuff, wuff, wuff!

"Only a dog!" panted Leila. "Come on!"

"But listen! We know that bark. It's Toonie's!"

"No!"

Tense they stood then. But the bark came again. As one their torches flashed



The EDITOR and STAFF of The SCHOOLGIRL, and all the AUTHORS and ARTISTS, wish you—

The HAPPIEST of NEW YEARS!

Shivering, she sat herself beside her patient. There was a long, long silence.

Then:

"Clara," he said again, so faintly that Clara's heart leapt.

"Yes?"

"Take your coat," he begged. "Take it. I'm cold with it on. I couldn't be much colder without it, and—and— Clara, it's silly that both of us should perish," he added slowly. "It's silly that—"

"Mr. White!" Clara almost screamed.

There was no reply.

"Mr. White!" And, fearfully trembling, she groped for the torch. She was shivering so much that for a few moments she could not find the switch. Tremblingly she put it on, her heart seeming to stop altogether as she saw the white, ice-cold face beneath her.

"Oh—"

He shifted a little.

"Save yourself," he said feebly.

"Save yourself. I'm not worth it all, Clara. I—" And his eyes closed; his head sank.

Clara, trembling, rose to her feet.

And then started.

For in that moment the wind dropped, and from far away it seemed came a sound. The barking of a dog!

"Toonie!" she cried joyfully.

"Toonie—Toonie!"

She staggered towards the mouth of the cave, and then everything seemed to go black. Limply she collapsed.

out. The driving snow flurried in the beams like puffs of cottonwool.

Then:

"Look!" cried Babs. "It is Toonie!"

Toonie it was, running towards them. Toonie with his red tongue hanging out, his fur smothered in snow. He gave an eager whine as he saw Babs.

"Gee, look!" cried Leila. "He's got something tied to his collar."

Babs stooped, calling the dog. Something was hanging from his collar—a damp, bedraggled something which was a handkerchief.

Babs unknotted it and smoothed it out. Then she jumped.

And they all stared as they saw the name embroidered in one corner. "C. Trevlyn!"

"Clara!" Jemima breathed. "Clara! Clara did this—to tell us where she is. Toonie knows that. Toonie wants to lead us back to her. Oh whoops! March to the rescue, troops!" Jemima called, her spirits, like the spirits of the rest of the party, soaring. "And my Spartan, Toonie, if you lead us to our one and only Clara, I—I'll buy you an elephant bone!"

"I'll say!" Leila breathed.

And with Toonie excitedly gambling before them they changed their direction. An hour later they had reached the ledge. Excitedly Toonie ran along it towards the cave, and Babs, flashing her torch into its interior, gave a startled, sobbing cry.

For there, stretched out, blue and

(Concluded on page 16.)

OUT OF SCHOOL HOURS



You do look on *PATRICIA* as your very own friend, don't you? Here is another chummy letter from her, filled with Christmas doings and chatter that you'll all love to read.

A BRIGHT and Happy New Year to you all, my nice schoolgirls!

Isn't it a shame the way Christmas so suddenly disappears? One day we're rushing and flurrying, frightened it will be on us before all our preparations are made—the next, it's all over, and even school doesn't seem so far away.

What sort of presents did you all have? Just what you had been longing for, I hope.

I had some lovely presents, thank you. Mother gave me a perfectly sweet party (or evening) handbag, in white silk, decorated with multi-coloured beads. Father gave me a gold chain bracelet that clatters and clanks on my wrist most excitingly.

Big brother presented me with a table lamp for my very own room—bless him! Small brother Heatherington (Heath for short) gave me a typewriting rubber and a bundle of pencils!

My rather wealthy friend, Esme, gave me the most fragile set of adorable undies—extravagant person!—and how I love them!

● Lovely Presents

Small brother Heath was absolutely enchanted when I popped into his room on Christmas morning, wished him a "Merry Christmas" with a kiss, and presented him with his present from sister Patricia.

His boat and Red Indian outfit, sweets, oranges, and new penny were all forgotten as he glimpsed the furry bundle.

"Oh—kit-ten!" he said faintly, and held out his chubby arms for it.

The kitten behaved adorably. It looked at Heath, opened its tiny mouth, and showed a dear little pink tongue—but no sound came.

"What's its name, Pat? And is he mine?" Heath asked.

"Yes, he's yours, but I haven't thought of a name," I said. "I thought we'd choose one together."

Heath stroked the silky fur and gazed at the kitten in wonder—who promptly opened its small mouth again soundlessly. "Quick, Pat! He's thirsty, my kitten is!" Heath said urgently. "He wants a drink—a drink of milk! Oh, silly—I mean drink of milk!"

So he scrambled out of bed and off we rushed to wish our r'Olive a Happy Christmas in the kitchen and introduce the new pet.

● A Well-loved Pet!

After all, the kitten's name is to be Minkie. Heath's mistake with words (making "milk" rhyme with "drink" started it, and mother decided it).

She said the kitten's fur was so soft it reminded her of mink. (At which father looked up rather suspiciously, wondering if mother was going to bring up the subject of a mink coat again—as she does every Christmas!)

So now we have a happy, cuddlesome bundle of kittenhood in the family. A pet we all love—particularly Heath.

I know he loves all animals already. But that's easy enough! What I want him to do is to learn to understand them. That is the greater gift—as I am sure you who have pets of your own will agree.

● Holiday Happenings

Like a good many of you, we spent Christmas Day at home. There was a walk in the morning, after all the present-opening, and then a dash back to see what the postman had brought.

Then came the giant Christmas dinner and lots of goodies and crackers. Olive, our maid, went to her home then, so we all helped with the washing up—and enjoyed it!

Lots of the relations came for tea, and after that we had the Christmas tree.

Father dressed up as Father Christmas and all the relations (as well as us, the family) had little presents. Then there were games, with Bridge for those who preferred it, until supper.

Heath and Minkie went to bed then—Minkie with his Christmas present round his neck—a tiny red collar.

● A Panto Party

On Boxing Day Heath went to a party at the house next door, and father took mother, Brian, and the daughter of the house—your Patricia—out to dinner and dance. That was gorgeous.

To-morrow is Heath's own Christmas party. He's received so many invitations this year, mother said he simply must have a party of his own.

It was father's brain-wave that I should take Heath and six small people to the panto. So we're going to see "Cinderella." (I've a horrible idea I shall enjoy it as much as they will!)

Then we're going home to a bumper tea, when more small people will arrive, and have games and bran tub in the real party mood.

● Pretty Party Bag

If you're off to either parties or pantomimes during the holidays, the little bag in the picture here is just the thing to accompany you.

You can make it in a very few minutes. Cut two circles of silk material and join

them nearly all the way round (on the inside, of course). Make a handle of ribbon, which fastens at the sides with bows to give a basket effect.

Then cut the little flowers—it's quite easy—from other scraps of silk and sew these at the top of the bag to hide the opening. It'll look just like a basket of flowers then (you can sew artificial flowers there, if you like), and will hold hankie, mirror, comb, and pennies.

Important Pets

I wonder how many of you keep pet mice?

We haven't any at home, but I have always enjoyed seeing other people's pet mice—and am especially pleased when they have nice homes.

In London there was a show of mice a little while ago—and do you know, that the very, very best mice were not pink, or green, or purple—but pale yellow in colour.

You would think, wouldn't you, that cheese would be a real luxury for pet mice, since their humbler brothers are so fond of it!

But experts say that mice should not be given cheese—not even for a treat, so

you must remember this, all you mice-owners. It gives them skin trouble.

Mice simply love bread-and-milk and oats, though, in case you're thinking of a change of diet for them.

Another treat for the Mouse family is to give them exercise. I know some "homes" have a revolving wheel inside for this purpose, but personally, I'm not fond of these.

I think it is much kinder to let the mice out on to a table covered in newspaper for a few minutes every day. (Don't let them fall on the floor, will you?) When you see how they enjoy this scamper, you'll soon realise that it is well worth the little extra trouble.

You'll be wearing all your frocks and out-of-school clothes during the holidays, I expect—and probably have several shocks to realise how you're growing!

If a favourite skirt is a little on the short side, it can be lengthened very easily and prettily simply by sewing some matching, or contrasting, braid all round the bottom.

A belt to match at the waist and a little bow of the braid worn at the neck of your blouse or jumper will quite take away any "lengthened" look.

Happy holidays to you all!

Your friend,

Patricia



NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS



Here are several resolutions *PATRICIA* has planned—for Home, for School, and for Good Looks. Of course, you won't want to make ALL of them, but there are sure to be one or two that will help you to plan your "I Resolve" for this year of 1938.

FOR HOME

—TO get up the very first time mother calls me in the morning and not to turn over for that last-minute snooze.

—TO clean my school shoes every single morning—so that they'll look their best, and wear longer.

—TO have a smiling "good-morning" for the family as soon as I come downstairs—for the nearest and dearest do appreciate a bright start to the day, I am sure.

—TO set the table for mother and help wash-up at week-ends without a single pout. (Incidentally, it's much easier that way!)

—TO offer to do the shopping on Saturday morning when mother's busy cooking for the week-end—even though my friend does ask me to play with her.

—TO give up my seat in the bus to older women—especially those with children. Their smile of gratitude will make it well worth while—if I need any thanks.

—TO have a hobby this year. I mustn't neglect my Homework, of course, but I will find time to concentrate on my stamp-collecting. (Or postcards—snaps—knitting—coins—or whatever you like best.)

—TO be as punctual at home as I am at school—especially over meals. For this does make such a difference to the easy and comfortable running of the house.



FOR SCHOOL

—TO make it my pride always to appear fresh and neat—a credit to my family. Shiny shoes, well-pressed tunic, spotless blouse—all are so easy to keep immaculate.

—TO put up my hand and ASK if there is any point in the lesson I do not understand. For, busy as mistresses are, they do LIKE me to do this rather than to remain bewildered.

—TO keep my desk tidy (if you have one of your own) and my school books well-covered and clean. Not to scribble in margins—even if "doodling" is fashionable!

—TO join at least one of the school's societies this year (if you don't already belong). Either the Art Club, the Dramatic Society, the Library, the Swimming Club, or the Rambling Society. Another interest, apart from lesson, is very stimulating and does help in the making of new friends.

—TO comb my hair before lessons and during break—not at other odd times, for it so soon becomes an unattractive habit.

—TO offer to carry a mistress' books or push her bicycle if I meet her.

—TO be a credit to my school at all times especially when in school uniform. Not to link arms with my friends in the street, or to walk more than two abreast on a crowded pavement.



FOR GOOD LOOKS

—TO remember that cleanliness—inside and outside—is the foundation of good health, which is the first essential for Good Looks.

—TO have a good "wash down" every single morning if a bath is not possible.

—TO clean my teeth twice every day without fail—morning and evening, and to visit the dentist regularly.

—TO brush my hair fifty firm strokes in the morning and fifty at night, and to wash it at least every three weeks.

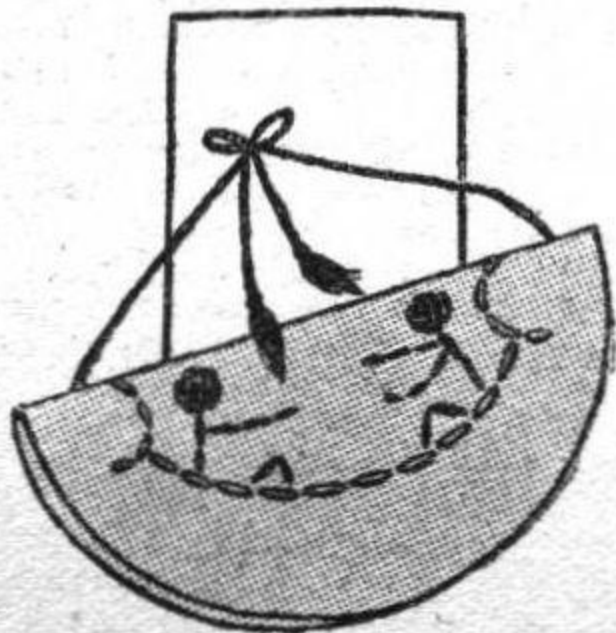
—TO rely on other exercise than gym or drill once a week at school. To walk with my head up, chin in and shoulders down. To keep my tummy flat and chest out. To breathe deeply and correctly. This will keep my figure well-proportioned and improve my complexion.

