

"MYSTERY HOUSE OF THE MOORS!"

Dramatic LONG COMPLETE
Cliff House story inside.

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Incorporating
"SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN"



"Don't go—please don't go! Stop and help me!"
came the sudden cry from the landing of the mystery house.

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

Dramatic LONG COMPLETE story of the Cliff House chums.

MYSTERY HOUSE of the MOORS!

By

HILDA RICHARDS

Illustrated by T. LAIDLER.



An Appeal for Help!



"HALLO, we're stopping again," Barbara Redfern remarked.

"Wonder what's the matter now?" murmured her great golden-haired Mabel Lynn.

"Perhaps the engine-driver's heard old Bessie's snore and mistaken it for something wrong with the engine!" she added, with a chuckle.

There was a grin at that, and the occupants of the carriage glanced across at the corner where plump Bessie Bunter sat fast asleep.

Besides the famous trio, there was one other member of Cliff House School's Fourth Form in the carriage—that strange girl Gemima Carstairs. And with the Cliff House chums were Jimmy Richmond and Don Haybury, of Friardale Boys' School, with whom they were travelling down from Scotland.

"Or perhaps the driver's left his pipe behind and trotted back to get it," suggested Gemima, slowly polishing her monocle. "What a life! How long have we been in this train now, Jimmy the Richmond?"

"About three hours," said Jimmy Richmond, and ruefully shook his curly head. "Must say it's a record service on this line!"

"Terrible!" laughed Mabel Lynn. "But, I say, that's a rather nice house over there!"

The others glanced with lethargic interest at the house referred to—not, indeed, that they could see a great deal of it.

Two upstanding turrets linked an embowered battlement, to which snow-covered ivy clung, showing in a fold in the hills on the Yorkshire moors, was all that presented itself to their vision. That, and the hail and sleet which for the last three hours had incessantly pattered and drummed at the windows of the compartment.

For it was twelve o'clock midday now, and, according to the time-table at the main line station at which they had left the London-Edinburgh express to board this two-coach train which was to take them to Ridingdale, the home of Donald Haybury, they should have reached their destination an hour and a half ago.

Yet here they were, still a good fifteen miles from Ridingdale.

Don Haybury, the frank, fresh-faced boy from Friardale School, who was their intended host for the remainder of the Christmas holidays, grimaced.

"I'm sorry, girls. I'd no idea we should be tied up like this. Hope you're not too bored."

"Oh, not at all!" Jemima said politely, stifling a yawn. "What can't be helped must be endured, you know. Would it mind, Barbara beloved, stuffing a suitcase or something into dear old Bessie's yawning cavern? The draught from her snore is something dreadful in this cheerless old corner! Wonder how the merry Spartans in the next carriage are enjoying life?" she mused.

But from the merry old Spartans in the next compartment—by which Jemima meant Leila Carroll, Jean Cartwright, Clara Evelyn, and their two other Friardale schoolboy friends, Lister Catermole and Douglas Courts—there came no sound.

Really, it was too bad. And yet they philosophically realised it could not be helped. For the Yorkshire moors through which the train was passing had been snowbound for days, and with an unexpected thaw setting in, matters had not been improved.

All along the line great avalanches of snow had fallen, impeding progress and causing so many irritating halts that Babs Redfern & Co. had lost count of them.

Worse than that, the train was not of a corridor variety, and so there was no means of communication with their chums next door save by means of the windows.

In her corner, Bessie Bunter shifted, stirred, licked her lips, and then blinked round surprisedly through her big, round spectacles.

"Oh, I sus-say," she said, "we've stopped!"

"Clever old Bessikins!" grinned Mabel Lynn.

"What's the time?"

"Just about two hours later than it should be," Jimmy Richmond said. "Ten-past twelve. Better go to sleep, Bessie. We'll wake you up again at midnight. Hallo?"—and he started up—the guard's shouting something!"

The guard was. His voice, mingled with the howl of the wind and the lash of rain and sleet, came confusedly to their ears.

Richmond, standing up, could see him as he came along the permanent way, a distorted figure through the rain-washed panes.

The guard stopped. Again he said

something. Richmond shook his head. "Better open the door," Babs advised. "It looks as if he's got some message for us. Hold tight, girls!" she gasped, and herself turned her back towards the blast as the boy tugged open the door, and the guard, breathless and streaming, scrambled in. "Ur-r-h!" she shivered. "Help Jimmy with the door, Mabs. Thank goodness! That's better. What's the news, guard?" she asked.

The guard's face was grave.

"Bad news enough!" he said gruffly. "We're held up, and likely to be held up, miss, for hours and hours. Question is," he added glumly, "whether we'll be getting through at all before this time to-morrow—which means, of course, we'll have to shunt back to the last station. Line's blocked. In the cutting ahead there's been a landslide, choking the track for half a mile or more."

They all stared at him in blank dismay.

"But what the dickens can we do?" Donald Haybury asked angrily. "We want to get to Ridingdale."

"Well, sir, there's Northdale over yonder," He nodded in the direction of the distant house. "That's a village—five miles straight across country. There's a bus service from there. If you like to go on, you can leave your luggage in the guard's van. We'll take care of that, of course. I leave it to you," he added, and, pulling open the door, vanished in another howl and flurry of rain and sleet.

A strange old house indeed. Babs & Co. and their boy chums of Friardale School seek shelter there from the storm, never dreaming of the strange, almost frightening happenings which are to occur within its walls, certainly quite unaware that they are on the threshold of one of the most exciting adventures of their lives.

The six glanced at each other.

"Well, now, can you beat that?" Mabs asked.

"Strikes me," Jemima murmured, "we'll have to beat it across country, children! Fond of railways as I am, I'm not too specially keen on wasting my young and beautiful life listening to Bessie's snores for the next twelve hours or so. Even a five-mile trot through the gale is better than a twelve-hour wait."

"But look here, you know, we shall be drowned!" Bessie protested in alarm. "Better drown than starve," Jemima replied. "Do you fancy facing life for the next twelve hours without fodder, Fat One?"

Bessie blinked. That observation, at least, made its profoundest impression. Not, of course, that there was a danger of that, of course, though it was more than probable they would end up at Northdale soaked to the skin.

But that, as Babs said, could not be helped—and, anyway, if they took a dry change of clothing with them, it would be easy enough to hire rooms at the hotel and change.

And from the hotel Don could get in touch with his people by phone, and ask them to send cars.

"Oh, then," Jimmy Richmond said.

"Is that agreed?"

"Rather!" nodded Mabs.

"Then will you pack a few of my duds in my small case?" Jimmy asked Don. "I'll nip into the next compartment and tell the others. Babs, pass my coat, will you?"

The coat was passed. Jimmy, ram-

ming his cap well over his forehead, donned it. The door was pulled open again, and the schoolboy disappeared.

"Right-ho! Then let's pack," Babs said briskly. "Small cases. We can't lug too much across five miles of open country, you know. Don, would you mind giving a hand with these cases off the rack? Bessie, get busy."

"Yes, rather, you know, but I've lost something," Bessie protested. "My book!"

"What book?"

"Well, that old book the laird of Glen-gowrie gave me, you know. 'Fifty Ways of Making Money,' Bessie cried. "I was reading it when I went to sleep, you know."

"Well, I shouldn't worry," Babs said. "Don't forget to take a pair of stockings, girls."

"What-ho?" Jemima beamed.

"But look here," Bessie said worriedly—and she really did look anxious—"what about my book, you know? I want that book. I'm going to read it and study frightfully, fearfully hard, you know, so that I can become a millionairess. If one of you jealous cats has taken it—"

"Oh, tut-tut, Bessica!" Jemima cried. "Well, where is it?"

"Ask me."

"Well, isn't that what I am doing?" Bessie shared. "Oh, phoo! That blessed door!" she roared. "I sus-say, I—"

The door opened and closed. Jimmy Richmond, grinning breathlessly, stood in the carriage again.

"All right," he said. "I've explained the position to Clara & Co. They're getting ready now, and are going to bang on the wall when they're fit. Packed my duds, Hay? Good chap! But my stars, it's a gale out!" he gasped.

"Are we ready?" Babs asked, glancing round.

"What-ho!"

"But, look here, my book!" hooted Bessie. "Really, you cats, I think you might help me to look for it. That book's worth millions—millions!" added the plump one impressively.

"Oh dear!" Mabs sighed. "Have a hunt round, everybody. Babs, will you pack Bessie's grip for her? Now, where is—"

Hallo, what's this you've been sitting on?"

"Why, that's it," Bessie said joyfully.

"Oh crumbs! Thanks, Mabs—"

"You old chump," chuckled Babs. "Better put it in your pocket, old Bess—"

Hallo, there goes Clara"—as a heavy thud sounded on the wall.

"Grab your cases, everybody. Did you say something, Jimmy?"

"Meaning me or Jimmy Richmond?" Jemima asked. "I just said I wish I had diving-suit, that's all. Well, well, stiff upper lip, what? Be British and bulldoze, and all that sort of merry old piffle. Out you get, Don, my boy! And whoa, there! Don't forget your life-belt!" she added, as she handed the boy his bag. "Whoosh, there!"

"Oh crumbs!" Bessie gasped, as the door opened. "It's lul-like stut-stepping out of a submarine, you know!"

Which, for Bessie, was a rather good

metaphor—and one which, if an exaggeration, was very apt.

One by one they climbed out, gasping as the cold, biting wind caught their breath, blinking against the violent hail of sleet and rain that was flung into their faces.

Out of the next carriage Leila Carroll, Clara Trevlyn, Jean Cartwright, Lister Cattermole, and the Douglas girls came tumbling. The boys gallantly assisted the girls on to the permanent way. In a group they stood and looked at each other.

"Oh, my hat!" roared Tomboy Clara. "I say, which way—"

"Across the fields there, past the house," Richmond roared, and had to shout to make his voice heard above the rush and the roar of the storm. "Babs, let me have your bag. Come on."

He led the way. The others followed. The wind rushed at them. Deluging rain poured down upon them. There came a howl from Bessie as suddenly she floundered up to her knees in mud. Another shriek from Mabs as, turning to help Bessie, she catapulted over a hidden stone, and, with a gasp, splashed into a great puddle of muddy water.

"Oh, gosh!" Richmond said. "Look here, we can't go on like this. Would you like to go back to the train?"

"Oh, stuff! Let's get on," Clara snorted.

They got on. But it was dreadful going. Even though they had expected it to be hard, they had never anticipated anything like this.

Before they had tramped two hundred yards there was not one of them, despite their coats, not soaked completely.

The ground, rocky and boggy and treacherous, more than once let them into unseen pools and puddles up to their knees. To add to the desperation of the circumstances, hard from hailstones now began to fall with the hissing rain, stinging their faces.

"Oh phoo!" Bessie gasped. "Oh dud dear, I sus-say, you gig-girls, go on. Lul-leave me to die alone!"

"Come on, chumplet!" Clara roared. "But I kik-can't, you know," Bessie said pathetically. "Oh dud-dear—"

They all stopped. Richmond bit his lip.

"I'm sorry," he said quietly. "I was an ass even to suggest this. Still— He looked back. He looked towards where the house they had spotted from the train—a big, rambling, old-fashioned structure, clad in a grey-and-white cloak of ivy and half-melted snow—was now in full view. There's the house! I vote we ask for shelter."

"Good idea," Don Haybury voted. "Perhaps I can phone up from there. Anyway, let's get on. Come on, Bessie. Lister and I will help you along."

"Oh, thuth-thanks!" stuttered the exhausted Bessie.

They tramped on again, but with more heart now. Before them the old house loomed larger and nearer, like an inviting haven of refuge.

Babs noticed with satisfaction that smoke was ascending from its chimneys, proving at least that it was inhabited.

"Well, here we are, I guess!" Leila Carroll cried, as they came out on to a road and found the big iron gates of the house confronting them. "And the gates are open!" added the American junior. "Hallo, there's a name on the gate, I guess! What's it say, Babs?"

"Wildmore Close," Babs said, peering through the semi-darkness.

"Sure is named well," Leila opined. "Wild's the name for a house in this spot. And sure, she's a dud, as they all tramped down the slushy drive, glad even for the thin shelter of the trees

which lined it, "seems sort of familiar. Where have I heard the name before, Babs?"

Babs shook her head. "Goodness knows! I never have." "But I have," Jimena put in. "Now, what, where—whoosh! I have it!" she cried. "Professor Marsh! I believe he lives here!"

"En?"

"Marsh," Jimena said. "Frightfully clever old Spartan. Works for the Government, or something, doesn't he? I haven't had the pleasure of his jolly old company myself, but my gov'nor knows him. Well, here we are!" she added, as they halted under the portico. "Ring the old bell, Babs."

Babs rang. Shivering and breathless, they stood huddled together.

They waited. No reply.

"Ring again," Lister Cattermole advised.

Babs rang again. Still no reply. Bessie groaned.

"Oh kik-crums! There's nobody in—"

"Hist!" Jimena said. Footsteps—padding footsteps—could be heard coming across the hall. Then there was a rattle, the door squeaked open a few inches, and a face peered out.

"Hallo!" a gruff voice said. "Who are you?"

"Please can we come in a moment?" Babs asked. "You see—"

"I'm sorry, you can't! Good-day!"

"But, look here—"

The door closed again. The chums looked at each other in consternation. Then Jimmy Richmond's lips set.

"The ill-mannered rotter!" he said. "But, wait a minute. We're not going to be turned away like that if I know it at the bell. And he rang angrily and violently at the bell."

Once again the door opened.

"I've told you to go away!" the man said harshly. "Now be off with you!"

"But—wait a minute," Jimmy said, and put his foot in the door as it would have closed. The man stood fully revealed then, dressed in the garb of a butler. "Is Professor Marsh at home?"

The man paused.

"What's that to do with you?"

"A jolly lot to do with me," Jimmy said warmly. "In any case, it's hardly your job to turn people away who may be his friends, is it? We're stranded. All we want is permission to dry ourselves and use your phone. After that, we'll go."

Still the man looked adamant. He shook his head.

"As for the phone, the lines are all down," he said. "I'm sorry; it's no good. The professor is busy, and he gave orders that no one is to be admitted."

"O.K.," Richmond's face was fierce suddenly. "Then we'll go!" he said.

"But please tell your precious professor that I shall speak to my father about this and see what father is of some importance in the Government, and the professor is engaged on Government work, he might not be too pleased about that, might he? Come on, girls," he added gruffly, and then stopped as there came a sharp exclamation from the man.

"Well?"

"Just a moment— The man paused again. "I—I'm sorry," he said.

