

"THE NEW GIRL WAS SO CHARMING!" Fascinating LONG COMPLETE
Cliff House story inside.

THE SCHOOLGIRL

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EVERY **2^D**
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Incorporating
"SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN"



THE GIFT THAT WAS MEANT FOR BABS!

Immediately Bessie's back was
turned, on to the fire went the
violets.

(See this week's Cliff House story.)

Magnificent LONG COMPLETE Cliff House story featuring Barbara Redfern & Co.—



The NEW GIRL

New Term Ahead!



"COURTFIELD in five minutes!" smiled Barbara Redfern. "That's where we change for Friardale and Cliff House School. Not feeling nervous are you, Faith?"

"Oh, no!" The girl in the corner seat smiled—such a sweet smile, it was, making her extraordinarily pretty face even more charming, so that Babs, without knowing it, just had to smile back. "But it's all so wonderful—so utterly like a dream, you know, that I can hardly realise it, even yet, Barbara. Oh, I do so hope they'll all like me at Cliff House School."

Babs laughed. Clara Trevlyn, her tomboy chum, in the corner, grinned. "Don't worry. They'll like you, all right," she said confidently. "The very fact that you're old Babs' cousin will guarantee that. Apart from that—"

Clara said, and stopped, her face flushing, but her eyes glowing with a sort of wonder as she still studied the entrancingly captivating face opposite her.

"But apart from what?" Faith Ashton asked, with wide-eyed innocence. "Oh, nothing!" Clara said, a little awkwardly.

But Babs smiled, realising very well what the Tomboy had most unintentionally blurted out.

Mabel Lynn, Babs' great chum, next to Clara, smiled, too. So did Leila Carroll, the American member of Cliff House School's Fourth Form.

The sixth occupant of the first-class carriage in which the chums were traveling back to school from London, however, did not smile.

She merely blinked over the tops of her extremely round and extremely thick-lensed spectacles and turned her head, rather unhappily, towards the window again.

For plump Bessie Bunter could also guess what Clara would have said, and Bessie, at least, did not find that unsaid thing echoing in her own heart.

For what Clara would have said was: "Your face will get you liked anywhere."

And of Faith Ashton, that was undeniably true. It was difficult, looking at her then, to feel that anyone

The sort of girl, indeed, at first sight of whom the Co.'s hearts had melted in instant liking and sympathy.

Except Bessie!

For Bessie Bunter, most astonishingly, did not like her!

And the worst of that was, from Bessie's point of view, that she did not know why.

Faith had done nothing to her. Faith, indeed, had been as sweet to Bessie as to the rest of them. It was Faith who, at Waterloo, had insisted on helping Bessie with her luggage; Faith who, when Bessie had confessed to a liking

There was no doubt that Faith Ashton, Barbara Redfern's cousin from Canada, was the prettiest, sweetest new girl who had ever come to Cliff House. With her childishly attractive face, her winsome ways, it was small wonder that the whole school loved her from the moment she entered its doors. Yet there was one girl who did not like Faith Ashton—and that girl, strangely enough, was that plump, good-natured duffer, Bessie Bunter of the Fourth Form.

anywhere could have refused her anything.

Barbara, with her serene blue eyes and dark chestnut hair, was pretty; Mabel Lynn, her lieutenant in the Fourth Form at Cliff House, was pretty, too, in a different way.

Yet Faith Ashton was prettier than either of them—so pretty, indeed, that it was difficult, even for Tomboy Clara, usually unimpressed by looks, to keep her eyes off her.

Big and long-lashed those blue eyes of Faith Ashton's. Peerless, and soft, and smooth that pink complexion.

Soft, doe-like, her expression, with just a trace of pardonable nervousness.

for a snack, had slipped out and bought her sandwiches at a station on the line.

And the dear old plump duffer, at this moment, was hating herself for not liking the new girl—especially as that new girl was her own dear Babs' cousin.

Why didn't she like her?

Bessie didn't know, and because she didn't know, Bessie was unhappy.

Not often was it that Bessie Bunter found her feelings at variance with those of Babs and Mabs. Not often, indeed, was it that the dear, good-natured duffer of Cliff House's Fourth Form, usually only too willing to see the very best in everybody, felt like this.

But there the fact was.

—and a newcomer to the Fourth Form: Faith Ashton, Babs' own cousin.



WAS So Charming!

"Bessie," Faith said softly. Bessie turned, her face red. "Oh, y-yes?"

"You've been very quiet since we left Waterloo. I hope," Faith said, her big blue eyes wide with concern, "you feel all right, Bessie?"

"Oh, y-yes. I—I'm all right," Bessie said unhappily. "I—I was just admiring the scenery, you know. It—it is beautiful, isn't it?"

"Oh, most!" Clara chortled sarcastically, gazing out at the Courtfield gasworks, which the train was passing. "Just too too, you know! The worst of our Bessie," she added, with a sigh, "is that she's got such an artistic sense!"

Redder Bessie became. Without replying to that sally she turned towards the window again, blinking through it with almost fierce intensity.

Babs laughed.

"Poor old Bess! I don't suppose she's too keen on returning to school," she said. "We've had such a ripping time during the holidays in Scotland that new term does come rather as an anticlimax, doesn't it? But tell me, Faith, how did you leave aunt—in Canada?"

"Oh, I left her very well," Faith smiled. "She's coming over in a month's time, you know. I do think it's really marvellous of her to send me to Cliff House School. I must remember to write to her to-night and tell her how lovely everything has been, and how really delightful you and all your chums are. Barbara, is Cliff House a very big school?"

"Big, as schools go in England," Babs replied. "There are over three hundred girls in it, you know, to say nothing of an army of mistresses, and servants, and all that. I expect you'll find it rather different from your school in Toronto,"

she added. "You know, different rules, and customs, and things."

"Yes, I suppose I will," Faith murmured, and smiled mistily. "Everything seems so different already—here. Just fancy, Babs! We were both only six, last time we met."

Babs laughed. Clara smiled, without knowing what she was smiling about. Six years of age! That would be over eight years ago. Great goodness, how time did fly!

But perfectly Babs remembered the occasion when her Aunt Felicity, most enormously wealthy, had departed for Canada, taking Faith with her—a sweetly pretty and captivating child, even then, but one who had grown even prettier with the passing of the years.

By
HILDA RICHARDS

Illustrated by T. LAIDLER.

Always Babs had had a great admiration and affection for Aunt Felicity, and always had that affection been returned.

"Hallo! Slowing down," Clara announced. "Here's Courtfield! Up you get, Bessie! What-ho for Cliff House!" Clara boisterously called. "We'll jolly soon be there again. Isn't it funny how, when you're at school you always think of holidays, and then, when the holidays are over, how jolly glad you all are to get back again. Here's jolly old Courtfield!"

Courtfield—or Courtfield Station, the junction with the main line and Friar-dale—it was.

And a noisy, jostling scene, at this time. Platforms crowded with girls—girls from Cliff House, girls from

Whitechester, girls from Courtfield Grammar School—and a good sprinkling, too, of the boys from Friar-dale School.

Eagerly excited, they grabbed up their cases. Babs and Clara were first to leap out.

To be at once greeted by:

"Hallo! Here, Babs! I say, Babs."

"How did you enjoy yourself, Babs?"

"Babs, did you get my Christmas card?"

"Babs, old thing, have you heard?"

Barbara Redfern laughed as she was surrounded by some twenty excited girls.

"Wait a minute!" she gasped. "Goodness! Let a girl get her breath! Hallo, Marjorie! Hallo, Diana! I say, there's Bridget O'Toole—"

"Sure, and it does my Oirish eyes good to see my old Babs again!" Bridget broadly grinned. "We were all wondering if you'd be coming on this train, begorra! But, arrah, who's the girl you've brought with you, Babs?"

"My cousin," Babs said. "Faith, come and be introduced. This is Faith Ashton," she added, while Faith rather nervously allowed herself to be dragged forward. "She comes from Canada, and she's going into the Fourth Form at Cliff House."

They all stared, struck as Clara & Co. had been by the loveliness of the girl.

"Well, if she's a friend of yours, she's a friend of ours," Margot Lantham said.

"Yes, rather, look you!" Lucy Morgan chipped in.

"Thank you," Faith smiled tremulously. "It's nice of you to accept me so readily," she said. "But, Barbara,

"I'd no idea you were as popular as this."

"Just wait till we get to Cliff House," Clara chuckled.

Faith's wide eyes opened still wider. She seemed faintly amazed. But more and more girls were coming up now. They were all greeting Babs, and after Babs, Clara; all eagerly exchanging greetings and news with her. Then came a sudden shout:

"Friardale train in Platform No. 3, young ladies!"

"Bag Babs' carriage!" cried Janet Jordan.

"And me!" shrilled Muriel Bond.

"Begorra, and I saw Babs first—"

"Oh, my goodness!" breathed Faith in wonder. "Barbara, are they always so glad to see you?"

"Always, I guess," Leila Carroll replied for Babs. "Sure, it is good to be liked like that, I'll say! But Babs deserves it, if ever a girl does! Gee, we'll sure have to be slick if we're travelling with her! Clara's gone on to bag a carriage. Come on!"

And away they rushed, to find a warm argument going on outside the door of Babs' compartment when they reached it. But Babs laughed.

"No, please!" she cried. "Let Faith in first. Bessie! Where's Bessie?"

"Bessie's in the next compartment, look you," Lucy Morgan said.

"Next compartment! Bessie! I say, Bessie—" And Babs peered into the next carriage, where the fat duffer—usually so anxious to travel with Babs—had packed herself in with Jemima Carstairs, Jean Cartwright, Marjorie Hazeldene, and four others. "Bessie, aren't you coming in my carriage?"

Once again Bessie turned pink. "Nun-no, thanks. I—I'm comfy here, thanks."

"Oh!" said Babs, and stared a little, wondering all at once what had come over her fat chum, and remembering now how unusually silent Bessie had been all the way from London. "You're sure, old Bess?"

"I—Yes, thanks," Bessie stuttered.

"All aboard!" shouted a porter. "Step in there, young ladies—please!"

Babs stepped back. Clara, from the next carriage, caught her arm, hauling her in.

Phee-ee-ep! The guard's whistle shrilled. The train pulled out. Once again they all seated themselves.

Babs smiled as she saw the big wondering eyes of her cousin upon her. "That's just a taste of Cliff House," she chuckled. "Wait till we arrive there. Oh, my goodness! I feel quite breathless. But it's ripping to see all the old faces again!"

The train chugged on. A quarter of an hour later the usually sleepy station of Friardale was reached. Out tumbled the girls once more, filling the platform at once with noisy animated life.

Once more Babs & Co. were surrounded. Girls who had not yet spoken to them, anxious to snatch a word, clamoured round; then there was a cry: "Barbara!"

And towards her, pretty face all smiles, came hurrying a graceful figure dressed in a smart tweed suit.

"Oh, I say, isn't she pretty?" Faith breathed. "Barbara, who is she?"

"Miss Charmant, our Form-mistress," Babs said. "She's a dear. Good-morning, Miss Charmant!"

"Good-morning!" the popular mistress of the Fourth laughed. "It's very nice to see you again, Barbara. Oh, my dear," she added to Faith, "I was forgetting our new girl, Barbara!"

"My cousin," Babs said proudly.

Miss Charmant looked at her. Her eyes lighted up with admiration as she stretched forward her slim, gloved hand.

"Welcome, my dear! I hope you will enjoy yourself at Cliff House. I am sure," she added glowingly, "that any relative of Barbara is more than welcome."

Faith smiled. "You all seem very fond of Babs," she said.

"We are," Miss Charmant laughed. "Perhaps, as a mistress, I ought not to say it, but—well, this is first day of term, and so I may be excused a little licence," she added. "Well, Barbara, what now? I have my car outside, and it will hold four besides myself. Your cousin will make one, of course."

"Oh, please, Miss Charmant!" "And Mabel and Bessie," Valerie Charmant guessed, knowing very well whom to select. "Where is Bessie?"

"Bessie! Bessie!" Babs cried. "I say, there's the chump going off on her own towards the barrier. Bessie!" she cried.

Bessie turned. She blinked woefully through her big spectacles.

"Oh dud-dear! Yes?"

"Miss Charmant is offering us a lift in her car," Babs cried. "You and Faith and Mabs and me."

Bessie stood still. "Fuf-Faith?" she stuttered.

"Yes, ninny. Here, let me have your bag."

But Bessie, almost as if to protect it, drew back with the bag as Babs would have taken it.

"Thuth-thanks," she stuttered, "bib-but, if you don't mind, I—I'd rather wait for the station bus. I want to see Mary Treherne, you know."

Babs stared at her oddly. "Bessie, are you all right?"

"Y-yes. Pip-please, Babs! I'll see you in the study."

"In that case, then, I'll bag the vacant seat," Clara Trevlyn grinned. "You don't mind, Miss Charmant?"

"Not at all," Miss Charmant said, but she cast a strange look at Bessie. "Come along, then, my dears."

And she shepherded them out of the station, while Bessie stood still, her face red, a strange suspicion of tears in her eyes, and her lower lip quivering with a sudden and most poignant unhappiness. Oh dear! What was the matter with her?

Outside the car stood. Into it clambered Mabs and Babs and Clara; then Babs looked round.

"Hallo! Where's Faith? Faith! Oh goodness!"

For there was Faith; she had stopped outside the station door. At the door stood a shabby, down-at-heel man, with a shivering little mongrel of a terrier at his feet, and a placard across his chest announcing in one revealing single word the fact—blind.

Faith was before him, trying to smile as she heard her name called, and dropping coppers into the tin tray the beggar held out.

"I'm sorry," she said softly, as she returned; "but I just couldn't pass a blind man, Babs. I'm always so frightfully sad when I see a poor human being like that."

"Y-yes," Babs said, and felt guilty herself for not having seen him. "I suppose—" she said uncomfortably, and then tripped out of the car, placing a sixpence in the tin tray. "Well, thank goodness there is one of us thoughtful for others!" she laughed. "But we're all so jolly excited at the

prospect of getting back to school. You see?"

"Why, Barbara dear, of course!" Faith smiled. "Oh, isn't this a lovely car? Miss Charmant must be very fond of you, Babs?"

Babs merely smiled. Then the car, with Miss Charmant at the wheel, hummed on. The distance was not far. Very shortly the tall, handsome, bronze gates of Cliff House came into view.

Babs & Co. were driven up to the quadrangle. There was another whoop as the car stopped. A dozen or more excited juniors crowded round the car, and, again, as the Co. stepped out, there was a shout:

"Babs! Good old Babs!"

Babs laughed. Breathlessly she introduced her bewildered cousin. Everybody was excited, everybody tremendously pleased at getting back.

In groups they stood around, exchanging reminiscences. Then Madge Stevens of the Upper Third said:

"Hallo, Babs, here comes Dulcia Fairbrother. I say, isn't your cousin good-looking? Dulcia's the captain of the school," she explained to the wide-eyed Faith. "But no end of a good sport, and she's frightfully fond of old Babs, too, you know."

"Oh dear! Is everybody fond of Babs?" Faith murmured.

"Nearly everybody," Madge Stevens said. "And they ought to be. Hallo, Dulcia!" she added cheerily.

"Hallo," Dulcia Fairbrother laughed. "Oh, Barbara, how are you? Good holiday, I hope? I've some news for you—but perhaps it had better wait. Babs, will you go to the headmistress at once? She's calling a captains' conference."

"Captain?" cried Faith, with a start. "But, Barbara—"

"Hallo!" Dulcia said, and turned a little, then immediately smiled. "I suppose you're Barbara's cousin?" she added. "Forgive me if I take Barbara away from you. We've been waiting for her. Will you come along now, Barbara?"

"Why, of course!" Babs laughed. "Mabs, look after Faith, will you?"

She tripped off. Faith was looking dazed. She turned incredulously to Clara.

"But Barbara—is—is she captain?" she asked.

Clara chuckled.

"Not only of the Fourth Form," she said glowingly, "but of the whole of the Lower School. But, what's the matter, Faith? You seem surprised."

"Well—well, I am. Barbara never mentioned that. I—I'd no idea," Faith stammered, and looked for a moment completely flabbergasted. And then, while Clara, with a laugh, turned away to greet Barbara's younger sister Doris of the Upper Third, she bit her lip.

Her face underwent a change.

"Captain!" she muttered. "Barbara—captain!"

And she stared with suddenly strange intensity at Barbara's trim figure as it ascended the school steps, laughingly chatting with Dulcia, the head girl of the school.

A Blow for Bessie!



"AND this," Mabel Lynn announced smilingly, "is our study, Faith—No. 4. Cheery little room, isn't it?" Faith Ashton's eyes glowed with admiration as she looked around the apartment.

Cheery Study No. 4 was. Snug and homely, too. A bright fire crackled welcomingly in the grate; everything was tidy, spick and span, and the furniture simply shone.

Her cheeks dimpled. "Oh, it—it's lovely!" she rapturously breathed. "And you and Babs and Bessie have it all to yourselves?"

"That's it," Mabs laughed. It was five minutes later, and Mabs, awaiting the return of Barbara from the captains' conference in Miss Primrose's study, was showing Faith round. "Three to a study is the rule, you know, and we're all very comfy and happy in here. Babs, Bessie, and I have had this study ever since we went up from the Upper Third into the Fourth—and, of course, we're quite a family party now. But, Faith, would you mind being parked in here for a little while? I must see Boker."

"Boker?" Faith questioned. "Our school page," Mabs smiled. "A frightfully nice and willing lad. We had a concert just before breaking-up day, and I asked Boker to send back the costumes during the holidays. I expect he's done it, really, but I'm rather a fidget where the Amateur Dramatic Society is concerned. Won't keep you long," she added.

Faith smiled winsomely. Mabs tripped out of the study. The door closed behind her.

For a moment Faith stood still, looking round. Again came that strange change to her face—a change which would have immeasurably surprised Babs and Mabs could they have been present to see it.

A faint contempt shone in the glorious eyes all at once; there was just the suspicion of a sneer curling at the corners of her lips.

"Her study—eh?" she muttered. She crossed the floor towards the fire. There she stood toasting her hands. Her eyes, critical and envious now, roved along the mantelpiece ornamented with several odds-and-ends. An inscrip-

tion on the little mahogany clock caught her eye.

Faith bent forward. "Presented to Barbara Redfern, Cliff House," she read, "by admiring friends, for her good work as captain of the Junior School, Cliff House, Christmas, 1937."

Faith scowled as she read that. "What a sickening fuss they make of her!" she muttered. "Barbara—junior captain—eh? I wonder what they'll say when—"

She did not finish. Her gaze, travelling above the clock, had singled out the Captain's Shield, which hung upon the wall. The shield was on a polished oval of oak. Near the top it bore the inscription:

"CLIFF HOUSE JUNIOR SCHOOL. CAPTAINS' SHIELD."

Separated by a pair of crossed hockey sticks from the inscription was a silver plate on which the names of the holders of the shield were engraved. The last one read:

"1937.—Barbara Hilda Redfern."

Above the shield was a smiling photograph of Barbara.

"Swanky cat!" Faith sniffed disdainfully.

Her eyes glimmered as she looked at the photograph. Bitter and deep then the jealousy reflected in their depths. Then suddenly she looked round towards the door.

From her handbag she produced another photograph—an extremely pretty photograph of her extremely pretty self. With sudden strange intensity she reached up, wedging the photograph into the frame so that it completely effaced Barbara's. Then she stepped back, cocking her head critically to one side.

"Better!" she said. "Much, much better above the captains' shield!" She smiled at it—a glad, admiring smile;

her cheeks pink with some inward excitement now, in her great blue eyes a glow that seemed to animate her whole face. "Oh, topping!" she breathed. "Just as if—"

And then quickly, as footsteps sounded outside, she snatched the photograph out, hurriedly ramming it into her bag. Not a second too soon! The door came open, and Barbara herself, her eyes glistening, stood on the threshold.

"Why, Faith!" she cried delightedly. "Are you alone?"

Faith smiled. "Mabs has gone off to see someone named Poker or something," she said. "She left me here. But, Barbara dear, what a delightful room this is! And how sweetly you've furnished it. I do love that clock, and—and, oh, Babs, I'm so thrillingly proud to find out how marvellously popular you are!"

Babs laughed, a little embarrassed. "Well, it is a nice clock, isn't it?" she countered. "Though goodness knows what I've done to deserve it. But—"

"And the captains' shield!" Faith breathed. "How proud you must be, Barbara, to have that hanging in your study. And isn't that photograph of you just too utterly delightful? I think it's just divine!" she added, and stared at it with a sort of entranced rapture. "How long do you hold the shield, Barbara?"

"Well, either until I go up into a higher Form, or somebody else is elected in my place," Babs replied.

"But nobody, I'm sure, could ever be elected in your place, Barbara dear!" Faith said sincerely. "I just don't see how anybody could, you know. You don't think it's ever likely to happen?" she asked anxiously.

Babs laughed. "Well, I hope not!" she confessed. "At the same time, one can never be too sure, can one? Funny things happen in a big school like this, Faith—and—well, popularity is sometimes a fickle thing. But never mind that now!" she added



"THUTH-THANKS," Bessie stuttered, "bib-but if you don't mind, I'd rather wait for the station bus." No one realised it, but it was because Faith, Babs' cousin, was going in Miss Charmant's car that Bessie was refusing this offer of a lift.

excitedly. "I've news—news! Oh, here's Mabs!" she added, as that girl smilingly loomed in the doorway. "Mabs, guess what?"

"No?" Mabs asked.