—TO dry my hands thoroughly every time I wash them (after a really good rinse). This will prevent redness and "chapping" (and the rinsing will save the towels and some scoldings!). My gloves are meant to be worn, of course, not to be kept in pockets any more than my hand should be.

—TO value my appearance at all times—without any vanity. For an attractive schoolgirl is a credit to her school and a joy to her home.



A SURPRISE PRESENT FOR MOTHER



WOULDN'T mother be delighted with this very novel kettle-holder to celebrate the New Year?

You'll require a circle of felt or some other thick material, measuring about 7½ inches across. (What about using an old beret for this, if you have a spare one?)

Fold the circle in half, and your kettle holder is nearly complete, for you see, it needs no sewing.

But I would like you to embroider the quaint little figures on it, so that it looks like a swing-boat from the fair-ground.

If you look very carefully at the picture I'm quite certain you could "work" these figures straight on to the felt in wool that's a different colour from the felt itself.

Heads, bodies and the swing are made only of plain stitches, you'll see—nothing difficult about it at all.

The novel handle for hanging up the holder is made from the cords of Christmas cards. Just stitch the cord at each end of the holder and tie the tassels together.

That's all—and now who said you weren't a brilliant little needlewoman!

(Concluded from page 13.)

unconscious, was Clara Trevlyn and James White—and around James White was carefully wrapped Clara's overcoat!

HOURS AND hours later. In the small hours of the morning of New Year's Eve indeed.

The storm had abated then. The moon had risen and the velvet sky was powdered with stars.

A doctor had been sent for, and the laird, together with the chums, were gathered in the snugly warm, cheerful little sitting-room of Craig Farm. For it was there that the sagacious Toonie had guided the rescue-party which had saved Clara and James White from a dreadful fate in the cave in the mountains.

On the settee, buried under rugs, White, still unconscious, reclined now. Clara, most magically recovered from the effects of her exposure, but still looking pale and ill, touched his brow.

"Mr. White! Mr. White, wake up!" she whispered. "You've been unconscious for hours—we're feeling worried. Please, please, do wake up!"

As if James White heard that voice, his eyes blinked open. A faint smile crossed his face as he saw Clara. Then he closed them again.

The doctor heaved a sigh of relief. "Och, an' that's a' I wanted to see," he said. "He'll come to in a wee while. See! His lips are moving."

That was true. Faintly, almost inaudibly, a word came: "Clara!"

"Yes, Mr. White?" Clara breathed.

"Where—am—I?"

"In Mrs. Wallace's sitting-room."

A pause. A wry smile flickered across the man's lips.

"Funny," he murmured. "Funny—that you, my enemy, should rescue me. That the woman I wronged should take pity on me. What a fool—what a blind, heartless fool I have been." Another silence. Then: "Clara, there is one thing I must do—now. Feel in my pocket, Clara. The inside one."

Clara felt.

"There is an envelope there?"

"Yes."

"Take it," White whispered. "Take it. It—it contains the paper, Clara. Give it to Mrs. Wallace. Let her burn it for me. And ask her, if she can, to forgive a harsh man who had to learn the meaning of the word mercy from herself and a schoolgirl—"

Silently, a little, fierce lump in her throat, Clara passed the paper to Mrs. Wallace. It dropped into the fire while the good woman, her eyes moist, watched it flare up and crumple and die. James White smiled.

"Thank you," he said. "Now I have something else to say—something I want you all to listen to, and the doctor to take down. Clara, you would wish this. Doctor, are you taking a note?"

"Ay," the doctor said gruffly.

"Then—" The man weakly shook his head. "I want you all to know," he said, "that I fixed that charge of theft upon Robin Wallace. I told lies to the police to get him out of the way so that I could tackle Mrs. Wallace here alone. Put that statement down, doctor, and let me sign it. And then, if you will, take it to the police, Clara." He looked up at her and Clara, through a mist of tears, blinked at him. "Have I done all that you would have wished me to do?"

"Oh, yes," Clara cried. "Yes, Mr. White, bless you, thank you—"

And impulsively she bent, touching the white cheek with her lips. "You'll

never let yourself down again," she added softly.

"For that, thanks," he muttered. "I'll do my best to live up to it. Clara—" and his head sagged; his eyelids drooped again.

And while Mrs. Wallace wept tears of happiness and gratitude, the doctor rose.

"I'll get going," he said gruffly. "I'll send an ambulance fra' the hospital. Bless the man—but bless, most of a', you, my lassie—" as he turned to Clara. "For it's no' only his life ye have saved, it's the man himself. I think ye'll ne'er ha' any worries, except friendly ones, fra' James White in future, Mrs. Wallace."

A prophecy which was destined to come true.

And then—

Happiness, such as Mrs. Wallace and her newly released husband had never dreamt was possible, came to brighten the home and the inmates of the lonely little farm among the mountains.

And the first evidence of that happiness after Robin's release was a joyful invitation from Clara to join the laird's New Year Party at Glengowrie Castle. And the first to welcome them there,

after the laird himself, was Mr. Ernest Trevlyn, with a radiant Clara hanging on his arm. He spoke with rather shamefaced emotion.

"My good people," he said. "I hardly know how to say it, but if a Trevlyn can make a mistake, he can also make amends. To you, to my niece, I wish to apologise, most earnestly, most humbly. And just," he added, "as a proof of my sincerity, may I lend your husband the fifty pounds he so badly needs?"

"You sport, nunky," cried Clara.

And he did. And for the rest of the evening Robin Wallace's face shone, and in his heart was a wonderful peace, and a great gladness. In the hearts of Ernest Trevlyn and his wife, too, was that peace, glowing together with a new and admiring understanding of their turbulent tomboy niece.

But even that was as nothing to the happiness, the gladness of Babs & Co., who, with Clara, had helped to bring this great content about, and in providing an encore to Christmas for little Lisbeth and Bobbie, had spent the most wonderful and adventurous Christmas of their lives.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

MYSTERY HOUSE of the MOORS!



What WAS the Mystery of that Queer Place?

Why were Babs & Co. and their Boy Chums of Friardale School at first refused shelter there from the storm?

And what was the meaning of the Strange, Eerie, almost Frightening

things which happened when they were at last admitted to the House?

There you have the theme of next Saturday's thrilling LONG COMPLETE Hilda Richards' story, of your Cliff House favourites. A thrilling story indeed!

For that House of the Moors was unlike any other house the chums had ever visited. It intrigued Babs and her chums. More than that, its puzzling secret actually involved them—and in so doing plunged them into the most extraordinary experience of their lives.

Don't miss this remarkable story. It will hold you spellbound from beginning to end.

You'll love meeting that cheery band of English girls who find themselves—

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. One day a yacht approaches the island!

(Now read on.)

A Trap!

"A SHIP—a ship!"
 Within a moment of that excited shout of Norma's, the whole crowd of girls was on the beach at the water's edge. Never had a prettier sight been seen than that sailing ship on the water. It was stark white save where here and there brasswork gleamed. The sea was dead calm, and deep blue, and only the slightest trace of wind ruffled the yacht's sails.
 "My goodness—who is in it? Has it come to rescue us?"
 "Do they know we're here?"
 Eager, excited questions sounded on all sides, and some of the girls, forgetful of the sharks, even stepped into the water, only to be dragged back to safety.
 "Hallo—seems to be stopping," said Norma.
 "Lowering a boat," murmured Kit. "Hurrah! They're coming ashore!"
 Norma had found her field-glasses, and now focused them.
 "It's a white man, wearing white ducks," she said. "And a sola topee thing. He looks bronzed and wiry."
 "Never mind what he looks like; he can rescue us, that's the thing," said Belinda. "But can he take us all?"
 "Not likely in that small yacht," demurred Norma. "Hallo—he's got a native with him—two natives—"

The boat was in the water, and soon being rowed to the shore. It came over the water at good speed until half-way from the ship. Then its speed slackened, and the girls heard angry voices from the shore, and a shout of rage from the small boat.
 "My goodness—the natives—they're going out in war canoes!" said Norma, aghast.
 From just beyond a row of trees that leaned down to the blue sea canoes had suddenly appeared into view. In each were half a dozen paddlers, and they were shooting their frail crafts at amazing speed towards the yacht.

What was wrong, Norma did not know. But one thing was certain. This yacht was not wanted. Why, the natives were already hurling short spears at the small boat.

"Rescued at last," cheer the castaway schoolgirls, when a yachtsman lands on the island. But soon—it is he, and not they, who needs rescuing!

Miss Manders gave a sharp, anxious command.
 "Back, girls—back! Get well back to the huts. Spears are flying. In a minute it may be bullets."
 "But, Miss Manders—we've got to make him understand that we're here," said Norma. "If he's driven away he may not know. He can't see us, I'm sure."
 "Norma, you heard my command?"
 "Yes, Miss Manders!" said Norma dismally.
 It was galling that she had to remain there and do nothing, when perhaps she could attract the attention of the men from the yacht.

The girls, ordered back, moved towards the trees, although reluctantly. Millicent, half delirious though she was, knew that a ship had arrived, and she was calling out with such frenzied excitement that Virginia, the prefect, went to calm her.

"What on earth are the natives driving the yacht away for?" asked Kit.
 "Either they don't want anyone at all to land, or else they know him and don't like him," said Norma, puzzled. "I can't think of any other explanation."
 The man from the yacht was now shouting angrily at the natives, who continued to throw spears and shout angry abuse.
 "Get back, all of you!" he shouted. "I've come to offer you big chance maka money."
 "Go back alonga way you comed!" shouted someone from the native boats.

"I want workers!" shouted the man. "I bring clothes, beads, gramophones, many tings."
 "Go 'way! Bad man!"
 The natives knew this man. He was a trader, and he came periodically to fetch workers to labour on another island that he owned near by. He also came to collect copra, coconuts, fruit, shells, anything they had that he could trade.
 But they had found only too often that those who went away to work did not come back. Sometimes they stayed on his island, sometimes they went to another; but there never seemed to be a ship to bring them home.
 And so it was that, not wishing to lose others, they were ready to fight him off.
 Naturally, he could not compel workers to go, but he offered a high price to tempt them, and those who went only learned later that they had been tricked.

By
ELIZABETH CHESTER



Norma knew nothing of this; but she guessed that the natives had some good reason of their own for being hostile.

"We can't let them turn him away," she said desperately. "We must attract his attention somehow."

The native canoes were closing in, and it seemed as though the man would be made prisoner, or driven back to his yacht.

"We've got to signal," decided Norma.

Miss Manders was so concerned for the girls to be kept at a safe distance that she had no time to think of making a signal to the yachtsman.

"A tree—help me up one," said Norma urgently.

Kit and Belinda eagerly helped, and one or two others lent a hand, too. Norma, a good gymnast, did not have much difficulty in climbing the tree.

From her lofty perch she could clearly see the war canoes moving to the yacht, and the man himself.

"When I say shout—shout all together," she said, looking down at her friends. "Shout 'Hurrah for England!' That ought to prove we are English."

She counted three, and then a deafening yell came.

"Hurrah for England!"