"Of—of course you can come in! I—I didn't know that, of course! Come right in," he added.

Jimmy grimly smiled. He glanced at Jimena, who, with her head in her own, solemnly winked back. A shrewd thrust that—for until Jimena

had mentioned Professor Marsh, Richmond had not even the faintest inkling of his existence, though, to be sure, it was strictly true that his own father was a high Government official. The threat, obviously, had done its work.

With one accord the chums tramped in, gratefully glad for the snug warmth which immediately enfolded them.

They found themselves in a great hall, round which, near the raftered ceiling and almost lost in the gloom beyond the glittering chandelier, ran a stout old gallery.

The place, if ancient, looked cheerful, and there had been many obvious attempts to add to it a touch of modernity, as, for instance, the electric light.

To one side stood a long, old-fashioned sideboard, glittering with a pile of crystal glass. Under the gallery a great table had been laid out with snowy napery and glistening silver. Gay garlands hung from the panelled walls, and below the gallery, worked in holly and berries, was a greeting: "A Happy New Year to all My Guests!"

"Say, looks as if somebody's entertaining a party!" Leila muttered.

That was the impression they all gained. But, for all that, the whole place seemed strangely echoing and empty.

The butler closed the door. He turned. Richmond looked at him.

"Well, thank you!" he said gruffly. "Is there anywhere we can change?"

"I'm sorry, sir, no," the butler said. "But you may dry yourselves at the fire. I hope," he added pointedly, "you will not remain too long."

"Well, talk about a welcome!" muttered Clara, in that blunt way of hers.

"I sus-suppose," Bessie asked, shivering, "there's not such a thing as a cup of tea about the place? I'm fu-frozen, you know."

"I am sorry, miss," the man answered stiffly. "I regret there is not. As a matter of fact, there is only one servant besides myself in the place, and we are not in the habit of making cups of tea for stray callers who come to the door. I will go and find the professor and tell him you are here," he added.

The chums looked at each other. They were clustered round the fire now, preparing to take off their coats. The steam that arose from their clothes testified to the thoroughness of the soaking they had experienced.

"Not exactly welcome, what?" Jimena asked, staring round. "Mr. Butler would rather have our merry old room than our company. Yet it's strange," she muttered, "uncannily strange, my comrades! Methinks I detect preparations for a party on right royal lines."

They stared at her.

"But what's strange about that?" Clara demanded.

"Just, Jimena murmured, "that it is odd to prepare for a party with only two servants. In a place like this one would expect to find ten of them, at least."

They paused, digesting that information. But they were more concerned with their own adventure than the strangeness of their surroundings.

Being rather sensitive upon such points, they were feeling too uncomfortably strange themselves—rather like interlopers. Jimena was just unbuttoning her coat, when—

"Hallo!" Clara said, head up.

"Someone's coming."

"Somebody was. The curtains under the gallery moved. For a moment

it was whisked aside, and there they saw the butler talking in low, hurried tones to another man. The latter nodded. He came over to them.

"I am Greening, the professor's manservant," he said. "The professor is sorry that he cannot see you. He is extremely busy on a most intricate part of his latest invention. He hopes, when you have dried yourselves, that you will go."

"Well, thanks for the hospitality!" Richmond said curtly.

Greening bowed. He withdrew stiffly. "Oh, gag-girls—!" Bessie stuttered, and then blinked. "I sus-say!" she said, staring.

But they had all heard that faint sound above them. They all saw now the dim figure which came running along the gallery—the face of the girl which peered at them. Amazingly they watched as she leaned over the banisters.

Her voice, tone vibrant on a note of agitated appeal, sounded.

"No, no!" she cried. "Don't go—please don't go. Stop and help me. I am—" And then she jerked backwards; came a sudden, gasping cry, followed by a thud which sounded like a blow.

Then the girl had vanished into the shadows.



Mystery Signals!



THRILLED, startled, the chums looked at each other. Had they imagined that it—

"A girl!" whispered Leila, surprisedly.

"Asking our help!" breathed Babs.

"But what happened to her?"

Clara, followed by Babs, impulsively hurried to the stairs, ascending a little way. They peered towards the gallery, but there was no movement now—no sound.

Who was the girl? Why had she appeared like that? And who, interrupting her appeal, had carried her off again?

"Oh crumbs!" Bessie gasped. "Oh dud-dear! I sus-say, it wasn't a gig-gosh, was it?"

Jimmy Richmond's eyes gleamed.

"There's something fishy here," he said. "Something jolly fishy. Why didn't that fellow want us to come in? Why, when we came in, should he want to get rid of us as soon as he could?"

"That butler chap—he looked like a crook. And now this girl—"

"Shush!" Babs whispered swiftly.

They tensed, looking again towards the curtain which had moved. From behind it appeared once again the butler who had first greeted them. He looked a little agitated.

"Please—please!" he said. "The professor says—will you go at once?"

"But why at once?" demanded Jimmy Richmond.

"Because—because he says your presence is interfering with his work."

"Well, that's rich, I guess," Leila Carvell said indignantly. "Why, we haven't even seen him!"

"And not because," Clara Trevlyn asked bluntly, "we might have seen something we weren't intended to see? Like the girl leaning over the balcony calling for help?"

The man started a little. For a moment Babs thought she saw the light of fear come and go in his eyes. Then he shook his head.

"I am afraid," he said suavely, "I

"SEE it?" Jemima asked. "There are two initials here—R.M."

Babs stared at the handkerchief. Obviously it had given Jemima some sort of clue to the mysterious happenings in this house.

have not the faintest idea what you are talking about. If you saw anything in the gallery, it was your imagination. Please go!" he added.

"Good enough," Jemima retorted. "Get your things on, old Spartans. Still, too tough—too tough," she added musingly. "The old professor must have had a fearful lapse in manners since my guv'nor knew him. I'm Jemima," she explained—"Jemima Carstairs from Delma Castle, which I gather is just about thirty miles across the moors. You may have heard of my father. Once a big noise—or, should one say a big whisper?—in the Secret Police Service."

The man stared at her. Once again Babs fancied she detected fright in his eyes.

"Clever man, the old guv'nor," Jemima went on chattily. "Knows no end of criminals—what? Also a great friend of the professor, although I'm sorry to confess I've never met the old Spartan myself. Great friend, too, of Police-Inspector Murphy, of the Darlingford Division. Know Inspector Murphy, old bean?"

"Why should I know a police-inspector?" the man asked stiffly.

"Oh, no reason! No reason at all," Jemima bubbled on. "All the same, I shall consider it my most serious duty forthwith to see the inspector, and ask him to come along here and give the old professor a lecture on manners. Ahem! Since you're so anxious to speed the parting guests, would you mind giving me a hand on with this coat?" she added winningly, and smilingly held it out towards him.

"I'd like to be able to tell the old

inspector about one good deed from you, you know."

But the man did not offer to assist with the coat. He was staring at Jemima.

"You—you know him?" he asked. "You—?" He straightened up. "But—but wait," he added hurriedly. "Please do wait! Just a minute, young ladies! I must apologise for my master. He—he is rather inclined to forget when he is absorbed, you see, and—and I don't think he has an idea of the weather outside, I'll go and have a final word with him."

He trotted off again. Jemima grinned.

"Strange, mon comrades, what magic the name of a policeman will conjure," she murmured. "Strange—strange, indeed. The little man seemed greatly disturbed—did you notice? Obviously he doesn't relish the opportunity of exchanging autographs with dear old Inspector What's-his-name. I think," Jemima added softly, "if you're all of the same mind, we can bed down in comfort now until the merry old gale blows itself inside out. Meantime, with your permission, I've a fancy to exercise my old curiosity, you know."

"But what—?" Babs asked. "Just find out where the girl came from," Jemima said carelessly. "But, Jimmy—"

But Jemima, with a strange smile on her face, was making her way towards the stairs which led up to the gallery.

"Jimmy, no!" Babs gasped, as she ran after her. "Supposing—"

"Well, supposing what?" Jenima grinned. "No harm in having a look round the old ancestral home—what? And surely," Jenima added, "if there is a damsel in distress it is up to us, being British and bulldog to the backbone and all that, to help her out. Coming?"

Babs paused; and then, on a swift, sudden impulse, she nodded.

While the chums watched uneasily from below, the two mounted, side by side.

"Here we are," Jenima murmured, as they reached the gallery. "And here's the spot from which she called. Hallo!" she muttered softly, and stooping suddenly, picked up something—a little lace handkerchief. "Now, I wonder," she added, staring along the gallery.

Certainly there was not much to be seen there. Stout oak panelling, rising to a height of six feet or more, formed a background to the banisters. Above the panelling was ranged a series of water colours, set among which was a modern oil painting of a benevolent, beaming, bearded old man.

"Secret panels—what?" Jenima thoughtfully murmured. "This place must be full of them—what? The mystery thickens. The girl, whoever she was, was grabbed from behind by someone who came out of a secret panel. But, whist!" she added softly. "Dodge back!"

Too late. For even as the two girls turned, a door along the gallery opened and through it came Greening. Swiftly, almost angrily, he bore down upon them.

"What are you girls doing up here?" he demanded.

"Just looking round, what," Jenima answered. "Admiring the photograph of the old gentleman here. So awfully good-looking, what, despite his old age. Is it the professor?"

"The man paused. Babs heard his quick, hissing intake of breath.

"That," he said, "is not the professor. That—" And then he stopped. For suddenly, muffled and faint, but clearly to be heard for all that, there came a scream—a scream in a girl's voice, followed by a single, broken word.

"Hel—"

Then silence.

"What was that?" Babs gasped.

"What was that?" Greening said, but Babs said that he was white to the lips. "Please will you go downstairs?"

"But that scream—" Babs demanded.

"I heard no scream. But go now. Mr. Beecham, the butler, will come to see to you presently."

Babs and Jenima looked at each other. Obviously the scream had disconcerted Greening as much as themselves. Deeper and deeper became that sense of mystery, that feeling that in this house they had stumbled upon something not intended for their ears or eyes.

Jenima nodded. The glance she threw at Babs told that girl that Jenima found it politic at the moment to fall in with the man's wishes. In a matter of this sort, at least, Babs was very content to leave the leading to Jenima, who had an uncanny knack, in her own weirdly mysterious way, of dealing with situations.

Together they went downstairs, followed by Greening. Then Beecham, the butler, came up.

"I have seen the professor again," he said. "He says if you wish you may stop. I am extremely sorry, my dear

young ladies and gentlemen, that you should have received so inhospitable a welcome at the house." The professor instructs me to do my best to make it up to you, although he is afraid he will not be able to see you for hours."

"The invention?" asked Babs.

"Yes. In the meantime, if you care to change, I will show you to your rooms. While you are changing I will see that a hot lunch is prepared in the small dining-hall. I trust that will meet with your wishes?"

"Mum-my hat, won't it!" Bessie breathed. "I'm starving, you know. And I say, I've lost that blessed book again."

"Oh, blow the book. Come on."

"But—"

"Rats! We'll find that later," Clara said joyously. "Pick up your bags, kiddies!"

And in new heart now, they followed eagerly as Beecham led the way.

Through the curtain they went, up a small flight of stairs. Here was a long, high corridor, supported by great pillars, with many doors leading out from it. Babs, who was in the van of the procession, saw one of those doors come open suddenly, and saw Greening, the servant, emerge, swiftly tucking something under his coat.

She couldn't be sure at the time, but it certainly looked, from that distance, like a photograph in a silver frame. He didn't look at them, however. He hurried on along the corridor.

Beecham paused.

"I expect Greening has been tidying up," he said, not very convincingly. "Now, here are the rooms. Will you please give me your names, and I shall know which to put you in—just in case," he added, "you have to stop the night. This dreadful storm certainly shows no sign of abating!"

"Nun-no, rather not. As long as there's plenty of good grub, I don't care if it never ab-ab-stops," Bessie beamed. "Oh crumbs, I mum-mean to say—dud-did somebody ask for my name?"

The names were given. Beecham made a note of them. Then he flung open the door out of which Greening had appeared.

"Miss Redfern, would you like to share this room with Miss Bunter?"

With Bessie, Babs stepped into the room. Certainly there was nothing to complain about. It was a snug, sweet little room, with a lilac colour-scheme, and many touches of modernity. Among its ancient furnishings were two divan beds, covered with embroidered elder-downs, and a gas-fire. Clean towels were on the rails, new soap in the dishes. Generally, the room had all the appearance of having been made ready for a guest.

Bessie beamed.

"Oh, I sus-say, you know, this is ripping," she said. "Nice. But I only wish I could find that book no more, you know. You—you didn't see me drop it, coming here, dud-did you, Babs?"

"No," Babs said with a smile, but she was looking at the mantelpiece.

On that mantelpiece were three photographs—and obviously, once upon a time, there had been four, for there was a rather large, blank space between the first and the second. That, of course, would be the photo Greening had taken away.

A nice room, yes. A snug room. Miles and miles better here than forcing their way through the raging blizzard of sleet outside, but—Babs did not feel comfortable.

She could not forget their reception,

and this present astonishing change of front. She could not feel happy with the memory of that dimly seen girl on the gallery—those haunting words still ringing in her ears: "Please don't go. Stop and help me—" Followed by that sinister hush—and later by that stifled scream.

What weird, sinister secret did this house harbour? And why, if only the professor and his two servants were in habitation, should these obvious preparations for a party, on a large scale, have been made?

The door opened. Jenima came in. She frowned a little as she saw Bessie, most politely wishing to talk to Babs alone. If that was the case, it was Bessie who gave her her cue.

"Oh, hallo, Jimmy. I sus-say, isn't this ripping? By the way, have you seen my book?"

"What, the old fifty million ways of becoming a pauper?" Jenima asked.

"Now—well, well, now, of course I have! Nip along and take a peep into my room, Bessie. Fifth door along from here. I'm sleeping on my own."

Bessie beamed. She ambled off. Babs blinked.

"Then you had it all the time, Jimmy?"

"Did I say so?" Jenima chuckled. "Alas, my beloved, how you do misinterpret. I merely advised Bessie to look at my room—a jolly natty little room, too, by the way—while I had a talk with you about"—Jenima said, and produced a crumpled piece of linen cambric—"this!"

Babs stared. She had almost forgotten the handkerchief Jenima had found in the gallery.

"See it?" Jenima asked. "There are two initials here—R.M. Possibly those are the initials of the girl who dropped this hanky. Examine the quality and the texture of the material, Barbara, beloved. It's plainly that belonging to a girl with pots of money, and must have cost five or six shillings in itself. Now take a smell at it."