"Stella Stone!" Babs got out. "Miss Primrose has just been telling us. Stella Stone was our last head girl," she explained to Faith. "We all adored her. She left to get her veterinary degree, and—well, now she's taken it, and she's coming back to the school on Saturday to be honoured in Captains' Corner—"

And Babs, seeing Faith's look of wonderment, went on to explain. No wonder Babs was almost quivering with excitement.

For at Cliff House there was a custom—a very pretty and praiseworthy custom indeed.

In the oldest part of Cliff House, known as the Cloisters, was an ancient wall, which was known as Captains' Corner.

In that wall were several niches, and in each niche was a marble bust of some famous ex-captain, together with an inscription setting forth their honours.

To be set among that throng was the highest possible honour Cliff House could give to any of its girls, and perhaps it is not to be wondered at that it was the most eager ambition of every girl in the school to one day be included in the Corner.

"And now the honour has fallen to Stella," Babs added. "And what a ripping send-off to the beginning of term. But listen, girls! Just hear the part we're going to play in it. Dulcia Fairbrother, as the present captain of the school, is going to do the actual unveiling of Stella's bust; Grace Woodfield, captain of the Upper Fifth, will present Stella with the bouquet after the ceremony. And I—"

"Oh, Babs, have you got a part in it, too?" Faith asked breathlessly.

"Haven't I!" Babs laughed. "My job is the biggest of the lot. Forgive me if that sounds like boasting, but—well, listen. You remember, Mabs, last term we were invited to send in designs for an illuminated address, because, you see," she added for Faith's benefit, "we all knew this would come off some time, and wanted to be prepared. Well, my design is accepted. And I," Babs added, all in a rush, "have got to do the address, and, when the time comes, deliver it, and hand it to Stella in a silver casket!"

"Oh, my goodness!" breathed Faith, while Mabs' eyes glowed.

"But I've got to work like fun," Babs added. "There's only two days, and naturally there are going to be no hitches. But, come on! I've got to tell the girls all about it. To the Common-room!"

And off, with Mabs and Faith chasing excitedly at her heels, she rushed. And bang! went the door of the Common-room as she thrust it open.

Quite a crowd of girls were there—among them Bessie Bunter, who had just arrived in the station bus.

Every eye turned upon Babs.

"Hallo, Babs! Whoopee!" Sylvia Sirrett sang. "I say, do introduce us to your cousin!"

"Yes, rather!" chipped in Gwen Cook. "And, Babs—"

Babs laughed.

"Oh, please. Just a sec!" she exclaimed. "Let me get my news out, or I shall burst. This is it—"

And while they all gathered round, Babs, in a thrilled voice, told them.

Excitement then. A cheer arose. If

Stella had earned herself a niche in Captains' Corner, she had no less earned herself a niche in every girl's heart there. To be sure, there were a few dissentients. For Stella, if she had been popular with most, had made enemies of other girls.

Lydia Crossendale, for instance, just sneered. Freda Ferriers scowled. Frances Frost shrugged indifferently.

"I think it's lovely!" Faith enthused. "But how marvellously clever of dear Babs to do the address. Will you do it all yourself, Babs?"

"Oh, of course! I've promised!"

"You wouldn't like me to help?" Faith wistfully asked. "I can draw, too, you know, and I should so dearly love to have a hand in things! You know, Barbara, everybody is so marvellously delightful in this lovely school, that I'm just itching already to do something that will make them proud of me."

"Then you shall—later," Babs smiled, and glowed again as she saw the breathlessly pretty face staring into hers. "But this—well, no, old thing! I'm afraid I must tackle it on my own. Anyway, that's the news," she added boisterously, "and if that isn't a ripping kick-off to a new term, please tell me what is. Hallo, old Bess! I didn't notice you standing there. Did you come on the bus?"

"She did," chuckled the Hon Beatrice Beverley. "That's why it broke down half-way between here and Friardale!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bessie blinked pathetically. Normally Bessie would have made some indignant retort to that sally. But she didn't look at Beatrice. She was looking most unhappily at Babs—and from Babs to Faith.

For Bessie, glad beyond measure that Babs had received that honour, was just dying to add her congratulations to the others. The sight of Faith there, however, hovering around Babs, so much apparently a part of Babs, prevented her. Oh dear, she did wish that she could bring herself to like Faith.

She turned, feeling a funny little lump rising in her throat. Nobody noticed as she left the Common-room.

"I'm just a mum-mean awful pig!" Bessie told herself. "I'm just jealous, that's what it is. She's a jolly nice girl really—she must be if Bib-Babs is so fond of her, and—and—" She shook her head. "Oh, blow!" she said exasperatedly, and feeling a futile sense of irritation and bewilderment at herself, pushed open the door of Study No. 4.

Then she beamed as she blinked around. Dear old Study No. 4! How snug, how cosy, how cheery it looked!

Her face brightened a little. It really did seem like coming home to see the dear old study again. There was her box, just as she had left it at the end of the term.

There was her own little cupboard, with her own things stacked in it. The old easy-chair, a bit faded now, to which she had established almost an unconquerable right.

"Yum! I'll make a cup of tea," Bessie thought.

She peeled off her coat, took off her hat. It gave her a sort of thrill to find herself moving about the well-remembered old room again.

There was the tea, just where she had left it. There was sugar and milk, too! Good old Boker! He must have brought those in when he lit the fire!

She put the kettle on the fire, and then got out the cups—four of them, because Faith was bound to come in

with Babs and Mabs, of course—and opened the milk.

The door came open. Babs, Mabs, and Faith entered.

"Oh, dear old Bess!" cried Babs. "Is that tea you've made?"

"Y-yes, rather!" said Bessie. "Shall I pour it out?"

"No, Bessie; let me," Faith simpered.

But Bessie very firmly grabbed up the teapot. Then she paused, remembering the good resolve she had made, trying most desperately to dispel that instinctive dislike of which she was so ashamed. She hesitated.

"Well, y-yes, of course you can, if you like," she mumbled, reluctantly surrendering the pot. "I'll put the sugar in the cups. I know how much each one has, you know."

"Oh, please, Bessie dear!" Faith agreed delightedly, and, with a beaming smile, picked up the pot. "Full cup, Babs?"

"Yes, please!" Babs said. "Dear old Bess! What a lovely idea of yours to make it! Thank you, Faith!" And then turned as a knock came at the door, and, swinging round, hastily put the cup back on the table as Miss Primrose came in.

The headmistress smiled.

"Please do not let me interrupt, my dears," she said. "I was passing, so I came to see— Ah! And she smiled as her eyes rested upon Faith. "You are Barbara's cousin—Faith Ashton?"

"Yes, Miss P-Primrose," Faith stammered.

"I am pleased to meet you. Welcome to Cliff House," Miss Primrose said. "Hem! You appear to be a little crowded in here. As you are a stranger to the school, Faith, I expect you would like to share this study for a while with Barbara and Mabel?"

"Oh, Miss Primrose, I most certainly would!" Faith said enthusiastically.

"Then you shall!" Miss Primrose said. Her eyes fastened upon Bessie. "But that means, of course, one of its present occupants will have to move out. As it happens, Rosa Rodworth will not be back for another month, which means that temporarily, at least, Study No. 1 will only have two occupants. Bessie—"

Bessie jumped.

"Yes, Miss Primrose?"

"In the circumstances I think, perhaps, a change might benefit you. As soon as you are ready, please remove your things to Study No. 1."

Babs started. Bessie stood completely still, looking as if she could not believe her ears.

"But, Miss Primrose," Babs broke in. "Oh dear, please! Not Bessie! Four of us can manage—"

"I am sorry, Barbara, but you know it is my rule not to overcrowd studies. Apart from which," Miss Primrose added, "I am convinced the change will be all for the best. Bessie is by far the most backward girl in the Form. I cannot help feeling that, in a new environment, she might find new inspiration. I shall expect you to move during the day, Bessie. The page-boy will help you if you have any heavy things."

"But—but—" Bessie protested.

"Please, Bessie, do not raise objections."

"But—but—" Bessie said again, and almost blubbered. "Miss Primrose! Oh dear, I—I don't want to go, you know! I can't go!" she broke out wildly. "Oh, Babs—"

"Bessie, do not be foolish!"

"But Miss Primrose," Babs anxiously

broke in, "Bessie is our chum. Bessie always has been our chum—"

"Bessie," Miss Primrose said, stiffening a little, "will obey my orders. Please, Barbara, do not be so sentimental. Doubtless Bessie does not wish to part from you, but, in the circumstances, there is no help for it. Perhaps," she added, more kindly, "we will reconsider the matter when Faith has settled down here. In the meantime, it is only fair that she should share this room with her cousin. That is all. And those," she added, in the tone of voice which brooked no further argument, "are my orders."

And with that she swished out of the study, leaving Bessie like a girl turned to stone, her eyes unbelievably fixed almost in horror as the door closed behind the headmistress' form.

Faith shuffled uneasily.

"Oh, Bessie, I—I'm frightfully sorry!" she murmured.

Bessie turned dazedly.

"Oh, Babs, she—she dud-didn't mean it?"

Babs bit her lip. Mabs averted her head.

"Babs——" Bessie said wildly.

"Oh crumbs! I—I'm sorry, old Bess!" Babs stuttered. "I—I——"



And she broke off with a little catch in her throat. "It—it will only be for a little while," she added consolingly.

"But I dud-don't want it to be for a little while!" Bessie blurted. "I don't want it to be at all, you know. They've never separated me from you before, Babs. And I can't go in with those cats, Lydia and Freda! They've never liked me, anyway. They—they will——" And suddenly the tears rushed into her eyes. "Babs, no! Pip-please," she cried appealingly. "Babs, dud-don't let Miss Primrose send me away!"

"Oh, goodness!" Mabs exclaimed. "We can't let Bessie go—not like this. Babs, suppose I go and ask Primmy to move me instead?"

Babs bit her lip. She didn't want to lose Bessie; she didn't want to lose Mabs; but the Head had made it clear

that someone must go. Still, better Mabs than Bessie. At least, Mabs could stick up for herself much better than poor old Bessie, with those heartless japers in Study No. 1. She paused.

"Mabs, if you wouldn't mind——"

"But what about me?" Faith asked.

"No, Mabs, let me go. I—I hate to feel I've upset things."

"No good," Babs replied. "Primmy's obviously determined you shall be with me. I'm sorry, old Mabs—— Bessie, cheer up!" she added, as Mabs hurried out of the room. "It'll all come right in——"

"But, Babs, I dud-don't want Mabs to go, either," Bessie said woefully.

"The study will never seem the same."

"Poor dear Bessie!" muttered Faith.

"Do cheer up, my dear!"

Bessie glanced at her. Then she turned her face. Why couldn't she believe in that, she asked herself? Why, when Faith was making every effort to be helpful?

Bessie didn't want to go. She didn't want Mabs to go. More emphatically, however, she didn't want Faith to stay, and, realising that, felt ashamed of herself. Oh dear——

Mabs came back. All three of them looked at her eagerly.

STEADILY Faith stared up at the captains' shield with Barbara's photograph above it. "Barbara—junior captain, eh?" she muttered. "I wonder what they'll say when——" She paused. A strange look crept into her eyes.

"Mabs, what did she say?" Babs asked.

Mabs glanced at Bessie, and worriedly plucked at the pocket of her tunic.

"She said she—she wouldn't change her mind," she answered. "Bessie must go!"

And while Babs stared at her in dismay, Faith turned her head.

Was it fancy, or did Bessie, just for one moment, catch an amused, a self-satisfied little smile upon her perfect features?

Not Welcome in Study No. 1!



"**K**IK-CAN I come in?"

Bessie Bunter asked the question almost timorously as she peered in at the door of Study No. 1 in the Fourth Form corridor.

It was after dinner at Cliff House, and Bessie, accepting at last the inevitable, had forlornly drifted along with her case to the study which was to be her new home.

Babs, on captain's duty, was busy in the Lower School, checking the arrivals of the girls who were still coming in. Mabs had gone off as an escort to the new girl, Faith Ashton, to show her round the school.

Bessie, afraid of the scene a farewell parting might mean, had quietly taken advantage of their absence to slip away.

"Kik-can I come in?" she repeated uncertainly.

There were two girls in Study No. 1. One was the lofty Lydia Crossendale, who stood in her favourite attitude with her elbow on the mantelpiece, smoking a forbidden cigarette. Freda Ferriers, her mousy-haired studymate,

was kneeling on the floor, busily unpacking a case.

Lydia scowled.

"Come in, if you want to," was her most unwelcome greeting, "though why the dickens we should have to put up with a fat frog like you, I don't know. What's that piece of garbage you've got in your hand?"

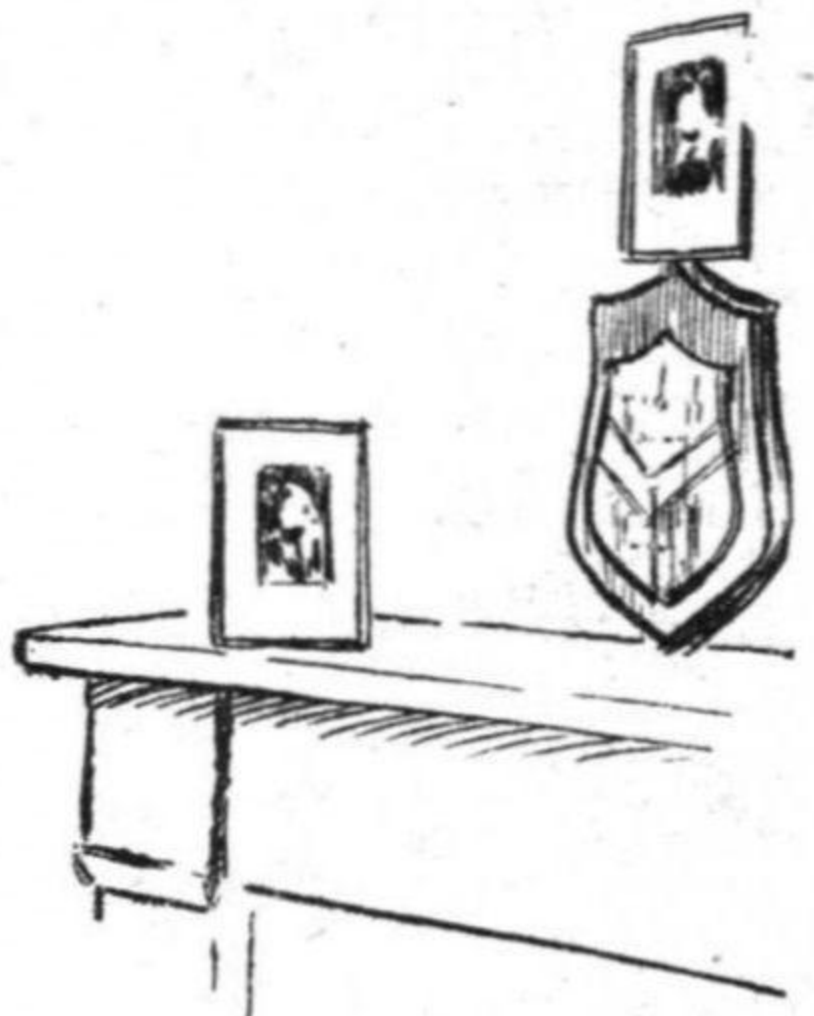
Bessie blinked.

"Mum-my case," she said. "There are sus-some of my things in it."

"Are there? Well, you can take it to the lumber-room, for a start," Lydia said disdainfully. "We don't want a shabby bag littering the place."

Bessie blinked. Her soft lips quivered a little. To exchange this for Study No. 4!

"And, while you're here," Lydia went on hectoringly, "remember this



is our study. That's my armchair. That's Freda's. If you want to sit down you can jolly well use the wooden stool there. And there's no grubbins for you in the study, unless you stand your share of the feed. And you're not to use this table when Freda or I want it. Got that?"

Bessie blinked again.

"But what about my prep? I've got to do my prep."

"That," Freda giggled, "is a problem you can solve."

Bessie glared. No longer was she nervous. She had hardly expected an effusive welcome from the inmates of Study No. 1. On the other hand, she had not expected to be met with a barrage of insults and sneers, and peaceful and good-humoured as was her nature, she was stung.

She said no word. With lofty dignity she started towards the cupboard. Lydia detached herself from the mantelpiece.

"And what, sugar lump, are you going to do?" she asked.

"I'm going to put my bag in that cupboard," Bessie said defiantly.

"And who says so?"

"I do," Bessie glared.

She made as if to brush past Lydia. But Lydia stepped in front of her. For several seconds the two glared into each other's face.

Then suddenly Lydia, with a wink at Freda, made a swift grab at Bessie's rather shabby bag. Quick as thought Bessie swung it back, and immediately Freda's hand fastened upon it.

With her cheeks glaring red now, Bessie spun round, vigorously trying to tug the bag back. Freda held on.

"Throw it in the passage, Freda!" Lydia cried derisively.

"You dare!" panted Bessie. "Give me my bag! Give—"

Fiercely she tugged. Freda tugged, too. Something had to give way—and something did.

The handle of Bessie's bag, never very secure, slipped its moorings. Bessie, with a yell, went staggering back—just as the door opened, and another girl came in.

Bessie and newcomer met and biffed; two yells sounded as one. The newcomer, staggering under Bessie's weight, was sent against the wall. The bag, describing a circle through the air, burst open, showering its contents across the floor.

"Oh crumbs!" Bessie gasped. "Oh dear! My valuable spectacles. They might have been bub-broken—"

"Bessie Bunter, you fat fool!" shrieked Sarah Harrigan—for the victim of Bessie's unintentional assault was the most unpopular prefect in the Sixth Form.

"Oh crumbs!" Bessie stuttered. "Oh dear! Is that you, Sarah—"

"Get up!" Sarah raved. "And pick this rubbish up. Freda, what was happening here?"

Freda grinned. Lydia smiled. They were not afraid of Sarah. Sarah always had been a bit of a toady towards rich Lydia, and Sarah owed Lydia money. In a dispute such as this the precious inmates of Study No. 1 could always rely upon Sarah's support.

"Well," Freda replied, "Bessie got an idea just because she's been put into this study temporarily that she owns it, you know. She had some intention of grabbing the cupboard for her personal use, and so, naturally, we objected."

Sarah's eyes gleamed. Bessie glared. "Truth—that's a fib, you know—"

"Bessie, be silent!" Sarah snapped. "So that's how you intend to behave yourself in your new study, is it? I suppose because Barbara Redfern let you have all your own way in Study No. 4, you think you can get it in this. You will take fifty lines."

Bessie turned red.

"But I tell you—"

"Take seventy."

"But look here, you know, it wasn't my fault—"

"Take," Sarah grated out, "a hundred lines, Bessie. And if you dare to say another word, I'll put you on the detention list!"

Bessie stared at her. From Freda came a chuckle. Lydia gave a supercilious grin. Bessie choked a little. This, coming on top of her being turned out of her old study; her treatment at the hands of Lydia and Freda—

It was just too much.

"Well, I won't do them," she burst out. "I won't! It's not fair. You haven't given me a chance. Well, I won't do them! No, I won't! I won't—"

"Bessie!" cried Sarah.

"Rabbits!" Bessie said, in open rebellion now.

There was a step along the passage. Barbara Redfern peered in, looking anxious.

"Bessie—why, what's happened?"

"If you don't do those lines, Bessie," snapped Sarah Harrigan furiously, "I'll take you before Miss Primrose. I shall expect them to be on my desk to-morrow morning."

"Then j-jolly well expect!" Bessie glowered. "I w-won't—"

"Bessie!" cried Babs. "Sarah, please," she begged, "let me handle this. Now, Bessie, you old chump, come along with me," she added, and put a

tender arm round her shoulder. "I'll come along and have a word with you later," she added angrily, as she threw a glance towards Lydia and Freda, standing by the fireplace.

"Do!" Lydia scoffed.

Bessie quivered. As suddenly as it had fired up, her mood of rebellion was spent. The very fact that Babs was there, the feel of Babs' comforting arm around her, had the power to turn her at once from the wrathful rebel to the broken-hearted outcast she felt she was.

She gulped a little. Without a word she allowed herself to be led along the corridor, and blinked gratefully as Babs, leading the way into an empty Study No. 4, pulled her into her favourite chair. Then concernedly Babs gazed down at her.

"Bessie, you silly old thing—"

Bessie's lips quivered.

"Oh dud-dear! I'm sus-sorry, Babs," she said. "But I—I—just had to do it, you know. Those cats—"

"Bessie, what's the matter with you?" Babs asked wonderingly.

"Well, Babs, you—you know I've been turned out."

"Yes, old Bessie, and I, like you, am frightfully cut up about that," Babs said worriedly. "But, Bessie, old dear, it's only for a short while. Just until Faith finds her feet. And you were funny before that happened, you know, Bess. Now, come on, tell me. What is it?"

Bessie was silent. She took her handkerchief out of her pocket and dabbed her eyes. Then she gazed wistfully at her chum.

"Babs, you—you do like me?" she asked pathetically.

"Bessie, you know I do."

"And—and I lul-like you," Bessie sniffed. "Oh dud-dear! Dud-don't mind me crying. Will you, Babs? But—but—dud-do you like me better than your cousin?"

Babs gazed at her oddly.

"Bessie, that's a funny question. Why should I like Faith better than you?"

Bessie blinked doubtfully.

"I—I don't know, Babs, but—but— Oh dear!" she said, and sobbed again. "Oh, it's rotten to be thrown out of the old study," she said. "I—I was looking forward to—to such a lovely term with you, Babs—"

Babs smiled.