That yell could have been heard half a mile across the water, and, reaching

the man in the small boat, it caused him to turn from the natives and stare at the shore.

"England ahoy!" he shouted.

"Rescue!" yelled Norma.

To Norma's amazement, then, the man in the small boat picked up a rifle which lay at his feet, and directed it towards the natives.

"The next one who throws a spear stops a lump of lead!" he barked. "Drop those spears, turn round, and get back. This is an automatic rifle, and before I count six I'll get busy with it. One—two—three—"

The native warriors did not wait for that rifle to open fire. There was a panic, and they turned back.

"My goodness, he's beaten them off!" said Norma, amazed and delighted.

"And he's coming ashore!" shouted Kit. "Now we really shall be rescued! Oh, hurrah!"

SURE ENOUGH the small boat was coming ashore through the surf, and now there were no natives anxious to bar the man's progress.

Miss Manders, who had been watching the fight from the cover of the trees, came to the realisation that the worst aspect of the danger was over, and emerged just as the boat grounded on the beach.

Norma, Kit, and Belinda did not

wait for Miss Manders' orders, but hurried down to the water's edge.

"Great snakes!" cried the man, amazed. "What are you girls doing here?"

He was tall and lean, with a hard, merciless face, and Norma was not at all sure that she liked the look of him—he seemed cruel. But, at least, he had a yacht.

"We were wrecked!" she said. "Until we can attract the attention of a ship, we're stranded. No one knows we are here, even."

"We can't send telegrams, or write, or phone," pointed out Belinda.

The man smiled. "Not unless the island has changed a lot lately. Shipwrecked, eh? How many?"

Miss Manders now came along and took charge.

"How glad I am that you have come," she said. "There may not be room for us all in your yacht, but for a few. And, at least, you can inform some passing ship of our plight."

"Certainly I can," said the man. "My name is Nichols."

"Nichols? We have a girl named Nichols here," said Miss Manders.

"Millicent Nichols," cut in Belinda. The trader gave a low whistle.

"You're not telling me that you are from St. Wanda's? Well, is the world small? Where is Millicent—she's my niece. I haven't seen her since she was a mere kid."

Miss Manders, almost springy in step, feeling that all her cares were gone, led him towards the shack where Millicent lay delirious.

"Millicent's uncle," murmured Norma. "It's—it's staggering."

There was wild excitement at once; for at last it seemed to them that rescue was near, and a few of the more daring ones even suggested going to the yacht straight away.

Kit wanted to do it, and Belinda also thought it would be a good idea.

But not Norma. "No," she said. "Much better wait until he comes."

Millicent's uncle was still in the shack with her, when there came a crackling sound from the undergrowth twenty or thirty yards away, and in their midst appeared Borki.

"Borki again!" said Norma sharply. "Now what does she want, I wonder?"

Borki hurried forward, rudely pushed between the girls, and stood and stared at the yacht.

"Good!" she said. She was about to turn back when Mr. Nichols, looking quite anxious, came from the shack where Millicent was lying.

At sight of Borki he pulled up and frowned.

"Borki—a bush girl," explained Norma.

"A bush girl, eh? No use for working in the fields," said Mr. Nichols.

Borki regarded him keenly, and then suddenly pointed to the spot from which she had appeared.

"Me—dad of me. Find yellow stuff," she said. "Plenty."

"Yellow stuff—not gold!" cried the trader.

"Tink so, yes," nodded Borki.

"You've found gold on this island?" murmured Norma. "I shouldn't have thought it possible."

The trader's eyes glinted. "That's all I want to know. Take me to it," he urged Borki.

Borki turned, obviously well pleased with herself.

"Come on alonga," she said. "Me

BETWEEN OURSELVES



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

story Miss Richards has ever written, it is certainly one of the finest. It will appear the week after next. You really mustn't miss it.

Next week's long Complete story is entitled:

"MYSTERY HOUSE OF THE MOORS!"

and relates the exciting adventures of Babs & Co. in a very strange house on the Yorkshire moors.

It starts when on the journey back from Scotland, where, of course, they have been spending their Christmas holidays. With the Cliff House chums are Jimmy Richmond & Co., of Friardale School. Their train is snowbound. They leave it and strike across country and so come to the house in which they are to have so many strange and thrilling adventures.

Jemima Carstairs is to the fore in this story, girls, and the inimitable "Jimmy" is at her best.

Two more instalments of our topping serials, a Complete "Gipsy Joy," with that lovable madcap in "snowballing mood," and Pat's ever-popular pages complete next Saturday's SCHOOLGIRL.

And now—just two Little Letters.

Dorothy and Ann (Croydon, Surrey).—I would have written personally if you had given your full address, girls, and perhaps been able to pass on some useful hints from Patricia which would have helped you. You would have heard before Christmas then. Still, I'm sure Pat's Christmas ideas in THE SCHOOLGIRL were of assistance to you. Ann, you would be in the Second Form, Lower Division.

"Skippy" (New Zealand).—Very many thanks for such a long and interesting letter. I am glad you have written at last. Space is limited, as you can see, otherwise I would have dealt with your letter more fully. I have made a note of your requests, "Skippy," and you may be sure I'll do my best for you.

Now bye-bye, all of you, until next Saturday.

YOUR EDITOR.

MY DEAR READERS,—Once more a new year is before us, once more many of us will be making good resolutions—and once more many of us will very soon be breaking them!

Gusty—our office-boy, you know—is my best example of the latter case. At the beginning of one year he told me very seriously that he had resolved never again to be late with my afternoon cup of tea, and that it would never again be cold when I received it. (You see, at that time, girls, I had been receiving practically cold tea about half an hour later than the time I had fixed!)

Well, two days after Gusty had made his noble resolution I didn't receive any tea in the afternoon at all. Gusty, if you please, had forgotten it entirely!

So much for that resolution!

Another year—just after Gusty had broken three teacups—he firmly resolved never to break another piece of crockery. The same afternoon he dropped a whole trayful of cups and saucers outside my office just as Miss Hilda Richards arrived to discuss a Cliff House story with me!

Well, girls, with these incidents in mind, this year I earnestly begged Gusty not to make any good resolutions—at least none to do with the office. It's too dangerous!

MISS RICHARDS' GOOD RESOLUTION!

Mind you, I'm not sure that your favourite author has made one, but to-day I have read one of her Cliff House stories which practically convinces me that she had resolved to write a story of Babs & Co. which will long linger in your memories.

This particular story stars Barbara Redfern herself, and if it isn't the finest



"LOOK!" said Talia tensely, and gripping Norma's arm, she pointed into the clearing. The castaways paled at what they saw. The man who might have rescued them was a prisoner of the bushmen!

take you. You gib Borki plenty nice tings. Yes?"

The trader patted her head.

"Plenty," he said. "If you've got gold."

Miss Manders was far more concerned about escaping from the island, back to civilisation, than she was about the gold.

"Mr. Nichols, can I take it that you will go at once to a steamer line, or somewhere where a telegraph message can be sent for help?" she asked.

He turned to her and nodded.

"Certainly. But I want to make sure about this gold first. I can't let a chance like this slip; and I don't suppose you'll mind being here a short while longer."

He strode off after Borki, and Miss Manders, in great excitement, went down to the shore, calling Virginia to study the yacht in the hope of estimating how many it would hold. Not all, anyway. And that meant dividing the party. But Norma, Kit, and Belinda were at the moment more interested in the gold—interested and puzzled.

"Fancy Borki keeping this secret," murmured Norma. "She's far cuter than I thought."

"Gold! A gold mine," said Belinda excitedly. "Perhaps we could dig a little up and take it home."

"Bucketful or two," Kit winked at Norma.

Belinda's idea was vague, and she pictured a gold mine as being rather like a coal mine, with solid gold that could be hacked out in chunks the size of her own head.

Other girls, equally curious, joined the trail, but Millicent's uncle did not look back. He strode on after Borki, his rifle under his arm.

Borki presently halted, and then beckoned him forward.

Norma, coming to a halt, was perplexed; for little though she knew about gold mines, she had never heard of any being in the midst of thick vegetation.

"It's queer," she murmured, and then suddenly stiffened, clutching Kit's arm. "Look—in the bushes—"

"Someone hiding!" gasped Belinda.

Norma suddenly jumped to the truth.

"It's a trap—an ambush—the bushmen are waiting to capture him.

There's no gold! Hi—look out!" she shouted.

Too late. Millicent's uncle, stooping to examine a spot indicated by Borki, suddenly collapsed with a bushman on his back.

The moment the trader crashed down, four other men rushed forward, dragging trailing creeper with them.

"To the rescue," said Kit grimly.

But Norma hauled her back.

"Don't be a duffer. We can't do anything—girls against men. Back to the shore. Come on!"

They raced the short distance back to Miss Manders, who faced them sternly.

"Where have you girls been? Really, Norma—"

Norma, panting, pulled to a halt.

"Millicent's uncle—the trader—he—they've got him!" she gasped.

The headmistress drew up, startled.

"Got him! Who—in what way?"

"The bushmen! The gold mine was only a trap. It doesn't exist. And now they've captured him. At any minute—"

Norma ended in mid-sentence, as yells and a great rustling sounded behind. And next moment, charging towards them, came a horde of bushmen, with Borki in their midst.

An Old Friend Returns!

WHAT the bush people shouted as they ran, none of the others present knew, but it was obvious to Norma that they were more intent on plundering the yacht than on the castaways.

Even so, they had already been forestalled.

They were not shore people; not skilled with canoes, nor used to the water.

Talia's people, already in their canoes, were half-way to the yacht by now.

Shouting angrily, the bushmen clambered into the yacht's boat. And having only a vague idea as to how many that boat could comfortably hold, a dozen got in.

"They'll be out again in a minute," said Norma. "Watch—watch—"

She was right.

With wild yells and much splashing, the bushmen toppled from the boat. Then, terrified of sharks, they scrambled up and came ashore on to the coral.

But the other natives in their canoes had reached the yacht, where the two native boys, forming the crew, surrendered without a murmur.

"This is sheer piracy!" gasped Miss Manders.

Miss Chatterton, who had been attracted to the scene by the sounds of confusion, now hurried to join her senior.

"They are robbing the yacht!" she exclaimed. "We cannot allow that."

And Miss Chatterton, to draw the pirates' attention, clapped her hands furiously. Naturally, the marauders ignored her.

Meanwhile the bushmen on the shore rushed up and down, danced with excitement and shouted angry threats. Borki was tearing her hair with rage.

But Norma, Kit, and Belinda were thinking of Millicent's uncle.

"We've got to save him," said Norma fiercely. "They've left him prisoner somewhere. Oh, if only we had Talia with us."

"I do hope he isn't hurt," said Belinda anxiously.

"They wouldn't dare," decided Kit. "But they've tied him up while they rob the yacht, the thieves!"

And then, as Norma turned, she saw Talia. Talia, holding her small brother by the hand, stood a hundred yards away amongst the trees, watching the scene.

"Talia!" cried Norma excitedly.

For a moment she thought her friend would turn and run, but Talia, after hesitating, stopped.

When Norma reached her, she looked pale and a little frightened.

"Oh, Talia, where have you been?" asked Norma in gentle reproach. "Why have you kept away from us? What's wrong?"

Talia met her eyes, and her look was intensely sad.

"I am bad. I not belonga you," she said. "You white—Talia—she brown. Different."

Norma nearly laughed, it was such a silly idea.

"Oh, Talia, you stupid!" she said.

"What ever difference does that make? We're friends."

Talia nodded sadly.

"Talia she like you very much—too much," she said.

"Too much!" said Norma quizzically.

"How can one like someone else too much?"

Talia's eyes filled with tears.

"You go 'way—Talia sad. Talia go 'way, too. Talia go on yacht, go work on land."