Babs, with her eyes wonderingly upon her chum, sniffed.

"Perfume," she decided.

"Exactly," Jenima looked shrewd. "Nice one, too, what?" she asked. "I happen to know that perfume, Babs, because it's one I have used myself, and it costs a dickens of a lot of money. The only place I can buy it is in York, which again proves that it is a local commodity."

"Yes. I can see that, of course," Babs said. "But what are you getting at?"

"Just nothing, and nothing at all," and then, with characteristic contradiction—"or p'haps a lot. First: Obviously that girl is a prisoner here. Obviously, taking the hanky and the perfume as evidence, she is a rich girl. And the initial—the 'M'—it did strike me, you know, might stand for 'Marsh,' which is the name of the professor. On the other hand," Jenima added carefully, "it might stand for Mitchell, or Meredith, or Mann, or any old name."

Babs blinked.

"And by coincidence," Jenima went on, "I think I've got the room the girl used to inhabit. At least, there is a pair of girl's shoes in it—size three. There's also a half-empty bottle of this perfume on the dressing table. Also," Jenima added profoundly, "I found an old bit of a shopping list. It was dated June 4th, 1887, and it had on it 'perfume from Magennis'—which is probably the date on which the perfume was bought, showing the girl has lived in this old place a long, long time, what? Just threads," Jenima added vaguely. "Weave 'em together as you like, and draw what conclusion you like."

"You mean the girl lived in this house?" Babs asked, her eyes beginning to glisten. "That she has been kidnapped?"

"Something like that."

"By whom?"

Jemima shrugged.

"Jimmy, tell me, what do you make of it?"

Jemima thoughtfully polished her eyeglass.

"I have a notion," she replied softly, "just a glimmering, what? But notions, like eggs, should not be counted before they become merry old chickens, what—" which was Jemima's polite way of saying that she did not intend to voice her suspicions before she had proved them facts. "Ask me that question again to-morrow morning, beloved."

Babs shook her head.

"Jimmy, aren't you the oddest girl?" she said. "Why not tell me now? Why—?" and then she jumped. "Oh, goodness! What was that?"

And once again Babs frowned, struck by the oddness of the manservant's actions. For catching a brief glimpse of the portrait in one of the frames, she could have vowed that it was the same as the one in the gallery, and the one which Greening had removed from her own room.

"Here—here are your spectacles, Miss Bunter," the man said. "I am sorry!" He helped her up. "You are not hurt?"

"Oh dear! Nun-no. But really, you know, you shouldn't come barging out of a room like that," Bessie said severely. "Have you seen my book?"

"I am sorry, Miss Bunter, I have seen no book," the manservant said, drawing a deep breath, and picked up his tray. "If you care to go downstairs you will find lunch ready," he said now.

He nodded, starting off, the tray piled with the fragments of photo-frames in his arms. Bessie ambled towards them.

"Hallo!" she said wrathfully. "I

once their faces lighted up. After their chilly reception in the big hall they had not expected much in the way of food.

But there in front of them was a table laden with good things, and before each chair was a steaming plate of soup.

"Yum!" Bessie said appreciatively.

"Well, I'll say this is the goods," Leila grinned. "And my, am I just ready for that. But we'd better wait for the old professor. Is he joining us, Beecham?"

"I am sorry to say," Beecham replied, "the professor is still busy. He will not attend lunch."

"Gee, doesn't he ever eat?" "When the professor is engaged, as he is engaged at the moment, he has no thought for meals," the butler said. "His time is too valuable."

"Then, in that case," Bessie giggled, "I'm bothered if ever I'll be an inventor. He, he! Rather good that! Pass the salt, Babs."

Babs passed the salt. The meal com-



THERE was Bessie sitting on the floor, with the manservant into whom she had apparently bumped hastily scooping together a pile of photographs. And the man's anxiety over those photographs was very, very intriguing to Babs.

For outside along the corridor came a sudden crash of glass, followed by a bump and a howl in Bessie Bunter's voice.

"Oh-wow-wow! Oh crumbs! Why kik-can't you go where you're looking, you know? Oh dud-dear, I believe I've got a bit of that beastly glass sticking in me—"

There came a furious snort, followed by a tinkling noise. Babs jumped to the door.

From a door farther along the corridor Jimmy Richmond and Lister Cattermole peered out.

And then Babs blinked, as she saw Bessie wrathfully sitting up in the passage, groping for her spectacles. And she saw Greening agitatedly and feverishly scrambling together a pile of photograph frames, and arranging them face downwards upon a tray he had been carrying.

thought you said my book was in your room, Jimmy?"

"Oh, tut!" Jemima demurred. "Don't think, fair Bessie, I tell the old fiblet! I said, sweet cornflower, that you might look in my room if you liked. And I said I had seen your book—granted. But I saw your book yesterday, beloved. I saw it again on the train this morning." She shook her head at the cross expression on the fat one's face. "Bessie, darling, you are not annoyed with me?"

"Stuff!" Bessie said huffily.

Babs smiled. All the chums were in the passage now, and in a body, extremely hungry for the lunch which awaited them, they swarmed downstairs.

Beecham, the butler, met them at the curtain.

"This way, ladies and gentlemen!" he said.

Into a small oak-panelled room on the left they were shown. And then at

menced. The soup was excellent. The roast chickens, served with sausage and white sauce, and the roast potatoes and asparagus which went with it, were excellent, too.

Certainly, as Jemima, with meaning, commented, it was a good spread at such short notice.

A great Christmas pudding, steaming hot, with custard as a sauce, followed the chicken. After that some delicious savouries, and finally cheese and coffee.

Don Haybury laughed.

"Well, thanks, Beecham. We owe you a vote of thanks," he said. "That certainly was topping."

"I am glad," Beecham murmured imperturbably, "that you've enjoyed it, sir. I only hope now that you have all forgotten and forgive the unwarrantable misunderstanding that attended your arrival."

Greening came in. Together he and the butler cleared up, and when Babs

volunteered to help with the washing up, the offer was accepted gladly enough.

Outside, however, the storm showed no sign of abating. It was, if anything, worse than ever.

"Seems," Don Hayburn said, when they were all seated round the cosy fire in the big hall, "as if we're stuck here for a while. The question is, now, what are we going to do to kill time?" Richmond, old sport," he added, "what about a spot of exploring?"

"I'm sorry, sir, but I wouldn't do that if I were you," Beecham said, appearing at this moment. "The professor is rather strict, you know," he added. "If you would like draughts or chess—or some games—I will bring them to you."

"Well, thanks," Richmond said.

"Not at all, sir."

And the butler disappeared. Babs sat up suddenly, glancing quickly at her chums. Somewhere in the house a bell was ringing—a muffled sound, with a strange uneven rhythm.

"Dong, dong!—very quickly. Then dong, with a longer dong to follow. Followed by two longer dongs and dong, dong again."

Then suddenly a clatter, as if the bell had fallen to the floor. The chums looked at each other askance.

"Wow! What was that?" Bessie gasped.

"A bell, clump!" Babs said. "Listen."

They listened. But the ringing was not repeated.

"Probably Greening ringing for Beecham," Jean Cartwright said. "Or perhaps some contrivance connected with the old professor's experiment. Jimmy, what are you looking thoughtful about?"

"Eh? Me?" Jimmie asked. "Thanks for the compliment, old thing. Just thinking, what, about muffins and things connected with bells, you know. Wonder," she added thoughtfully, "what made the jolly old ringer drop the bell, you know, and why was she trying to signal Morse code messages with it?"

"Morse!" Richmond said, staring.

"Oh, didn't you notice?" Jimmie asked. "Might have been a coincidence, of course, but I had fancied that that bell spelt out 'I-am-a—'. But probably mistaken," Jimmie added. "Alas that we can go through life tripping over errors as we do. Seems," she added, nodding towards the gallery, "that Mr. Beecham or Greening has taken objection to the nice old boy we admired this morning, beloveds."

Babs stared at her amazing friend. Then she glanced towards the gallery. And for some reason she was aware of the strangest thrill which she noticed a blank space in the wall where the picture of the benevolent old man had hung.

Babs said nothing, though, looking across at Jimmy Richmond, she guessed that his mind was busy, too. He, like she, was staring towards Jimmie, probably wondering what strange thoughts were coursing through the shrewd brain covered by the sleek Eton crop.

Then Beecham came back, carrying several games piled high on a tray. He gave them a sharp swift look as he set them down.

"There you are, ladies and gentlemen. I hope they will help to beguile your time," he said. "Would you like tea served round the fire?"

"Oh pip—please," Bessie said eagerly. "Can we have it now?"

"Tiggy!" Clara said warningly. "The table will be served at four o'clock."

Beecham said, and then withdrew. But hardly had his back turned when—

Tap, tap! Tap, tap! Tap, tap!

"Hallo!" Jimmy Richmond cried, and jumped up, gazing towards the gallery again. "I say, that is Morse. Listen."

They listened, straining their ears. The tapping went on:

"I—am—Pamela—Marsh. I—am—"

Then again—abrupt silence.

"A message," Clara cried. "And it jolly well came from up there."

"The girl again!"

They looked at each other. Their faces were tense now. Pamela Marsh! Pamela Marsh up there—held a prisoner! Pamela Marsh trying to signal to them.

Richmond rose to his feet. "This is getting fishier and fishier," he said grimly. "I'm not satisfied. There's a girl here who knows we're here. That girl is asking for our help. Come on. We're going to explore."

"Don't," Jimmie said quietly.

"Eh?"

"I say, don't!" Jimmie shook her head. "Think well, Jimmy the Richmond. Chivalry and all that is a virtue, but put common sense before it. Every movement you make here is being spied upon. You should know that by this time. Just pretend," she added, "as if you hadn't heard or seen anything. To-morrow—"

"To-morrow? What about to-morrow?" Richmond demanded.

"Well, perhaps," Jimmie remarked dreamily, "we shall see things. Meantime, caution old Spartans."

Again they stared at her. What did Jimmie know which they themselves did not guess? But Jimmie spoke seriously.

Jimmie spoke, indeed, as if she knew what she was talking about, and the swift reflection showed them that she was right. All the same they felt uneasy.

Bessie shuddered.

"Oh crumbs, you know, I'm not sure I like this place, after all. I wish we were at Don Hayburn's."

Jimmie Vanishes!



AND so the long day wore on. Darkness fell. They played games by the fire.

They had tea. Then more games, followed by a really sumptuous dinner—at which again the professor made no appearance.

Still the storm raged, ever growing in violence, and, with the night, bringing bullet-like hailstones which rattled against the windows.

Impossible, had they wished it, even to think of leaving now.

But nobody was thinking of leaving. They were all thinking of the mystery girl hidden in Wildmoor Close.

Early that night they turned in. In the morning, Babs awoke to see that the sleet and hail had given place to snow.

The leaden grey world was filled with white and whirling flakes. A new carpet of snow covered the earth; here and there the drifts piled high, and everywhere was bleak, white desolation.

"Oh crumbs! Lul-look at it," Bessie said, suddenly awakening. "It—it doesn't seem as if we're going to get away, Babs."

It didn't. Not, to be sure, that Babs felt inclined to get away. The mystery of the unknown girl was still preying on her mind.

Then suddenly she thought of Jimmie—that mysterious strange girl, who had so mysteriously hidden last night that she would be in a position to explode the mystery this morning.

Well, perhaps Jimmie had news now. She washed and dressed hurriedly and went along to Jimmie's room.

Then she frowned a little. Jimmie was not there!

Her bed had been slept in, however; the disordered, tumbled condition of the sheets told Babs that. Under the dressing-table Jimmie's stout walking shoes peeped out, keeping company with the size 3's of the unknown mystery girl.

But—and then Babs blinked a little again. For the wardrobe door was wide open, and the wardrobe was empty. Jimmie's coat was not there. Nor was her hat nor her gloves.

Babs eyes went to the dressing-table. That, too, had been cleared of all Jimmie's belongings. Her eyes went to the corner. Jimmie's case had vanished as well.

It looked, indeed, as if Jimmie, during the night, had made a hurried exit—except for the fact that Jimmie would never have ventured out without her walking shoes.

Babs for some reason, felt a quick stab of apprehension. Then she turned, as footsteps sounded in the corridor, and Jimmy Richmond and Douglas Courts looked in.

"Hallo, Babs! Top of the morning!" Richmond said. "But, my hat, what a morning! Is Jimmy the Carstairs about?"

"No!" Babs said.

Richmond looked at her quickly. "She's not gone out?"

"Well, it looks like it, but she couldn't have," Babs said. "She's left her walking shoes behind."

Richmond looked strangely disturbed as he and Courts peered into the room. He looked queerly at Babs.

"She didn't say anything last night about going?"

"No, of course not, and—and even if she had gone she would have left a message or something. But, Jimmy, do you know anything?"

"Well, not much," Richmond said.

He paused. "I don't know if this has any bearing upon her disappearance, but anyway, I'll tell you. Whether it was the creepiness of this place or what," he went on, "I don't know. But last night I hardly slept a wink. Then somewhere in the early hours, I thought I heard footsteps shuffling past the door. I got out and looked—and there shuffling up the corridor was Jimmie herself."

"And—and you spoke to her?" Babs breathed.

"Yes, of course. I said, 'Jimmy, what are you doing?' But you know what a funny soul she is. She just turned round, putting her finger to her lips, and shook her head, making signs at the same time that I was to go back to my own room and not interfere. Well, knowing Jimmy and her queer ways, I did, of course—and that's all."

Babs hit her lip again. So Jimmie had been busy on her own account during the night. But where was she now?

Clara and Leila came along. Leila smiled a little as the story was re-told.

"Well, I guess I shouldn't worry," she said. "We all know our one and only. Ten to one she'll turn up all bright and smiling like a new penny at brekker."

And that really was the opinion of most of the chums when they heard the news. Whatever Jimmy was doing, she could be trusted to look after herself. All the same, Babs could not feel very reassured. "She tackled Greening," Greening smiled.

"Miss Carstairs?" he said. "Oh, yes. She went off an hour ago—with Mr. Beecham."

"Out, you mean?" Babs asked. "Yes," Greening smiled again. "As a matter of fact, I am expecting a phone message from them now," he said. "Miss Carstairs said she would go to the village and see if she could find a conveyance of some kind—because, you see, the professor's cars are both in the garage, and the chauffeur unfortunately took the ignition keys away with him. Naturally Mr. Beecham would not allow her to go alone in such weather, and got the professor's permission to go off with her."

"And that," Clara said cheerfully, "clears up the mystery, doesn't it? Well, now, what about a spot of brekkrer?"