"Well, old Bess, there's no reason why you shouldn't have it, is there?" she asked. "Oh, come on, you've just got a fit of the blues. Anyway, never mind Lydia & Co. You can still work and feed in Study No. 4, old goose! Now, Bessie, come and be sensible. I'm sorry about the lines, but you'll have to do them, you know. Can't have you getting into disgrace right at the start of the term. Here we are," Babs said brightly, and, producing papers, pen, and ink, laid them on the table. "You work at the table, Bessie. I'll work over here at the small desk by the window. I've got the address to start on, you know."

Bessie paused. But the smile Babs gave her was so dazzling that any further thought of mutiny disappeared at once. Dear old Babs! Jolly old Babs! Now Bessie did love her, to be sure, and what a terrific influence Babs had over her!

She sat down. Babs, with a sheet of parchment in front of her, and her design by her side, began to sketch, casting sidelong, sympathetic looks towards the duffer of the Fourth from time to time.

For half an hour they worked. Then the door opened, and in came Mabs and Faith. Faith was chatting brightly,

Mabs watching her wonderfully pretty face with admiration in her gaze.

Bessie looked up. Babs saw the colour that stained her face as Faith's big, wondering eyes fixed upon her. Mabs beamed.

"Why, hallo, Bessie! Back again?" she cried. "I say, that's ripping! But what on earth are you doing there? You've never been collecting lines so early in the term?"

"Well, it wasn't my fault," Bessie mumbled. "If I'd never been thrown out of this study I shouldn't have had them, you know."

"Oh, Bessie, I'm so frightfully sorry!" Faith said swiftly. "What an awful shame it is! Look here, let me help you out with them."

"I've nun-nearly finished," Bessie said gruffly.

"Bessie dear, you don't blame me, do you?" Faith asked anxiously.

Bessie's reply was to thrust her snub little nose towards the paper and scribble furiously. Babs, catching her cousin's eyes, shook her head.

"Poor Bessie!" Faith sighed. "What a dreadful shame! And on the first day of term, too. Oh, Bessie dear, I am so frightfully, so awfully sorry! But never mind," she added brightly, "supposing I make you a nice cup of tea, Bessie? I'm sure you'd like that, and it would help you most frightfully."

And brightly she moved towards the fireplace. She picked up the kettle. Round she swung—and out of the spout came a sudden stream of hot water, shooting straight towards the bent figure of Bessie.

Up with a yell jumped Bessie, and over with a crash went the inkwell as Bessie's plump arm caught against it, sending a thick, blue-black stream right across the sheets she had with so much labour already filled.

Faith gasped.

"Oh, Bessie, I'm most frightfully sorry—"

"Oh dud-dear!" cried Bessie. "I'm drowned! I'm scalded! I—!" And then she swung round. "You did that!" she hooted, and, without meaning in the least to say it, added: "You jolly well did that on purpose, you cat!"

"Bessie!" cried Babs in horror.

"Well, she did!" glowered Bessie. "She—she—!" And then, as Babs stared at her, as Mabs glared at her, as Faith, biting her lip, shook her head, she stopped, realising all at once how she had betrayed her secret self. "I—I—I—" she stuttered weakly. "Oh, crumbs! Babs—"

Babs frowned a little.

"Bessie, that's a very wicked thing to say," she said seriously. "It was just an accident. I think you owe Faith an apology."

Bessie turned scarlet. Misery was in her face. She turned. While Babs and Mabs watched in amazement, she caught up the inky sheets from the table. Then, her eyes filled with tears, she made for the door.

"Bessie! Bessie, you silly old chump—!" cried Babs.

Bang!

That was the door.

Bessie had gone!

Not to be Comforted!



"Oh, dear, I'll just have to go and see where poor old Bessie is!" Barbara Redfern said worriedly. "You know what a touchy old chump she can be. Mabs, don't make the tea till I come back."

"No, right-ho!" Mabs said, and sighed a little. "Better keep the muffins back, too, Faith."

"Babs, would you let me come with you?" Faith asked. "I'm so fearfully worried about poor old Bessie—"

But Babs shook her head at that. She had a fairly good idea now what was the matter with her fat chum.

Silly old Bessie! What a sensitively shrinking girl she was!

Bessie was jealous, of course—but fancy being jealous of such a harmless, such a sweet-natured girl as Faith Ashton!

Babs hurried from the study. Now, where was the old goose? She made her first call at Study No. 1. Lydia was in there, but Freda was not.

"Seen Bessie?" Babs asked.

"No, and don't want to," grunted Lydia. "You can tell her to keep out of here."

"Thanks. It won't be my fault if she's here more than is necessary," Babs retorted, and went off. She looked in the Common-room, and spoke to little Marcelle Biquet.

"Marcelle, have you seen Bessie?"

"Mais oui," Marcelle answered. "I saw her a half-minute ago. She was going to ze music-room."

The music-room. That was a new refuge-for Bessie.

Thither Babs made her way, pausing outside the door before she opened it. Was it her fancy, or did she hear a stifled sob?

She tapped. There was a moment's pause. Then:

"Wh-who's there?" gasped a stifled voice.

Babs did not reply. But she frowned just a little worriedly. Poor, poor old Bessie! She was in there—and judging by the sound of her, had been crying.

Softly she swung open the door.

Bessie, her eyes red, her face flushed, was sitting in the chair near the piano.

She glared as Babs came in, and then, seeing it was Babs, bit her lip.

"O-oh!" she muttered.

"Bessie! You old—old silly!" Babs said softly, though she felt a queer constriction in her throat. "Bessie, old darling—" And she went forward and put an arm around the fat one's shoulders. "What's all this about?"

"Oh, Babs!" Bessie said wretchedly.

"Poor old Bess, then!" Babs said soothingly. "But please, old thing, don't be so upset. Bessie, I've come to fetch you to tea—"

Bessie shook her head.

"I dud-don't want any tea."

"Oh, but, Bessie, that's silly—and we've got such lovely things for tea, too," Babs said. "Muffins—pork pie, Bessie—you know how you love pork pie."

But Bessie mournfully still shook her head.

"I dud-don't want any tea," she said dolefully. "I—I—" And she choked there, as though the words stuck in her throat. "Babs, you—you don't think I'm being a kik-cat?" she added with forlorn wistfulness.

"Good gracious, Bessie, of course not!"

"But—but you don't want me back in Study No. 4," Bessie suddenly burst out with surprising bitterness. "Not—not now you've got her!"

Babs bit her lip.

"Bessie, you're being awfully silly," she said gently. "Of course we want you back in Study No. 4. We'd just love to have you back in the study, and you know that. What's the matter, Bess? Are you jealous of Faith?"

Bessie shook her head.

No. 23 of our delightful series for Your "Cliff House Album."

CLIFF HOUSE CELEBRITIES

SHY, but very sweet-natured is little Dolores Essendon of the Second Form at Cliff House. She is the school's youngest pupil, her age being only 8 years and 4 months.

It is not customary at Cliff House to admit girls under eleven but in special cases exceptions are made. Both Dolores' parents are famous dancers, and their work takes them abroad for the greater part of the year.

Apart from that Dolores' mother, Spanish by birth, is an old Cliff House girl.

That Dolores inherits the dancing talents of her famous parents there is no denying. Small and elfin as she is, she has already taught most of the Second Form the steps of ballroom dancing, and is always in great demand at school concerts, where she is quite an expert little toe-dancer. It is a sheer joy to watch her on these occasions, when she loses her normal shyness, and dances with a charming lack of self-consciousness.

Cliff House rather bewilders little Dolores; she still clings to a firm belief in fairy stories. Her great heroine in the school is Marjorie Hazeldene, though she has a very soft spot in her young heart for plump Bessie Bunter.

Her great ambition at the moment is to possess a pair of shoes with red heels, like her mother has!

Dolores is an arresting-looking child with her big dark eyes, almost black hair, and warm, olive skin.



Dolores Essendon

She likes childish games of "make-believe," and still loves her doll. She is enormously fond of swimming, though she can only do a few strokes.

Her favourite flower is the violet; her favourite literature fairy stories.

Very fond of films, her imagination is excited by Shirley Temple, whose gestures and antics she will often be caught trying to imitate after seeing her latest film.

Dolores was born in Huddersfield. She is very small for her age, and is adored by everyone.

"I—I dud-don't know," she said. "I dud-don't think so, you know. But—but—oh, Babs, I can't tell you. I can't, you know. She's your cousin and—and—I've nun-never been jealous of anyone else, have I?" she asked defensively. "I'm only too jolly glad for people to like you. But—but—no, Babs, please go and leave me," she said.

"But, Bessie, I can't—not like this. Do come to the study."

But Bessie, with surprising firmness, shook her head.

"No, please. I—I shall be all right," she said with an attempt at braveness. "Leave me alone. Everybody seems to be leaving me alone now," she added with another flash of bitterness. "I—I'm not wanted any more."

"Bessie!"

"Well, it's tut-true, isn't it? That cat—I mum-mean—oh, please do go, Babs," she said wretchedly. "It doesn't seem the same now. It—it never will be the same any more. I'm not going back to Study No. 1 with Lydia and Freda, and—and I don't want to come to Study No. 4. I—I don't know what I want to do," Bessie miserably confessed.

Babs sighed. Poor Bessie! Never before had she known the old duffer so doleful, so depressed.

And for Bessie not to profess an interest in tea—that certainly was a sign for alarm.

"Please go, Babs," Bessie said.

"Not unless," Babs said, "you come with me."

Bessie again shook her head, although in the end she agreed to go down with Babs to the tuckshop. But even there she showed little interest in the food. Afterwards Bessie drifted off into the Common-room, while Babs went along to Study No. 4. Faith and Mabs, who had both finished their tea long ago, stared up at her.

"Babs, where ever have you been? Miss Charmant's been asking for you," Mabs said.

Babs frowned.

"Miss Charmant? Why, what's wrong?"

"Oh, nothing. She just came in to see if you'd made a start on the address," Mabs said. "I showed her what you'd done, of course. She says you'll have to get a move on, though, if you're going to have it ready in time."

Babs nodded. What Mabs said was true. All her spare time would be needed for the job. But what about Bessie? She could not desert poor Bessie—not in the old duffer's present mood. She told them about her.

"Oh, the scatterbrained old chump!" Mabs said.

Faith bit her lip.

"It's my fault," she said. "Oh, Barbara, I'm sorry. Perhaps I ought not to have come to this school after all. Perhaps I ought— Poor dear, sweet old Bessie," she added with a sigh. "How sad she must be feeling. I think I'll try to find her and—and have a word with her."

And followed by a "That's sweet of you" from Mabs, she went out. But in the corridor she paused, for there was Miss Primrose talking to Sarah Harrigan.

"And I shall be obliged, Sarah, if you will make it your duty to look into each dormitory at about eleven o'clock to-night," Miss Primrose was saying, "just to make sure that everybody is present. There are several late-comers who will not be arriving until the last train, and I should like to know who is absent before assembly to-morrow."

"Yes, Miss Primrose," Sarah said. "Will that be all?"

But Faith did not wait to hear the rest. She passed on, a thoughtful

expression upon her angelic features. And with a new idea in her mind, she didn't seek out Bessie after all.

The Scheme that Failed!



"**B**ESSIE!" breathed Barbara Redfern.

A pause.

"Bessie!" Babs repeated softly—for it was half-past ten in the Fourth Form dormitory, and most of the girls had been asleep this past hour. But Bessie wasn't. Babs could tell that from the restless turnings and murmurings which occasionally came from her bed.

Then—

"H-hallo, Babs! Were you talking to me?"

"I was, Bessie." Babs shook her head.

"Have you done your lines?"

"No!" Bessie said, with a trace of defiance.

"But, Bessie, don't you think you ought to do them? Sarah will report you for certain otherwise."

"I don't care!" Bessie mumbled.

"Blow the lines!" Babs sighed. She said no more. Bessie was still on her high horse, and Babs knew better than to argue the point.

She lay awake, worrying about her plump chum. Those lines had to be done, and if Bessie herself would not do them, then somebody else must.

Herself!

Babs lay still for a little while. In that interval she heard the beginning of the rhythmic snore which told her that Bessie at last had fallen asleep.

Quietly she rose, quickly slipped on her dressing-gown. Silently she padded towards the door. A sudden voice arrested her. It was Faith's.

"Barbara, is that you?"

"Yes. But—shush, Faith! I'm going downstairs."

"Oh, Babs, what for?"

"To do old Bessie's lines, as the chump won't do them herself."

"Oh!" Faith paused. "But do be careful, Barbara darling!" she said. "You'll get into awful trouble if you're caught, won't you?"

"Oh, that's all right; I'll look after that!" Babs said confidently, and went out.

In the dark, the large eyes of Faith Ashton watched the door close. She frowned a little. Then suddenly a strange smile transformed her face as she sat up in bed. Without another word, she climbed out, stealthily making her way to Babs' own bed.

Silently she crept between the sheets and snuggled down, still smiling that strange and angelic smile.

Five, ten minutes went by. Then there was a step outside. The door-handle turned, and the light switched on. Sarah Harrigan stood there.

"All right! You can bob down!" she said surlily, as two or three heads rose above the sheets. "I'm only checking up on the girls in the school. Hallo! Where's the new girl?" she added.

Faith lay still.

"Sure, she should be in bed!" Leila Carroll replied.

"Well, she isn't, and—"

Then Sarah paused. A gleam came into her eyes as her gaze wandered towards Barbara Redfern's bed and espied there on the pillow, not the chestnut curls of the bed's normal occupant, but the tumbling gold crown of somebody else. Quickly she crossed the room and jerked back the bed-clothes.

"Faith Ashton!" she said grimly.

Faith's face was the picture of bewildered consternation.

"Oh dear!"

"Quite a stunt—eh?" Sarah sneered. "Taking your cousin's place while she's breaking bounds? Very nice, very cousinly, I'm sure; but before you try this trick a second time, just remember that your hair is a different colour from your cousin's! I shall report you for this! Meantime, where is Barbara? Breaking bounds, I'll warrant!"

"Oh, please, Sarah, don't make trouble for Barbara!" Faith pleaded. "She's only down in her study!"

"Get into your own bed!" Sarah retorted.

Faith, with a sigh, rose. Sympathetic and admiring glances followed her. Poor Faith! It seemed she had tried so hard to save Babs from detection, and all she had earned for her pains was probable punishment for herself.

Grimly Sarah strode off. Five minutes later Babs came into the dormitory, looking rather disheartened, obviously sent back by the prefect. Faith sat up.

"Barbara, I—I'm awfully sorry, really! I—I heard somebody coming, and slipped into your bed, hoping that you wouldn't be found out. But, like the empty-headed idiot I was, I forgot that my hair was a different colour, and—and, of course, Sarah spotted it at once! And—and—" And there Faith's lips quivered. She looked so utterly cut-up that she seemed on the point of tears. "I'm sorry, Babs!"

"Silly old goose!" Babs said tenderly. "Thank you! It was jolly sporting of you! And I'm grateful, really! Sarah only lined me. Well, well!" And wearily she climbed into bed. "Hallo, Bessie! Are you all right?"

"Y-yes, thank you, Babs!" Bessie said, and looked at Faith. "Oh dear! I sus-say, Faith—"

"Yes, Bessie darling?" Faith said.

"I—I think that was jolly sporting of you, too!" Bessie mumbled. "Gig-good-night!"

"Good-night, Bessie! I'm so happy you're pleased with me!"

The Fourth settled down. Bessie, gulping a little, trying to tell herself once again that she was mistaken in Faith, Faith herself chuckling under the bedclothes. Perhaps she was wondering what Babs would have said had she—Faith—admitted that she knew all the time that Sarah Harrigan would come to the dormitory!

Sleep settled upon the Fourth once more. For hours there was no sound in the room save the deep, unbroken breathing of its inhabitants. Then, with the first rays of dawn, Babs was awake again.

Faith, who seemed to have an uncanny knack of waking at the same moment, looked at her as she tripped towards the door.

"Going to finish Bessie's lines, Babs?"

"Yes," Babs said.

"Then," Faith said resolutely, "I'm coming with you—because, Babs, it's my fault, really, they weren't done last night. No—please! I'm not taking 'No' for an answer this time!"

Babs smiled. What a dear, sweet girl she was! And how fresh and pretty she looked in the early morning light! she reflected.

Downstairs they went together. Babs made up the fire, and for the next half-hour they both worked with terrific industry. Then Faith sighed.

"There we are!" she said. "Babs, I expect you'd like to get on with your address. You've a quarter of an hour before rising-bell. And you have lost time, haven't you, dear? I'll trot these along to Sarah's study."

She gathered the sheets together. With a bright smile at Babs, she quitted the room, while Babs, very conscious of the leeway she had to make up, sat down before the hardly touched address again.

The voice of Sarah Harrigan bade her enter as Faith knocked on the door. The prefect was already up.

"Please, Sarah, I've brought Bessie Bunter's lines!" Faith said. "I hope you'll find them all right. I think they're done very well."

Sarah stared suspiciously.

"Why couldn't Bessie bring them herself?"

"Well, she—she—" And Faith bit her lip. "Well, Bessie's busy," she said falteringly.

"Oh?" The uplift of Sarah's brows plainly implied her doubt. "And since when has Bessie Bunter been busy ten minutes before rising-bell?" she asked. "Wait a minute! Give me those lines!" And while Faith stood hesitating by the door, she swiftly ran through them. "So that's the game, is it?" she asked quietly. "You've done the lines for her? I thought there was something funny going on by the way you spoke!"

"Oh dear! Did I give myself away?" said Faith. "But I didn't do them—that is, not all on my own—"

"You mean to say that somebody else helped you? And that somebody was Barbara! I fancy I see now why Barbara was in Study No 4 last night when she should have been in bed. So this was the game, was it? Well, as you're so jolly fond of writing lines, you can start doing some of your own! You can do a hundred of them! And tell Barbara Redfern that she can do a hundred, too! Meantime, I'll go and see Bessie Bunter!"

And while Faith stared, her face the picture of dismay, Sarah dropped the lines in her wastepaper-basket and walked from the room.

Bessie Amazes Everyone!



"**I** AM sorry, Bessie; but if you do not do those lines before prep to-night, I shall have no recourse but to detain you!" Miss Charmant

said, gazing rather puzzledly at red-faced Bessie as she stood in front of her desk, after being reported by Sarah that same morning. "Bessie, it is very unlike you, you know, to act in this defiant way! Do try to be sensible, there's a dear!"

Bessie left, gulping a little. Rather woefully she made her way to Study No. 1. First lesson bell was ringing then, and that meant she had only five minutes before she was due to face Miss Bullivant, the sharp-tempered mathematics mistress, in the class-room.

Lydia Crossendale and Freda Ferriers were in the study, getting their books together. They winked at each other as Bessie came in.

Bessie treated them to a disdainful look. She crossed the room to where her case containing her books—the only part of her belongings she had so far removed from Study No. 4—was propped up by the side of the settee. She opened it, and then glared round.

"Here, who's taken my books?"

"Talking to us?" Lydia asked, haughtily.

Bessie glared.

"Well, sus-somebody's taken them, you know. I believe you cats—"

"Really, Lydia, are we going to stop here to be insulted in our own study?" Freda asked, offendedly. "If she's lost

her books, that isn't our fault, is it? Come on, there's second bell."

"But lul-look here—" Bessie said, frantically.

Lydia and Freda gave her a mocking smile. Then, arms linked, noses in air, they walked out.

The look Bessie threw at the door as they disappeared should have caused the panels to crack. Oh dear, where were her books? Of course, Lydia and Freda had hidden them—that would be their spiteful idea of a joke. Of course—she threw open the cupboard door. Not there. She looked under the settee. Not there.

She tried Lydia's bureau. It was locked. Then Babs looked in. Babs was rather worried on her own behalf, for now she had two lots of lines to do, and she was wondering how on earth she was going to find time to work on the address.

"Bessie, old thing, do hurry up," she begged. "You'll be late."

"But I haven't got my books," Bessie hooted. "Those cats have hidden them."

class late," was Miss Bullivant's tart retort to that. "In any case, you should not have delayed looking for your books till the last minute. Take another fifty lines for coming into class without them."

"But how can I find my books when I don't know where they are?" Bessie expostulated. "Somebody has hidden them!"

"What?"
"Ahem!" Lydia Crossendale stood up. "I think, Miss Bullivant, that Bessie is trying to say something against Freda and myself," she added. "We tried to tell Bessie before we came out of the study, but she wouldn't listen. Her books, Miss Bullivant, are on top of the cupboard in the study."

Bessie gazed at them bitterly: Miss Bullivant smiled sourly.

"If you would use your eyes, Bessie," she rasped, "perhaps you would have seen. Now go, Bessie—go at once! And hurry," she added, as Bessie took half a step towards the door and then paused. "You hear, Bessie?"

"Bessie!" Miss Primrose said, severely.

But Bessie stood still. She was quivering now, dimly realising the awfulness of her conduct, but still determined not to give way. Anyway, what did it matter? What did she care? Blow Miss Bullivant! Blow Miss Primrose! Blow everybody!

"Bessie, be sensible!" Miss Primrose said. "Go and carry out Miss Bullivant's orders at once!"

Bessie stood stock still. Babs gasped. "Oh, the chump!" she breathed, and tried to whisper across the class-room—"Bessie!" But Miss Bullivant swung round and glared her to silence. Babs subsided into her seat.

"Bessie, do you want to be detained?"
"I don't care!" Bessie said defiantly, and the Fourth Form gasped.

"Very well, then!" Miss Primrose said. Her lips came together. "Since, Bessie, you are incapable of behaving yourself, you shall be treated as a naughty child. Get into that corner. Stand there with your face to the wall



FURIOUSLY Bessie glared at the new girl. "You jolly well did that on purpose!" she blazed. "Bessie!" cried Babs in horror.