Norma gave a quick start of alarm.

"You mean you want to go away—as a worker—as practically a slave!" she cried.

"Oh, Talia!" protested Belinda. "You're much happier here; your father is a chief."

"Talia not happy here any more if Norma go."

Norma shook her head.

"Norma not going. Bushmen take man who came in yacht. He their prisoner now. So he cannot take us."

Talia's eyes lit up.

"You not go?"

"Not until we can find that man—the trader."

"And we want you to help us," said Kit.

Talia released her small brother's hand.

"You want Talia help you?" she asked eagerly.

But it was for Norma's sake that she did so.

Norma, looking about her, realised with sinking dismay that if Talia were captured, or if she left them, they might be completely lost.

This jungle was trackless, and near by was a swamp—the overflow from the river. Talia had warned them that alligators might lurk there, for there were many in the river. And an alligator to an inexperienced eye was indistinguishable from a fallen tree.

But now the voices of the bush people could be heard, and Talia, creeping cautiously nearer, parted the undergrowth.

Belinda paused to sniff the rather sickly garishly coloured flowers that grew in profusion; but Norma was intent only on the sounds that came from the bush people.

"They dance," said Talia softly.

For there came the thumping sounds of drumming, and then occasional laughter, and shrill noises. With every step they took the sounds became clearer, and then suddenly Talia, parting massive leaves, gave Norma a peep at the revellers.

Norma held her breath as she stared warily, ready to dodge away at any moment.

The bush people, short of stature, with long, matted hair, were dancing

"We certainly don't," shivered Belinda. "Borki would want my frock. And she has no respect for a nice frock. Fancy any girl tearing a frock—"

"Shush!" warned Norma. "They'll hear us."

Belinda stifled her indignation, but it was none the less on that account.

Norma gave the signal for them to move back to a spot where they could talk more freely without fear of being detected.

"There's only one way we can do it," she said, in low tone. "We must frighten them. If they get scared they'll run, won't they, Talia?"

Talia frowned in doubt.

"Bushmen not 'fraid much," she demurred.

"They were afraid of the 'ghosts' on the ship—or what they thought was a ghost," Norma reminded her. "And if we could do something like it now—pretend to be evil spirits—they might run, and we could have a chance to cut the trader free."

"Bushmen 'fraid of alligators," said Talia slowly.

"So are we," remarked Kit.

"Ugh! Yes," agreed Belinda. "Besides, where can we get an alligator?"

"River," said Talia. "We go to river; alligator come. Talia make soft noise bring alligator."

"No, thanks!" said Norma promptly. "Too risky. The alligator might chase us instead. But—my goodness!" she ended excitedly. "I know what we could do. Scream and run ourselves."

"That's what I would do," said Belinda. "But would it help? I can always scream, you know. Some people have said I have the most frightening scream they've ever heard. It made mother quite ill once. And it was only because a spider dropped on me."

"Good!" said Norma eagerly. "That's just the kind of scream we need. Can you do it without practice?"

Belinda felt her throat, and made a little preliminary cough.

"Yes, I think so. But it's better if I'm frightened."

"Easy," said Kit, with a glimmer of fun in her eyes.

"Then it's settled," Norma said briskly. "Belinda's got to scream!"

"But why?" asked Talia, who had not realised what Norma's artful plan was.

"Just this," said Norma. "You know their word for alligator. If we can get round towards the river, and then you rush yelling their word for alligator, Belinda can then give her scream."

"And then?" said Kit eagerly.

"Well, then, while they're all rushing around," explained Norma, "we can cut the trader free from behind the tree. But everything depends on Belinda's scream."

Belinda gave a nod, and looked more solemn than usual as she realised the weight of responsibility she carried.

"I'll give my very best scream," she promised.

Led by Talia, they worked round the place where the bushmen danced, and down to the alligator-infested river.

But if only they had known that, stealthily stalking them, was Borki!

WHAT a thrilling situation this is! How will Norma & Co. fare, with the treacherous Borki following them? You'll see when you read next week's dramatic chapters.

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GIRLS' CRYSTAL

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Norma was deeply touched. There was something so pathetic about Talia's joy at being able to do something for them.

"Yes, please," said Norma. "You will, won't you, Talia?"

"Yes, yes. I will," said Talia readily.

"And Norma not cross with bad Talia?"

"No, of course not!" Relief showed on Talia's face, and she let out a great sigh; for she had been afraid that Norma and her friends blamed her for the incident on the volcano, and indirectly for Millicent's fever.

"We go look for man," she said.

Norma, noting that Miss Manders, Miss Chatterton, and most of the others were engrossed in watching the goods being taken from the yacht, now moved swiftly away.

With Talia's help they might find the missing trader, Millicent's uncle—and if they did, then it would be only a matter of a short time before they could be rescued from the island!

"Belinda's Got to Scream!"

"GO quietly. Here bush people live!"

Talia gave that soft warning, and Norma, Belinda, and Kit became suddenly very quiet.

Talia herself was running a risk in coming so near to the enemy country, and so far from her own people,

in a wild manner, skipping and jumping and stamping with hardly any sense of rhythm at all.

Borki was in the centre of it all, wearing a frock she had stolen from one of Miss Chatterton's girls.

It was long for her, and every now and then she tripped. Finally, furious, she ripped savagely at the hem, and tore it jaggedly, leaving a train hanging out behind her.

"Where's the trader?" asked Norma.

Talia had not yet seen him herself; but she moved to left and right, and presently gave a sharp exclamation.

"Here!" she whispered, taking Norma's arm.

Norma moved close to her and stared, amazed and indignant.

The trader, completely helpless, was tied to a palm-tree with long cords made of interlaced creeper stem, while mocking him, even throwing things, were some of the bush people.

"They will leave him there," whispered Talia.

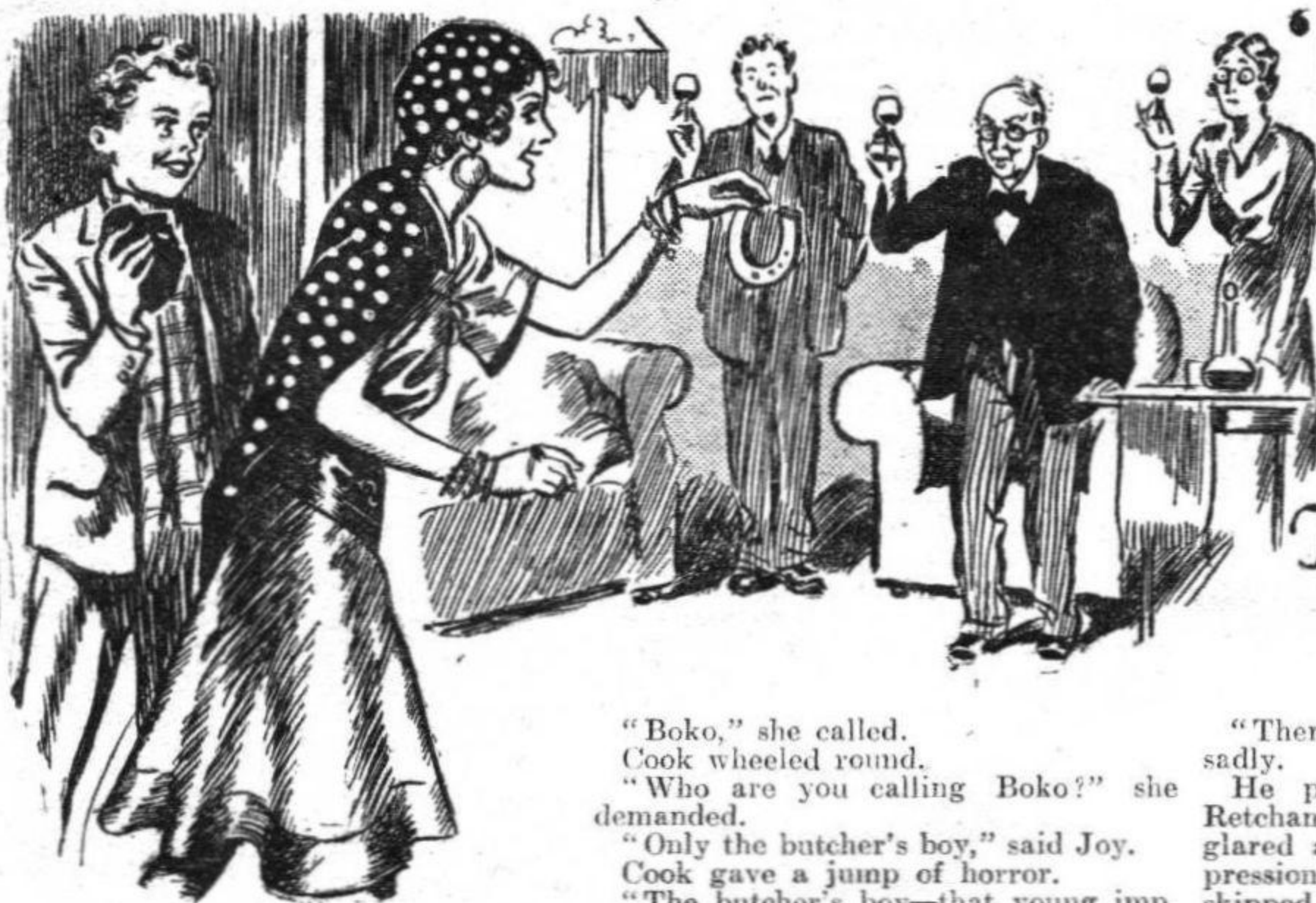
Norma shivered.

"The sun will be on him soon," she muttered. "He will be scorched. Ugh! The cruel, horrible savages!"

"Let's rush in and rescue him," whispered Kit. "They haven't any courage; and I have a knife with me. We could soon cut that creeper."

"Wait!" advised Norma. "We don't want to risk being captured, too."

Another delightful COMPLETE laughter-story introducing harum-scarum—



'GIPSY JOY'

*The Rich Girl
Romany*

"Good luck—good luck!" cried Nakita—Joy Sharpe, in disguise. And she waved the horseshoe all round her. But what she really meant was "Jolly good fun!"—for herself!

A Mince Pie Mishandled!

"COO, wouldn't I like one of those mince pies!"

Joy Sharpe, as she heard those longing words, put her head out of the landing window and looked down at the garden below.

She had a view of the back door of her home, the Gables, and of the small porch and path of the kitchen garden. Even without looking, however, she knew who had uttered the words.

The butcher's boy, known to his friends as Boko, stood lolling against his cycle, and noisily sniffing the air.

"Did I hear you say you'd like a mince pie?" asked Joy, smiling.

"Wouldn't I just, miss," said Boko. "They smell good, and I bet they are good, too."

"Wait—and I'll come down," said Joy.

As Miss Retcham, her governess, was not anywhere in sight, Joy foresaw no difficulty in giving Boko a mince pie.

Miss Retcham, very stern, liked forbidding Joy to have things, and do things. It was just a part of her governessly nature.

But as she was nowhere to be seen, Joy, thinking that she might be able to wheedle round cook, hurried downstairs.

As she pushed open the kitchen door, cook turned from the kitchen range, her face pink.

"Now, Miss Joy, out of my kitchen, please. I'm very busy."

"I should just think you are, cook," said Joy in her most honeyed tone; for cook was not in one of her best moods. "Phew! But aren't those mince pies delicious. Can I take one?"

"Take one—you'll spoil your lunch."

"I promise not to eat it now," said Joy.

"Swear?" said cook.

Joy, nodding eagerly, took the mince pie, and went to the kitchen door.

"Boko," she called. Cook wheeled round. "Who are you calling Boko?" she demanded.

"Only the butcher's boy," said Joy. Cook gave a jump of horror.