It seemed a reasonable and satisfactory explanation, but Babs was still wondering. If Jimima had gone out, she must have gone in her thinnest shoes—and that was not like Jimima.

Also, if Jimima had intended to return, why had she taken all her luggage?

But breakfast now was the order of the day, and eagerly and hungrily the chums were ready for it. Downstairs, in a group, they collected and, entering the small dining-room, received shock number two that morning.

For a girl rose to meet them—an utterly strange girl.

A very attractive girl, too, with mischief gleaming in her brown eyes, and her good-looking face surmounted by a halo of bright auburn curls.

"G-good-morning!" Don Haybury stuttered. "But—who—"

"The girl laughed. "Surprised to see me?" she asked. "Well, sit down, please! My father will be along in a minute." She shot a glance towards the door. "And I'd better unburden myself of my guilty secret before he arrives. I'm sorry," she said, "if I've given you any cause for alarm."

"But how could you?" Jean Cartwright asked. "We've never seen—"

"Oh, yes you have—yesterday." The girl laughed again. "I was the girl you saw on the balcony—don't you remember? I told you to stop when you were all thinking of running away." She laughed again as they stared at her. "My name," she said, "is Pamela Marsh."

Babs jumped.

"Co!"

"Me—yes!" Pamela nodded. "I live here with my grandfather, you know. Grandfather, as you may have heard, is frightfully busy on some mysterious experiment for the British Government. I'm afraid—with a sigh—"that I'm a bit of a thorn in his side, really. There are a good many things we don't see eye to eye upon, and—well, cutting a long story short, yesterday was my day of punishment because he caught me fiddling about with some of his apparatus. So—and here the girl pulled such a seriously comic face that they all had to laugh—"nasty Pamela was sentenced to be shut up for the day—which order was carried out until I broke away, and hearing you— But shush! I hear grandpa! Sit down—quickly!"

They all sat down, staring at the girl. Leila chuckled. Bessie smirked. So that was the mystery, was it? All their scares, their wondering, were explained by the simple prank of this wayward girl who had simply been suffering

punishment because her grandfather was displeased with her.

"And—and was it you who tried to signal?" Babs stammered. "Just me," the girl smiled. "A stick with the bell, and then with a 'Flick. Rather cute—what? And—ahem!' she added, as the curtains swished aside and the professor—an elderly man who wore slightly tinted spectacles—entered. "Good-morning, grandpapa!" "Good-morning, Pamela!" he said, without enthusiasm. "Good-morning, ladies and gentlemen! I trust you had a good night?"

"Oh, quite, thanks, sir!" Don Haybury answered. "And I must say how we all appreciate—"

The professor waved the suggestion aside.

"It is nothing—nothing!" he said. "I am afraid it is up to me to do the apologising. I sincerely hope," he added, as

he seated himself next to his granddaughter, "that you don't think me too much of a churl for the way in which I treated you yesterday. Working downstairs in the cellar, I had no idea, of course, how bad the weather was, and I am afraid I wasn't greatly pleased when Beecham told me that a party of girls and boys had arrived. I had already had some trouble with one girl"—casting a glance at Pamela. "Still, make yourselves at home now until the weather is fine enough for you to venture farther. Ahem—ahem! I am extremely busy—extremely busy! Where is Beecham, Greening?"

Greening explained. The professor nodded absent-mindedly.

"Very well—very well," he said. "I am anxious to meet Miss Carstairs—knew her father, you know. Well, girls and boys, get on with your breakfast," he added, rather testily, "and

No. 22 of our delightful series for Your "Cliff House Album."

CLIFF HOUSE CELEBRITIES

CHARLES AUGUSTUS HENRY PIPER, the school porter, is Cliff House's oldest inhabitant, having recently completed his thirty-first year as a servant of the school. Except for three years of that time, when Piper was a soldier in the Great War, he has been in constant residence at the school.

Whence did Piper come? How did Piper get his job? Many Cliff House girls have tried to elicit these facts from the crusty old porter, but Piper, ever unwilling to speak about himself, has never satisfied their curiosity. Readers will, therefore, I hope, give more than usual interest to the facts which follow.

Charles Augustus Henry Piper, then, was born in Staffordshire. As a youth he had great ambitions to travel. His father, however, had other ambitions for his boy—and chief among those was that Charles Augustus should become a coal miner. At the early age of twelve, therefore, Piper was taken from school and plunged down a pit.

EARLY ADVENTURES.

His career as a budding miner lasted exactly one day. Piper had not been in the mine more than three hours when there was an explosion. A fall of stone from the roof of the pit resulted in Piper spending the next three weeks in hospital.

There he met a sailor who, taking a fancy to young Piper, offered him a cabin boy's job on a cargo vessel which plied between Jamaica and Liverpool, carrying bananas.

Thus did Piper at last realise his ambition to travel.

For three years Piper served before the mast. A careful, thrifty lad, he saved money. At the age of sixteen, falling down the hold of his boat, he broke a leg, however, and hospitalised him again for three months.

Discharged once more, he sought another mode of making his living, and being persuaded that he could become a millionaire by investing his money in the fishing industry, went to Grimsby, and in company with another adventurous, seventeen-year-old sprit, bought a secondhand fishing smack.

Alas for Piper, however! His first trip met with disaster. The smack foundered and had it not been for the fortunate appearance of the *Wills Gregory's* yacht, it is likely that the story of Piper's adventures would have ended at the bottom of the sea.

Sir Wills, as you probably know, was interested in Piper and sorry for him, he gave him his next job—page-boy at Cliff House School.

At the age of twenty-two Piper became porter at the school; at the age of twenty-four enlisted to join the Army.

THE WAR YEARS.

At the outbreak of the war he was away, and it is those three years of his life which are a mystery. It is said that in London Piper was



"crossed in love"; that the girl to whom he had given his heart, callously flitted him the day before he was to have married her, and ran away with his old friend who had been Piper's unlucky partner in the fishing venture. How true that is, however, only Piper himself can say.

But it is certain that the Piper who came back to Cliff House after the War was a changed man. In place of the cheery, willing, hardworking porter the girls had known, they now saw Piper as a rather surly, grudging and grumbling young man who seemed older than his years.

Piper, who had once been so eager to oblige the girls, now grumbled openly that all girls were a nuisance and even the Military Medal which was conferred on him after the War for his bravery in the last great Battle of Ypres had no power to change his nature.

And the Piper of then is the Piper we know to-day. Yet despite his grumpiness there is still something very likeable about Cliff House's porter. Sir Wills Gregory, though no longer a governor, is still his hero, and if Piper does not regard other mistresses with affection, he has a very warm corner in his heart for Miss Primrose—and also (though he would be the last to admit it) for cheery Babs & Co.

He has no hobbies apart from his newspaper reading; as far as one can gather he has no friends save Mr. Merryweather, the school gardener—who, incidentally, was recommended for his present job by Piper himself.

Piper's age now is forty-seven years though with his lined, unsmiling face and his half-bald head he looks much older. His only ambition, he confesses, is to keep his job at Cliff House.

excuse me if I just glance through these notes I have made. Meantime, just consider the house your own until it is fit for you to go."

The chums glanced at each other. They grinned. Pamela, catching Babs' eye, winked, and Babs, with a start, smiled back.

For, truth to tell, Babs was interested in the professor, wondering vaguely where she had seen him before.

For some minutes nothing disturbed the silence except the chink of knife against plate, half whispered requests to pass the salt, the bread, and so on.

Outside the storm still howled, and in the grate the cheerful fire burned cracklingly. All at once, however—

Babs started. Somewhere—it seemed in the upper regions of the house—came forth the strains of music.

They all listened, staring towards the ceiling. Babs saw Pamela's face pucker in a frown. What tune was being played it was impossible to say. It sounded to Babs as if the player's arm were being jostled as he drew the bow across the strings.

"Music bath charms," murmured Leila. "But I guess the person who's playing that should get a few lessons first. What on earth is it?"

The professor stared upwards. Babs saw the quick, queer look he exchanged with his granddaughter. No hostility, no grumblings in that. Almost it struck her as a look of uneasiness.

The music went on. And then suddenly Babs caught her breath. Wait a minute—wait a minute! What was this?

For it struck her all at once that there was method in the discord. Those short notes followed by the long ones—those pauses.

She listened, ears attuned now to new inspiration, and then her face flamed with swift excitement.

For the unmusical violinist was not such an amateurish muff as she appeared to be. The violin was spelling out a message in Morse:

"M-I-M-A— That would be Jimima. Tensely Babs listened. "H-A-S-B-E-E-N K-I-D-N-A-P-P-E-D. W-E A-R-E O-K-I-H—"

Abruptly the music stopped. Almost unconsciously Babs threw a searching glance at the professor. He had risen to his feet, his face betraying an odd agitation as he glanced at the girls. He coughed.

"Pamela, there—there is something I have to say to you—urgently," he said. "Please excuse us! Pamela, follow me!"

And Pamela, agitatedly rising, followed him as he went out. She had not even glanced at the girls.

"Sure the old fellow seems upset all at once!" Leila murmured. "Babs—"

But Babs, thrilling now, had spotted something on the table which Pamela had left behind. It was a handkerchief. To the chums' amazement she reached over and snatched it up.

Babs blinked.

"Babs—"

But Babs did not reply. It was doubtful if she heard. With considerable bewilderment and consternation her chums watched her as she put the handkerchief to her nostrils and sniffed, and then, carefully unfolding it, ran her fingers round the hem. And then Babs stiffened.

Clara blinked.

"Babs, you cuckoo, what's the matter with you?"

Babs looked round. She leaned forward.

"There's nothing the matter with me," she replied. "But"—her voice sank—"there's a great deal the matter with Jimima. Jimima's a prisoner in this house, and this girl, whatever she calls herself, is not Pamela Marsh!"

"What?"

"Look!" Babs said quickly.

And she held out the hem of the handkerchief towards them. On that handkerchief two initials were embroidered. But they were not "P.M."

They were "J.B."

"Pamela Marsh," Babs breathed, "is still a prisoner in this house. That was her you heard playing the violin—and, incidentally, sent a message at the same time. But—"

And then she flung herself back as the door opened and Greening appeared, a smile on his face.

"Well, Greening?" she asked, trying to make her voice normal.

"I have just received a message by phone," Greening said. "The line has been repaired. It was from Miss Carstairs. She and Beecham have reached



Northdale, but are sorry to say that no conveyance can be had there. Miss Carstairs says she expects to be delayed, but will get back as soon as possible."

"Thanks!" Babs said.

Clara breathed a sigh of relief as Greening retired.

"Well, that seems to put paid to your goofy suggestion, old Babs," she said lightly. "If Jimmy's a prisoner in the house she can hardly be phoning from Northdale, can she? What do you say to that?"

"I say," Babs replied grimly, "that that is a lie. Greening is faking that the same as this J.B. girl is faking to be the professor's granddaughter. But come outside," she said. "I'll explain there. Bessie—"

Bessie shrugged.

"Oh, really, Babs, you must be wrong," she said. "And, anyway, I've only had my first portion of bacon and eggs. You nitwits can go if you like; I'm stepping here. And anyway, I want

to look for my book," she added offendably.

And the "nitwits" went.

Babs Learns the Worst!



"AND this," Babs said keenly, "is what I make of it. We all know Jimminy wouldn't have left us without some message. We all know that she wouldn't have gone without her walking shoes. Jimmy definitely had some wheeze up her sleeve last night—"

"Well!" Clara said impatiently.

"What the wheeze was I don't know. But it's obvious from what Jimmy Richmond says that she was on the trail last night. Since he saw her, nobody else has. It's my opinion," Babs added seriously, "that she fell foul of somebody last night, and is sharing the imprisonment, at this moment, of Pamela Marsh herself!"

"But what about the girl who calls herself Pamela Marsh?" Mabs argued.

"Impostor!"

"Oh, I don't know!" Lister Catermole frowned. "You've forgotten, Babs, that if she's an impostor the professor would have seen through her, too."

Babs looked at him keenly.

"Do you know for a fact that the man is the professor?" she asked.

"What?"

"Well—"

Babs paused. "This is just a shot in the dark," she said. "At the same time, do any of us know

HER face paling, Babs stared at the shoes of the two men, at the black handkerchief which protruded from Greening's pocket. Babs knew now who had struck down her boy chums.

the professor? If the girl who calls herself Pamela Marsh is an impostor, why shouldn't the professor be one, too? And—my hat! And here Babs' face suddenly flushed with excitement.

"That would explain it," she cried. "Explain what?"

"The photographs!"

Leila sighed.

"Would you mind telling us what you're babbling about?" she politely inquired. "I sure figure either I'm as dense as a London fog or you're going crackers. What have the photographs to do with it?"

"Well—" Babs' face was aflame now; so earnest, so convinced her attitude that even the others could not fail to be impressed. "Yesterday," she said, "Greening took great pains to go round the Hall collecting certain photographs. Those photographs, as far as we know, were all of the same man—dear old greybeard, who might have been the professor himself. Supposing," Babs breathed, "he was the professor? Supposing, even then, that this impersonation was being planned, wouldn't it be just the very thing Greening would do to collect those photographs? In case we saw them, and realised that they must be of the professor."

"Pshaw!" whistled Mabel Lynn.

"And then there's the message," Babs went on. "None of you cuckoos seems to have realised the violin was sending out a message. But I did. I was reading it, and it said as plainly as anything: 'Jimima has been kidnapped. We are both—' And there

stopped. Apart from that," Babs went on, "we all know Jimmy didn't trust Beecham. We've got good reason to believe that Beecham himself was afraid of her. In that case, it is likely that Jimmy would have chosen to go out with him this morning? If you ask me—"

"And then she swung round as the door opened. Bessie Bunter, her face wildly excited, came rushing into the room.

"Bessie!" cried Babs. "Oh dud-dar! Oh gip-goodness!" Bessie stuttered. "Oh crumbs! Beecham—"

"Beecham?" Babs stared. "What's the matter with Beecham, you chump?"

"I've sus-seen him."

"What—?"

"He and the professor."

"You mean you saw him talking to the professor?"

"Oh, nun-no, you know. I sus—"

"And Bessie gulped. "Oh crumbs, it's a dud-dream!" she stuttered. "It mun-must be a dud-dream,

just shut the door and bolted like anything. Oh dear, though, it's given me a frightful turn. Get me a glass of water, Mabs."

And while Mabs darted to the sideboard to do her fat chum's bidding, the chums looked at each other. Startled consternation was in each of their faces.

JIMMY RICHMOND was the first to break the silence. His eyes narrowed.