"Oh, my goodness! But—" came Dulcia Fairbrother's voice along the corridor. "Barbara! Bessie! You'll be late!"

"But my books—" howled Bessie. "Oh, never mind," Babs said. "You'll have to tell Miss Bullivant and ask permission to come and get them. Buck up, now."

She fairly raced her chum-out of the study. But even then it was too late. At the class-room door Miss Bullivant, looking, if anything, slightly more bad-tempered than usual after the holiday, met them.

"Barbara! Bessie! You are one minute late," she rapped. "You will each take twenty lines! Go to your places!"

Babs sighed. Lines, lines, lines! Bessie, however, paused.

"Please, Miss Bullivant, it wasn't Babs' fault," she stammered. "Babs was only trying to help me find my books."

"As captain of the form, Barbara should know better than to come into

"Yes, I hear!" Bessie said deliberately.

"Then obey!" Miss Bullivant said, and treated the air to a lordly wave of her arm. "At once!"

Bessie stood perfectly still.

"Bessie!" exclaimed Miss Bullivant.

"Well," Bessie said truculently, "it isn't fair! It wasn't Babs' fault she was late. She was only helping me. She wouldn't have been helping me if those cats hadn't hidden my books."

"Bessie!" Babs whispered in agony, and then jumped as the door opened and another figure came into the room—Miss Primrose herself!

She stared for a moment at the red, defiant Bessie, at the angry Form-mistress.

"Why, bless my soul!" she murmured. "Miss Bullivant, what is this?"

Miss Bullivant's eyes glimmered.

"I am trying to impress upon Bessie Bunter," she said, "that when a mistress gives an order, it should be obeyed. Bessie, for some reason, is frankly mutinous."

until I give you permission to look round again. At once, girl!"

Bessie stared at her. Her eyes opened wide in horror. For a moment she trembled. Then her plump little hands clenched by her sides. She turned. But she did not walk to the corner. She walked right out of the class-room.

There was a buzz. Miss Primrose turned pink.

"Bless my soul! What has come over the girl?" she muttered. "Barbara, quickly! Bring her back!"

Up leapt Babs at once. Oh, what a silly old impetuous chump Bessie was! Out into the corridor she dashed, to find Bessie hurrying as fast as her short legs would carry her, towards the stairs. She cried:

"Bessie!"

Bessie turned, and then hurried on. "Bessie!" Babs called again—and sprinting, reached her and clutched her by the shoulder. "Oh, Bessie, you old chump," she breathed, "what's the good of doing things like this? Bessie

"please!" she begged. "Come back! Do come back! For my sake——"

Bessie paused.

"I'm not——"

"Yes, Bessie, you are! Please, Bess, you—you don't want to make me unhappy, do you?"

Bessie shook her head. She looked very worried, very harassed. But Bessie was no proof against an appeal like that—not from her own dear Babs. Forlornly she sighed.

With Babs tugging at her arm, she allowed herself to be led back. Miss Primrose fastened her gaze upon her.

"Bessie, what is wrong with you?"

Bessie blinked up defiantly.

"Well, it—it's your fault!" she blustered.

"Mine? Bessie, how dare——"

"If—if you hadn't thrown me out of my study it—it wouldn't have happened!" Bessie blurted, nearer to tears than rebellion now.

Miss Primrose bit her lip.

"And you think," she asked, "that this mutiny will cause me to change my opinion, Bessie? You think this will make me reconsider my decision?" Her face set a little. "Well, Faith?" she added, as that girl, her doll-like face a picture of distress, stood up.

"Oh, Miss Primrose, please—please couldn't you put Bessie back in her study?" Faith faltered. "I do hate to feel——"

"Thank you, Faith. Your sentiments are creditable, but entirely out of order. Please sit down. Bessie, I cannot and will not overlook this rank disobedience. Please go to your place!"

Bessie blinked.

"But, Miss Primrose, won't you put me back?"

"Putting you back now would be one of the last things I should consider," Miss Primrose returned, tartly. "Now go!"

And Bessie, with a sob that seemed wrung straight out of her heart, went.

"You do not appear to be making great progress with that address, Barbara!"

Thus Miss Primrose.

It was after tea that same day, and Babs, still rather worried, feeling strangely depressed, sat before her work again. Miss Primrose had just looked in.

"In fact," Miss Primrose said, "I do not see how you can possibly expect to get it done. If it is not completed, Barbara, I shall be very, very disappointed!"

She went out. Faith, who was in the room, bit her lip. But Babs did not look at her. She looked at her work, helplessly, worriedly, feeling somehow, no enthusiasm now for this task upon which she had embarked with such tremendous glee. She was thinking, instead, of Bessie.

Poor, dear, broken-hearted old Bessie!

All break Babs had spent with her. From after afternoon lessons until tea-time, trying to cheer her up. But Bessie would not be comforted. For Bessie had said good-bye now, in her own mind, to the prospect of ever getting back to Study No. 4, and laden down with lines, gated for the next two half-holidays, was wildly talking of running away.

"Babs!" Faith said, suddenly. "Oh, you look so dreadfully worried. Can I—I do anything?"

"No, thanks, old thing!" Babs said.

Faith sighed. Babs went on with her work; but she could not concentrate. The picture of poor Bessie's misery-haunted face seemed to rise between

her and the task upon which she was engaged.

She put down her brush suddenly. She'd have to see old Bessie; have to cheer her up and make her comfortable. She felt unless she had Bessie under her eye she could never work on happily.

She rose suddenly. Faith stared.

"Babs, old thing——"

"I—I shan't be long," Babs said. "If Bessie comes along, ask her to stop here, will you?"

"Yes, of course."

Faith looked after her as the door closed, thoughtfully smoothed her chin, and then glanced at the uncompleted address. A smile came to her lips suddenly, a brighter light to her eyes. She gave a little giggle. Then she sat down and picked up the brush.

"Poor dear Babs!" she chuckled softly to herself. "Won't she be surprised when she finds she's not the only artist in the study? And how," she murmured, "Miss Primrose will thank me! Because, you know, Babs, with all this worrying about that silly fat girl, you'll never get this finished unless somebody gives you a hand!"

She chuckled again. Diligently she bent to her task. Then she straightened as there was a tap on the door. The face of Bessie Bunter peered in.

In one of Bessie's plump hands was clutched a bunch of violets. Bessie had bought those flowers with her last threepence—one of the new twelve-sided pieces she had by some miracle managed to save all over the Christmas holidays with the intention of making a collection. She looked a little dismayed, now, however.

"Oh dear! Isn't Babs in?"

"No, Bessie dear," Faith said. "But what lovely flowers!"

Bessie blinked at her.

"I—I bib-bought them for Babs," she said. "I—I thought she'd lul-like them, you know." She did not feel it necessary to explain that the flowers were just a little peace-offering. "I—I——"

"Dear Bessie! What a sweet, kind girl you are!" Faith simpered; and Bessie turned red again, wondering once more why she couldn't bring herself to like this girl, and yet conscious somehow of a stiffening of her hostility towards her. "Barbara will love the flowers. She's bound to!" she said. "Leave them with me, Bessie darling!"

Bessie blinked again. She had rather wanted to hand those flowers to Babs in person. Still, as Babs was not here— She handed them over.

Faith took them, burying her nose in them.

"See, I'll put them in this vase," she said brightly.

"You—you won't forget to tell Babs that I sent them?" Bessie asked.

"Oh, Bessie, as if I would!"

Bessie gulped. She smiled a rather sickly smile and turned to the door.

With the flowers in her hand, Faith looked at the fire. A glimmer of mischief flashed in her blue eyes. Then, even as Bessie left the room, she tossed the violets on to the brightly burning coals.

The Last Straw!



"FAITH, what are you doing?"

Barbara Redfern, in tones of rather sharp inquiry, asked that question as she stepped into Study No. 4, twenty minutes later.

There were several girls in Babs' company—Clara Trevlyn, Janet Jordan, Leila Carroll, and Lucy Morgan. Babs

had met them on her hurried tour of the school in quest of Bessie, who, after delivering her flowers in this same study, had immediately retired to seek the companionable solace of her little friend, Mary Treherne, in the Lower Third.

Most of the Fourth Formers had heard the rumour which was going the rounds now—that Barbara, contrary to all expectations, was not making good progress with the address.

Most of them were anxious, for Stella Stone was due to arrive to-morrow morning, and most of them naturally wanted to see with their own eyes what Babs had been doing. Thus the audience.

Faith, busy at work on the address, swung round with a beaming smile.

"Oh, hallo, Barbara! Here we are!" she said, with a laugh. "I've just been trying to help, but I'm afraid that I'm not such an expert as you are, though."

Babs stared.

"You mean you've been getting on with the address?"

"Well, Babs, you don't mind, do you?" Faith asked distressfully. "I only wanted to help, you know. I've done seven lines."

Babs blinked at it. The others, crowding round, stared, too. Certainly the lettering was good. Not quite as Babs would have done it, but not noticeably different from her own.

For a moment she paused, feeling the red prickling under her skin, trying to tell herself that she was being beastly and uncharitable not to accept this well-meant offer of help in the same spirit which had provoked it, and yet, somehow, feeling rather disappointed. She had so wanted the address to be all her own work. Mentally she had been planning to finish it off during the night.

"Well, I think it's jolly good, look you," Lucy Morgan said. "Yes, rather!"

"Topping, Faith! Blessed if I can tell the difference between yours and Babs'," Clara said. "And it's jolly sweet of you to come to the rescue! Think you'll be able to finish it now, Babs?"

"Y-yes," Babs said, and tried to smile at Faith. "T-thuth-thanks!" she said.

"Oh, not at all!" Faith simpered. "It's so lovely to feel that I can help! I'm glad I've had an opportunity of doing something. I do so love the old Fourth," she added sentimentally. "And, of course, we're all in this together, aren't we? Anyway, there it is! And, my goodness, there's the bell for prep ringing! Did you see Bessie, Babs?"

"No," Babs said, and felt annoyed at herself because she sensed she said it rather shortly. "Has she been in?"

"Oh, no!" Faith said.

But for a moment she glanced towards the fireplace where the precious violets, bought with Bessie's last threepence, had long ago perished in the flames.

Babs sighed a little. She wondered why she was feeling rattled all at once. Rather worried and strange the looks her chums cast at her as she carefully put away the address, got out pen and ink, and commenced prep. Half-way through it there came a tap on the door. Bessie blinked in hopefully. Her eyes travelled at once to the vase on the window-sill, and then she blinked.

"Oh, hallo, Babs!" she said. "Dud—did you like them?"

Babs looked up.

"Like what, old Bessiekins?"

"Well, you know."

"But I don't!"

Bessie stared at her. She looked at the empty vase again, and then a look



ADMIRINGLY Clara & Co. looked at the work Faith had done. And yet Babs felt vaguely irritated and annoyed. For even though Faith said she was only trying to help, yet Babs had particularly wanted to finish that job herself. And surely Faith might have first asked her permission?

of deep disappointment overspread her face. For a moment her lips quivered. Without another word she went out.

"So she—she dud-didn't want them!" she muttered.

Forlornly she drifted along to Study No. 1. She pushed the door open. Lydia and Freda, busy on prep, scowled as she came in.

"Oh, clear off!" Lydia said irritably. Bessie eyed her and went out. In the corridor she met Connie Jackson.

"Here, you, why aren't you doing your prep?" the prefect said.

Bessie glared and passed on. She went to the library—a strange and unusual place for Elizabeth Gertrude Bunter to be found. There, taking out a book, she cried quietly as she held it upside down on a pretence of reading it.

Supper-bell sounded, but Bessie did not move. Call-over came after it, and with a sigh she heaved herself out of the chair and trotted down to Big Hall. Miss Charmant eyed her sharply as she came in.

"Bessie, did you do your preparation?"

"No," Bessie said, without caring. Miss Charmant bit her lip.

"Bessie, you know that will mean another report."

Bessie shrugged. She didn't care. She felt Babs looking at her, and turned her head. If she had been hurt and mutinous before, she was trebly hurt and trebly mutinous now. That Babs should have refused her offer of flowers!

Call-over came to an end. Bessie waddled off and tramped upstairs. In the dormitory she undressed in woeful silence. In the night Babs awakened to hear the sound of a stifled sob from her bed.

Early next morning—long before rising-bell, in fact—Babs, feeling more harassed than ever, rose with the intention of completing the address.

Instinctively she looked towards Bessie's bed, and then, alarmedly she jumped. It was empty! Bessie was no longer there.

"Bessie!" Babs choked.

She rushed across to it and felt the tumbled sheets. Cold!

Gone in a moment all thought of everything save old Bessie! Oh, goodness, what had the old duffer done now? Hurriedly she dressed, with her heart throbbing alarm dashed down to Study No. 4, half expecting to see the familiar old form there. But there was no Bessie.

What had happened to her? What— And then she saw the note propped up by the vase on the table. She read it with staring eyes.

"Dear Babs,—I just can't stand it any longer. It was bad enough to be turned out of the study, but now you have turned against me as well, I have decided to leave Cliff House for ever. Oh Babs why didn't you say you liked my flowers? I know I've been a cat but I thought you'd understand when I sent you the flowers.

Your heartbroken ex-friend,
"ELIZABETH GERTRUDE BUNTER."

Something was gripping at Babs' throat as she read that. Something seemed to be thrown into her eyes, causing the stinging tears to start. The part referring to flowers was, of course, a mystery to Babs, but the blatant fact jumped out and hit her like a blow.

Poor Bessie, fed-up, heartbroken, feeling the whole school was against her, and feeling for some reason that Babs had added herself to the list of her enemies, had run away.

Just for an instant Babs looked at the uncompleted address. Her heart knew a qualm. Two hours and she could finish that—but first and foremost she must get Bessie back.

No longer did Babs hesitate. Stopping only to grab her hat and coat from the cloak-room she hurried out of the school by the servants' exit.

Half an hour's walk brought her to Friardale Station. Into the waiting-room she went.

No sign of Bessie. She was almost in

despair when another wayfarer entered the waiting-room—a short man who beamed at Babs cheerfully.

It was Farmer Lane, who owned property adjoining Cliff House. He grinned.

"Miss Redfern, eh?" he said. "You girls seem to be early astir this morning. I've just left a friend of yours—Miss Bunter."

Babs leapt to her feet.

"Where—where did you leave her?" "Oh, at Kenmarsh. I picked her up on the road this morning and gave her a lift. But—Miss Redfern!" he called, in amazement.

For Babs, all fluttering and sickening anxiety at once, had shot out of the room.

Kenmarsh! Oh, my goodness! Out of the station she flew—just in time at the Market Cross, to catch the bus for Kenmarsh. Half an hour later she was climbing out in that little village, and almost immediately she saw, gazing hungrily in the window of the little cafe opposite the bus stop, a forlorn fat form.

She stepped over to her, touched her on the shoulder.

"Bessie!" she whispered.

Bessie Bunter gave a gasp.

"Babs—you!" "Bessie, you silly old chump!" Babs was almost crying in relief. "Oh, great goodness, what a dance you've led me! Where are you going?"

"To—to London, you know."

"Bessie!" Babs despairingly shook her head. "Bessie, please," she said, and tucking the fat one's arm in hers, led the way into the cafe. "Come in here. Let's have some hot coffee and rolls or something. Now, how were you going to get to London?"

"Well, I could walk, couldn't I?" Bessie asked. "And—and I might have got a lift or two, you know. Oh, crumbs!" she added, as coffee and hot eggs and bacon arrived. "I sus-say, dud-do we really eat? But, Babs, what are you doing here? I thuth-thought

(Concluded on page 16).



HALLO, GIRLS!—With the taking down of decorations, Christmas is really over, isn't it?

You did know, didn't you, that decorations should be removed—with ceremony, if you like—on Twelfth Night, that is, twelve nights after Christmas night.

It's always a sad business parting with the Christmas-tree, I know—and we in our family simply can't bear to burn it, as superstitious people say it should be.

So each year we plant it in the garden. It looks very lively at the moment, but I'm sure it won't live, for all that.

You might wonder why Christmas trees so seldom live. It isn't anything to do with our climate, you know—and goodness knows it should have been cold enough for polar bears to thrive in England this year!

But father—who likes to think he knows a lot about gardening—says it is because the roots of bought Christmas trees are generally scalded, so that they fit into the small pots more easily. No wonder, then, the poor things soon die off.

All evergreens, so the same superstitious people say, should be burned, not thrown on to the garden rubbish heap or into the dustbin.

As a matter of fact, our family does do this—burn them, that is. Not because we're superstitious by any means—for not one of us is!—but because mother believes in burning as much as possible rather than filling the dustbin to overflowing.

So all our nice decorations have gone—and the house looks almost lonely without them.

● A Useful Stocking

It was I—your Patricia—who put away all the bubbles from the Christmas tree, in readiness for next year. A few were broken during the process, but on the whole we didn't do much damage.

It's simply no use trying to keep tinsel, I've discovered. You might just as well wrap it round a doll—or round a favoured teddy bear—and let it get lost that way. For it tarnishes very quickly, however carefully you wrap it up.

To keep bubbles bright and sparkling you should wrap each separately in black tissue paper. I'm afraid we hadn't any, though it's quite cheap to buy—but you know how low funds are after Christmas. Instead, I wrapped them in ordinary tissue paper and then, to keep the light from them, tucked each bauble into a black stocking.

You'll probably wonder where I got the black stocking from, if you're feeling very inquisitive.

Well, as a matter of fact, it was the last pair I had when at school. Mother had tucked them away—as mothers will—

OUT OF SCHOOL HOURS

Your friend **PATRICIA** always has news and views of interest to schoolgirls to chatter about. Her writing is gay; it can be serious, too—but it is always enjoyable, as her many admirers know.

for some vague, indefinite use, which has never arisen until now.

So now we can all sit back and wait until the next holiday—Easter. It's not until April this year, so I'm afraid this is going to make it a very long school term for you. But then, I'm sure you like school—now don't you?

● Serious Fun

Talking about school, how I wish I had attended that school in London Fields where the pupils learn the rules of the road so excitingly!

Their headmaster, in encouraging them to learn road-safety, has arranged the most thrilling lessons in which the pupils take the part of motorists.

Much nicer than learning Boyle's Law or the Effect on Europe of the Forty Years War!

● Ribbons So Gay

What lovely things you can do with ribbons these days—and so cheaply. If you've a simple frock that looks just a little bit too plain for your mood, ribbon will cheer it up wonderfully.

A pretty bow at the neck and a new sash-belt to match, will do it in a twinkling.

There's no need to have a buckle for the belt. Just bring the ends of the belt-ribbon round to your front, and tie in a bow. This bow, you see, matches the one at your neck.

There—why shouldn't your clothes be cheerful in winter?

● Minkie the Kitten

Our young kitten, Minkie, is growing into a perfect little rascal. We all love him, as you can imagine—and particularly my young brother, Heath. (I gave him the kitten for a Christmas present, you remember)

By tying a piece of string to a rolled up ball of paper, and tying the string to the handle of the sitting-room door, we made a toy for Minkie.

Minkie loved this, and very wisely kept his eye on it—just in case anyone should try to steal it!

But, alas, it wasn't popular with mother. For Minkie would chew up the paper. Then, finding it didn't taste of salmon, or hake, or some other costly fish, he would just spit it out—all over mother's precious carpet!

So it had to be removed.

Now young Heath and I have given him a new toy. We made a little rag ball instead of the paper one. But our

brainwave was to fasten this to the door handle with elastic, instead of string.

Minkie has a perfectly lovely time now, grabbing this ball, and pulling at it. You should just see his face, as it springs back. The "hunter" in him is aroused then with a vengeance—and he takes a fierce leap at the ball that would do credit to a king of the jungle.

● Heath to the Rescue

My mother had a very sweet candlestick given her among her Christmas presents. I know this doesn't sound a very glamorous gift at first mention, but actually it was.

For you see it was made of the most delicate blue and amber glass—Venetian glass it is called. The curious thing about this kind of glass is the shock it gives you as you lift it, it's so light you almost (almost!) fall backwards.

So, naturally, mother had to rush out and buy a very special ornamental candle for this candle-stick. She returned with a perfect beauty in an amber shade that suited the candle-stick beautifully. (It's not going to be lighted, you see, but is just for ornament.)

Then to mother's sorrow, the candle would wobble and wouldn't stand up straight in the stick. We tried wrapping paper around the end and all sorts of silly tricks that weren't a bit successful—the paper looked perfectly awful, incidentally.

"If only we had something soft that would grip the candle," mother sighed.

"I know," said daughter, your Patricia. "Heath—where's Heath?"

Small brother came trotting along, small kitten following hopefully.

(You know, I have an idea that our kitten isn't very sure of his name yet. I believe he thinks it's 'Heath,' for I notice he always appears when his young master is in demand!)

"Heath, bring mummy your plasticine," I commanded, as older sisters may in moments of family crisis.

Off Heath trotted (also kitten, I need hardly add) and came back with box of coloured plasticine in his hands and kitten at his feet.

He was quite honoured, I think, when I asked him if I might have a tiny piece of the yellow stick of plasticine.

"Course," he said. "I don't 'spec' Father Christmas'll mind me giving away just a bit of his present, specially if it's for mummy."

Anyhow, the rest of the story is that we warmed this piece of yellow plasticine, smoothed it inside the candle-stick, and now the candle is held in the most stately, upright position. Not a wobble—and the plasticine doesn't even show.

Your friend,

PATRICIA.