"The butcher's boy—that young imp. You don't—"

But Joy hardly heard; she had bobbed out of the back door, and was just handing the mince pie to the cheery-faced, rather long-nosed Boko.

"Thanks, miss," he beamed. "What a beaut!"

The mince pie was hot, and he passed it from one hand to the other. He was just about to take a chance with it, and snap a nice chunk, when cook pushed past Joy.

"Give me that pie back!" she stormed.

"Oh, cook, let him keep it," begged Joy.

"You be good enough to go inside, Miss Joy. I shall report this to Miss Retcham!" said cook angrily. "And I'll report you, too, what's more, my boy, for your cheekiness. If you don't hand over—"

It was at that moment, just when she was marching towards him, that Boko let the mince pie drop. It fell with a thud on to the metal tray of his carrier, and broke into fragments.

"There!" said cook. "Isn't that just like you?"

And she marched indoors.

Joy winked at Boko. Then, while she was watching him pick up crumbs from his tray, from the shrubbery just round the bend of the house appeared Miss Retcham.

"Joy—what is this?" she snapped.

Joy tried to turn and re-enter the house, but it was too late.

"Oh—er—nothing much, Miss Retcham," she said. "Boko—the butcher's boy—is just having a mince pie."

Miss Retcham, eyes glinting, strode forward. She had taken a marked dislike to Boko, harmless though he was.

"'Fraid the old mince pie has gone phut," said Boko. "I dropped it. Sorry."

"Just an accident," cut in Joy.

"I did not ask your view of the matter, Joy. It should not be necessary for me to forbid you to talk to tradesboys. Go indoors at once. And as for you," she added to Boko, "return that mince pie at once!"

"R-return it? But it's all broken," said Boko in surprise.

"Broken or not, give it to me!" said Miss Retcham grimly, and held out her hand.

Boko sighed, and gathered the mince pie, all piping hot, in his fingers.

"There you are, ma'am," he said sadly.

He put the hot mince into Miss Retcham's hand and the governess glared at him. Next moment her expression changed completely, and she skipped into the air.

"Ow—w-w-w—ooh!" she wailed.

She flung her hand up, and the fragments of mince pie scattered in all directions.

Boko gave a quick look at Joy, stifled a gurgle of mirth, and then fairly flung himself on to his machine and pedalled away.

Miss Retcham, shaking her hand, glared.

"Is there anything to laugh at, Joy? I told you to go indoors. Go to the school-room and await me!"

"Oh! Yes, Miss Retcham," said Joy, looking solemn, and she hurried into the house.

She went into the hall, and there permitted herself a little giggle or two of mirth at the memory of her governess' war-dance.

She did not hear her grandfather cross the hall, for he was clad, as usual, in slippers.

By IDA MELBOURNE

"Well, well, Joy, and what is the joke?" he smiled.

Joy turned to him, serious at once.

"The butcher-boy had a mince pie, granddad, and—and have you ever seen anyone get hot mince on their hands and skip?"

Her grandfather smiled.

"I have. It burns. I bet he skipped and danced. What a duffer, eh, touching hot mince?"

He was chuckling at the thought when Miss Retcham, her injured hand wrapped in her handkerchief, swept through the swing-door.

The governess came to a halt.

"Were you referring to me as a duffer?" she asked huffily.

"To you? Oh, no!" said Joy's grandfather, surprised. "I was referring to the silly fellow who hadn't sense enough to keep hot mincemeat from his hand."

Miss Retcham tossed her head.

"It was I whose hand was burned," she said icily. "And I fail to see anything at all amusing in it. To impress that fact upon Joy she had better go to her room and write out one hundred

times 'I must not laugh at the misfortunes of others'!"

Miss Retcham then strode on upstairs. But before she had gone far Joy's grandfather called to her.

"There was something I wished to say about this evening—or, rather, to-night," he murmured. "It's New Year's Eve, of course."

"Of course," said Miss Retcham.

"And I am sitting up late," said Joy in a small voice, hopefully.

"You? Indeed you are not," said Miss Retcham. "You will go to bed at your usual time, and if you happen to be awake you may hear the bells—"

"Oh, thank you, Miss Retcham!" said Joy, not without a touch of sarcasm.

"I have just remembered what I meant to say," Joy's grandfather went on. "A friend of mine is arriving some time this morning, Miss Retcham. He will spend the night with us. I thought I had better mention it, because, although he is a learned professor, he looks more like a tramp, I am afraid. I shall not be in for lunch."

Joy showed interest, but Miss Retcham's eyes glinted more than ever. She was not in a mood to entertain people who looked like tramps.

"Very well," she said coldly.

"Er—if you need a clue to his identity," added Joy's grandfather, "he has a habit of saying 'Well, well, well, what a charming place! Well, well, well!'"

"I see," said Miss Retcham; and she stamped on upstairs.

Joy turned to her grandfather as he also made to go.

"Granddad—please!" she begged. "Couldn't I stay up just to-night to see the New Year in? It's either to-night or not until another year," she said sadly.

He shook his head, but patted her cheek in his kindly way.

"That, I am afraid, you must leave to your governess. We'll see!"

He hurried across the hall then, and Joy turned, with a sigh, to the staircase.

"I jolly well will see the New Year in," she told herself determinedly.

She walked into the school-room, sat down at the table, and took up her pen.

"And if doing those lines will mean I can stay up to-night it'll be worth it," she told herself.

Then her pen skipped busily over the paper.

At all costs Joy was determined to greet the New Year!

"Well—Well—Well——!"

"YES, quite well-written, and the spelling is correct," said Miss Retcham, as she picked up the sheets of paper Joy had covered. "I only hope that you have learned your lesson."

Joy looked up in relief.

"Yes, Miss Retcham. I'm sorry I laughed," she said. "Awfully sorry, and—and please can I stay up to see the New Year in?"

Miss Retcham arched her brows.

"My dear Joy," she said, "what point is there in seeing it in?"

Joy did not know quite, but she had a good enough answer.

"But you are seeing it in with granddad and his friend the tramp."

Miss Retcham bridled.

"Tramp? He is not a tramp, but a learned professor, and you must not make rude comments, Joy. I meant to warn you, and I am glad the topic has arisen. If this friend of your grandfather does appear eccentric in his attire, kindly make no comment at all."

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Lovers of Babs & Co. will revel in this magnificent story—No. 619—for it deals with the early adventures of the famous chums.

"Oh, I won't, of course, Miss Retcham," said Joy.

"I do not want to be ceaselessly rebuking you, Joy, but there is just one more thing. I do not wish you to talk to common, vulgar people, such as that lad Boko. You do not see me speaking to people of that type, do you?"

"No, Miss Retcham," Joy admitted.

"Very well, then. They are not to be encouraged. Stay here while I go down to the village."

Miss Retcham went from the room, and Joy was left in peace.

But there was no delight on Joy's face. She felt far too depressed to be cheered even by Miss Retcham's temporary absence.

Joy rose and folded her arms, pacing the school-room floor.

"So I'm not to see the New Year in?" she asked herself.

And then suddenly her face cleared, and she laughed.

Tugging open the school-room door, she ran at once to her bed-room.

Her pup, Tinker, who was asleep on the eiderdown, awoke with a startled yelp.

"All right, Tinks," she murmured. "Who'd like to go out with Nakita?"

The name Nakita acted upon Tinker like magic. He knew what it meant. He knew that Nakita was the girl with the bright clothes and the brown face—the gipsy girl who was light-hearted, gay, and full of fun, ready to take him for long runs!

He barked and sprang round Joy's feet.

And when Joy opened the wardrobe door he darted inside, and groped for what he knew was there—Nakita's frock, shawl, and shoes, and cloak.

"Quiet, quiet, darling," said Joy softly. "And for goodness' sake don't tear the frock. Nakita won't like it."

Nakita, as only Tinker, beside Joy, knew, was really none other than Joy herself—Joy, with her face dyed. But such a different Joy!

For whereas Joy, under Miss Retcham's thumb, had to do as she was told, Nakita could do much as she pleased, dance, and sing, and shout, pick flowers, climb trees.

Tinker loved nothing more than a run with such a gay person as Nakita, and he could not imagine why his mistress was not always Nakita.

But for the moment Nakita was free

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to go out, and cast all Joy's worries from her mind.

"And to-night, Tinks—to-night I must be Nakita, too. It's the only way. Oh, if only I can slip out—how I'd love to hear the New Year in and see the fireworks and the people dancing!"

But it was easier to think of that exciting prospect than to find a way of fulfilling it. If Miss Retcham kept a close eye on her, then Joy could not become Nakita. That was certain.

"Anyway, I'm Nakita now, and maybe I'll find a way, eh, Tinks?" she asked her pet.

A minute or so later Nakita was out in the large garden, and then climbing over the wall into the lane.

Tinker scampered and barked and pranced, and Nakita skipped with him, in high fettle, her troubles forgotten.

But she suddenly saw, farther down the road, a shabbily dressed man, who carried a small suitcase.

He saw Nakita, and presently came to a halt and raised his hat.

"Well, well, well, good-morning, gipsy girl," he greeted her. "Perhaps you can direct me to the Gables?"

Nakita looked him up and down, and her eyes gleamed. So this was the professor!

"Yes, gent, I can," she said. "The Gables is the big house on the hill-top, professor."

The odd-looking man, whose boots were fastened with wire, and whose jacket was held together with string, gave a start of surprise and regarded her fixedly.

"H'm—psychic, eh?" he murmured. "Well, I wonder if you can tell me if there is anything I have forgotten, at home. I am absent-minded enough—my goodness!" he ended in horror. "The gas. I have left it on and not alight! If someone goes in and lights a match—oh dear, oh dear!"

He turned, looked at his watch, and hurried off.

"Take a message to the Gables, please," he called, halting for a moment. "Say that the professor regrets he had to go back—and explain why, with my compliments."

Then he ran all the way to the station.

"Well," murmured Nakita. "Of all the queer men, he's the queerest. Fancy leaving the gas on and forgetting to light it!"

Nakita soon forgot him, however, playing with Tinker, and not until she heard the clock strike did she remember herself that she was really Joy Sharpe, and had better be hurrying home.

She threw the ball for Tinker just once more, and it rolled out into the road. Tinks ran to get it, but a car flashed past.

"Phew—Tinks. It might have got you," gasped Nakita. "Don't you go and get the ball; I will."

Before she could do so, however, it came sailing through the air, to bounce at her feet.

"All right," said a jolly voice. "There it is."

"Thank you," called Nakita.

A man with a seafaring look and a kitbag over his shoulder came to a halt. His boots were dusty from long walking, and did not look too weather-proof. His face was jovial and sunburned, with twinkling eyes.

"Happy New Year to you!" he called. "And wish me one, gipsy girl! I need it. They say a gipsy can bring luck."

Nakita's eyes shone.

"Then I wish you a Happy New Year!" he said.

"That's the idea! And wish me a

good hot lunch, too—eh? And a nice chair to sit in and a cigar to smoke!" he laughed. "I'm as likely to get it as a car to carry me along in luxury, so let's wish for that as well!"

He swung the kitbag on to his back, and Nakita's heart was touched with sympathy.

"Would you like a cigar," she asked, "and a chair by the fire and a hot lunch?"

"Eh—would I? You bet I would, gipsy?" he chuckled.

Nakita, with a sudden flash, saw just how easily he could get it.

"Then listen, professor!" she said. "If you go up to the large house on hill—the Gables—and say 'Well, well, well, this is a nice place!' to the hatchet-faced woman, you can have it all. She'll just welcome you as a guest."

his wanted mince—
pie—perhaps
even a dozen!

Good Luck For All!

JOY was first in, Miss Retcham a close second, and then, some ten minutes later, the tramp arrived.