"Well, O.K.," he said. "I'm sorry, Babs, if I ever doubted what you said. Beecham is obviously posing as the professor. But we've got to do something," he went on. "And we've got to do something pretty soon. Jermina's been collared, and Beecham and Greening are just scoundrels being helped out by the girl. I vote," he added, "we fetch the police!"

Unseen by any of them, the curtain near which they stood moved a little. For one fraction of a second a face

if you hadn't a care in the world. I've got a rough notion of the direction. There's a map in my room, and I studied it pretty hard last night. Come on, Don."

"But, Jimmy, be careful!" Babs breathed.

He gripped her hand.

"Trust us," he said.

He jerked his head towards Donald Haybury. Together the two of them vanished. A deep, uneasy silence fell. It was broken by a sudden swish of the curtain. The girl who called herself Pamela Marsh, all smiles, whisked gaily upon the scene.

"Well, here we are!" she said jovially. "Poor old me! I've just had another lecture! What a life, to be sure! But, I say, what about some games?" she added, her eyes sparkling. "What about hide-and-seek or blind man's buff, or something of that kind? It's rather a kid's game, but it's good fun."

"Good wheeze!" Leila voted. "Blind man's buff it is! Who'll be the blind man? You, Bessie?"

"No jolly fear!" Bessie said hastily. "I'm fed-up with you girls playing tricks on me when I'm blindfolded, you know! You be it!"

"Well, I'll be it," said the red-haired girl. "Anything for a lark, you know!"

And she laughed as she was blindfolded. Really, it was hard to believe that she was guilty of any deception. Even Babs was feeling just a little doubtful until, glancing at her feet as she stood to have the bandage adjusted, she spotted her shoes.

Jermina had said definitely the shoes of the girl who had occupied her bedroom were No. 3's; but this girl had a foot almost as big as Clara Trevlyn, and Clara took a very large size in shoes.

The game commenced. But for once the Cliff House chums could not let themselves go. They were thinking of Jimmy Richmond and Don, wondering where they were, if they had got away all right.

And then suddenly—

"Help, help!" cried a voice outside.

"Help!"

They all stood electrified.

"What was that?" gasped Bessie.

"Jimmy Richmond!" cried Babs.

"Jimmy! It came from outside!"

Deserting the game, she made a dash for the window, and flung it open, unheeding the great gust of wind-driven snow that came blinding into her face.

Then she gave a cry.

"Oh, great goodness! Look!"

They all crowded to the window, and then their faces turned white.

For out there, near a clump of bushes, lay two motionless forms—Jimmy and Don!

"Oh, my goodness!" the red-haired girl gasped. "I say, what's happened to them, Barbara? Where are you going?" she added, as Babs ran towards the door.

"I'm going out!"

"But no—no, you mustn't! Call for Greening!"

"I tell you I'm going out!" Babs said, and impatiently thrust aside the girl's detaining hands. "Those are our friends! Quick! Come on, girls!" she cried.

But no need to tell the girls. They were all rushing as one towards the great door.

Babs reached up; with difficulty pulled down the great iron bolt. A scurry of snow leapt at them with a hiss.

"Over there by the bushes!" gasped Babs.

She was the first to run forward, pounding ankle deep into the soft,



you know. But when I'd finished my breakfast I thuth-thought I'd have a look round for my book, you know, and—"

"Yes?" Babs said.

"I thuth-thought one of you cats mun-might be hiding it for a joke," Bessie said, "so I went towards Leila's room. At least, I meant to go to Leila's room, but I must have got into the wrong passage, or something. It's beastly, having passages all on the same pattern, like they've got them here. Well, I pushed open a dud-door, you know—"

"And then?" Mabs asked.

"Thuth-then I saw him," Bessie said.

"It wasn't Leila's room, after all. It was Beecham's. He was standing in front of a mirror, and he was fixing the professor's whiskers to his face. He didn't see me, thuth-thank goodness and I—well, you know how renowned we Bunters are for our resource. I

peered out—a girl's face. The curtain dropped in position.

"But—but how?" faltered Babs.

"Easy enough!" Richmond flung a swift look round. "Don, you come with me," he said quietly.

"Two of us will be enough, I imagine. If anybody wants to know where we are, let them we're gone to our rooms, or something. Just go on as though you suspect nothing. It'll be a hard job to make it through the snow, but somehow we'll get there. Don, you coming?"

"No, let me!" Cattermole said.

"Me!" said Coutts.

"And what," Clara snorted, "about me? Why should you boys take all the work on your shoulders?"

"Because," Richmond said, "this is a boy's job, Clara. No, please don't waste time arguing. There's so much trickery going on in this place that goodness knows what might not happen next! Say nothing; do nothing. Just act as

powdery drift. She was the first to reach the two boys, who lay across each other, their faces white, eyes closed. Babs bent.

"Jimmy!" she breathed anxiously. No reply.

"They're unconscious, both of them!" she gasped. "Somebody or something's struck them down! Lister, give me a hand! Douglas, help Clara and Leila! Bring them inside!"

"With difficulty," they raised the two boys and carried them back into the house. There, gently they were laid upon the settee. The red-haired girl's eyes were wide.

"Oh, my goodness, what has happened?"

"That," Babs panted, "is what we're going to find out! Oh, my goodness!" she cried. "Feel this lump on poor Jimmy's head!"

At the same moment Richmond's eyes flickered feebly open. He stared in surprise at Babs.

"Babs, you? Why, what—?" And then his eyes roved round. He started up, quickly putting a hand to his head. "Those scoundrels!" he breathed.

"Jimmy, what happened?" Babs asked.

"I don't know—except that two ruffians jumped on us from out of the bushes. Both of them had black handkerchiefs round their faces. They struck us down with sticks. I reckon somebody must have got wind that we—"

And there he stopped as his eyes alighted upon the red-haired girl.

But at that moment who should come running on to the scene but the bogus professor himself and Greening. The professor stared in consternation.

"My dear boy, what has happened?" Babs exclaimed.

"The scoundrels!" the professor said. "But why were you going out? But never mind—never mind!" he added testily. "Richmond, did you see the men—their faces, I mean?"

"No," Jimmy said. "They both had their faces covered. They jumped from behind, you know. But I reckon," he added, "you'll be able to track them if you get after them. The snow won't have covered up their footmarks yet."

"Gee, that's an idea!" Leila cried. "Come on!"

"Girls, no!" Very resolutely the professor barred their way. "Please—please listen to me!" he said gruffly. "You do not know. You do not guess. I have enemies. Those enemies, obviously, are prowling in the grounds outside. More than once this sort of thing has happened. Poor Greening was a victim of the scoundrels once. You are in my charge now, my care, and I should be outraging the responsibility you have thrust upon my shoulders if I allowed anything to happen to you!"

"But surely!" Cattermole protested, "you are not going to let them get away? Let us get after them, sir!"

"No, please! No, I beg of you!" And the professor backed towards the door, as though half-afraid that they would try to storm it. "I beg of you, desist! I will see that the police are informed at once. And after this I must insist upon all doors in this house remaining locked and everybody remaining indoors. You hear that, Greening?"

"Yes, sir," Greening said.

"And you boys and girls?"

"Yes, professor," Babs said. But she was looking as she said that at the shoes of both Greening and the man, she knew was really Bechiam in disguise; and she was noticing, with a dreadful pounding of the heart, that, though both of them had apparently

never been out, there was snow upon their shoes.

And she was noticing something else, too—the colour of a too hastily tucked away handkerchief in Greening's pocket.

Its colour was black!

A Daring Bid for Rescue!



FROM that moment there was no further doubt in Barbara Redfern's mind that Jimmy and Don's unknown assailants had been the false

professor and his henchman—Greening. And she had no doubt, either, that the order to keep all doors locked was tantamount to an order to keep them all prisoners.

So here they were, pent up in this house of sinister happenings and weird mystery, with one of their number already held captive with the real Pamela Marsh.

Something of what was in her mind Babs managed to convey to her chums, though, to be sure, it was not an easy business.

For when Jimmy and Don were sufficiently recovered to take an interest in things again, the professor, Greening, and the girl with the red hair were still there.

Not even when the false professor had been assured by the boys that they had suffered nothing worse than a severe headache each did he seem inclined to go.

Only when, just before lunch, Greening, looking rather agitated about something, came to him and whispered in his ear did he tear himself away.

"Er—hum—I—I have rather a delicate experiment which must be checked up," he said. "I must leave you to yourselves until lunch. Meanwhile, Pamela, my dear, do see that the girls and boys enjoy themselves, won't you? I will join you at lunch."

Pamela smiled. For the chum's benefit she made a face at him as soon as his back was turned. But it was obvious that she did not intend to leave them.

"Well, let's have games," she suggested. "What shall we play at? Anybody any good at chess?"

"Well, I guess I know the rules," Leila said.

"Oh topping! I love chess. And what about you others? Lexicon, draughts, ludo—oh, anything you like! Jimmy, you ought to play some quiet game, you know, with that hen's egg on your head. Now, what would you like to play?"

"Lexicon," Jimmy Richmond said; and Babs stared a little. For Lexicon, she knew, was not a game Jimmy was ordinarily fond of. "Babs, you'll play with me, won't you? And you, Lister? And you, Mabs?"

"And the others ludo, or something?" Pamela asked brightly.

"Yes," Babs said quickly, for she had caught a quick wink from Jimmy Richmond, and knew that he had some scheme in mind.

The cards were fetched. In groups they sat themselves down—all except Bessie, who, having failed to recover her "Fifty Ways of Making Money," was smuggling down in front of the fire. Richmond took the lexicon cards.

"Shall I deal?" he asked carelessly. Babs handed them over.

The cards were dealt. But it was obvious that Jimmy had some scheme

on. Watched by the others, he sorted out his hand. With a swift look in the fake Pamela's direction, he laid down his first word. It was "Shall."

They all looked at him. Babs laid down her word.

Then Don's turn came. He laid down a word—"Try."

Then Mabs, who hadn't got a word, Jimmy, meantime, had appropriated another set of cards. He laid down two words this time—"Again to-night."

Babs looked at him uneasily. They all had the hang of the game now. "Shall try again to-night," Jimmy and Don's sentence read. She put down a hand—"How."

"Window end of passage," came the thoughtfully prepared reply. "Be there to help midnight."

"O.K.?" Richmond asked.

Babs replied with a significant nod. "Well, that was a queer round!" And Jimmy carelessly shuffled the cards again. "Oh, my hat! My head!" he grinned ruefully.

Five minutes later they had lunch—and, fortunately, for the first time that day, the gale seemed to be blowing itself out. After lunch the fake professor spent the afternoon with them. In the evening the red-haired girl was constantly at their elbow.

In those circumstances open discussion of their plan was impossible. Nobody, except Don and Jimmy and Babs and Mabs, knew anything at all about the projected adventure. In any case, Babs reflected, perhaps it was just as well they were not all engaged.

Very quietly that night they went to bed, the bogus Pamela insisting upon chatting to each of them in their rooms before they went off to sleep.

By that time the gale had blown itself completely out. Hardly a breath of wind disturbed the stillness of the night and outside a milky moon had turned the sky to a listening silver.

Eleven struck. Half-past. Twelve o'clock boomed.

Silently Babs rose from her bed. She donned a dressing-gown. Shivering, she tiptoed to the door. In the bed Bessie still snored loudly, muttering from time to time in her sleep; and Babs' heart leapt as the door squeaked. She peered into the corridor.

At the same time Mabs' door came open.

"That you, Babs?"

"Oh, good!" Mabs breathed. "All clear?"

"I think so." Silent as shadows they flitted up the corridor. They turned the corner into the passage, shivering suddenly as a cold breath of air blew upon their faces.

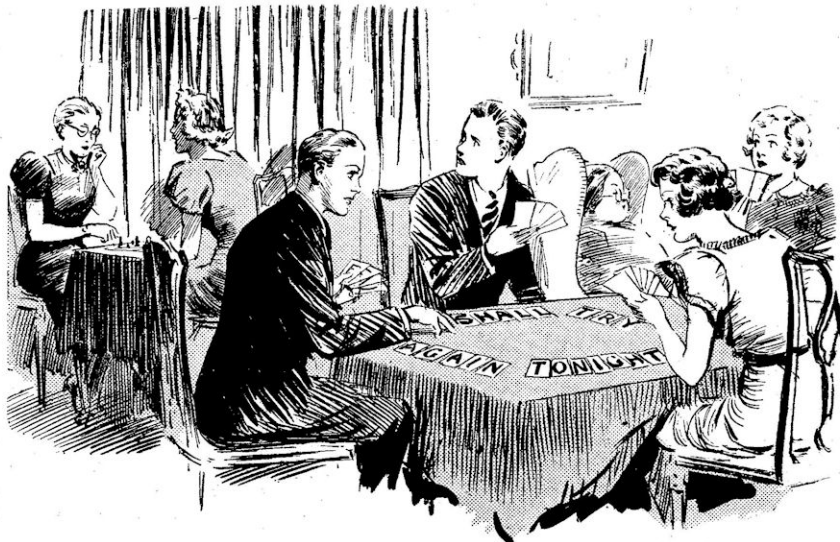
The draught came from the window which was open. Don Haybury and Jimmy Richmond, fully dressed, loomed up to meet them.

"Good work, girls!" Jimmy Richmond breathed. "New's our chance. For goodness' sake, be careful while we're away! Look, Babs!" he added, and pointed to the window. And Babs, peering at it now saw a stout length of rope knotted round the main support.

"Don and I are shinning down that. We're going to Northdale. Just in case anybody should be nosing around after we've gone, take the rope and hide it in your room."

Babs nodded, casting a swift, anxious look back: Haybury clambered on to the sill. The rope creaked and tautened as he slid down it. Then there came a soft call from below.

"O.K.!" Richmond grinned. "Well,



THE chums knew that the girl playing chess with Leila Carroll was spying on them, and so they were using the word-making game to discuss their plans.

good luck, kiddlets! Keep out of mischief. We'll be back in an hour or two and clear this fishy business up for good! I'm off!"

"Jimmy, be careful!" Babs gulped anxiously.

Richmond laughed softly and slipped from their sight. There came a swishing sound from outside. Then a soft call:

"O.K. Take it in."

"Keep watch, Mabs," Babs ordered. She reached up. Her fingers were cold, however, and it took some little while to loosen the knot. Just as she was freeing it there came a sudden hiss from Mabs:

"Cave! Somebody coming!"

Babs jumped. In doing so her numb fingers released the end of the rope. Too late she tried to recover it. With a swish it vanished into the outer darkness; there came a soft pop as it thudded into the snov.