P.S.—I expect your chums have all told you that a perfectly sweet necklace is being given away with our companion paper, the "Girls' Crystal," which is now on sale. If you're anxious to have this paper, you'd better buy it quickly, for every other school-girl has the same idea, too!



WINTER HAS ITS PROBLEMS, TOO—

But Patricia has some very helpful ideas about solving them for schoolgirls.

HOW we all love the bright and bracing outdoor days of winter!

There's no need for me to tell you how good for you—and your good looks—these days spent in the open are, but they do bring their own problems.

Dried and rough skin on the face is one of the schoolgirls biggest winter problems. The keen east and north winds simply dry up all the natural oils and leave the skin flaky and "tight" feeling.

WINTRY SKIN

Obviously, the natural oils must be replaced—then the skin will be petal soft and smooth again.

But how, you ask me?

Well, for schoolgirls, I do recommend that you buy a pot or tin of good quality cold-cream. (Sixpence buys a very excellent make.) A dab of this applied to the skin either at night, after some time spent in the open, or smoothed into the skin just before you go out, will improve the texture of your skin wonderfully.

And you mustn't regard this in any way as a "beauty treatment," you know. For there is nothing magic about cold-cream—it doesn't pretend to do more than nourish and cleanse the skin.

FOUR HANDS AND FEET

After dried-up skin, perhaps the next most common problem concerns the hands and feet.

"Chaps" are quite common this weather—and are entirely due to the cold, especially when you don't dry your hands carefully after washing.

The obvious cure is to keep your hands as warm as possible, but I know this isn't always easy—especially in class, when windows are open, and there's often a most killing wind shrieking in and making straight for you!

If your circulation is brisk and good, you'll keep warm, and the way to ensure this is to give yourself plenty of exercise.

As soon as you get to school, have either a good game of "He" or play skipping,

to warm you up for the morning sessions. Do the same at "break," and again before afternoon classes.

If your hands are still frosty, I think you should mention this to mother. She might decide you need a "tonic." A tonic, you see, tones up the blood, which improves the circulation—and so keeps you warm. Very simple!

THOSE HORRID CHILBLAINS

Chilblains are every schoolgirl's terror. Oh, how I know! I used to have absolute monsters. Just to cheer you, though, I can assure you that these are generally "grown out of"—though that may be a year or two for you yet. (Still, it's nice to know!)

The circulation-enliveners above will help considerably to keep chilblains at bay. But if you're still a coldy mortal, you must take even more precautions.

Be sure to wear your gloves every time you pop your hands out of doors—woolly gloves for preference.

You'll be wearing wool stockings, of course, but even over these you can wear little "feeties." These are tiny foot socks, that don't show over the tops of your shoes as over-socks do—and so are very suitable for school wear. (Any good shop will sell you these for one shilling a pair.)

A pair of wool panties under your school bloomers are also a great aid to keeping you very cold people warm—and so will help to prevent the chilblains.

But if a chilblain should arrive, I want you to paint it with iodine at the very first "tickle." This will save that agonising irritation and prevent the misery of their becoming "broken."

CRACKLY HAIR

My next cold-weather problem is dry, brittle hair.

Do you find yours stand out like a hedgehog's quills on wintry days—especially when there's frost in the air? And does it splutter and crackle as you brush it?

This is a very common grouse about winter—so you won't be an exception.



Again, it means that the natural oil in the hair has been dried up—so again you must restore it, for your hair lives and thrives on its oils. But not with cold-cream this time—that's too costly. A twopenny tin of "Vaseline" is actually better for your hair; it is greasier and also encourages it to grow. (That's one of the reasons why you shouldn't use it on your face much, you see.)

Any morning that you wake with your hair feeling very dry, rub some vaseline into the scalp, then brush the hair well. It will look and feel much lovelier after that—and incidentally, will keep much neater.

ROSY NOSES

Does your pert schoolgirl nose sometimes look as if Jack Frost himself has cast his icy spell on it?

Cheer up, if it does, for a decidedly pink nose is quite a common winter complaint. But that doesn't alter the fact that it's not lovely to look at.

One of the causes of rosy nose is indigestion. Wretched word, that, for the cure for indigestion rests in the right choice of food, which always sounds so uninteresting.

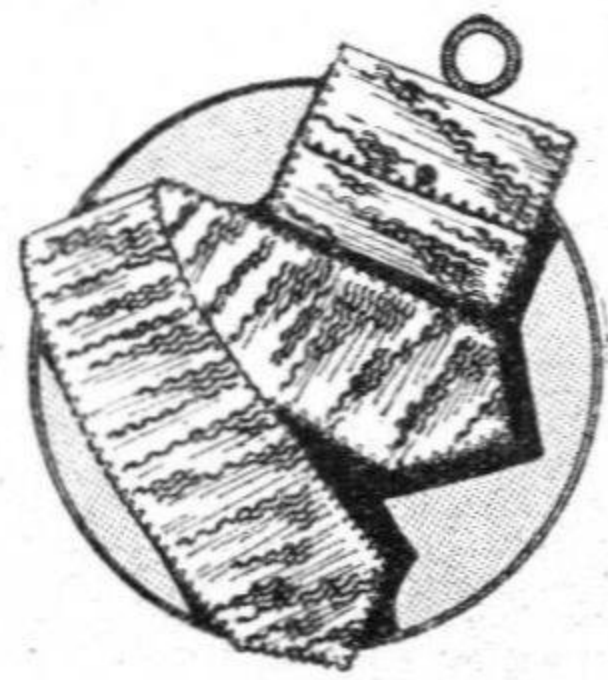
But if you avoid drinking very strong tea—keep it weak with either milk or hot water—you'll notice an improvement. Go gently on fried foods, too; delicious as these are, they do tend to cause the pink tinge to the nose.

When you wash your face, give your nose a special dab with cold water afterwards. Avoid washing it in very hot water, at any time; it should never be more than warm.

With this care, you will go through the winter days that are still to come, looking a picture of glowing health—and loveliness.

A COSY SCARF FOR CHILLY DAYS

—and a bag to match. Both can be knitted in no time and you don't have to be a knitting expert, either!



BRR! So what about making yourself this choery, and very cosy scarf to tuck inside your school coat? You could complete it on one evening, for it is the fashionable short length, which doesn't require much wool.

To begin, cast on three stitches only.

For the second row, knit plain, and **MAKE** two stitches at the beginning and end of the row.

Knit eight rows in exactly the same way, making two stitches at the beginning and end of each row.

After that, you knit plain for twenty-eight inches.

Then you start to decrease to make the point at the other end of the scarf. Knit two stitches together at the beginning and end of each row. Do this for eight rows, when you should have three stitches left (if you haven't dropped any on the way!)

Fasten off, then the scarf is complete.

BAG TO MATCH

After doing that so successfully, I'm sure you'll want to make the bag to match.

Cast on forty-nine stitches and knit in plain knitting for fourteen inches. Then cast off.

Fold the knitting over to make an envelope shape, and stitch up the two sides to make the bag. Cover a curtain ring with buttonhole stitch in the same colour wool and stitch this to the top of the bag.

Trim all round the bag and all round the scarf with blanket stitch—and you'll be surprised and delighted at the results.

NOTE.—To MAKE a stitch you wind your wool twice round the needle before pulling it through. To make two stitches you wind it round three times instead of the usual once and knit them as stitches.

(Concluded from page 13.)

you were going to make the presentation to Stella?"

Babs bit her lip. She, too, was thinking of that now. Had Stella arrived yet?

"I came to look for you, Bessie. I want to know why you ran away—and what you mean by doing it. Why should you think I turned against you, old goose?"

"Well," Bessie stammered, "when you never even thanked me for the fuff-flowers, you know—"

"But what flowers, Bessie? I never saw any flowers!"

Bessie eyed her in wonderment. Then she explained. Babs looked at her sharply.

"You say you gave them to Faith? But I asked Faith if you had been in, and she said no."

Bessie's eyes opened wide.

"Then—then she didn't tell you?" she asked. "But, Babs, I did go in. I—I gave her the flowers, and she said she'd hand them over to you as soon as ever she saw you."

Babs eyed her chum queerly. For the first time she caught herself wondering a little. Impossible, gazing at Bessie then, to believe she had made a mistake and yet—

Perhaps, just for a moment, she experienced her first stab of doubt against Faith. Why had Faith lied to her? And what had happened to Bessie's flowers?

She thought of her address—of Stella. Impossible now to finish the address, of course—but not impossible to meet Stella and perform the presentation ceremony. She said briskly to Bessie,

"Bessie, look here, you're coming back with me—at once!"

Bessie gulpingly nodded. Reunited with her beloved Babs again, she had no further thought of running away.

Meekly she rose; out of the shop they hurried. Ten fretful minutes Babs waited for a bus, wondering with increasing dismay what was happening at Cliff House.

At Courtfield, where they changed, there was another exasperating wait. It was eleven o'clock by the time they reached the school.

And Babs' arm sank as, with Bessie's plump arm tucked in hers, she hurried through the gates. Just in time to see a crowd leaving the Cloisters; a happy, lovely-faced girl with her arm entwined in Stella Stone's, and a great cheering throng of girls surrounding them. Miss Primrose was there, too.

Bitter, bitter the disappointment which suddenly welled up within Babs, as she hurried up.

"Miss Primrose—" she panted.

Miss Primrose turned. Her expression altered.

"So, Barbara, you have deigned to return! I understood," she added icily, "that you were interested in this presentation to Stella. Apparently I was mistaken, as you so rudely rushed off, leaving another girl to finish your task!"

"Another girl?" Babs stammered.

"Your cousin, Faith Ashton!" Miss Primrose announced coldly, and passed on. "Come, Stella!"

But Babs stood still. Bessie bit her lip.

"Oh, Bib-Babs, I'm awfully sorry. Oh dear! If it hadn't been for me—"

And then as Faith Ashton came up, she stopped.

"Oh, Barbara, I'm so dreadfully glad to see you," Faith said. "We've all been wondering where you went to. And, Barbara, Miss Primrose asked me to finish the address, and—well, as you weren't here, I couldn't refuse, could I? And so I did, Babs. And then Miss Primrose said, as I've done it so well, I should present it."

Babs eyed her. For a moment she did not reply. She was trying to crush the bitterness in her heart, trying at the same time to crush down the suspicion she felt rising in her. Very straightly she eyed her cousin from Canada. Then:

"Well, I'm glad," Babs said quietly. "You do want to do things for the Form, don't you, Faith?"

"Oh, Barbara, how sweet of you to take it like that!"

"And now you've done them you feel you've found your feet, so to speak—that you've settled down?"

"Barbara, you know I do."

"Then in that case," Babs decided, "the testing-time is rather over, isn't it? I mean to say, now you've settled down, perhaps you wouldn't mind going—and telling Miss Primrose so."

Faith's big eyes opened in a wide stare.

"But, Barbara, why?"

"Because," Babs said, and looked at Miss Charmant, "I'd like Bessie Bunter to come back to our study. Obviously, now you're able to stand on your own feet, you can get on all right in another study. Bessie can't! Bessie has been broken-hearted from the moment she left the study. I just can't see her going on breaking her heart. Faith, this is your chance to do the really sporting thing."

Faith paused.

Out of the triumph of which she had been robbed, Babs, it seemed, had wrested another triumph. But there was nothing for her to do if she was to remain the kind, loving, adorable Faith all these girls knew, but graciously to accede to that request. She said, with a smile, that to Babs seemed forced:

"Why, yes, of course, Babs dear. How lovely of you to think of it! We'll go and see Miss Primrose now, shall we, Miss Charmant? Poor, dear Bessie! I do hope Miss Primrose won't refuse this time!"

And off she went with Miss Charmant, while Bessie blinked at Babs, and Babs smiled as she clasped her fat wrist.

But as Faith went her blue eyes were no longer shining. And to herself she was saying, bitterly, vengefully:

"Hang Bessie Bunter! And hang clever cousin Babs, too! It suited my plans to be in that study!"

But the charming smile was back on her lips and the glow in her eyes when,

with Miss Charmant, she stood before the headmistress' desk.

Stella Stone was there, too, and as the ex-captain listened to the really moving plea Faith put forward, she smiled.

"Miss Primrose, will you grant the favour?" she quickly asked. "You see, I do know so much about Babs and Bessie. I do realise what they both mean to each other—and especially Barbara to Bessie, and I'm sure, Miss Primrose, you'll have no cause to worry about Bessie once she falls directly under Barbara's influence again."

Miss Primrose paused. It was very difficult to refuse Stella that wish. It was still more difficult to renounce the plea which false Faith had made.

She smiled.

"Very well," she said, "you may tell Bessie, Faith, that she may return to Study No. 4. Meantime, of course, you will move to Study No. 1."

Babs, Mabs, and Bessie were in Study No. 4 when Faith, pretending to be overwhelmingly joyful, came in with that good news.

Babs smiled. Bessie, looking as if she had just been told someone had left her a fortune, just stared for a moment and then dropped into the armchair.

But Babs laughed.

"And so," she said joyfully, "that's that. Oh, Faith, what a ripping sport you are! You don't really mind?"

"As long," Faith said softly, "as it makes dear Bessie happy! Mabs, will you help me along with my things?"

But the smile as she said it was rather strained, and there was no glow in her eyes. Babs noticed that, and again felt a tremor of wonder, a little spasm of doubt.

She threw a glance at Bessie, her plump face now flushed with happiness. She dimly wondered why, in herself, this parting with her cousin from Canada called up no feeling of regret. As Mabs and Faith went out she bent towards Bessie.

"Happy now, old Bess?" she asked tenderly.

For answer Bessie caught her arm. She could not, and did not, speak in that moment, but the starriness of her tear-dimmed eyes gave Babs a very complete answer.

And Babs smiled; gently, tenderly.

"And—and Bessie, do you still dislike Faith?" she asked.

Bessie looked up appealingly.

"Bessie, do you?"

"Oh, Bib-Babs, why ask me?" she replied. "You know I—I can't tell a lie to you. Oh dear, I want to like her, you know! I—I'd love to like her. She—she's been a sport to—to do what she has done, and—and I'm just a cat! But even in spite of all that—"

Babs eyed her oddly.

"You still feel—"

"I still feel that—that I can't trust her," Bessie confessed.

And Babs, shaking her head, looked worried. Why couldn't she be angry with Bessie for making a remark like that? Why didn't she even feel offended or resentful?

Was it possible, for once, that the instinct of dear, duffer Bessie made her see farther than the rest of the Form?

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

(See page 24 for full particulars of next week's wonderful Faith Ashton story.)



The most exciting time of the Morcove chums' lives is when they become—



SCHOOLGIRLS IN SOCIETY

FOR NEW READERS.

BETTY BARTON and her Morcove chums, POLLY LINTON, NAOMER NAKARA, PAM WILLOUGHBY, JUDY CARDEW, to mention only a few, join forces with JACK LINTON & Co., of Grangemoor, to form a concert party which, visiting wealthy Society homes, during the Christmas holidays, is raising a fund on behalf of a children's home. They have a chaperon, MISS LESTER, an outwardly charming lady, but whom they suspect of being a traitor. Visiting a country estate Miss Lester tries to ruin the show by stealing the dress baskets. Betty laughs. The baskets are full of paper!

(Now read on.)

The Case Against Her!

BETTY sat alone in the library of the Willoughby town house, in Mayfair, "going into figures."

It was less than an hour since she, along with the rest of the Morcove Concert Party, had got back to London from snowbound Hacklow Park, after one of the biggest triumphs of the concert party's career.

No sooner had Betty's chums got indoors than they had been off out again. There was really nothing to keep them about the place, and it would not have been them to waste a single hour of the January "hols."

But Betty, as "business manageress," was now having the happy task of seeing how the "Holiday Home Fund" stood as a result of Hacklow Park's handsome collection.

Suddenly the telephone rang at Betty's elbow—tr-r-r-r-r!

"Hallo?" she inquired, never expecting the call to be for her. But it was. A commencing, "That you, Betty?" caused her face to brighten considerably.

"Oh, yes, Lady Kitty! Yes, all O.K., thanks—splendid journey! Pardon? Can we all do—what?"

A startled, delighted smile was Betty's as she paid eager heed to the thrilling invitation coming over the line.

"Right, I'll tell them! They'll just love it! Terribly sweet of you, Lady Kitty. We shan't know how to thank you enough! 'Bye, then, for now!"

Putting down the telephone, Betty jumped up from her chair to take a few jaunty steps about the fine room.

She felt like clapping her hands in wild delight.

Then, at sound of a certain voice out in the hall, she looked very grave.

It was Miss Lester speaking to the manservant, who had just opened the front door to her "Now for a row!" Betty was thinking. For she and the trickster, when next they faced each other, would be doing so for the first time since the return to town.

"But I don't care!" shrugged Betty. "There's our side of the story to be told yet. And if she's been slanging us to Pam's mother, then I guess we've got a good answer to everything—even though we mayn't have got direct proofs, worse luck!"

For a few moments, after sitting down again at the table, the schoolgirl manageress of the M.C.P. chewed a pen-top and frowned. Then, fighting off the disagreeable effect of Miss Lester's connection with the party, she got her young head to those figures again.

With the net slowly closing round her, the Morcove Concert Party's treacherous chaperon makes a last desperate attempt to ruin their efforts.

But a fresh interruption soon occurred. Now it was the pleasant voice of Mrs. Willoughby that came to Betty from the hall, and she had no sooner clacked down her pen and jumped up again than that lady was sauntering into the library.

"So there you are, Betty! And the others?"

"Oh, just gone out again for a bit! Mrs. Willoughby, how much would you guess we took at our show last night? Nine pounds eight!" Betty sparkled. "Not so bad, considering?"

"I should think not, indeed!" Pam's mother nodded and smiled, laying aside her sables. "Even allowing for Lady Kitty and the rest giving pretty liberally, the servants must have been very generous."

"The staff gave splendidly!" "Nearly ten pounds—it all helps, Betty! But now, tell me, what is this bad feeling that has come about between

you and Miss Lester? There is something that needs explaining."

"There's a great deal that needs explaining!" was Betty's spirited reply to Mrs. Willoughby's graver remark. "May I ask exactly what she has been saying about us? Of course, she told you that we refused to come back yesterday, as she practically ordered us to do?"

"Yes, Betty. And I really was shocked when Miss Lester turned up here early yesterday evening all by herself—"

"But with some of the dress-baskets that hold our stage dresses," Betty laughed. "Although, all that was in the baskets was a lot of waste stuff; the frocks and things were still at Hacklow Park!"

"That was a trick you played upon her, Betty!"

"Well, she has played enough tricks upon us!"

"What?" And now Pam's mother stared as if she feared that Betty had taken leave of her senses. "Betty, what on earth do you mean?"

"Just this, Mrs. Willoughby; ever since my chums and I got going with the concert party stunt, one queer thing after another has been happening. The others will bear out what I say," Betty rushed on. "It has just been as if someone were wanting to spoil our chances, and, although we cannot prove it, we are quite certain that it is Miss Lester's doing."

"Betty dear, this is—incredible! If she heard you saying it—"

"She is indoors now, Mrs. Willoughby. Will you get her to come here?" Betty boldly suggested.

"No." And, very calmly, Mrs. Willoughby sat down. "Tell me from the very beginning, Betty," she urged.

And after that, for ten minutes on end, Betty's was the only voice speaking in this room.

Without even a single interrupting word, Mrs. Willoughby listened to the whole amazing story. Trick after trick played upon the concert party, for no other reason than that of trying to frustrate its laudable purpose! And, if this cruel series of underhand blows had not been dealt by Miss Lester, for some secret reason of her own, then who else could the culprit be?

That was the question with which Betty ended her careful recital, receiving the very swiftest answer.

"There can have been no one else, Betty! Amazing though it all is, it must be Miss Lester. Her offer to act as

By

MARJORIE STANTON

temporary chaperon was really made for the sole purpose of being in a position to ruin the show! She has not wanted you all to get in the money for the Holiday Home scheme. That is what it amounts to."

"But why—why on earth shouldn't she?" Betty puzzled aloud. "I just can't think of a reason."

"And I'm sure I'm completely baffled," said Mrs. Willoughby, rising to her feet. "Perhaps she stands to gain in some mysterious way if the house is not bought, after all."

Betty gave a slight phewing sound with her lips.

"The money has to be found by a certain date, hasn't it?" she exclaimed. "A fortnight from now—"

"And unless the fund is big enough by then, the chance to buy is gone," Mrs. Willoughby nodded. "But if you girls and boys go on like you have been going—"

"Yes, Mrs. Willoughby. But—but is Miss Lester to be left to go on the way she has been going? If so, think what may happen at any moment!"

"Oh, I quite realise that, and the obvious thing to do is—a thing that just can't be done, Betty. We dare take no active steps yet. Miss Lester enjoys a good social position, otherwise her offer to chaperon you all would never have been entertained. You have hesitated to tell me things about her because you lacked proof. For the very same reason, I must go slow, or she will be bringing an action for defamation. But she won't get another chance of harming you, even though she may have to stay on with you all."

And Mrs. Willoughby, as she said that, smiled calmly. She took up her furs and sauntered away to the door, as if the whole thing could well be left at that.

"About this evening, Betty," she paused to inquire—"no engagement, I think?"

"No. But—oh, I must tell you! Lady Kitty is up in town, and she phoned through just now, wanting to take me and my chums to 'Merry-Go-Round' at the Monopol Theatre. I said 'Yes,' and thanked her awfully, feeling sure you wouldn't mind."

"How nice of Lady Kitty!" nodded Pam's mother. "I've been, and it's a show you'll all love."

One thing more Mrs. Willoughby said before opening the door to pass out:

"And Miss Lester, Betty, will not go with you!"