Joy took care to be at the door in the hall, so that she opened it herself.

"Oh, good-morning!" she exclaimed. "Please come in!"

The tramp did not recognise her as the gipsy girl he had seen in the lane, and did not even give her a keen scrutiny.

He stepped into the hall and looked about him in awe.

"Well, well, well, nice place you've



"JUST go to that house and say 'This is a nice place,' and they'll give you a meal, professor," Nakita told the tramp. She did not add she knew he wasn't a professor—nor what an ingenious plan she had in mind!

"You're kidding!" he said.

"I'm not. A gipsy doesn't kid!" said Nakita severely. "You go there and see."

"Um! Maybe I will. I seem to trust you, and gipsies certainly get to know most things," he said. "A Happy New Year!"

"A Happier New Year!" said Nakita, smiling.

And then, hurrying back herself, she kept him in sight most of the way.

"Miss Retcham will take him for the professor," she told herself, in almost delirious delight, "and she'll give him lunch and a cigar! But how I'll stop myself from dying of laughter, I just don't know!"

But, reaching the Gables, Nakita quietened down a little; for it suddenly came to her that Miss Retcham would come rather badly out of this, and back of her mind she saw a way of avenging the wrong done to Boko, of getting him

got here!" he remarked.

Miss Retcham, standing at the head of the staircase, nearly fell down.

"The professor!" she gasped. "Well, goodness gracious! A hundred times worse even than I had thought he might be! Oh dear—oh dear! Joy!"

She beckoned, and Joy ran to her.

"Joy, this is your grandfather's friend," she said.

Joy pursed her lips.

"Oh, but do you really think, Miss Retcham—"

"I do not think; I know!" said Miss Retcham. "I order you not to comment upon him in any way whatsoever, but to treat him with the same respect you would treat any other of your grandfather's less eccentric friends!"

Miss Retcham crossed the hall.

"I am delighted to meet you, professor!" she said.

"Not so delighted as I am," he said,



sniffing the air.

"What's that? Not turkey?"

"Yes, yes, turkey!"

"Well, I'll be blown!"

he said. "And mince pies, too. Now a mince pie is what I could do with right away."

He strolled round the hall, surveying the pictures.

"Perhaps I can get the mince pies for you," Joy said.

Joy went to the kitchen and returned with a plate of mince pies, and the professor took them gratefully and wolfed them.

"Better!" he admitted. "Hope lunch will be soon."

Lunch was soon—five minutes later.

Joy was politeness itself to the guest—a good deal more polite than Miss Retcham when he insisted on eating the turkey leg without knife and fork.

"Some people think it's rude to lick your fingers after eating," he said chattily. "But I think it's best."

"It is one of those delicate points of etiquette which have never been quite solved," said Miss Retcham coldly; "such as whether it is better to lap one's tea from a saucer, or suck it up from a spoon."

"I always suck it up from a spoon," said the professor.

"I knew it," said Miss Retcham.

The governess' efforts at being a complete host were strained almost to breaking point, and she was only too glad when, at last, the professor settled down in an armchair with a newspaper over his face, and his feet on the table.

"How your grandfather can have such a friend I do not know, Joy!" she remarked.

"You don't think you have made a mistake, Miss Retcham?" asked Joy.

"Mistake? In what way, pray?"

"Well, it might be just a passing tramp," said Joy.

Miss Retcham gave a violent start.

"That is quite absurd, Joy. If so, where is your grandfather's friend?"

"Ah!" said Joy. "That's so, isn't it, Miss Retcham? Still, if he isn't granddad's friend, and just a tramp, it would be a fearful insult to granddad's friend that you thought it was him."

"He—" began Miss Retcham.

But at that moment the maid entered the room.

"There is another gentleman at the door," she said. "A Professor Hicking."

Miss Retcham shot straight up into the air.

"Professor Hicking!" she cried, in a tone of horror.

"Yes, he's in the hall, Miss Retcham," said the maid.

Miss Retcham almost galloped out into the hall, and Joy followed. The real professor, who had gone back to turn out his gas fire, was there. Compared with the tramp, he seemed a Beau Brummel, and the only really odd thing about his appearance was that he seemed to lack eyebrows, and, save for a charred fragment in front of his collar, lacked a tie.

"Well, well, well, nice place you've got here!" he said.

Miss Retcham all but screamed and fainted.

"Look a little strange, do I?" said Professor Hicking. "I must apologise. I had a minor accident with the gas fire. It seemed to explode as I lit a match, and it has blown my eyebrows off!"

"Oh, it doesn't matter a bit!" said Miss Retcham.

"Well, it matters to me," said the professor, a little huffily.

Joy, greeting him politely, suddenly heard a car in the drive, and knew that it was her grandfather.

"Oh, here is granddad, Miss Retcham!" she said.

Miss Retcham twittered, but could not speak; for prominent in her thoughts was the tramp whose reverberating snore could be heard out in the hall.

"This—this is dreadful!" she muttered.

Joy's grandfather entered, greeted his friend enthusiastically, and then led him towards the library, where the tramp was sleeping.

"Oh dear—oh dear!" moaned Miss Retcham. "Oh, what can I say?"

Joy stepped into the breach.

"Leave it to me, Miss Retcham," she said.

She hurried after her grandfather and caught his arm.

"What ever is that extraordinary noise?" he asked.

"Sssh! It's Miss Retcham's friend. He's sleeping," said Joy, her eyes glimmering.

"A friend of Miss Retcham's?" said her grandfather. "Well, we won't wake him up. Come into my study, Hicking!"

Miss Retcham had heard; and now, in horror, she confronted Joy.

"My friend—you dared to refer to him as my friend?"

YOUR FRIENDS

would love "Gipsy Joy" just as much as you do. Why not tell them all about her? Better still, let them have your **SCHOOLGIRL** when you have read it.

"Well, you couldn't insult granddad or his friend by saying you thought he was the professor, could you, Miss Retcham?"

Miss Retcham groaned.

"Oh dear, dear—what can I do? We must get him out. I'm sure he will create a scene."

Joy's eyes gleamed.

"I know someone who could get him out, and she isn't far away at this moment."

"Who?"

"Nakita, the gipsy girl!"

"You really think so? Without a scene?"

"Yes, yes, Miss Retcham!" said Joy. "She will be out in the garden, because she wants to wish you a Happy New Year—"

Miss Retcham, even though she disliked Nakita intensely, knew that she had no alternative, for she could not trust herself to get the tramp away without a scene.

For five minutes the governess wandered in the grounds without seeing Nakita; then the gipsy girl appeared from nowhere, her brown face half-hidden by the shawl.

"Happy New Year, lidy!" she said.

Miss Retcham, in agitation, took her arm and explained.

"And if you can persuade him to leave the house I'll never forget it—never!" she said. "I will buy you a present."

Nakita shook her head.

"I don't want a present, but I'd like to be able to cross your threshold at midnight, and bring you luck, lidy."

"Yes, yes, yes: of course!"

"And a little cold turkey and some mince pies—"

"Certainly!"

"And can I bring a friend?"

"Of course!"

"Then leave this to me," said Nakita.

Two minutes later she had aroused the tramp, who blinked at her and rubbed his eyes.

"Gipsy, you were right," he said. "I've had the lunch and the fine cigar, and I feel grand!"

"I am glad. But heed my warning," said Nakita impressively. "Heed it well. Be gone from this house as quickly as you came, or evil will befall you. Go through those french windows, otherwise you are trapped—"

The tramp, still a little bemused by sleep, blinked at her and shook himself.

"It seemed more like a dream," he admitted. "There must have been a mistake, or something—"

"Go, go—quickly!" urged Nakita.

The tramp, finding his kitbag beside him, where Nakita had dumped it, snatched it up, and without hesitation vanished through the french windows!

"It is a good thing that Joy is in bed," said Miss Retcham, with a yawn. "Five minutes to twelve o'clock! I thought this quaint custom of a gipsy girl crossing the threshold would interest you, professor."

"It does—it does," said the professor. "Interesting people, gipsies. Hark!"

Steps and voices were heard outside. A hush followed, and then came the rolling stroke of midnight, the boom of guns, the roar of rockets, and the tolling of bells.

But at the very first sound the door was flung open and Nakita stepped over the threshold, carrying a horseshoe.

And behind her was Boko, the butcher's boy, grinning right across his face, and carrying a chunk of coal.

"Good luck—good luck!" cried Nakita, spreading it like confetti.

"Hurrah for nineteen-thirty-eight!" called Boko. "And mince pies."

Joy's grandfather was on his feet, his friend, and Miss Retcham, too, and they drank a toast to the New Year.

"Mince pies are on the side-table, youngsters. Lemonade, ginger-beer, and cold turkey sandwiches," he said. "Yes, and fruit salad. Tuck in!"

Nakita winked at Boko, who rubbed his hands, and for them, at least, the New Year started well.

There was, in fact, only one shadow for Nakita—the moment when Miss Retcham was almost persuaded by Joy's grandfather to bring Joy downstairs.

"No, lidy—no!" implored Nakita earnestly. "It's bad luck to rise from bed within three hours of the first stroke of midnight. Take heed!"

And her words were so dramatically uttered that they took effect. Nevertheless, an hour later, after Nakita and Boko had gone, Miss Retcham went into Joy's room.

Joy was fast asleep, a faint smile on her lips; and not only a faint smile, but, as Miss Retcham might have noticed, if she had looked more closely, a crumb from a mince pie!

"Slept through it all!" decided the governess. "And just as well. The less she sees of Nakita and that Boko creature the better!"

And, satisfied that she had started the New Year well by being firm with Joy, Miss Retcham slipped from the room.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

ANOTHER sparkling fun-story featuring "Gipsy Joy" next week. You'll simply love it, so book your SCHOOLGIRL now!

Our magnificent story of what happens to the Morcove girls when they become—



SCHOOLGIRLS IN SOCIETY

By

MARJORIE STANTON

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 chaperon, MISS LESTER, an outwardly charming lady, but whom they suspect of being a traitor. Just before one of their shows, all the frocks disappear!

(Now read on.)

The Secret of Next Door!

"IS something wrong, Betty? You're looking upset, and you were whispering to Dave just then."

It was in a deep whisper that Polly herself was speaking, amidst all the gay chatter of the ball-room buffet.

She had slipped away, unnoticed, from chums who were joking and laughing, so as to catch Betty and Dave when they were hastily quitting the brilliant scene.

"Come on with us, then," Betty whispered, "and I'll explain. I went to our stage dressing-room just now, and—all our stage frocks were gone!"

"What!"

"Sh! We don't want an upset. If possible, it must be hushed up. But it means that we'll never be able to give our show to-night."

"Our frocks—gone?" breathed Polly incredulously, whilst she hurried with Betty and Dave towards the dressing-room. "But how? She isn't here to-night!"

It was inevitable that Polly should think instantly of Miss Lester. Neither Betty nor Dave answered. It was a time for action, not words. They and Polly crossed the deserted ball-room floor, and, reaching the temporary stage, went behind its lowered curtain.

With a rush Betty and Polly got to the dressing-room, which Dave reached a moment or so later, pausing at the doorway.

It was Betty who turned to him. Polly was in a spellbound state, her lips forming a mute "Oh!" of rage.

"You see, Dave? Not one of the frocks to be found, although it's only half an hour since we laid them out!"

"And it's that Miss Lester's doing—it must be!" Polly suddenly blazed.

"She's not done it by gate-crashing," Dave's calm voice interrupted. "There's been no Miss Lester at the party in disguise. I've been keeping my eyes about me. But I agree, this business looks like Miss Lester's doing. Half an hour ago, you say, everything was all O.K.?"