Quick as thought Babs pulled the window to and crouched, shivering, by Mabs' side. At the same time, from above them, came a cry:

"Let us out! Help!"

"Jemima!" thrilled Babs.

Muffled and faint though the voice was, they both recognised it.

"Help!"

"Look out!" whispered Mabs.

In the darkness her hand had found the wrist of her chum. There it remained with a warning grip. Crouched and tense they waited, eyes fastened upon the corridor ahead, along which now footsteps and a man's voice could be heard. Upstairs Jemima continued:

"Let you don't let us out—"

"Dash that girl!" a voice in the darkness growled. "She must have freed her gag! You've got the stuff, Greening?"

"Yes."

"All right. We'll put her to sleep. And if the old man won't talk now—"

Lower the two chums crouched, hardly daring to breathe. Thank goodness it

was pitch dark here in the thick shadow beneath the window. Thank goodness both their dressing-gowns were made of dark material.

Nearer, nearer the steps came. The two held their breath, clutching hands. Two faint shadows loomed up, and in the white light of the moon Babs saw their faces. Greening and Beecham—but Beecham now without his professor's disguise.

Unsuspecting, they tramped past. Babs rose.

"Come on!" she said.

"But, Babs, where—"

"Didn't you hear?" Babs hissed, trembling a little with excitement.

"They said something about putting old Jimmy to sleep; I don't know what that means, but we've got to do something. Are you game?"

"Y-yes," Mabs said uncertainly.

"Come on then! We'll follow them."

That, as a matter of fact, was not a hard job. In the intense silence which reigned unbroken even by the faintest whisper of wind the men's footsteps came clearly to their ears. Hearts thudding, but grimly determined to help their chum, they crept on.

In front of them the two rounded a corner. Babs paused.

"I believe," she breathed, "(that leads on to the gallery.)"

It did. When they arrived at the corner they were on the gallery itself. A few yards ahead of them they saw the two men. They had halted, facing the panelling, and one of them was flashing a small torch.

As Babs and Mabs watched he gave a grunt. His hand reached forward. There came a snick. The two men disappeared into the wall.

"A secret panel!" Babs breathed. "That's one of the reasons why they were so anxious to keep us off the gallery. Come on!"

Mabs did not reply. She was trembling a little in the darkness. If

Mabs had confessed, she was afraid—horribly afraid at that moment. But even fear had no power to turn her back from this purpose now.

Jemima, her friend, was in danger. Jemima needed her help. That was enough for Mabs. More than enough for Babs!

They crept towards the panel. It was still open. Beyond they saw a flight of stairs rising upwards. From the top of those stairs came a mumble of voices.

Babs looked at Mabs. Mabs nodded.

So into the panel they both stepped. Cautionally they made their way up the stairs. At the top was another door, partly open, and, crouching on the top stair, they peered through it.

Beecham and Greening stood before a table, and at that table, looking weak, ill, emaciated, one wrist handcuffed to a staple which had been driven into the stout leg, sat an old man.

It was not difficult to recognise in him the original of the picture which had so mysteriously disappeared from the gallery. Here, then, was undoubtedly the real Professor Marsh!

In front of him were pencils, draughtsman's instruments, and a sheet of paper completely blank.

The scowl on Beecham's face was dreadful to behold.

"So you still hold out, professor?"

The old man looked at them dully.

"I still hold out, you scoundrels."

"In other words, you prefer to starve rather than redraw those plans?"

Babs and Mabs glanced at each other. Their faces were white.

"I prefer," the old man said defiantly, "to starve, you scoundrels! Those plans are for my Government, and—"

"Then," sneered Greening, "get on with it, professor. Already you have been without food for three days, and I may tell you now that your grand-

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(Continued from page 13)

daughter in the next room has also been without food for one day! If you think nothing of yourself, perhaps you will think of the other girl—the daughter of your old friend, Colonel Carstairs. And let me tell you this," he added menacingly. "In this house as my guests are other girls and boys—friends of your Carstairs friend, who are entirely helpless and in our power. Nobody has ever been enter here. Unless, professor, you are going to be very, very sensible, nobody is going to see them go away!"

"You—you scoundrels!" the old man choked.

Beecham laughed.

"Hard words break no bones, professor," he said mockingly. "It is in your power to end it all. It will take you less than four hours to redraw the plans you destroyed. Think it over," he added mockingly.

The old man's head fell; something like a moan came from between his lips.

Babs was breathing swiftly, for now she had an idea of the solution to the whole mystery. By her side, she gripped Mabs' arm.

They waited. The two men strode across the room. A door opened. At once they heard Jemima's voice, imperious as ever.

"What cheer, my merry rogues! And what little surprise now, forsooth? Poor Pamela is in a bad way, though," she added grimly.

In a moment Babs, quivering, had sprung to her feet. Mabs leapt with her.

"You scoundrels!" Babs cried.

She flew past the professor; into the next room she rushed. And even in that moment of stress she gasped at what she saw.

In one corner of the room sat a girl bound hand and foot to a chair. Near her lay the smashed case of a violin.

Jemima's bonds were loose, and she wore a gag which had slipped round her neck, obviously having managed to work it loose.

With a shout, Babs jumped forward. "Babs!" gasped Jemima. "Babs, mind—"

"Jimmy! Oh, Jim—"

No more. Beecham, with one furious cry, sent Mabs reeling against the wall; with another snarl, whirled upon Babs.

"So!" he snarled. "You, prying, interfering schoolgirls! So—!" and he flung her across the room, at the same time leaping towards the door.

Babs, breathless, sat up dazedly.

"So you join your meddling friend!" he snarled. "Perhaps you, too, would like to share her punishment. Greening, get back!" he added. "Close the door. I wish you all merry entertainment," he said "But, be warned. Make no noise, for the next time I come I shall not deal leniently with you! Back there, Greening. Since they are so fond of each other's company they starve together!"

There came a laugh. The door closed and the two vanished into the adjoining room in which the half-starved professor sat chained to the desk at which he refused to work.

"NICE HAPPY ending to a lovely Christmas holiday, what?" Jemima murmured. "Alas and alack! Well, here we are. Let us undo our fair and plucky Pamela, and then, seeing there's nothing else to do, we'll sit round the old camp fire and spin yarns. Haven't got a bit of choccy or anything

about you?" she asked. "Poor Pam's starving."

Babs shook her head. Was Jemima never dismayed? she wondered.

But willingly enough they all set to work to free the half-fainting Pamela. It was plain that girl had been through much. But she was full of pluck.

And, free again, she seemed heartened by the presence of the three other girls, even though their plight now was as sorry as her own. Falteringly she told her story. She told how her grandfather had arranged a big party for her fourteenth birthday. The party was to have taken place yesterday.

"I see. That explains why we thought there were going to be celebrations," Babs said.

That was so. A week ago the vanguard of the servants had arrived. They had turned up in the persons of Greening and Beecham.

Beecham, as hired butler, had immediately taken charge of everything. But Pamela had discovered by accident that Beecham and Greening were not the men they purported to be.

At the same time, her grandfather had just completed the plans for an enormous secret invention connected with an invisible radio ray designed to be a surer check to invading aeroplanes than any number of guns or counter-attacks could be. The two men had tried to steal the plans.

"But my grandfather got wind of that," she said. "He ordered them out of the house. Beecham's reply was to shut him up in his room. Then he dismissed the servants, cancelled all the invitations, saying that there was a case of scarlet fever in the house. I hadn't been shut up, you see, and I knew all

this. I whispered it to my grandfather, who very wisely burned the plans in his study. After that—"

"Poor kid," murmured Babs.

After that, of course, with the house to themselves, and the professor and his granddaughter at their mercy, the two scoundrels had forced them into captivity here, threatening to starve them, unless the professor re-drew the plans he had already burned.

"And that," Jemima said, "is the end of the story, what?"

"But what," Babs demanded, "happened to you? How did you come to be made a prisoner?"

Jemima sighed as she polished her monocle.

"Another story," she said. "But very simple. You may have gathered, Barbara beloved, that I had certain notions in my head. One of the notions was that the professor was still in the house. How? Why, simply because Pamela here shouted to us over the banisters. I made a guess at who Pamela was, and reasoned that her father was almost certain to be here also. Pamela, by the way, forgot to tell you that she dodged Greening and rushed out to call to us. I had a notion then that a secret passage was to be found in the old gallery, you know. Well, I found it."

"And then?" Mabs asked.

"Well, what? Naturally I tried to free the old professor. Unfortunately for me, Greening and Beecham arrived just at the wrong moment. That's all." That was all. But Babs' eyes glowed. "And you've tried to escape?" she asked.

"What thinkest?" Jemima answered.

"But how to escape? No window, one

(Concluded on page 28.)

FROM CANADA TO CLIFF HOUSE

came Faith Ashton, Barbara Redfern's cousin. And what an attractive girl she was! No doubt about her being the prettiest, sweetest new girl who had ever come to the famous school. With her childishly lovely face and her winsome ways it was small wonder that all Cliff House loved Faith from the moment she entered its doors.

BUT

there was one girl who did not like Faith—and that girl, strangely enough, was that plump, good-natured duffer

BESSIE BUNTER.

What was the reason for Bessie's attitude? There seemed no reason for it, and even Bessie herself could not have explained it, except to admit that she jus:

DISLIKED BABS' COUSIN.

On no account miss this fascinating story. It is the first of a wonderful new series featuring your favourites—shows Miss Hilda Richards in brilliant form—and appears next Saturday. Don't forget the title—



The NEW GIRL WAS So Charming!

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SCHOOLGIRLS IN SOCIETY

FOR NEW READERS.

BETTY BARTON and her Morocco chums

POLLY LINTON.

NAOMER NAKARA.

PAM WILLOUGHBY.

JUDY CARLEW, 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 child's home. They have a

chaperon.

MISS LESTER, an outwardly charming lady,

but whom they suspect of being a traitor.

Visiting a country estate they are told

their engagement was cancelled—but a

girl greets them at the house!

(Now read on.)

Enter—the Traitor!

THIS way, all! Polly—all of you—here!"

Betty Barton could see that the french window outside which she was standing, in the heavy snowstorm, was being hastily unlatched to let her in. So she had called out that to all her chums.

In a moment or so most of them were with her, and it became their turn to laugh delightedly at sight of the mischievous young lady who was so eager to admit them.

"Oh, do come in out of such an awful night!" was her inviting cry, as she opened wide one of the glass doors. "Nearly dead, you must be! I'll call the others"—meaning friends of hers. "Excuse me, just a sec—and do go to the fire!"

Then, as they all acted on that hospitable advice, she herself ran across the grand room to whip open a door and give hailing cries:

"Joanie! Vieve darling! Morie! Here's the Morocco Concert Party turned up—by mistake. Ha, ha, ha!"

She added another merry cry, addressed to one "Freddie."

"Game's over, Freddie! I want you, quick!"

She flashed round, to come prancing away from the left-open door and go amongst the girls and boys.

"Don't imagine you're not welcome here—"

"You're not giving us much chance to imagine any such thing," Betty laughed. "Oh, but you shouldn't have let us in by the window. We're dropping snow all over this lovely room!"

"As if it matters! But what ever made you come down from town? A

letter was sent, you know, regretting that everything was suddenly off."

"Well," said Betty grimly, "we never received it—"

"What!" gaped the very bewitching young lady. "And so you made the journey; you expected to find cars at the station—and there was none! But here's my brother—"

"Hal-lo!" grinned a most good-looking, big-built fellow of Varsity age, strolling forward from the doorway. "Jingo!" he said. "So it is—the Morocco Concert Party!"

"It's nothing to laugh at," his sister rebuked him; but the "M. C. P." gaily corrected her. By a sudden burst of light-hearted remarks, Morocco & Co. made it clear that, whether on or off the stage, their function was to amuse others.

"Well, anyway, I must explain," went on the young hostess. "Our people are away—they had suddenly to go to Paris

THE TRAITOR TO THE MORCOVE CONCERT PARTY STRIKES AGAIN —BUT BETTY BARTON MERELY GIVES A KNOWING SMILE!

on some business—so Freddie and I are on our own, except that I've sort of had down a few girl friends of mine. Here they are now!"

Four of them there were, all bright young things with just another year or so to go in their teens.

"You must have guessed who I am," lightly said the daughter of the house, after the M. C. P. had explained its own who's who. "Lady Kitty Horroff, and my brother here, Dr. Lord Freddie, down from Oxford. Do get to know these chums of mine!" Pleasantly she introduced them, and there were smiles and jokes.

"Small audience for the show, I'm afraid," chuckled Lord Freddie. "But by to-morrow night we can easily beat up a few more."

"It's terribly nice of you to talk like that," Betty said. "We certainly could not give our show to-night, for the baskets are still down at the station. But you won't really want us?"

"You girls come up and get your things off," Lady Kitty said very gaily.

And leaving her brother to deal with Grangemoor, she conducted the delighted girls upstairs.

"But what a spree!" Polly was gleefully exclaiming a few minutes later. "Wasn't it worth that struggle through the snow, Betty?"

"I'll say it was!"

The pair of them were ready to go down again now, from the luxurious bed-room to which they had been assigned. And doubtless their chums, given equally sumptuous guest-chambers near by, were also ready to tackle the "spread" which awaited them, in the panelled Weirhaven dining-room.

"What about Miss Lester, though?" Polly tittered, and scampered across to the bed-room window. "Wonder if she's still on the station, waiting to catch the train up to town?"

"Don't care if she is or isn't," shrugged Betty. "We're not taking any orders from her, even if she turns up. It's as plain as daylight, Polly. She got hold of that letter, warning us not to come down to Hacklow Park—and simply tore it up."

"Oh, that's it, for a cert. Only it's another case, I suppose," grimaced the madcap, "of not being able to prove it!"

And then, dancing across to Betty, who was opening the door:

"Just look at the lovely fire that's been lit for us up here! Oh, we have struck lucky! Lady Kitty—those other girls—that brother of hers, too! Such rippers!"

The wireless was on downstairs, and the loud music of a Continental dance band was enlivening this vast country mansion, about whose ancient walls the blizzard raged.

And then—tr-r-r-ing, ring, ring! skilled the porch bell.

Betty and Polly, just as they were being joined by most of their Morocco chums in the wide corridor, turned to each other excitedly.

"Miss Lester!" they both guessed. Down they went, descending the wide, picture-hung staircase all the quicker because of that ominous ring at the bell.

And then they saw young Lord Freddie, obviously unable to make head or tail of wild utterances by a certain snow-whitened lady whom he himself had just admitted.