Then "Manageress" Betty was alone again, and the inspiring effect of her talk with Pam's mother was evident. She pranced back to her little account-book on the table, sparkling her eyes at the latest figures entered

"A FORTNIGHT to go, and over two hundred pounds still to get!" Betty mused, a few minutes later. "But we shall do it! Oh, now that Pam's mother is in the know about Miss Lester, we shall manage fine!"

A Schemer on the Phone!

OUT from their several taxis jumped Betty and all her chums on to the thronged pavement in front of the Monopol Theatre at quarter to eight that evening.

"MERRY-GO-ROUND!"

The catchy title of London's latest hit was done in white electric lamps high up on the front of the great building.

It figured in another illuminated sign at the broad-stepped entrance to the best part of the house, where the chums now flocked into the grand foyer.

Big party though they were, they seemed to be lost amidst the gently moving crush of well-dressed folk.

"Now my job begins!" Lady Kitty jested, appearing among them all. "Official chaperon!"

"Oh— Ha, ha, ha!"

"We like you a jolly sight better zan Meess Lester, any old how!" shrilled Naomer.

"Well, it's a big change for us—a grand treat," Polly chuckled, "to be going to a show instead of giving one!"

"A treat you've earned!" sparkled Lady Kitty. "This way, all, and we're Rows E and F. My brother said he might be a bit late— But he isn't. Here he is!"

"Hallo, Morcove! Hallo, cads!" Young Lord Freddie put on a false drawl. "I was looking for you at the stage door! And I've come without any money! Sorry!" he particularly apologised to Naomer. "I'd have liked you to have some chocs!"

But either Lord Freddie was kidding, or else he got "tick" for that beribboned box of chocolates which, five minutes later, was being passed round.

Then the tuning-up scraping of fiddles died down, and with it the lively chatter-chatter and the rustle of programmes. Last-moment arrivals writhed quickly to their seats, tipped them down, and flopped. The conductor sprang to his desk, and there was a crackle of applause as he raised his baton. Then the big orchestra crashed into a very modern overture.

Between Betty and Polly there was a vacant seat. It was Lord Freddie's. He had gone away as soon as they had all settled themselves, and it was high time for him to be back for the rise of the curtain.

Down went all the brilliant lights in the packed auditorium; up flashed the footlights. Girl attendants jingled passage curtains along their rods. And still Lord Freddie was absent.

Why?

Betty looked back over the back of her luxurious seat and caught Dave's attention. But her questioning eyes could only draw a shrug and a puzzled smile. In the gloom Betty next exchanged meaning glances with Polly across the vacant seat.

Then the orchestra did a clever switch as the great velvet curtains flashed apart, and a grand opening chorus came from the thronged stage.

Instantly Betty and Polly were as much entranced as any of their companions, even though they still had that vacant seat between them. Lord Freddie's absence was nothing to bother about, anyway, and this show was grand.

The producers had put on a chorus that was a sight for sore eyes. There were comics who were a cure for the blackest moods.

Suddenly Betty was tapped upon the shoulders.

Young Lord Freddie, a slim black-and-white figure in the semi-darkness, was bending to whisper to her:

"Want you outside, Betty. I've got Dave coming, too. My sister will explain presently to the others."

So, up rose Betty, with "What on earth!" feelings. Dave was already away from his seat. Girl and lad crept out with Lord Freddie, and then all the patter from the stage, and the constant laughter of the audience became hushed to them by intervening curtains. Lord Freddie lit a cigarette.

"Couldn't tell you before, because up to a minute ago the management—all pals of mine—didn't know whether it could be worked. But I've just had the O.K., so now the thing is to nip to Mrs. Willoughby's to fetch along all your stage stuff."

Betty's mind leapt to a conclusion that made her gasp aloud.

"Our things—for this theatre!"

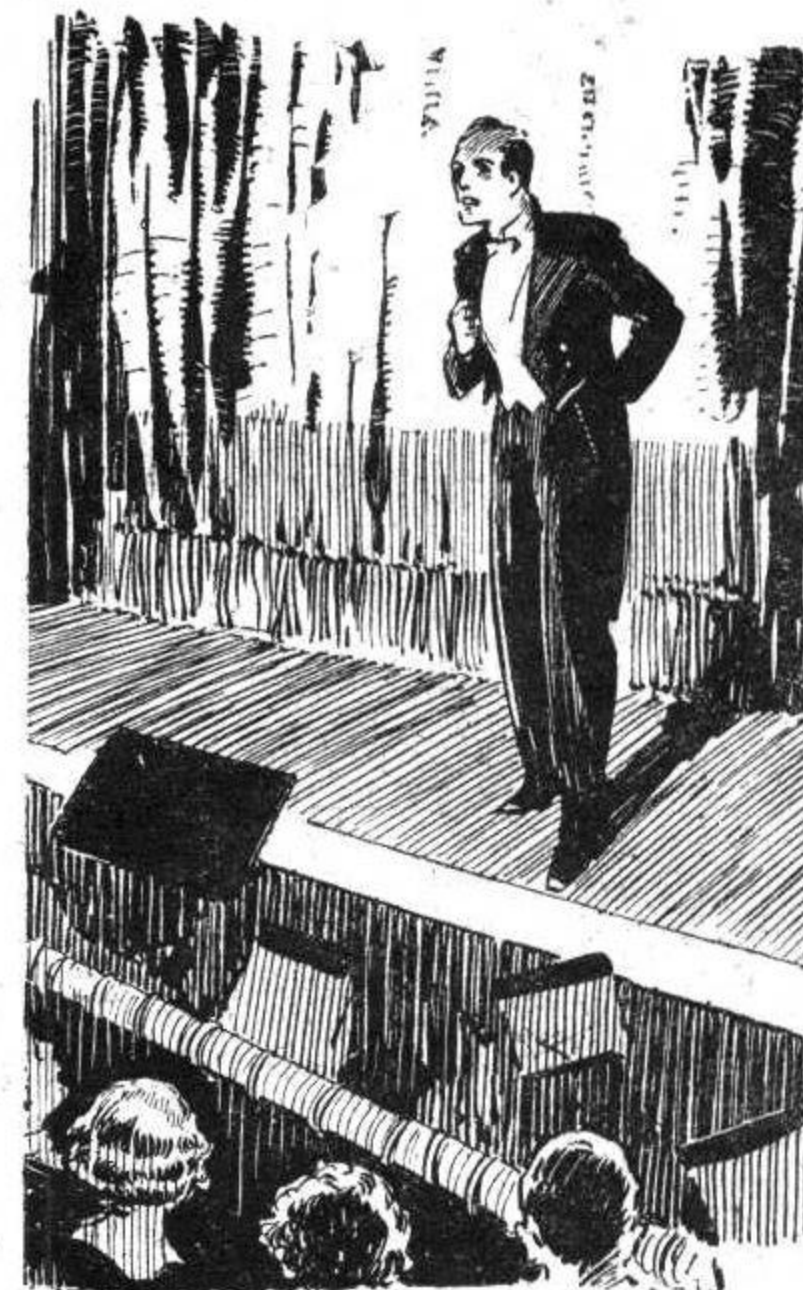
"That's the bright idea," grinned Lord Freddie, taking her and Dave towards the foyer. "The manager is going to speak from the stage, and then you'll all go on to do a bit of your stuff. I've my car waiting, and a theatre lorry is engaged."

Betty claimed her outdoor things from the cloak-room rather giddily.

The "M.C.P." to appear upon the Monopol stage! Enough to turn the brain of any schoolgirl!

"Oh, Dave," she panted, when Lord Freddie's own fine Roysler was rushing them back to "Headquarters," "isn't it thrilling!"

"It should bring in a decent bit of



"LADIES and gentlemen," the manager began, "the Morcove Concert Party will now entertain you."

cash, no mistake!" Dave said, in a quiet but very gratified way.

"Cash? How do you mean, Dave?"

"Collection at the exits, when the audience comes out. There must be some idea of that sort."

"Phee-ew!" Betty whistled. "My goodness!"

And her bright eyes regarded Lord Freddie, where he sat at the wheel, taking the car through one dim street after another.

If there really was some idea of a collection being taken when the audience left the theatre, then how much more than ever were the "M.C.P." going to thank Lord Freddie and his sister for to-night's grand treat!

Even as the car drew up to the kerb, opposite the Willoughbys' West End mansion, Betty and Dave saw that a lorry was waiting. Its driver and another overcoated man, pacing the pavement, saluted Lord Freddie as he jumped out with his brace of juniors.

"Got to be nippy, although as to that," said his lordship genially, "I can lend a hand with some of the really hefty baskets."

Then, to Betty, as they all mounted the steps to the street door:

"All you've got to do, young lady, is just check out the Morcove baskets: Dave will see to the Grangemoor lot."

"Miss Lester is in," the manservant imparted to Betty. "Keeping to her room on account of a slight cold, I understand. Do you wish to see her?"

"Oh, no, thank you, Dawkin!"

Betty felt no shame in voicing that "definitely not" kind of answer. A little bird whispered her that Miss Lester's cold was probably "put on"!

The trickster's real reason for keeping to her room was more likely due to sulkiness. Anything Pam's mother had said, was certain to have been most diplomatic. All the same, it could hardly have left Miss Lester in any doubt that she was being "stood off!"

"I daren't speak any louder. Can't you hear me now? Oh, wait a bit! Operator, clear this line, will you! It's a trunk-call from Sandton Bay, and most important!"

Sandton Bay!

No wonder Betty stood transfixed just outside Miss Lester's room.

Sandton Bay was that seaside place, a few miles from Morcove, where it was hoped to acquire Rock Hill House!

Now Betty was aware of the woman changing to a guarded tone:

"Is that better, Steve? Listen, then; I'm not going to be able to work things—you know how. Oh, I can't explain, but that plan has phutted out!"

"That plan!" Betty's excited mind echoed the words. "Her plan to wreck our efforts! She's in talk, then, with—a confederate!"

And on tiptoe the schoolgirl manageress of the Morcove Concert Party

down there. But, Dave, how can our concert party be upset from as far away as that—Sandton Bay?"

"No; but I do see how the holiday-home scheme can still be spoiled—"

"What!" Betty blurted; for Dave's alternative theory had come with such amazing swiftness. "You mean, even though we all get the money that is needed by the date fixed, it may be impossible, after all, to buy Rock Hill House? But I don't see—"

"I do," Dave said crisply, and added: "Was Miss Lester fixing up over the phone go down to Sandton?"

"Yes, she was. I overheard that, too," Betty excitably added, whilst the car rapidly purred upon its way. "She's catching the twelve-thirty from Waterloo in the morning," she said. "She'd better leave town for a few days on the South Coast. But it's to Sandton Bay, North Devon, she'll really be going."

Dave nodded.

"Let me think," she sensed his unvoiced request, but she simply had to pluck him by a sleeve, imploringly.

"You know what's going to be done down there. You've a hunch already, Dave. Tell me, then—quick, before we get back to the theatre!"

"But it would spoil you for that bit of our show we are all going to do," he wisely demurred. "Anyway, my idea will keep for a bit. I wonder how you'd like, though, going down Morcove way, whilst the hols are on?"

"To Sandton Bay—to-morrow?" she jerked. "Is that what you mean? Why, what is there to be done down there?"

"A little job I'd like to take on, with Jack and you and a few others," Dave smiled wistfully. "But maybe we'll just have to leave it to—the police."



BETTY and Co., in the wings, were trembling with excitement. Another few seconds and this vast London audience would be theirs!

Five minutes later, all the baskets had gone out to the lorry, and Betty would have been in the car again with Dave and Lord Freddie, but she had just remembered something that meant a flitting to the bed-room she shared with two other Morcovians.

They had had a mending party this afternoon, some of the stage frocks having suffered some tearing. The frocks had not been put back into the baskets, and so now they must go out to the car over her arm.

Quietly she was going by the closed door of Miss Lester's room, when she heard the bell of an extension telephone ring. Somebody was being put through to Miss Lester, and it must have been a trunk call, for next moment the woman was speaking back very loudly.

Even so, the person far away at the other end of the line was not hearing distinctly, for, just as Betty came by again, with the odd stage frocks bundled together, she heard Miss Lester saying, in answer to some complaint:

went closer to the door to listen—as she was sure she had every right to do.

Outwitted!

THE Lorry had gone when Betty came running down the front steps to the lamplit pavement.

Lord Freddie, in his playful defiance of "no hooting" by-laws, sounded an impatient "toot-toot," as she ran to the car.

"Sorry!" she panted, and scrambled in, with her armful of stage-frocks, to share once more a deeply upholstered seat with Dave.

Then, with the Roysler starting its race back to the theatre:

"I say, Dave, what do you think of someone called Steve, ringing Miss Lester up all the way from Sandton Bay, to know how her plan is going on? I'm afraid I listened. Well, she was saying it had phutted out, and the next thing was some talk of 'trying'

THE CURTAIN was down at the Monopol Theatre for the first interval, and so it was not surprising that a good many stalls were temporarily vacant.

But now the warning bell rang for people to return to their seats, and, rapidly though most of these filled up again, it was noticed that Rows E and F still remained—empty!

Hallo, though! The manager, out in front of the curtain, holding up his hand for silence!

"Ladies and gentlemen," his voice rang out upon the suddenly attentive silence, "we have in the house to-night certain young people of whose praiseworthy activities you may have heard about in the Press. The Morcove Concert Party—"

Tremendous applause, instantly proving what little need there was for the audience to be told of the deserved success which had so far crowned Morcove & Co.'s effort.

"The girls and boys are behind the curtain now," laughed on the manager, "so they will know how kindly you have expressed your regard for their good work. At the same time, your applause has proved that you would welcome an excerpt from their own wonderful little show. You know the splendid cause for which they are working so hard during their holidays, and so we on this side of the footlights are confident that as you go out, later on, you will all give liberally."

"Hurrah! Bravo!"—and clapping. "Bravo!"

"Ladies and gentlemen—the Morcove Concert Party!"

And the curtains flashed apart.

No band—only Madge Minden at the grand piano below the footlights, rattling off that lively tune to which her chums on the stage were singing out for all they were worth:

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

Just that one "asking" verse from their opening chorus, and then, whilst the audience demonstrated its intention of "giving liberally" by-and-by, off-stage danced all the versatile amateurs, except Pam.

She, dressed for the stage, in her riding-kit, was to speak the opening witticisms of the now famous "Riding School" farce.

The chums had chosen this item from their programme as being the one likely to go down best.

And it meant, anyway, that there would be gee-gee "Ginger" to create the liveliest knockabout diversion, if some of his fellow players rather went to bits because this was a real London theatre, and the audience such a vast one.

But, as to stage-fright, there was nothing like that about Pam, or jovial Jack the Groom, or any others with speaking parts.

Ginger himself was the one to show fright.

Never had there been so much difficulty in getting him to come out of his stable. Never had there been a louder whinnying and kicking against woodwork.

Even before he came ramping all round the great stage, dragging Jack the Groom with him, the whole house was in roars of laughter.

For nearly ten minutes the uproarious fun went on, and the audience, even whilst it was kept in convulsions of laughter, never missed the cleverness in any of the witty lines. Every joke was all the better for being topical. The whole thing, in fact, was seen to be an up-to-the-minute skit on the riding-school craze.

At the finish there was more deafening applause for a "turn" that must have called for hard team work, or it never could have gone with such a bang.

Then, with only three minutes left of the time that had been so good-naturedly allotted to them, the M.C.P. concluded with its closing chorus, and "all-line-up."

The curtain fell whilst they were joined hand-to-hand, bowing and laughing; but it rose again, and again after that.

"Hurrah!" The roar of cheering simply would not die down. "Bravo, Morcove! Bravo, Grangemoor! Encore! Bravo!"

And when they scampered away to the wings, there to find the theatre manager, and the whole "Merry-go-round" company, clapping still, just the same as the audience.

Betty for one just had time to notice that one of the professional "stars" was going round with a plate, to take up a collection from her fellow "pros." And then came a shout from the manager:

"Call before the curtain, miss! Go on!"

"Me?"

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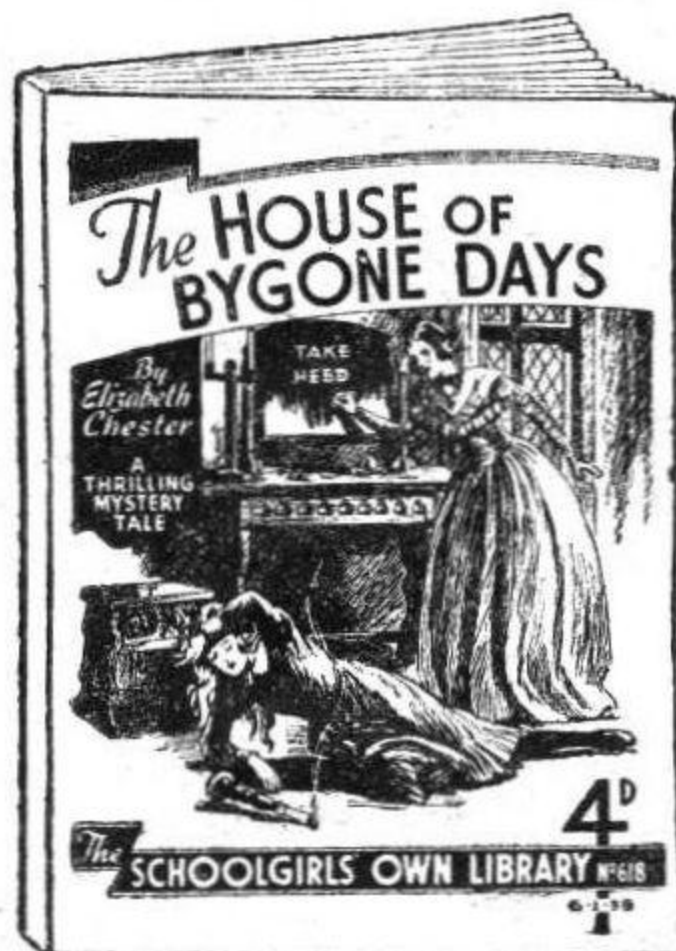
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"Yes; you first!" he dinned at gaping Betty.

Then a roguish idea seized her. If she must go before the curtain, she'd put her fleeting appearance to good use.

"One of the collecting-boxes—quick!"

And so, next moment, out she went to take her "call" as "manageress," and, no sooner had she bowed several times, than she flourished that collecting-box in a very meaning manner.

Polly and others, taking their personal calls, did the same, and each time the laughter and cheering remained as great as ever.

At ten-past eleven, when the theatre emptied, every exit had a couple of the Chums, collecting-boxes in hand. And how the silver and copper rained through the slots! Ten-shilling notes, as well—pound notes even!

But it was impish Naomer who, on the way home to "H. Q." at last, in a cab with Betty and Polly, Jack and Dave, could claim to have done best.

"Bekas," exulted the dusky Morcovian, "I sold my autigraff to some girl with ever such a rich father. And what do you zink he put een my box? A whole five-pound note! Gorjus!"

"You're telling me!" said Polly.
"All right, wait and see! Directly we get indoors, Betty, you'll open all ze boxes, won't you?"

But Fate itself intended that Betty should have no chance of totalling up the collection to-night.

This cab in which she was riding had been the last to get away from the theatre. When it set them down at the Willoughbys, lights and laughter in a front room showed where the rest of the M.C.P. could be found.

But out on the pavement, waiting for this last taxiload, were Lord Freddie and Lady Kitty. They had used the Roysler to get some of the juniors home.

"Say, Betty! And you, Dave!" voiced Lord Freddie, with startling gravity. "A bit of a surprise about Miss Lester. You told me something, back there at the theatre, about her meaning to be off to-morrow morning. But indoors they tell me she's already gone."

Betty simply gasped.

"Gone?"

"Flitted the jolly old mansion," agreed Lord Freddie.

He puffed thoughtfully at his cigarette.

"Well, what now, old things?"

But Morcove & Co. were silent. All who had heard of Miss Lester's telephone conversation were stunned by this news. So the traitor had flown before her time; had stolen a march on them!

"But," Betty found voice at last, "what ever excuse did she give?"

"That she had decided a certain matter was urgent, Dawkin says, and so she is travelling to the South Coast by a last train."

Betty turned to Dave to see how he was taking this staggering news.

"There's a West of England express," he said, promptly and calmly, "that leaves Waterloo at midnight. And that, I've an idea, is really the train she is catching, on her way to Sandton Bay."

CAN Betty & Co. possibly prevent their enemy from carrying out her secret scheme? Be sure not to miss next week's fine chapters, in which this story moves towards a gripping climax.

COMPLETE this week. Another sparkling, full-of-fun story introducing—



GIPSY JOY

The Rich Girl
Romany



Forbidden to enter her pet in the dog show, Joy Sharpe did so as Nakita, her gipsy self. And what sensations there were!

Tinker's Chance!

"COULDN'T Tinks be let off the lead just for a bit, Miss Retcham?"

Joy Sharpe put as much pleading as she could in her tone, but she knew what her governess' answer was likely to be, even before she spoke. "No; certainly not, Joy! I have told you before that Tinker cannot be trusted at large."

Joy, her governess, and Tinker were having their morning walk, and, as usual, Tinker was on the lead. Naturally, being a young dog, he wanted to be care-free, able to run and romp. But Miss Retcham did not see eye to eye with him.

"Tinker is an unusually stupid dog," said Miss Retcham. "Otherwise he might be allowed more freedom."

Proving her own stupidity by tripping over a stone that Tinker evaded, Miss Retcham entered a chemist's, telling Joy to wait outside and to keep a tight hold on the lead.