"And a minute ago, when I came here to shut a window that I'd left open," Betty exclaimed, "so that the place wouldn't get too stuffy with the pipes on—"

She stopped, for Dave was nodding as if he had already got a "hunch."

"Balcony window," he said.

"Eh?" stared both girls.

But Dave could do better than stand about in talk. Striding across to the window, he jingled apart the thick

THROUGH BLINDING SNOW THE MORCOVE CONCERT PARTY SPEED TO LUXURIOUS HACKLOW PARK— UNAWARE OF THE STARTLING SHOCKS THAT AWAIT THEM!

curtains that such bitter wintry weather demanded.

Plate-glass doors, giving access to a first-floor balcony, were disclosed, heavily blobbed with snow.

"My goodness! Both those french windows are drawn together now!" Betty gasped. "I left one of them open an inch or two!"

"Gee!" Polly used one of her brother's favourite expletives. "Then it's by means of the window the room has been entered!"

Then, as they saw him opening the french windows, they both darted to put on something extra over their party frocks.

It was a wise precaution. Dave opened the balcony windows wide enough for him to be able to step out on to the balcony. And there was deep snow out there, whilst the myriad flakes still

edded down through the dim-lit darkness of the street.

He turned round to pull the glass doors together between himself and the girls.

"It'll be O.K. about the show, I guess. Just give me a few minutes."

"But—" Polly began.

"If you don't mind waiting, girls."

But they did mind! Neither Betty nor Polly could think of simply waiting—standing about doing nothing—whilst he set to work in mysterious fashion out there in the falling snow!

So, no sooner had he latched shut the glass door and floundered a step or two away to the left, than impatient Polly got them open again.

One behind the other they went on to the balcony. Dave, as they kept after him, was a snow-powdered figure already. Another moment, and they saw him clambering over some low partition railing.

"Oh!" Betty excitably breathed. "The house next door! Polly—it's an empty house. D'you understand?"

"Whew! She—she's worked it from there, has she! But come on!" was the eager cry with which Polly scrambled over that bit of railing.

Betty followed. Then they were all three grouped in front of a dark, snow-flecked window, corresponding with the one at Lady Jessington's, by which they had just left.

Dave quickly rubbed a clear space on the dark pane of glass. Then he peered in.

"Can see them," he muttered. "The frocks!"

Betty and Polly turned to each other as if wanting to say "Well!" only amazement had them speechless.

It was so sensational, discovering the stolen frocks inside a dismal room of a long-shut-up mansion!

Now he glanced at his wrist-watch.

"Not a moment to waste. And, besides," he murmured on, "if we find Lady Jessington and do everything properly, it means a sensation, after all. Girls, I'm going to break this window."

"Go on, then," Polly stamped in the snow. "Break it!"

"And to-morrow morning," Dave said, more to himself than to them, "the house agents can be told why, and the damage paid for. Thanks, Betty!" as he suddenly rested a hand upon her shoulders to obtain support.

Then Dave stood on one leg in the snow, whipped the snow off his uplifted foot, and—

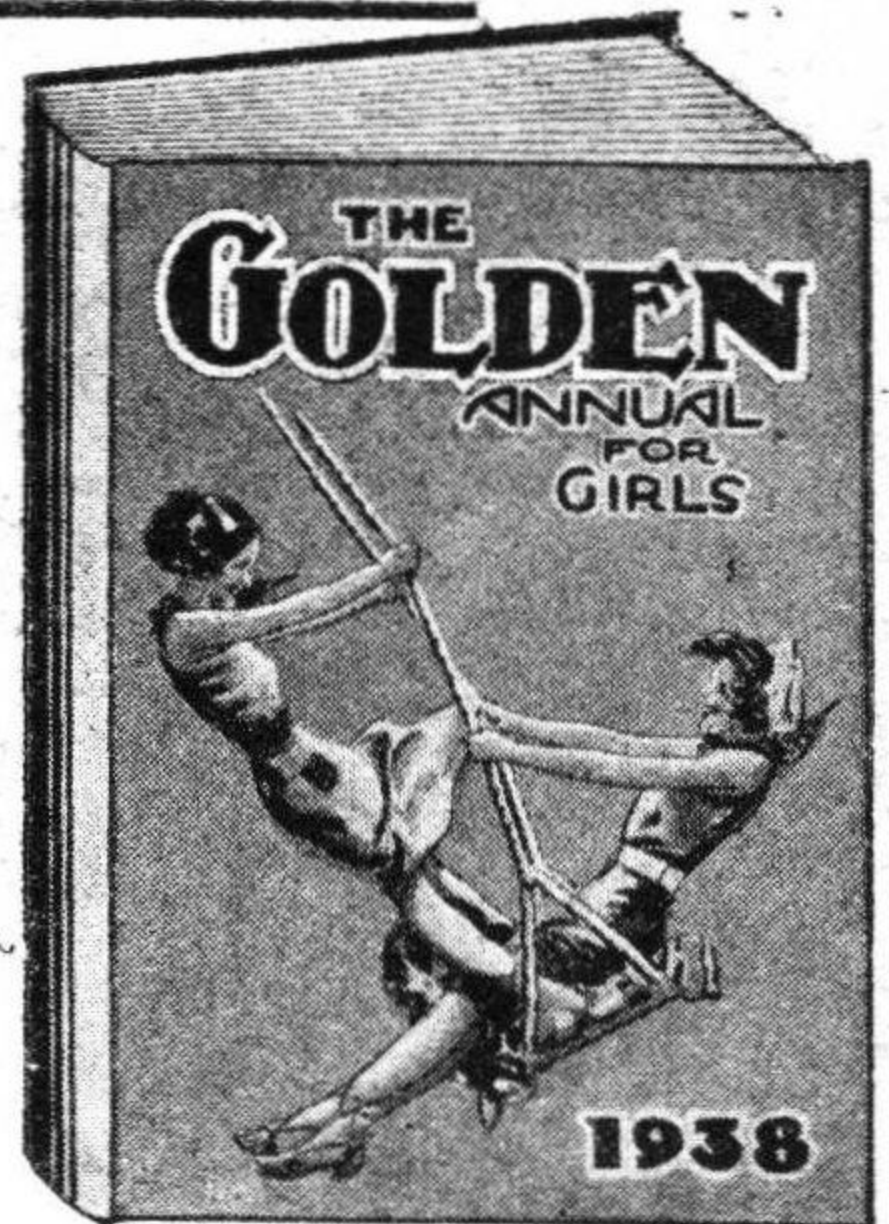
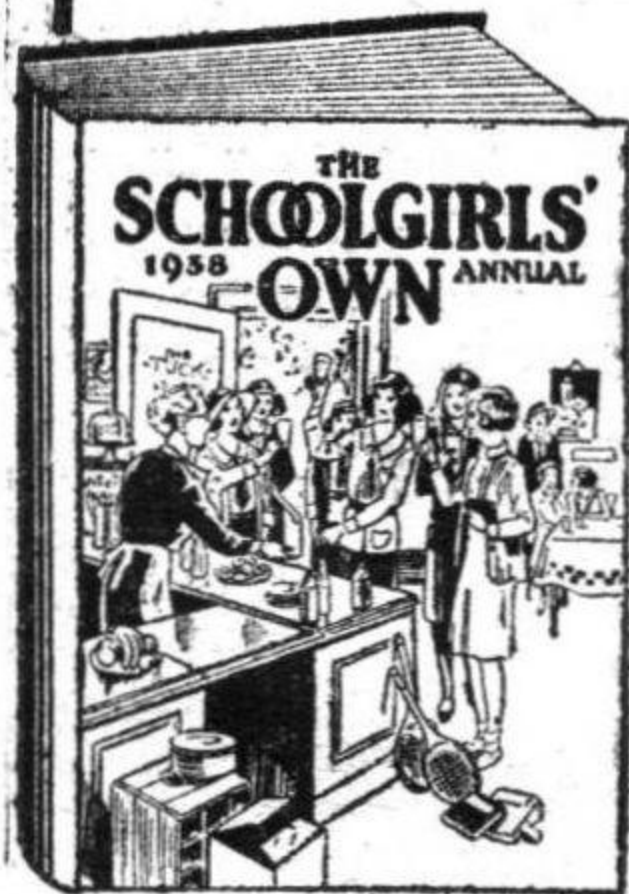
Crack! He fractured the window-pane near the inside latch, as neatly as he might have chipped an egg at break-

Two More Good

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fast-time. Then he put on that shoe again.

"I'd like you two girls to stay to help take back the dresses," Dave invited them.

And scarcely a minute later they were doing that.

In next to no time Dave had let himself and both girls into that icy-cold room, all so bare and dark, and then it had been simply a case of all three of them gathering up armfuls of dumped stage frocks from the floor.

Back in the temporary dressing-room they had no need to go out again. They had brought everything away.

"And no one any the wiser," Betty rejoiced. "What we girls owe to you, Dave!"

"A dance, that's all," was his "bill" for services rendered. "You want the others to come in now, to start getting ready? I'll tell them."

And then he was gone!

A Morning with "Detective Dave"!

"MORNING, miss!"
"Morning!" a very elated Betty smiled across the counter of a certain West End bank, at the same time sliding a bag of money and a paying-in book towards the bald-headed clerk. "Cold as ever, isn't it?"

"Would like to be out somewhere, skating, wouldn't you, young lady? Hallo!" the clerk exclaimed, as he saw the amount entered on the paying-in slip. "Twenty-nine pounds! For last night's collection—"

"At Lady Jessington's—yes!"

"You and your friends must be making quite a sensation!"

"Well, we hope we are, anyway!" laughed Betty, who then had to wait just a few moments whilst the "rake-off" was counted and checked.

All being in order, she received back the paying-in book, that always made her feel amusingly grown-up and "important," wished the beaming bank clerk a polite "Bye for now!" and hurried out to the pavement.

There Dave awaited her, and only Dave. He had come along with her to the bank, so that they might afterwards make for the house-agent's office, there to explain away that broken window at the empty house next door to Lady Jessington's.

As for the rest of the juniors, mighty London held too many attractions for them to feel like wasting time, trotting round with Betty to the bank.

"V'lets, sweet v'lets!" chanted a shawled woman with her basket at the kerb. "V'lets!"

Dave thought: "Yes!" He acquired a bunch, which Betty was next moment inhaling before fastening them into her coat.

"You do waste your money, though," she let censure follow her sparkled thanks. "We've got all those flowers at Mrs. Willoughby's—the bouquets that were handed up last night. Not, of course, that one could wear one of those!"

"I like just a bunch of violets," Dave simply pleaded. "As for bouquets—those last night were, of course, a nice surprise."

"And the surprise they gave Miss Lester, when we got back indoors with them all!" Betty rippled. "I ought not

to laugh, though. Dave, that woman's a real danger as long as she stays on with the party. If only we could prove last night's business against her! Do you think we will?"

"If she went to the house-agent's yesterday, as Miss Lester, then we've got her right enough. There's their office now, over the way," Dave remarked. "So we shall soon know."

They crossed the street, and next minute were being attended to in a dingy outer office.

"We're here," Dave continued his explanation to a senior clerk, who had been fetched away from a private room, "to pay for the broken window that I've just told you about. Sorry it had to be broken, so that we could get our stage dresses; but there was no time to lose, for one thing, and for another, we didn't want the affair to get known."

The elderly clerk nodded appreciatively.

"Oh, I don't think you will find that any fuss is going to be made. A few shillings will make good the damage. My firm has heard about what you youngsters are doing in aid of that Holiday Home scheme, and so we'll send a man round at our own expense."

"Well, thanks ever so, but—"

"But what an amazing thing," Dave was cut short, "that anybody should plan such a rotten trick! Come to think of it, there was a lady here yesterday morning, I think it was—obtaining a permit to view," the clerk remembered, becoming a little excited. "And she rung up from somewhere later, asking if she could keep the keys until this morning, so as to see over the place again."