"Caught my death of cold—I know I have! Give me a room, a bed I can have! Scandalous—the way I have been treated! After this," panted Miss

By

MARJORIE STANTON

HILDA RICHARDS

REPLIES

to some of her correspondents.

"ADMIRER OF JIMMY AND DIANA"

(Hull).—Thank you for a very nice letter, my dear. You may certainly write to Patricia. Address your letters c/o The Editor, The Schoolday. I won't forget your other suggestions, but I shall be able to carry them out!

though I cannot promise that I shall be able to carry them out!

NOBAH MCGOUGHIN (Darlington).—I see that your two favourite Fourth-Formers are Babe and Clara, and I'm sure that many of my readers will agree with your choice! My dear. Juno sends a pawshake to each of your two favourites. I hope you have quite recovered from "A CHAMPION OF BESSIE" (Gloucester).—I hope you are always unwelcome guests! Juno, my pet dog, is that nasty cold, my dear. Colds are always unwelcome guests! Juno, my pet dog, is that nasty cold, my dear. Colds are always unwelcome guests! Juno, my pet dog, is that nasty cold, my dear. Colds are always unwelcome guests!

"CLIFF HOUSE FAN" (Barton, Yorks).—What a charming place your village must be! Yes, I read every single letter my readers send me, and although it takes me a long time, I enjoy every moment of doing so. Thank you for your good wishes to Juno—I'm sure she does appreciate them.

PHYLLIS GOYEN (Shepparton, Victoria, Australia).—Gail Groves Gregory left Cliff House when her "Reign of Tyranny" came to an end. Phyllis. Yes, Doris Redfern & Co. are in the Upper Third Form. They are all thirteen years old. Juno sends Nip a special pawshake.

JOAN WILLIAMS (Wavertree, Liverpool).—So you would like to be an author, Joan? I wonder if you have tried your hand at writing stories yet. You'd be in the Lower Third if you went to Cliff House, my dear. Write again when you have time, won't you?

ROSE GITTEIN (Tenbury Wells, Worcs.).—I'm not surprised to find that you like Clara most among the C. H. Fourth-Formers, for you certainly seem to be very much alike. Clara will appear in many more of my stories, Rose. Have you decided which kind of puppy you are going to have, my dear? (Though perhaps you have already got him.) I'm sure you will love him.

ISABEL MCKENZIE (Newcastle, Notts.).—Thank you for another of your interesting letters, my dear. And congratulations on passing your exams successfully! Mats has an elder brother, Eric, and a younger sister, Ivy. Sylvia Sirett is now first in form in the Fourth. No, Sarah Harrigan is not specially clever at her work, Isabel.

PATRICIA GARDNER (Hoddesdon, Herts.).—I've passed on your suggestion regarding exercises to Pat, my dear, and I know she will not forget it. What a clever kitten Spats must be, though, as you say, rather a naughty one! Write again some time and tell me who you like most in the Fourth Form at Cliff House, won't you, Patricia.

WINIFRED ELLIS (Bilshurst, Sussex).—Thank you so much for your good wishes. Winifred. And thank Tommy for his greetings to Juno; my pet returns the compliment. So your friend Lord is reading about Bessie, my dear? You must ask her to write to me some time.

DAFNE CLUBB (Chingford, Essex).—You are just two months older than your favourite, Bessie, my dear. I did not have to excuse your spelling errors, Dafne, for there weren't any in your letter! From what you say it seems that you like all the three in The Schoolday, and I need hardly say that I hope you will continue to do so!

JOAN WHITE (Bournemouth, Hants.).—So glad to hear from you again, Joan. I do hope you are now better, my dear, and are able to get up. I'm sure The Schoolday cheers you up until you can return to school! Write again some time, won't you?

JOYCE BEVAN (Dawley, Shropshire).—What a good idea to have a Cliff House Club among yourselves, Joyce! There must have a lot of fun in pretending to be C. H. characters. Write again, and do tell me more about yourself and what you like in The Schoolday, won't you?

BERNICE LEE (Stockport, Cheshire).—Evidently you are a "Clara fan," Bernice! I'll not forget your suggestion about a new Clara story, my dear. I liked the little riddle you enclosed; it was very ingenious, wasn't it? Write again—I shall look forward to your letter.

Lester. "I will insist that the Morcové Concert Party shall be—dissolved!"

Not So Welcome!

WITH charming blandness Lord Freddie turned to Betty.

"Perhaps you know something about this?"

"Oh, yes, we know quite a lot!"

"No more of your impudence, Betty Barton!" cried Miss Lester furiously.

"I am too done up to deal with you now! I—" "Tishoo!" she sneezed.

In the morning I will—"Tishoo!"

"Miss Lester," interposed young Lady Kitty, with a degree of solicitude that was, Morcové, guessed, intended to afford them secret amusement.

"Before you give these girls your cold, do let me get you all by yourself!"

"But I haven't a cold!" almost raved the official chaperon. "It's simply that I'm nearly perished!"

"Well, be queek to bed, any old how!"

This impatient cry, shrilled by Naomer, was enough to arouse peals of laughter, not merely from her chums, but also from Lady Kitty and her girl

friends, by now mirthful onlookers in the drawing-room doorway.

Miss Lester bounced round, but Lady Kitty intervened.

"Dear Miss Lester!" she said, most appealingly. "You know very well it is not the fault of these girls and boys."

Miss Lester, gulping, restrained herself. Bad-temperedly she followed Lady Kitty to the stairs.

Whereupon young Lord Freddie waved the entire concert party towards the dining-room.

"Great thing is, not to let her make any difference," he cheerfully remarked, attending them all to their marked, attending the long table.

"I don't like to let you, yet I don't like to leave those girls to themselves in the other room. Say! I'll get them to come in and sit down with you, shall I?"

"Do—do!"

So, next minute, they were all together there in the dining-room.

There was just time for Lord Freddie to be seized with the idea of providing a musical accompaniment to all the happy chatter-chatter, and so he went away and came back with a gramophone. Then his sister pranced in.

"I've got her to go to bed!" was the roguish announcement that drew loud cheers from Morcové & Co. "And I'm

sending her up a tray of hot things. She should be all right by the morning.

Except," Lady Kitty deplored, "I'm afraid I've given her the haunted room!"

"No, really?" gurgled Morcové. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, of course, if you've done that!" grinned his lordship to his sister. And he set the gramophone going. "Think this will disturb her?"

he bawled, above the sudden blaring of a fox-trot, plus wireless, that had been left on in the other room. "But how are you all getting on?"

Seeing Jack and one of the girls were fox-trotting, the rest pushed back their chairs. Everyone was going to dance!

Tubby and Naomer—even they could forsake the table's tempting catables.

"Bekas we can pop back in a meenit," the dusky one was to be heard shrilling to her portly schoolboy partner.

And quite likely Naomer and Tubby did very soon gravitate back to the dining-room. But with all the others dancing remained the thing for the next half-hour.

Said Lord Freddie, dancing presently with Betty:

"Whole day out of doors to-morrow—what? You all love a bit of winter sport. I guess you do! And you just see what the morning turns out to be—blue sky after the blizzard, sunshine, frost like iron."

"What we've been longing for," sparkled Betty. "Tobogganing, perhaps?"

"Oh, and skating on the lake! I'll hail that swopt," said Lord Freddie. "Half-! There is your O.C.!"

Betty glanced up to a half-landing above the first flight of stairs. Miss Lester was viewing the happy scene from that aloof position, with disapproving eyes.

"I wish to speak to you, Betty!" came the stern order. "Come to my room!"

Only because it suited Betty did she at once run upstairs to follow the now irate lady into what seemed a very gloomy corridor, off which her bedroom opened.

Plenty of the other juniors had shown by their looks that they would heartily support Betty if she were minded to show open defiance. But Betty had an idea that a straight talk with Miss Lester would not be amiss.

There was a good fire in the bedroom, and there was everything else for the lady's comfort. But Miss Lester appeared most uncomfortable—mentally!

"What is this I have been told," she icily began, "about some intention of staying to-night, Betty?"

"It's what they've kindly asked us to do, so that we can give our show, after all."

"You will not do anything of the sort!"

"Miss Lester, we shall do just that," Betty calmly insisted. "We had no engagement for to-morrow night, and even a poor collection will be better than none."

"Oh, the collection!" Miss Lester positively sneered. "A fine lot you all are about that!"

"We care a good deal more than you—"

"What? That, Betty, is another sample of the cheek which, for some reason or other, I have been getting from you and your friends just over you! I do not know what has come over you! I do not know what has come over you!"

Miss Lester protested, in an injured-innocent tone. "Do you wish me to resign—have nothing more to do with the concert party?"

"It might be as well if you did," Betty spoke out, at the same time retreating to the door.

"Don't go!" stamped Miss Lester. "Impudence! If Mrs. Willoughby or your headmistress heard you saying a thing like that—"

"Then I would have to say, at last, what I've been suspecting for a long time," Betty said. "That's all!"

But, although that was all she meant to say, she did not open the door and pass out. She preferred to stand there, looking the "suspect" straight in the face. Nothing, yet, that could be proved! So it would do more good than harm to give Miss Lester to understand, as plainly as this, that she had better be careful.

And, not for the first time, schoolgirl and grown woman engaged in a battle of looks, before Miss Lester looked away and Betty, eyes gleaming, went downstairs.

Lord Freddie gave abundant proof, during the rest of the jolly evening, of a boyish rascality rivaling that of the Grangemoor comics.

Whilst the Morcove girls revelled in the friendly society of Lady Kitty and her sisters, such a working alliance was established between the Varsity fellow and the Grangemoor fun-lovers as meant a vast amount of larking about, late into the night.

NEXT MORNING there was an alpine brilliance that had the whole strange house-party—with the welcome exception of Miss Lester—out of doors before breakfast.

Deeper snow than ever, after last night's blizzard, provided ammunition for a first grand snowball fight. Later, they all went off to get some tobogganing on a splendid slope, whilst the lake was being swept for skating.

Some of the sledges were of the homemade kind, belonging to a time when Lord Freddie was very young. But they served their purpose well enough. In fact, Betty & Co. were not alone in preferring such clumsy contraptions to "the real thing" in toboggans, of which a few specimens were available.

Lady Kitty and her equally skittish friends minded not in the least that Lord Freddie and the boys had

"selfishly" talked of "bagging" the best sledges for themselves.

But, of course, Lord Freddie and the boys were not so ungallant as to mean to stick to all the best sledges.

Very soon the girls were being offered to try out these, and welcome! Harmony reigned, and there was even talk to be quite fair.

After the first event, however, high spirits caused the races to be treated with levity. And the boys would not be fair after all.

Even when the girls won, Lord Freddie and his lot complained of fouls, or the flouting of some very important rule—anything to make out that the race was really theirs.

So at last Lady Kitty and her lot—which included Morcove—went for the boys, meaning to snowball them into good behaviour.

But Lord Freddie & Co., tiresome as friends, were far worse as opponents in this fresh set-to in the snow.

Betty herself was soon a prisoner, along with Polly and Bunny, behind the enemy lines, after which their own side went to bits.

But it was shortly after lunch, that day, when a bit of fun began such as only the minds of Jack and his fellow Grangemoor comics could have devised.

All the concert party stage-baskets had been fetched along from the station, and now Betty was all by herself, paying attention to her and her girl chums' costumes.

Suddenly Polly came whirling into this downstairs room where Betty had the Morcove baskets. And never yet had Form captain seen madcap in a greater state of laughter.

"Look out of window, Betty—quick, do! Ha, ha, ha!"

Betty darted to the window.

Then, instantly, she gave a merry laugh.

Outside in the snow there was a full-size sleigh, to which a horse could be harnessed. And there was a horse being backed into position, even now, by Polly's own brother, whilst Lord Freddie joyously looked on.

But such a horse!

It was, in fact, the now famous steed

which figured in the concert party's show.

Grangemoor had lost no time over getting the hearthrug "hide" unpacked. Young Tom was serving again as front legs, and Tubby as the hind pair, with the usual result that neither lad knew quite what the other was going to do next.

"Whoa there!" bellowed Jack. "Tehek-ik!" He made oster-like sounds in his cheeks. "Goo-lun then, Heathrugs!"

His name being "Ginger" in the programme, possibly the stage pony reared being called by one that meant teasing allusion to his stitched-together skin. Anyhow, he suddenly put down his head like a bull and charged Jack, bowling him over in the snow.

Then spirited Ginger chased Lord Freddie all round the yard.

Betty and Polly stayed to see no more from the window. Away they romped, and they could hear Naomer and others doing a similar stampeo for out-of-doors. Some would have the luck of bagging seats in the sleigh, when it set off for the lake for the afternoon's skating. And the rest would, at any rate, have all the fun of helping to ginger-up "Ginger."

"Come on, girls!" was the old rallying Morcove cry which also fetched Lady Kitty and her friends full-pelt for the open air. "It's a scream!"

Then, suddenly, Betty and Polly were stopped in their rush to join the others, by Miss Lester.

They had seen nothing of her during the morning. At lunch, she had come to table looking fairly amiable, as if resigned to letting them all have their own way. But now, as both girls came running out of a side passage, the official chaperon was ready to bar the way, her looks as fierce as they had been overnight.

"No, I say!" was the hissing whisper with which she spread out her arms to prevent Betty and Polly from getting by. "Stand still—listen to me! Betty, I hold you answerable! There's a train up to town at two-fifty—"

"Yes, and there's ice on the lake that's the best for years," Betty said, in between one laugh and another. "And so we're going—skating."



"GEE up there!" cried Dave, cracking the whip. The comic horse "geed-up" all right, but the passengers went the other way. With roars of laughter, they tumbled in the snow.

"Then I shall report you when we get back to town, and there'll be no more going about to give you show."
 "Won't there?" retorted both girls, and quick as lightning they dived under those spread arms, to dash on once more.

LEFT to herself, Miss Lester stood biting a lip and frowning hard.
 "Yet what can they prove against me? Nothing!" ran the thoughts of this designing woman who knew herself to be at least under suspicion. "Nothing yet, or they would have gone straight to Mrs. Willoughby. And so—"
 And so, next minute, she gave a fierce determined nod, then moved on with the quick strides of a born schemer whose crafty brain and strong nerve were not failing her—even now!

Betty Could Afford to Smile!

"H A. ha, ha! Oh, funniest thing ever!" Ha, ha, ha!
 "Gorjus! And bags a front seat!" rose Naomer's shrill above all the mirthful comments and peals of laughter from a very hilarious crowd. "Come on, Tubby!"
 "He can't!" chuckled Bunny. "He's the hind legs!"
 "Of course, I was forgetting—swindle!"