"Stop laughing, Tinks," said Joy softly. "It wasn't funny. Just because you had sense enough to step over the thing doesn't mean that anyone else had—and besides, cheer up. Nakita!"

Tinker's ears went up, and his eyes brightened.

The magic word Nakita had the same effect on him as the word "rats" on many a terrier. It filled him with new life.

"Soon," Joy whispered.

Tinker's short tail thumped and banged against the front of the shop.

For Tinker knew exactly what "Nakita" meant. It meant that his mistress was going to the wardrobe in her room and take from it a gay, pretty frock, a shawl, a cloak, and some sandals.

Then, when she had dressed in those clothes, she would stain her face with some funny stuff so that it would look brown instead of white. And what fun they would have!

Joy, waiting for her governess, glanced casually at the contents of the window.

Her casual look vanished almost immediately.

Right in front, prominently displayed, was a large bill.

DOG SHOW.

The words jumped up, and Joy eagerly read the details.

In aid of local charity there was to be a special bazaar, and a feature of it was to be a novel dog show.

The dog show was not for special, show-bred dogs. Everyone's dog, thoroughbred or mongrel, was to have an equal chance. Instead of the judging depending upon appearance alone, there were to be marks for cleverness, for good nature, and appearance!

"Tinks—look!" said Joy, in a thrilled tone. "The chance of your young lifetime."

Miss Retcham at that moment emerged from the shop, and Joy turned to her, full of excitement.

"Miss Retcham—look, look!" she cried eagerly. "A dog show. We can enter Tinker. There's a special class for dog's tricks. And you know I've taught him one or two—"

Miss Retcham looked at the notice, and then at Joy.

"My dear child," she said, in her most crushing tone, "you're surely not counting on this silly creature to win a prize."

"Oh, Miss Retcham!" protested Joy, quite hurt. "Why, Tinks is awfully good at picking up tricks. He can shut a door, and hold a ball on the end of his nose, and carry a basket."

"And so can any dog," said Miss Retcham. "But there is no use arguing, Joy; because, in any case, you don't want to compete."

But Joy did want to compete!

"Couldn't I enter him just for one class?" she begged.

"No; and again—no, Joy! For goodness' sake do not be so persistent. You must remember that you are a young lady, with position and dignity to maintain. We will turn towards home. And if any intelligent remark should occur to you, Joy, by all means make it."

Joy Sharpe remained silent all the way home.

Nevertheless, half-way home the expression on her face brightened, and a look came to her eyes that suggested that if she had cared to speak, she could have said plenty.

For Joy, of a sudden, had struck the most wonderful idea.

As a rich girl, with dignity to maintain, she could not—for some reason known to her governess—exhibit a dog at the show. But Nakita could.

Nakita, the gipsy girl, was only Joy Sharpe dressed up, but only Tinker realised the fact.

Therefore, although Joy could not go to the show, Nakita could.

"And, my golly, I will, too!" vowed Joy in excitement. "I'll go down to the village just as soon as I can and enter Tinks—or rather, Slinks, I'll have to call him. Tinks with a brown patch to make him different."

It was twenty minutes later that Miss Retcham, looking into the school-room where Joy had settled down to work, told her that she would be out for perhaps half an hour. She had to return to the village.

It was the chance Joy needed. Running up to her room the moment the

By IDA MELBOURNE

governess had left the house, she opened her wardrobe, and, with Tinker barking excitedly, got busy.

With her skin stained brown, and wearing the gay gipsy frock, she was soon completely unrecognisable as Joy Sharpe.

Carefully, stealthily, she crept by the back staircase down to the tradesmen's entrance, and out across the path to her secret way out—over the fence!

"NAKITA—that's all. Just Nakita."

Nakita was giving in her name at the address mentioned on the poster that the chemist had displayed. A vacant shop-front was being used by the committee organising the bazaar, and a Mrs. Mitford, known to Joy, was taking the names and particulars of entrants.

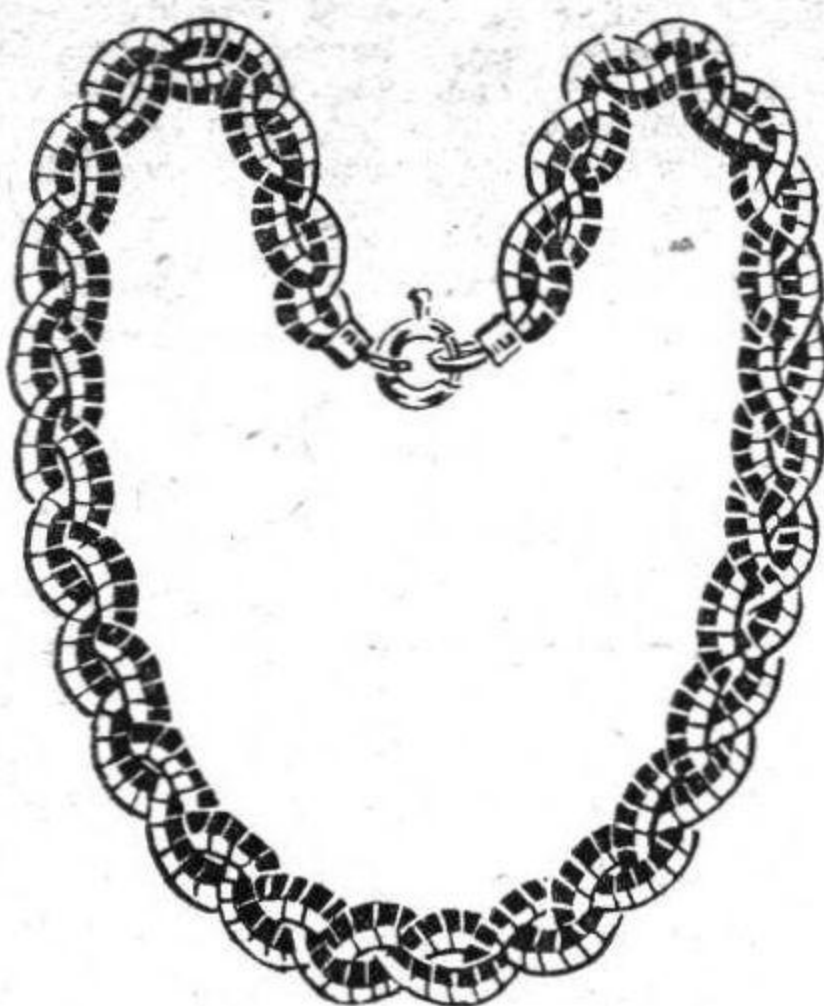
But Mrs. Mitford did not recognise Nakita the gipsy girl as Joy!

"Nakita—well, I suppose that will do," she grumbled. "And what's the dog's name?"

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"Slinker."

Mrs. Mitford looked at Tinker, who stood without his lead, looking very bright and happy.

"That dog looks like the one at the Gables!" she said sharply.

Nakita gave her a wary look.

"Ah, well, I dare say, lidy," she demurred. "But I bet you haven't seen that brown spot on the dog at the Gables."

She turned Tinker round and displayed the brown stain which she used for his disguise.

"Um!" said Mrs. Mitford. "Well, I dare say Miss Retcham will be there. She may even be one of the judges."

Nakita's heart gave a jump.

"One of the judges?" she gasped.

Mrs. Mitford's small eyes regarded her with suspicion.

"Why should that make you seem so anxious?" she asked keenly. "If that dog has been stolen—"

"Oh no, he hasn't," said Nakita hurriedly. "Oh no!"

She paid the shilling entry fee, and then gladly hurried from the shop—to come face to face with Miss Retcham!

The governess glowered at her, looked down, saw Tinker, and gave a start.

"Why, Tinker!" she exclaimed.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Mitford grimly.

Nakita did not answer, but again showed Tinker's brown patch.

"Oh, no—the other one!" said Miss Retcham without apology. "They are as alike as two peas except for that mark."

She walked into the shop, and Nakita moved back.

Tinker dodged out of the shop eagerly, relieved that for once Miss Retcham did not insist on his having a lead. And he frolicked after his mistress.

"Nakita—girl!"

Tinker heard the governess' voice and his ears went down. And if Nakita's ears had shown her feelings they would have gone down, too.

"Oh—yes, lidy!" she called back.

"Have you seen a pair of kid gloves with fur lining and fur trimming?"

Nakita had seen the governess wearing them often!

"No, lidy!" she said. "But if I do, I'll bring them to your place."

Miss Retcham did not thank her, but returned to Mrs. Mitford; and Nakita, with Tinker at her heels, hurried back by the footpath to the woods.

And what fun they had. But this morning there was not only play to be considered. Tinker had to be rehearsed.

"Tricks," said Nakita.

An errand boy, cycling along the lane, waved and then stopped.

He was a cheery-looking lad with a rather prominent nose, which had earned him the name of Boko.

"Hallo, Boko!" called Nakita. "Come and join in. I've got to train Slinker—teach him some tricks."

"What—for the show?" said Boko, interested at once.

"Yes. I want him to win a prize," said Nakita excitedly. "He's a clever dog."

Boko brought his powerful brain to bear on the subject.

"Now I'll tell you an easy trick I taught our old dog once," he said. "And that's giving things back to people he got them from. What I mean is—say three people gave him something different. Well, I'd jumble them up, and give them back to him one at a time like. Then he'd have to take them back to the people they belonged to."

Nakita's eyes brightened.

"Golly! Slinks can do that a bit already!" she said.

Boko threw himself into the thing. He stopped a grocer's delivery boy, and the work began. Slinker, understanding that this was an exciting game, joined in, and very soon surprised them with his brightness.

Now and then he made mistakes. But soon he warmed up to it.

And it was not long before he was faultless.

Whether he judged by smell, or by some secret memory of his own, Nakita did not know; but when Boko, his friend, and Nakita put things on the ground, Slinker could sort them out correctly and give each only what was his or hers.

Unfortunately, just when they were really warming up, Miss Retcham appeared, and hurried over to Boko.

"Boy, have you seen a pair of kid fur-lined gloves lying anywhere?" she demanded.

"No, ma'am," said Boko. "At least—why, yes," he added. "Now I come to think of it, ma'am, I did see a lady pick up a pair like that from the pavement. But I thought they were hers."

"Brown gloves?"

"That's right."

"Well, who was she? What was she

like?" asked Miss Retcham.

Boko shook his head.

"Dunno," he admitted.

"A very intelligent description," rapped Miss Retcham. "You are a stupid boy!"

And she marched on.

"Not so stupid as to lose a nice pair of gloves," retorted Boko.

But he did not utter it aloud—only to himself.

Nakita, waving to Boko, hurried back to the Gables, to get there ahead of her governess and change before they came face to face!

"REALLY, JOY, I do not know what makes you think I might be a judge at the dog show."

Joy Sharpe sighed heavily. It was the day of the show, and not only the day, but the afternoon. In an hour or two's time the judging would start.

She had thoroughly trained Tinker, either as himself or complete with brown spot, and he was ready to demonstrate his cleverness.

At first the idea of Miss Retcham's being a judge had alarmed her; but now it gave her hope. For, of course, in order to be Nakita, she had somehow to escape from her governess.

"Oh, well, I suppose—I suppose we can go and watch?" said Joy tentatively.

"We can do nothing of the sort, Joy," said the governess. "If we do not work we shall go for a bracing walk. For the next quarter of an hour I shall be busy in the garden."

And out she marched.

Left alone, Joy looked dismally at Tinker.

"We're sunk. Now, Nakita," she said, "I've got to be Joy."

Tinker put his ears down, as though he understood perfectly.

For five minutes Joy sat in gloomy thought. She planned and plotted, conjectured and schemed, but she could see no way out.

"And you can't go all by yourself, Tinks," she sighed. "Even if you did, she'd chase you—"

It was a casual thought, but as it came to her, Joy stiffened. For with it came an idea.

"My golly, Tinks, suppose she did chase you—and chase you to the show?" she mused.

Up she jumped, her eyes sparkling. For of a sudden she had seen the way out.

Looking out of the window, Joy saw her governess in the garden examining some snowdrops, which were just showing.

"Now's our chance, Tinks," she whispered. "Come on, Nakita!"

Having changed, Joy took something from her dressing-table drawer—one of a pair of expensive gloves that had been a present to her at Christmas, and which she had worn only once or twice.

"Gently, Tinks!" she warned him. "And don't let anyone else have it. Understand?"

Tinker, immensely proud, took the glove firmly but gently, and fully realised his important position of trust.

With his brown spot imposed on his flank, he strutted down the stairs with Nakita and out the back way.

Miss Retcham, seeing Nakita, stiffened.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded.

Then she looked at Slinker, and saw the glove.

"Why—my missing gloves!" she exclaimed.

She stepped towards Slinker, who dodged.

"Catch him!" she cried to Nakita.

"That is my glove! He will ruin it!" Miss Retcham, even wearing her glasses, had not very good eyesight, and she jumped to the conclusion that Slinker had found one of the missing pair.

Slinker ran, darting through the bushes, with Nakita and Miss Retcham in pursuit, and, naturally, made for his own secret way out—a hole low down in the fence.

Neither Nakita nor Miss Retcham could escape through there; but Nakita climbed over at an easy part of the fence.

"Make him drop it! Call him back!" stormed the governess.

And then, fired by the urgent need, she actually clambered over the fence herself.

But by the time she was over Nakita and Slinker were out of sight.

Miss Retcham, in shaking anger, looked about her.

"The little thief! She has gone off with the glove herself."

"I am the last person to be spiteful, but that gipsy girl needs a lesson. If she is using that dog for stealing, I'll very quickly put a stop to it! It's a thousand to one that she has not got a licence for her dog. We'll just see what the village policeman has to say about that!"

Gloves Off!

NAKITA was thrilled. The dog show was a great success.

There were fat dogs, thin dogs, thoroughbreds, mongrels, big, small, toy, sporting—

The competition for the dog with the nicest eyes was being judged when she arrived. Tinker had not entered for that.

Miss Retcham appeared when the next class—length of tail—was being judged. A collie won it, amidst great applause, by a mere half-inch from a most odd-looking mystery dog.

The governess sought out Nakita and went to her.

"I demand my glove!" she snapped. "Your dog was carrying it!"

"Oh, no, lidy!"

Miss Retcham stiffened.

"Very well! Perhaps you will show me the licence for your dog! Every dog entered in this show must be licensed, and, confident that yours is not, I am sending for the village constable! I will go and make sure that he comes!"

She turned away, and Nakita paled under the dye.

"Oh, lidy—"

"Well?" said Miss Retcham, turning grimly. "You are now prepared to give me the glove, I suppose? It is too late. I shall demand it, anyway; but because of your dishonesty, I am bringing the constable, all the same!"

Nakita shivered in her shoes. For although Tinker was licensed—to Joy—Nakita had no licence for him.

It was a nasty situation, for she could be summoned and fined.

There had been other people standing near by, and a murmur of disapproval sounded. But the governess, never one to study popular opinion, stalked off.

"Oh golly, Slinks!" murmured Nakita.

At that moment she heard Mrs. Mitford call out:

"The tricks class. Every dog can perform one trick."

Nakita fell back, her heart heavy. If she waited until the constable appeared, she would be summoned. And at any minute it might be Slinker's turn to show his trick.

"If you weren't mine it would be different—if—if you were Tinker, and not Slinker!"

A brush with the cloth, and he could become Tinker. But what would Miss Retcham say to that—to Tinker's being there?

Two dogs did their tricks—one balancing sugar on his head, and the other walking on his hind legs wearing a hat.

Then—

"Nakita, the gipsy girl, and her dog, Slinker!"

Nakita made up her mind. There was only one way out, and she took it. Moving back, she half-concealed Slinker with her cloak, and took out the cloth she kept hidden there. It was saturated in the special dye-remover, and kept for such an emergency as this.

Hurriedly she wiped the brown stain from his flank.

"Nakita! Where is she?" called Mrs. Mitford.

Nakita hurried into the centre.

"It's Miss Joy's dog I'm showing," she said, "if that doesn't make any difference, lidy?"

Mrs. Mitford shrugged her shoulders.

"No. I don't see why it should," she said, "provided you don't show two dogs."

Nakita knew that at any moment Miss Retcham would appear with the constable, and no time could be wasted.

"Tinker will be able to remember who gives him any article," she said. "And even if he is given, say, six, he will still give back each thing to the right owner."

There was an interested murmur from the crowd, and Nakita, just like a stage conjurer, asked members of the crowd to lend things as test.

In a moment there was compliance. A box of matches, a walking-stick, and three different gloves were given.

Nakita made them up into a heap, and picked up the walking-stick first.

"Give it back!" she said.

Tinker took it, looked about him, and then, tail wagging, returned the stick to its owner, amidst applause. Next came a box of matches, and again the rightful owner received it.

"Now the glove!" said Nakita.

She took up a kid, fur-lined glove, and as she looked at it gave a faint start.

Tinker snatched it, and turned.

At that moment the door opened, and Miss Retcham strode into the hall. She saw Nakita there, and called out:

"Wait! That girl has no dog licence! And, moreover—"

She stood stock-still, staring at Tinker, and he, at the same moment, saw her. Turning, he went trotting to her, stood up on his hind legs, and offered the glove.

Someone laughed, and there was an excited murmur from the crowd.

"Wrong!" said Mrs. Mitford. "The trick doesn't seem so successful!"

Miss Retcham took the glove and stared at it.

"My glove!" she said.

"Your glove?" said Mrs. Mitford, in surprise. "But the lady in blue gave that glove—"

The lady in blue edged back a little, and went red in the face.

"Nevertheless, this is my glove!" said Miss Retcham firmly. "The lining is torn, and there is a red inkstain on the index finger."

Miss Retcham then turned to the woman in blue, who was looking very sheepish.

"Do you claim this glove?" the governess asked in dangerous tone.

The woman in blue began to stammer.

"I—er—I found the gloves. I picked them up in error for my own, and did



"WRONG!" exclaimed the judge, as Tinker took the glove to Miss Retcham. But Tinker wasn't wrong. It was the glove Miss Retcham had lost. "Now for the fireworks," Nakita murmured.

not notice the fact. But now you mention it—"

Miss Retcham walked up to her and took the left-hand glove.

"It is an odd mistake to make!" she said coldly.

The woman said nothing, and it was apparent to Nakita that she had found the gloves, liked them, and not made any great attempt to find the owner of them.

"Well done, Tinker!" said Nakita softly.

"The dog knew whose they were, anyway," said Mrs. Mitford, in surprise. "I call that really clever!"

Tinker without being told to do so, returned the other articles to their owners, and there came a ripple of applause, whereupon he sat up and bobbed his head in a bow that earned him more applause.

"And now," said the village constable, "about this licence!"

Nakita was quite cool.

"You'd better ask the lidy!" she said, smiling.

"Ask me? That is your dog Slinker! I know by the brown spot— Why,

where is it? Tinker! You mean that this is our dog?"

Nakita nodded.

"Yes, lidy. I'm showing it for Miss Joy. And he's clever, ain't he? Bit of luck he give back your glove! And here's Miss Joy's—the one what he was carrying when you chased him."

Miss Retcham examined it, and saw that it was indeed Joy's glove.

Mrs. Mitford patted Tinker and congratulated him, then turned to the governess.

"I congratulate you, too, Miss Retcham! Very smart little fellow! How ever did you teach him the trick?"

Miss Retcham had no idea that Tinker knew any tricks.

"Oh, well, he's a smart dog!" she said, as she saw a dozen people petting and praising Tinker. "He can shut the door, and do various tricks. By kindness any animal can be taught."

"But why isn't Joy here?" asked Mrs. Mitford. "Poor Joy doesn't seem to get much fun!"

"Oh, she isn't detained?" asked someone else.

"Why couldn't she have shown him?"

"Poor child!"

Miss Retcham, her cheeks pink, realised that she had lost the sympathy of the crowd. She had reported Nakita unfairly, and now had to produce a dog licence herself; and, also, everyone thought that it was harsh treatment that Joy should have been left at home.

"Er—Joy is coming in a few minutes!" she said. "I will telephone for her. She had better bring the dog licence."

Nakita's eyes shone.

"No need ter phone, lidy," she said. "I can tell Miss Joy. She'll be glad ter know about Slinker—"

"Slinker?" exclaimed Miss Retcham, and gave a penetrating glare at Tinker. "But I thought—"

Nakita created a diversion by fluttering her hands at great speed. She did not want Miss Retcham to do any thinking at the moment, for the governess could only think of one thing eventually, and that was the startling truth—that Tinker and Slinker were one and the same dog.

"Slinker—Tinker! All the same, lidy," she said carelessly. "Tinker slinks about, yer know. My little joke. Haw, haw, haw!"

There was a ripple of amusement from the onlookers. Miss Retcham turned pink, and a sudden revulsion at the idea of this uncouth gipsy girl calling upon Joy made her shiver.

"Er—I think I will telephone, after all," she said abruptly, and strode away.

There was only one thing for Nakita to do, of course—get back to the Gables as soon as possible.

"Please, lidy, look after Miss Joy's dawg, would you?" she asked one of Miss Retcham's acquaintances.

"Dear me—really I—" the lady began to protest, and then she ended with a flustered, "Good gracious me!"

For Tinker, at a sign from his mistress, had leaped up, planted himself in the lady's lap, and curled up as though intending to stay there for the rest of the afternoon.

"Thank you kindly, ma'am," said Nakita.

Then she sped away just as fast as she could anxiety urging her on towards her home, for if a search for her was started, as a result of Miss Retcham's telephone call, and she was found to be missing, there might be no end of trouble.

"Oh dear!" she sighed.