An office-boy paused in his work to speak across to his senior.

"The lady was here as soon as we opened, sir, and gave back the keys. We've got them now."

"Ah!" And the senior clerk, rubbing a clean-shaven chin, stared at Dave and Betty. "Um!"

"Can you describe the lady?" Betty eagerly pleaded.

"An elderly lady—white hair, and inclined to stoop, which made her a bit round-shouldered," the office-boy brightly stated. "Spoke very softly, with a cough."

"That's quite right, Jones," the senior clerk approved every detail of this description. "That's the lady exactly, as I saw her yesterday. Can you think of anyone like that?" he appealed to Betty and Dave.

They shook their heads. "Sounds to me like a disguise," Dave frowned. "And so there it is! Nothing to be done about it. What name did she give?"

"Hodgson."

Betty had to laugh, although really it was a time to feel enraged, rather than amused. Out on the pavement again with Dave, she glumly echoed his comment of a few moments ago:

"Nothing to be done! She was in disguise—my hat, the artfulness of it! We've no more right now to make any charge against Miss Lester—have we, Dave?"

"Not a bit," he soberly agreed. "Remembering she's a woman whose stock stands very high with all the best of people, like the Willoughbys, and the Lundys."

"Even Miss Somerfield, at Morcove—she thinks a lot of Miss Lester! Oh, it will never do for us to say anything," Betty sighingly exclaimed, "unless we've real proof. We can only go on until at last she does get—"

"Caught in the slips," Dave supplied a metaphor from the cricket field. "I wouldn't let it get you down, though, Betty."

"Oh, I'm not going to be down about it all!" And there was Betty's rather fierce laugh to bear out those words. "We'll bowl her out in the end. And one thing we can do, in the meantime—let her know that we're jolly well waiting to catch her!"

There was no need for Betty to tell Dave how she and her chums would miss no chance of treating Miss Lester to hints, warning her to be careful.

And, since nothing further happened in the nature of a blow against the "M. C. P.," it began to look as if Miss Lester really was having to think twice before striking again.

Almost night after night, for nearly a week, the hard-working chums gave their show, without suffering a single hitch. Steadily the "collection" mounted up. The first hundred pounds was reached and passed. One hundred and thirty pounds became the heartening total at the bank, and a fortnight still to go.

As for Miss Lester, outwardly it was as if no one could be better pleased than was she at the way the juniors were succeeding. But, inwardly, wasn't she seething for a chance to cause a bad set-back? They guessed she was.

And now, just after a crashing New Year's Day, Morcove & Co. were due to give their show miles away from Mayfair—at the famous country seat of the Earl and Countess of Weirhaven.

From all accounts, the chums would be as much "in Society" down there at Hacklow Park as they had been

in the West End. And there'd be plenty of snow!

King Frost reigned, decreeing such a succession of blinding snowstorms as had not been known for years. Ice, kept clear for skating, was six inches thick.

But Morcove & Co., taxiing to Paddington through another flurry of white flakes, had no need to worry about possible conditions at "the other end."

Everything had been arranged for them. The road from the lonely wayside station to Hacklow Park would be kept open, and there would be cars to meet their train.

A ticket inspector could hardly look at the "party" ticket which Manageress Betty flourished. He was so staggered by the storming past of certain roystering Grangemorvians, along with sundry rosy-cheeked schoolgirls.

The boys had raided bookstalls, station tuckshops, and the fruiterers'. Now, hugging something to read in the train, and a good deal to eat, on dashed the diehards, with Jack an easy first in the race to the reserved corridor carriage.

A porter's truckload of luggage rumbled by, going to the guard's van. The M. C. P. theatrical baskets. And as these had gone astray once before, Betty jumped out to see for herself that they really did get put on board. Dave also decided to watch.

The party had lost its "official chaperon" for the moment, and so—just as well to be watchful.

Cancelled—or—?

BUT Miss Lester had not given them the slip all at once, so as to get up to tricks with the luggage.

Betty and Dave saw it go into the van all right, still labelled as it should be. Returning to the reserved car-

riage, they found Miss Lester settling down all by herself in a corner of one compartment with plenty to read.

Those bookstall purchases had, in fact, been made over to the lady in their entirety. Morcove & Co. had done this with the same consideration that was going to let Miss Lester have a whole compartment to herself. And if she saw in all this another hint that they preferred her room to her company—what did it matter? She would be as sweet as ever—couldn't afford to be otherwise.

The whistle blew, and a snorting engine hauled its great train out of the station. One of the important expresses of the afternoon, the first stop would be at that far-off and lonely wayside station where the chums must alight.

It cannot be said that they all settled down for the journey. With some in one compartment, and some in another, the thing became a continual exchange of visits.

Naomer in particular divided her time like this, so as never to miss seeing what might be going round, in the way of chocs and fruit. Nor was it long before the Grangemoor "band" took its stand in the corridor as being a good place for, as it were, serenading both compartments.

But was Miss Lester being fidgeted by these methods of passing the time? It was roguish Polly who went presently to inquire.

"D'you mind, Miss Lester?" Polly wanted to know—oh, so sweetly!

"Not at all!" cried Miss Lester, with a sweetness rivalling the mad-cap's. "I like to hear you all."

So that, for what it was worth, was that. Polly devised her own comb-and-paper musical instrument, and the band played jazz.

To tease Miss Lester was meat and drink to Morcove & Co. these days. But, towards the end of the seventy-



WITH one blow of his shoe, Dave smashed the window. Betty and Polly watched in growing excitement. Would the empty house give them a clue to their vanished costumes?



mile run, their general inclination was to leave the lady in peace, and pay more attention to the blizzard-swept countryside, as seen through rubbed window-panes.

Shrilly the keen wind was whining about the gently rocking train as it still forged along. Only a few more minutes of wintry daylight remained, for the sky was dark with clouds, ready to let down more snow.

A lonely shepherd's cottage was the most that could be seen in the way of a habitation. The rest was rolling downland, deeply covered with an un sullied white mantle, and here and there tremendous drifts smothering hedges for great stretches at a time.

Suddenly the brakes went on, and the curving track enabled some of the girls and boys to see a desolate little station as a dark blotch upon the snowy wastes. The train was going to stop.

"But if this is where we get off," Betty was next moment exclaiming. "Then where are the cars to take us to the house?"

"Can't be our station!" cried Polly and the others.

But it was!

Another minute and they and their belongings were all out of the train, which was at once gliding away.

After the warmth of their comfortable coach, the bitter cold of this exposed platform was something to be felt, in spite of thick gloves, turned-up collars, and gaiters. Many a pair of eyes, peering to where those cars should have been in readiness, grew watery in the stinging wind.

"Dear, dear!" Miss Lester very distressfully exclaimed, while the juniors were inclined to be glumly silent, doing some hard thinking. "How very unfortunate! Strange, too! But here's the porter; he can tell us something, perhaps."

A man, who seemed to be ticket-clerk and porter combined, was coming along from where the "M.C.P." baskets had been put off the train. As he padded nearer over the snowy asphalt, they all read puzzlement in his looks.

"It's a couple o' miles to Hacklow Park, I hope you know?" he mumbled. "And there's nothing here to be hired in the way of a cab, like. But I can't make out why you've come!"

"Why we've come?" half a dozen of them almost yelled. Then Betty elaborated.

"But isn't there a big house-party at Hacklow Park—"

"I don't think there is, and I should know," was the porter's staggering response. "From what I've heard tell that party's all off. If you do go along to the Park—'twill be trouble all for nothing!"

Betty found herself suddenly staring at Miss Lester in an accusing manner.

"So you've served us another trick, have you?" was what she felt like bursting out.

But she forbore. Caught as they all were, out here on the windswept platform, with another snowstorm starting to rage, it was no time for making any accusations, overdue though they might be.

"Do you mean Hacklow Park is shut up—everybody away?" she questioned the porter.

"Oh, some of the staff will be there, miss. But that'll be all, I reckon."

"The next train back to London?" clamoured Miss Lester. "For that's what we must do—go back."

"Nothing until seven-twenty—stopping at all stations."

"Dear, dear!"

"But," Betty dissented, "we're not going to try to get back to-night! Cars or no cars, we're going on to Hacklow Park—"

"Hear, hear," chorused several of the others.

"If only to find out why we weren't told to come!"

"Bekas, eef I conk out, zen Tubby can carry me—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But wait, all of you—stop!" Miss Lester commanded. "It is madness, any idea of getting there on foot! In this snowstorm—"

But the chums thought otherwise.

"Up the Die Hards!" Jack bellowed. "Come on, chaps!"

"Come on, girls—hurrah!"

Neither deepening darkness nor whirling snow could prevent their seeing Miss Lester's white face—its tense expression of rage, the biting of a lip. And for that very reason many of them were already dashing off, with a merriment that meant defiance.

They formed a rollicking batch whose girlish peals of laughter and boyish guffaws were soon coming back only faintly to those who were still on the platform, seeing after the stage baskets.

Dave and Jimmy, watched by "manageress" Betty, were helping the porter to get the baskets under cover.

"Betty!" And now, by her tone, Miss Lester meant to assert her authority. "Those others have gone without my permission! They must all be fetched back!"

"Sorry, Miss Lester, but you heard me say—"

"It is not for you to say anything, Betty! Come now, you know I have been most easy going—"

"Oh, I know what you've been!" Betty said, dryly. "If you'd like to stay here for that slow train back to London, there's nothing to prevent you!"

"Girl! How dare you!"

"Because—to give only one reason—it's just no use our getting back to London to-night. We've been nicely done, by not getting some letter or telegram that must have been sent off in time to stop us. And that's why we're all so determined—"

"To defy me, is that it?"

"Determined to find out—who is responsible!"

Miss Lester's eyes narrowed.

"What do you mean, girl?"

"You ought to have a pretty good idea of that!"

Betty, choosing to put it that way, was looking Miss Lester straight in the eyes.

For a few moments that battle of looks went on, whilst the snowflakes eddied thickly between one hard-set face and another. Then, with a sudden smile and a fling of the head, Betty turned away.

Snow-powdered, Dave and Jimmy were ready to go off with her, and they all three floundered away, leaving Miss Lester to follow—if she liked!

Deep tracks in the snow showed the way the others had gone, having first obtained the right direction from a signpost.

A pointing arm, from which the advance party must have knocked away the smothering snow, said:—

HACKLOW PARK—2 miles.

And now, how dark it was: how the icy wind howled across the white wilderness!

In spite of much fun-making, it became a real test of endurance to struggle on as they did.

Just about all-in were many of the girls when, at long last, the walls of a great mansion, ghostly grey in the night, loomed into view.

Through the trying blur of the snow-storm, the chums saw gleams of brilliant light at windows which, the house-party being "off," they would have expected to be blackly dark. Even more surprising, suddenly Morcove & Co. heard sounds as of great merrymaking.

Aware of all her chums doing the same, Betty dashed on towards the mansion.

Joyful relief was giving her fresh energy, and she was still a little in advance of the others when her eyes noticed something greatly startling.

Behind the drawn-together curtains of a drawing-room window that opened on to the terrace, there was a young and most lovely girl, in a beautiful evening frock.

She had obviously slipped behind the curtains to hide, and now, as she held herself perfectly still, a glance out through the snow-blobbed pane of glass caused her to see—Betty!

For a moment more that lovely face expressed utter amazement.

Then Betty, out in the driving snow, was quite close to the window. And she and the other girl burst out laughing at each other—total strangers as they were!

NO wonder the Concert Party are so astounded. What is the meaning of the strange misunderstanding? On no account should you miss next week's dramatic chapters.

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