And it was observed that Naomer, scrambling to a good seat in the fine blue sleigh, had affectionate eyes for old "Hearthrugs," of whom her favourite Grangemovians formed such a useful working party.
 "Hey, whoa, steady!" Jack was now shouting, whilst backing the recaptured stage-pony into position for harnessing up. "Stand still, chaps! Can't you see what I'm doing?"
 "No, I can't see!" the hollow voice of Tom came from inside the horse's head.
 "Nor can I!" was Tubby's foghorn bellow.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Oh, hurry up!" Polly dinned at all three nonsense-lovers. "We'll never get to the lake to-day! But who's going to ride, and who isn't?" she eagerly wanted to know.

Then there was a most lively argument, affording Jack ample time in which to get "Ginger" yoked to the sleigh. Indeed, it became Ginger's own turn to shout a "Hurry up!" whilst he sat down in the snow, so as to gather strength for the coming baulage.

"Just look at him!" gurgled Lady Kitty. "The dear!"
 Lord Freddie had run back into the house for a camera. Now he was back, and—snap! he clicked off a quarter-plate that would give a picture to be prized.

It would be a picture showing the sleigh fast filling up with a load of gleeful passengers. And it was to be hoped that the "snap" would take in the very decrepit-looking steed, with Jack the Groom doing his best to look like a juvenile Cossack, in borrowed furs and wielding a huge riding-whip.

"Hey-ho, hi!" roared Jack, cracking the whip in the air. "Allez-vous! Presto! Gee-up, then, Dobbin!"
 "Yes, quick—ret-zerk on!"

But at this instant the forward end of Ginger fancied a cigarette from the gold case that Lord Freddie was just then handling. An arm of Tom's mysteriously obtruded itself from an opening in the neck, and the reaching hand helped itself to the proffered case.

"Oh, get on!" yelled Polly, knowing that such raging impatience would add to the peals of merriment. "Goops, all of you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 At last, Ginger having been provided with a light for his cigarette, he set off with a rush calculated to make up for all the delay.

There was an initial jolt that flung the passengers about, but this did not prevent their giving loud cheers, along with those merry-makers who were mobbing around, waving wildly.

Jack cracked his whip like a ring-master; Ginger got into a grand gallop over the snow; and away rocked the sleigh, for a distance of four or five yards, anyhow.

Then one of the runners stuck in the snow, with a suddenness that slewed the whole thing round, almost capsizing it.

Passengers in shrieks of laughter, tumbled out, the traces came undone, and Ginger, after bowling over like a shot rabbit, could be seen trying to get up again.

A few moments of comical struggling ended in only his front legs coming into use. They and the entire bundle of

LITTLE LETTERS— from Your Editor

Jean Handsome (Newark).—It was so nice of you to write to me after all this long time, Jean, but why such a very tiny letter? Next time you must write longer and exactly what you think of all our features. The answer to your most important question regarding Cliff House is "No," my dear. Look out for a wonderful new serial shortly, and please don't forget that other letter.

Barbara Gorst (Warrington).—So glad that you like our "Celebrities" corner. I will certainly see what can be done regarding your suggestion, Barbara—for which, many thanks—but I cannot give you a definite promise. So much depends upon what the majority of my readers want, of course. I'm sure you will be thrilled to know that an early adventure of the Cliff House girls is included in every month's issues of the SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN LIBRARY. Be sure to write again soon.

Phyllis Claymore (Bath).—If you went to Cliff House, Phyllis, you would be in the Upper Third. Delighted to know you are so fond of the Cliff House stories. You'll simply love the fascinating new series which commences next Saturday. In Faith Ashton, Babs' cousin, you will be introduced to one of the most unusual girls who has ever come to the famous school. Best wishes!

hearthrugs suddenly went galloping off, whilst Tubby was left behind, still floating in a drift.

"It isn't funny!" Madcap Polly scathingly informed roaring Jack, at the same time jumping down from the sleigh.

"Bekas, now we've got to walk!"
 "Not at all!" said Lord Freddie.
 And very soon those who liked to have the fun of doing so could still ride in the sleigh, Grangemovier and his lordship forming a strong team to haul it along over the sparkling snow.

The lake, when they got to it, showed at least an acre of sweet ice, shining dully in the red afternoon sun. On went all the skates that Hacklow Park had provided, and for an hour it was perfect skating for those who could skate.

As for those who had yet to learn, they found this winter's ice more slippery than ever!

There must have been something wrong about the "instruction" given by Messrs. Jack and Tom. Could it have been only a bit more of their usual teasing?

At any rate, several girls looked greatly relieved when the rascally pair packed up, so as to go with other Grangemovians, who had arranged to leave early to prepare for the show.

"Manageress" Betty, and Polly as well, went along with the boys back to the house.

There was a makeshift stage to get ready, and ever-serious Dave asked the two girls if they would mind being on hand, to approve all arrangements.

With the sun sinking early behind the black woods, the batch of juniors briskly trudged across the snow-mantled park to the great mansion. Good-natured Lord Freddie had preceded them by a few minutes, promising to collect a few estate workmen who would be helpful. But when Betty and Polly and the boys went surging in by the main door, they were surprised to find his lordship merely standing about in a very flummuxed manner.

"Oh, there you are!" he uncomfortably greeted them. "Say, there's been a bit of a blow about to-night's show. Your Miss Lester—hanged if she hasn't gone up to town by the afternoon train, and—"

"But what of that?" laughed Betty. "Nothing!" grimaced Lord Freddie. "Only—uh—Batters here explain. He can tell you better than I can."

This caused a portly manservant to approach, with a preliminary bow.

"The lady requested me to get her a car to run her to the station," said Batters smoothly. "The lady also desired me to have certain dress-baskets put on board the game cart. Both car and cart left in time to catch the twofifty."

"Well," gasped Polly, "what a nerve!"

"By George!" Jack exploded. "The blinking villain!"

"I could not obey the lady's orders," pleaded Batters.

Lord Freddie said nothing. He was going to relight a pipe, but he held the flaming match away, staring agape at Betty. Lord Freddie, in the circumstances, was becoming surprised that Betty could keep smiling. So were Betty's chums.

"Miss Lester hasn't," said Betty, "taken any of our stuff."

"Hasn't?"

"She may have taken our baskets, but I had unpacked them, putting everything safely out of sight. All that's in the baskets is only a lot of newspapers and rubbish, to give them the right weight. I thought I'd do that—just in case."

"Oh, boy!" Jack shouted, and then he turned to his Grangemovier pals.

"D'you chaps hear this?"

Lord Freddie relit his pipe, flourished out a match, and stood regarding Betty with supreme delight.

"No reason, then, why the show can't be given after all?"

"None at all!"

And Betty, as she said that, could surely be excused her smile of quiet triumph!

ONE up to the Concert Party—and a nasty shock awaiting Miss Lester! But the traitor is by no means beaten yet, as you'll see on reading next week's chapters of this magnificent story. Order your SCHOOLGIRL well in advance.

came to her face, and she clasped her hands.

"No hurt!" she begged. "Borki good friend." Borki like all white girls! "Like us or not," said Norma, in her grimaces of tone, "you're staying with us until Talia comes back, and the white man. You stay along here all time."

Borki did not answer; she only gaped. For this was such an unexpected end that she was quite terrified.

Naturally Norma did not intend to frighten her, and she did her best to assure Borki that she would not be harmed in any way.

Between them Norma and Kit helped her up, and Borki, hopping as best she could, was led to Miss Manders.

"MYSTERY HOUSE of the MOORS!"

(Concluded from page 16.)

door—that, incidentally, is made of steel, and is locked on the outside. Short of a chopper to chop through the merry old floor, that hope of getting out!"

A rather grim silence fell. Babs apprehensively glanced at her watch. An hour had gone since Jimmy and Don had departed. On their shoulders now rested their only hope of salvation.

It would take them a good hour, at least, to reach Northdale, another hour to come back. That is, if they succeeded in reaching Northdale.

At a rather head falling, was quietly nodding as she sat in her chair. Exhausted by her experiences, worn out by lack of water and food, she was in a sorry condition indeed. Jemima, plainly, was keeping up her spirits by an effort.

They waited. Half an hour went by, an hour, an hour and a half.

Two hours. Babs inwardly groaned. By this time something should have happened.

A two and a half. They were all looking white and haggard now. Three o'clock in the morning. Still no sign. Jemima shrugged.

"All up," she murmured. "Tough, Babs—"

"But listen," cried Babs.

They stood tense, ears alert and strained. Then they gasped a joyful whoop. From somewhere came a voice. Clara Trevlyn's voice, shouting excitedly.

"Babs! Mabs! Where are you?"

"Clara!" cried Babs. "Clara! All together, girls! One, two, three—"

"Clara!" they all shouted in chorus, and Pamela woke up with a start.

"Where?" came the Tomboy's distant yell.

"The gallery. Secret panel—"

"Sounds outside, confused and hammering—the shouting of voices, the thudding of feet. Then another voice, nearer this time—a voice which made them all jump with joy.

"Hack the wall-down!"

"Jimmy Richmond!" Babs cried joyously. "Jimmy! Jimmy, this way. Near the missing picture—"

"Then—ah, thud! Their prison shook. Crash again. Then a yell:

"Here we are! My hat, mind the stairs!"

"Hurrah!" shrieked Babs.

They waited, quivering now, half-laughing, half-crying. In the next room, they heard a sudden shout, tramping feet. Jimmy Richmond's voice again:

"Here she is," said Norma. "And she can't escape. We could tie her hands, too, if necessary."

She allowed Borki to sit down, and the little savage moaned and groaned, and tugged at her ankles.

"Good gracious! The bonds are cutting her! They are tied too tightly!" protested Miss Manders. "There is no need to be unkind, Norma."

Norma studied the bonds carefully.

"I don't think they are too tight, Miss Manders," she said. "Borki is wild and strong, and if they were made looser she could escape. She's only pretending, so that she can have a chance to escape."

Borki's wailing was such that several

"Clara, where are the keys ye took off Beecham?"

"Here they are," Clara cried excitedly.

The key clicked in the lock. The steel door flew open—and Babs gave a cry of joy as her chums, led by Jimmy Richmond and Clara Trevlyn, rushed into the room.

"WELL, we made it," Jimmy Richmond grinned—this was several hours later, in the early hours of the morning, and they were preparing food in the kitchen. "If it hadn't been for the fact that we got lost on route, we should have been back earlier, with the police. Still, all's well that ends well. Beecham and Greening have been carted off to the lock-up, and so has that other girl. Her name, by the way, was Jane Beecham. She's Beecham's daughter, Pamela, old thing, have another egg."

"Thanks," Jemima laughed.

"And a little more coffee, sit?"

Richmond added, turning to Professor Marsh, who for a man of his years, had made a surprising recovery.

"And so," Jemima chirped, "all's well that ends well. And now, I suppose, we go to visit the ancestral home of the Hayburs'. Quite an exciting end to our hole, what? And if I may say so, a very, very pleasant end. The only shadow on the horizon," she added gravely, "is dear old Bessie's loss. I suppose you haven't found your Fifty Million Ways of Becoming a Pauper, Bessie?"

Bessie beamed.

"But I have, you know," she said. "It was in my coat pocket all the time. And we're not," she added, going straight away to Donald Hayburs', because the professor has asked us to stop on to the party, you know.

And I, Bessie beamed, reddening a little. "Have accounts for all of us. I hope you don't mind, Don?"

Don Hayburs' laughed cheerily.

"Not a bit," he said, "because I happen to know all about it. And at the professor's very jolly invitation, my people will be here to join us. So that's all right, what, as Jimmy the Carstairs would say. And here," he added, raising his cup of coffee, "is jolly good luck and happiness to all of us. Shall the sun ever set over dear old Britain?"

"Never," the professor said, "as long as Britain has boys and girls such as you to keep her traditions going."

Which pretty, but very sincere compliment, backed up by an admiring and glowing smile from his granddaughter, caused the Cliff House girls and the Friarale boys to turn pink in modest embarrassment!

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

girls who had gone to help in the treasure-hunt returned, wondering what it was all about.

"You are sure she is in no pain, Norma?" Miss Manders asked.

She examined the bonds herself, and then realised that Borki was making them appear tight.

"Yes; she is only hurting herself by struggling," said the headmistress. "But now, having made her prisoner, where can we keep her?"

"Norma had thought of that."

"The only place is the yacht," she said. "The chief's men have left it; and the boat is here. We can take her here."

"Not, not," said Borki, looking up, her eyes wide. "My feller father come make plenty trouble. Burn all tings."

"No, he won't," said Norma. "Not while you're on the yacht. If he wants you back, he can give up the white man and Talia."

Miss Manders still wore a doubtful expression, as though she was not quite sure that this was really the wisest course to adopt.

For to her it seemed that by kidnapping Borki they were adopting the principle that two wrongs make a right. But Norma, although she quite understood that, knew that they were dealing with people who could not be persuaded or appealed to. "Fit-for-taf was the only kind of argument they could understand."

Virginia at that moment returned, and started with amazement at the scene for the prefect had not heard the details of Norma's plan.

"What ever's going on?" she exclaimed.

"Quick! Help us get her aboard the boat, and out to the yacht!" said Norma urgently.

"But—but there are bushmen coming," said Virginia. "If they see you capturing Borki, there'll be a awful scene. Release her at once, Norma!"

"The bushmen are coming—how?" cried Miss Manders, in horror.

Borki's eyes lit up; and Kit saw her drawing a breath to give a wild yell. Kit did not hesitate, but hurled the blanket over the bush girl's head, and pressed a wad of it over her mouth.

Only a stifled gurgle resulted.

"Miss Manders, are you allowing this?" asked Virginia, amazed.

Miss Manders looked towards the bush.

"I—really—I—" She hesitated.

"The bushmen will be here in a minute," said Norma desperately.

"We've got to act. It's too late now to draw back."

"Borki will say we were cruel to her, anyway," added Kit. "They just mustn't see her with us."

Norma looked at Kit.

"Come on!" she said quickly.

"Belinda, help!" Kit snapped, and the three of them pushed and dragged the struggling Borki towards the small ship's dingy. They had gone 100 feet far to draw back. Already they had done enough to earn the bushman's vengeance. It was all or nothing.

But Miss Manders, at the last moment, lost her nerve.

"Stop! This can't go on. Norma, stop!" she ordered.

SURELY Norma's plan is not to be ruined at the last moment by Miss Manders' intervention? Next Saturday's magnificent instalment will tell you. You simply must not miss it.