But there was no need for alarm. When she crept in by the servants' staircase the house was as peaceful as usual, and, reaching her room, she started to change.

She was in time to hear the maid asking for her and to receive the summons to the hall from Miss Retcham. So, as herself, ten minutes later, she went down to the dog show, and there heard of Tinker's triumph, and received congratulations.

And because Tinker had triumphed, and because she herself basked in the reflected glory, Miss Retcham decided not to comment on the fact that Tinker had been loaned to Nakita for the afternoon. Least said soonest mended!

But Tinker was happy, and Boko, who felt partly responsible, was delighted, too. But Joy Sharpe was the most pleased of all. Despite the presence of her governess, she enjoyed the rest of the afternoon to the full.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

OUR lovable harum-scarum will be here again next Saturday, as full of fun and frolic as ever. You simply must make sure of meeting her. Order you copy well in advance.



NOT *the* GIRL
SHE SEEMED

"Topping sport!"

"First-rate!"

"Nicest new girl for years!"

"Simply adores Babs!"

"Wouldn't hurt her biggest
enemy!"

Those are some of the opinions Cliff House School holds about Faith Ashton, the cousin of Barbara Redfern. For Faith has already become a firm favourite there. Soon she is to win even greater admiration by her generosity and sympathy towards Babs' dearest friend, Mabel Lynn.

But—Faith is a puzzle, an enigma. At times her secret thoughts and actions are so different from what one would expect. And, as you will see next week, despite her apparent eagerness to help Mabel Lynn, one or two strange things take place; things which cause Barbara to suspect that her cousin is *not*, after all, *the girl she seemed*. Don't miss this wonderful HILDA RICHARDS STORY. Now is the time to order your copy of—

THE SCHOOLGIRL

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AT SCHOOL IN THE SOUTH SEAS



FOR NEW READERS.

NORMA LANGTON, bright spark of St. Wanda's School, on holiday with a party of the girls and two mistresses, is wrecked on a tropical island. With her are her chums,

BELINDA MALTRAVERS, pretty but dull, and

KIT TURNER. While gathering fruit they come upon a little native girl,

TALIA, whose father is chief of the island. Her father insists that she joins the school. As a rival for the chieftainship insists that his daughter joins also, the school splits in two, with

MISS CHATTERTON, an unpleasant mistress, in charge of one section. To please the bushman father of the other native girl,

BORKI, the chums pal up with her. A trader with a yacht arrives on the island. Borki's tribe capture him, but Norma & Co. capture her as a hostage!

(Now read on.)

An Ideal Prison!

"STOP, Norma! Come back!" So well-trained was Norma that when she heard her headmistress call she did stop, even though she knew that to go on was by far the best thing.

It was not easy to be openly defiant, even in a good cause, and when wisdom directed, for although this was a South Sea island, habit died hard. And Norma could not forget St. Wanda's and its discipline.

But Kit Turner was even more defiant and reckless.

"Oh, come on!" she said impatiently. "It's our last chance."

"The bushmen are coming," said Belinda fretfully. "Borki's father will be furious!"

The bushmen were not far away, but at the moment they were hurrying to the scene where the girls were digging for "treasure"—in other words, merely pretending.

But Norma knew that the bushmen would not loiter long. Borki might manage to call out—or, anyway, they might come in search of her.

It was a time for quick decision and instant action.

"We've got to do it," muttered Norma. "Come on, into the boat with her!"

And then, in direct defiance of the headmistress, as though they had not heard her, they hustled Borki along to the boat, carrying her between them, staggering under the burden.

Virginia, head prefect of St. Wanda's, stood paralysed, incredulous.

"Norma, you heard me?" gasped Miss Manders.

Then she turned to Virginia; but the prefect was already hurrying down to the water's edge.

But Norma, Kit and Belinda had just reached the boat, and they bundled Borki in. Even as Virginia arrived, Norma pushed the boat over the coral.

Virginia caught her arm, and Norma, instead of wresting free, allowed herself to be pulled back.

"Virginia, you don't understand!" she said desperately.

"I understand that you are defying Miss Manders."

The Yacht That Could Rescue the Castaways is Captured by Their Biggest Enemy!

"I've got to; it's the only way," insisted Norma.

Kit and Belinda had the boat in the water now.

"Very well, Norma," said Virginia angrily. "I can only say that I am bitterly disappointed. You cannot be given lines—in fact, I don't see that we can give you any real punishment. But for you to take advantage of the fact is mean."

Norma coloured deeply.

"Virginia, I don't mean it in that way," she protested.

"Whichever way you mean it—Ah!" the prefect broke off. "Here are the bushmen."

She turned, and Norma drew back towards the water. But the bushmen, looking about them, failed to see Borki, and hurried off.

They would not be gone long, however, and Norma, splashing through the surf, reached the boat and scrambled on to it.

"Norma! My goodness! Suppose a shark had got you!" gasped Belinda.

"It didn't, that's all," said Norma lightly. "Come on, row as hard as we can!"

Borki, her head muffled in the blanket in which it had been wrapped since her capture, tried to call out, but she could not manage a sound loud enough to attract the attention of her tribe.

It did not take the girls long to reach the yacht, which lay at anchor. The native boys had deserted it, and now, despoiled of its cargo, it rode up and down on the waves.

There was a rope ladder down the side, and Norma climbed it, and then

from the deck gave her friends a hand up with the bush girl.

Borki wriggled and struggled until she realised that the water was just below, and that a fall would mean she would go in with her ankles still tied.

Her fear of the sharks that infested these waters was in itself sufficient spur for her to help herself climb aboard, and presently she was on deck.

"Not a sound!" said Norma sternly. "We're standing no nonsense!"

There was something so grim about Norma at this moment, Borki was quite awed. She did not realise that a more kind-hearted girl did not exist.

But affairs were desperate, and Norma had need to be firm.

"Now, listen, Borki," she said, "and try to understand. We don't want to hurt you, but you and your bush people have stolen our friend Talia. You have also stolen the man who owns this yacht."

"White man him alonga you," said

By
**ELIZABETH
CHESTER**

Kit, to make it easier. "Talia, her alonga you. Come back, and you go back alonga own people."

"So do be reasonable," added Belinda. "We didn't want to kidnap you. We have never kidnapped anyone before, have we, Norma?" she added.

"Never," said Norma. "But it's tit-for-tat. As soon as your people return Talia and the white man, you can go back. Not until."

They carried Borki below, and then, to make sure that she did not escape, they tied her hands behind her back with some cord taken from the yacht's little saloon.

Borki seemed to be quite helpless, but they put her on the bed with a pillow at her back, so that she was not too uncomfortable.

"One of us ought to stay," murmured Belinda anxiously.

"You stay, then," said Kit, "or I will. I have a penny; let's toss."

"Heads," said Belinda. It was tails.

"You stay," decided Kit, with a smile. "And if you need help, yell. There's a cabin, and there's water and some books. You won't do too badly."

Belinda looked at the saloon, and decided that she could be quite comfortable there, or even sunbathing on the deck would be pleasant.

"I shall like it," she said.

Norma and Kit returned to the small boat and went ashore, finding the camp in uproar when they arrived.

The bushmen had insisted on digging for the supposed treasure, and, coming upon coral, had stopped work. Then they had searched for Borki.

Naturally, no one had given a hint as to where she was, and even if they spoke

about it, not a word could be understood.

Miss Manders, fearful lest the bushmen might go to the yacht and capture the girls, insisted that no one looked in that direction.

"Borki?" said her father, looking right and left, marching to and fro. "Borki?"

Miss Manders walked up to Norma as she landed, her face dark with anger.

"Norma, you have behaved foolishly, crazily! What do you propose to do now? You have got us all into this difficult situation, and I want to know how you propose to get us out of it."

Norma answered in low tone.

"We've got to demand the release of the white man, that's all, Miss Manders," she said. "And, of course, Talia."

"But these savages cannot understand English! How absurd you are, Norma!"

Norma was not as absurd as the headmistress supposed; for Borki's father understood a few words of English, and at least he knew Talia's name.

As he advanced, calling Borki in a loud, guttural voice, Norma went up to him.

"Talia?" she said in inquiring tone.

The bushman stared at her.

"Talia?" he echoed, and shook his head.

Norma answered him in the same way.

"Borki?" she said, and shook her head.

The bushman gave a start, and his brows narrowed.

"Borki!" he repeated angrily.

"Talia!" said Norma firmly.

The little ugly bushman stood staring at her, then, tickling his left ear in thought, he turned and muttered to one of his followers.

"Talia come—Borki come," said Norma. "No Talia—no Borki. No white man—no Borki."

Borki's father turned to his men and shouted a few words that were quite unintelligible to Norma or any of the other castaways.

But it appeared to be a word of command, for suddenly they all turned and hurried away.

"Gone!" said Norma. "Miss Manders—it's worked! They've gone for Talia and the white man!"

"Perhaps so, perhaps not," retorted Miss Manders. "We are taking no chances. Every girl is to go into the huts and stay there. If the bushmen return, you will not come out. This time, Norma, I shall handle things my way!"

"Yes, Miss Manders," said Norma weakly.

"And when we return to St. Wanda's—if we ever do," said Miss Manders, "I shall consider seriously the matter of allowing you to remain."

Norma was silent. She had done as she thought best. It was hard to think that if it failed she must take the blame.

But if it succeeded, then Talia would be returned—and with her the white trader, owner of the yacht, their one key to freedom!

Plenty of Excitement!

MISS CHATTERTON, in high dudgeon, furious that Norma should have been allowed her way, was returning to the camp when the bushmen made for home.

"Stop!" cried Miss Chatterton.

The bushmen, hearing the shout, came to a halt, and Borki's father advanced to the mistress grimly.

"Uhuh-ough," he grunted.

BETWEEN OURSELVES



MY DEAR READERS,—My niece, Claudine, has asked me to go for a ride in her new car. A little while ago you may remember I told you I was buying her a pair of gloves for Christmas—which she has now duly and very gratefully received—and promised I would one day tell you about the very first car ride I had with her. Well, here the story is—in all its adventurous glory.

"Uncle," Claudine announced, as we set off, with my niece at the wheel, "I'm going to keep away from all the main roads. They're far too crowded. I know some topping little short cuts and by-ways that you'll love. They'll be far nicer."

They were. I must give Claudine credit for that. They were full of old-world charm, of peace and solitude. An occasional cottage, of course, and now and again an odd person, but of other cars, or even bicycles or hikers—not a glimpse.

"Enjoying it, uncle?" Claudine suddenly asked.

"Rather," I told her. "Grand!" Then I started, as my niece, twisting the wheel, cut through an open gateway into the narrowest lane we had yet seen.

"Here, I say!" I exclaimed. "There's a notice—PRIVATE RO-RO—"

I couldn't finish. The notice had exaggerated too much. It wasn't a road; it was a winding, snake-like track, full of drying potholes, wheel-ruts and bumps. A non-stop joggiting left me breathless, nearly lifted me out of my seat, and made my teeth rattle.

Finally, during a lull in the storm, I managed a gasping:

"I say, are you sure this is all right, my dear? It said—"

"Quite all right," Claudine cried confidently. "Been down here lots of times. It's a bit bumpy, I know, but ever so quiet. You never meet a soul—oh, my gug-goodness!"

For, rounding our tenth bend in two hundred yards, we came face to face with a herd of cows!

With a little squeal, Claudine jammed on the brakes and the car lurched to a standstill. Cows, with resentful and envious eyes, swarmed all round us. We seemed to be in a sea of them.

"Hoi, there!" roared a voice from the distance. "This be private property. Get ye back t'other way!"

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

Oh, yes, it was the farmer. And we were on his private road. But neither I nor Claudine fancied trying to back around all those corners to the other road, so, spotting a gate in the hedge, I pointed.

"In there, my dear! The buffers at the back of the car will knock the gate open."

"But—but—" Claudine began.

"Don't argue, there's a good girl!" I begged. "Back into the field!"

With a sort of resigned sigh, my niece did so. Good, I thought, as the cows were shepherded past, and the farmer drew level. Then, chancing to glance behind me, I blinked. Tearing across the field towards us was the largest, most ferocious bull I have ever seen!

"Quick! A bull! Into the lane again!" I gasped.

And into the lane we lurched.

There was no danger, really, for the farmer soon pacified the animal and then, closing the gate, proved himself quite a sport.

"Didn't ye see the notice, 'Private Road'?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. I did," I said, trying not to seem at all smug about it. The smile I directed at my niece was favoured with one equally as bland.

"And I saw the notice, 'Beware of the Bull' just to the side of that gate," said Claudine, sweetly. "So we're quits!"

Quits we were! Now I'm wondering exactly what sort of drive I'm going to have this time!

What do you think of the first story in the

FAITH ASHTON SERIES.

Simply lovely, isn't it? And how strange that out of all the Cliff House girls there is only one who dislikes the charming newcomer; stranger still, that it is Bessie Bunter who doubts Faith's sincerity and wonders if she is all she appears to be.

The next story in this magnificent series deals with ice skating and brings Mabel Lynn to the fore. And it also shows how Babs has reason to believe that dear old Bessie might be right, after all, about her cousin. A story in a thousand, girls. Hilda Richards at her best. Don't miss it.

And don't miss any of our other topping features; further instalments of our two enthralling serials, another delightful COMPLETE "Gipsy Joy" story, more of Pat's Bright and Useful pages, another popular Cliff House Celebrity and—thrilling surprise!—full particulars of a wonderful new serial which will commence the week after next!

Au revoir for the moment, then. With best wishes to you all,

Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.



NORMA, looking towards the shore, suddenly gave a cry. "It's Talia—she's free! Look!" she cried. Racing towards them came their native chum, with a crowd of bushmen in the distance.

"You are looking for your daughter?" said Miss Chatterton coldly.

"Borki?" said the bushman. "Where am I?"

"I must warn you," Miss Chatterton continued, "that you cannot hold white people prisoners. I demand the instant return of the white trader, Mr. Nichols."

Borki's father grunted.

"You are not as stupid as you pretend," said Miss Chatterton, in her most cutting, contemptuous tone. "No living creature could be, even though your brow is so low as to suggest complete absence of brain, and your eyes are almost completely devoid of any kind of expression."

It was fortunate that the bushman could not understand English.

"Uhuh!" he grunted.

"You are untidy, dirty, and stupid," said Miss Chatterton. "And you do not terrify or intimidate me in the very least. Understand this. Very shortly a British dreadnought will arrive, and when the bluejackets land they will show you no mercy."

Where the dreadnought was coming from Miss Chatterton did not say, but the girls could hear her voice, and, despite Miss Manders' commands, they drew near to listen.

"Hark!" said Norma. "Chatty dressing them down."

"If only we could record it on a gramophone," sighed Phyllis Watts.

Miss Chatterton's voice came again.

"Return the white man instantly. Send bakka da white man," said Miss Chatterton. "Bring him bakko."

It was her idea of pidgin English.

"Borki," said the bushman, and tapped his chest.

He waved a thin stick in his hand, and Miss Chatterton drew back. But, suddenly aware that the girls were watching, she braced herself.

"Give me that stick," she said.

She held out her hand for it; for Miss Chatterton had a theory that a commanding tone of voice used to simple people brought instant obedience.

For this once at least her theory worked well.

When she held out her hand, Borki's father gave her the stick. He gave it in the traditional schoolmaster manner.

Suddenly whisking it down, he smote Miss Chatterton's outstretched hand with all his might.

The mistress let out a sharp cry; and, like a schoolboy, pressed her hand and tucked it under her armpit.

From the St. Wanda girls came an uncontrollable peal of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The bushman, beaming all over his face, gave a cackle of laughter, in which his fellows joined. Then, still yelping with mirth, they disappeared into the jungle.

Miss Chatterton, livid with rage, strode towards the girls.

"You are shameless! Is there anything amusing in my being struck on the hand by a stupid, brainless savage, little better than an animal?" she demanded.

Most of the girls seemed to think there was, even though they had no wish for the mistress to be hurt. But Miss Chatterton, so scornful and triumphant, could do with a lesson of that kind—so most of the girls believed.

"I never wish to see or speak to any of you again," said the mistress, in shaking temper—"never!"

She turned, tripped over a trailing root, and fell on all fours.

It was not funny, perhaps, but the girls, highly strung by the exciting events, giggled and gurgled in helpless laughter.

Even when they turned and found Miss Manders behind them they could not control themselves, though they tried to, out of respect for her.

"Girls, girls!" implored the headmistress. "Please remember that Miss Chatterton is a mistress, deserving of respect."

Norma pulled herself together and nudged Kit, who straightened her face and managed to keep her lips from twitching.

"You, Norma, I regard as the ring-leader. I think you had better go away from the others," said Miss Manders.

"You are a disturbing influence. Once discipline goes, we are lost."

Norma said nothing. She did not want to argue; and she felt guilty because she had defied the headmistress. But she still believed that what she had done had been for the best.

It was hard to be idle when there was so much at stake; but Norma could do nothing useful at the moment. Everything depended on the bushmen.

"Perhaps we could all go for a bathe, Miss Manders?" she said.

At that moment, one of the girls who had wandered near the water's edge gave an excited shout:

"Turtles!"

There was a rush of girls at once to the spot, and a large turtle which had climbed ashore went slowly back into the water.

"A real turtle," said Kit. "What fun! Natives ride on them, you know."

"It's big enough," agreed Norma. "Look! Another one over there!"

It seemed odd to the girls that the turtles should be there in their natural state, even though they knew that this was where they lived. Usually such creatures were seen only in zoos, and the girls were thrilled.

"Oh, for a camera—"

"Do let's try to ride one!"

"What do they eat?"

No one knew much about them, but that only made the spectacle all the more interesting, and Kit, always daring, waded into the water to get a better view.

The turtles were friendly enough, but did not come when called, so Kit paddled in the surf, and, despite Miss Manders' admonishments, managed to get astride one.

"Come on, Steve!" she urged, amidst laughter.

There was a struggle among the girls then to ride the others.

It was not cruelty to the turtles; for they were able to support the girls, floating in the water, without hardship. Natives often rode races on them, and the girls were eager to try the trick.

So near to the shore there was no danger from sharks, and the worst that could happen was a tumble in the water.

Miss Manders, realising that she could not intervene, and that, anyway, no harm was being done, walked back from the shore.

"Virginia, cannot you assemble the girls for lessons?" she asked. "It is the only way we shall ever regain discipline."

"I'll try," said Virginia, with a grimace. "But I think they'd rather play with the turtles."

As Virginia drew near, other girls splashed into the surf, and Virginia, knowing when she was beaten, drew back.

Norma, about to capture a turtle, looked out to sea. And instantly her interest in the turtle-riding vanished. For, a hundred yards or so from the shore, a canoe was making for the yacht.

"Who's in it?" gasped Norma. "Look!"

They all looked, and a shout went up:

"Miss Chatterton!"

The mistress, though paddling inexpertly, was now not far from the yacht.

"What's she going to do?" asked Norma, in dismay. "Not set Borki free?"

"Surely not," said Kit, in dismay.

But at that moment Norma chanced to look towards the shore, and she gave a cry of delight:

"My golly! Talia, she's free!"

There, running ahead of a crowd of bushmen, came Talia, waving excitedly.

Freedom in the Balance!

"TALIA—Talia! Oh, how glad I am to see you, dear!" said Norma. "And none the worse!"

"Me—no," said Talia, her eyes sparkling. "Ah, how I am happy, dear Norma! It is good—yes. The bushmen they came after me, but now they go."

Norma saw that Talia was right. The bushmen were standing some distance off.

Miss Manders, amazed to see her, welcomed her effusively.

"You take along Borki?" asked Talia excitedly. "Keep her—yes?"

"Yes. Did her father say that?" said Norma.

"He understood. He make me free. Now he want Borki."

"He can have her," said Norma. "As soon as the trader is free, too."

Miss Manders smiled at Norma.

"I fear I was wrong. Your plan, strange though it seemed, succeeded admirably. And if Millicent's uncle is also set free, we have nothing more to worry about."

"Millicent—how she is?" asked Talia.

"Millicent is being looked after, and is as well as can be expected. I found some chlorodyne, and that has helped," said Miss Manders.

"Glad," said Talia simply. "White man not here?" she added.

"No. Are they bringing him?" Norma asked eagerly.

But Talia did not know the answer to that, having hurried away soon as free, eager to be back with the girls.

"Me should waited," she said guiltily.

"Oh, you couldn't have done anything, really!" said Norma kindly.

"You've done all you could, Talia. Thank goodness they haven't got you still! Anyway, we still have Borki, and we shall jolly well keep her, too, until the old bushman sets the trader free."

Talia's eyes glimmered in a mischievous way, and Norma knew that she was pleased to think that her old enemy was now a prisoner.

There was no love lost between the two natives. And Talia had Norma's full sympathy for her intense dislike of Borki.

"Keep Borki all time," said Talia. "Not let go. Borki bad. Borki make bad trouble."

But Miss Manders did not approve.

"I am not at all sure that we are justified in keeping Borki now that you are freed, Talia," she said. "A bargain is a bargain, and we must keep our word. The British are renowned throughout the whole civilised world for that. And although we are now far from the seat of Empire, we must keep the Union Jack aloft."

Norma made a grunting sound. For although she believed in keeping her word, she saw no sense in freeing Borki until the trader had been returned.

"We didn't promise to free Borki—not until his prisoners were free. He has only freed Talia, Miss Manders."

"I am aware of that, Norma. And I shall insist upon the trader being freed."

Miss Manders then walked down to the beach.

"What are you going to do, Miss Manders?" Norma asked.

At school in England she would not have dared to ask. She would have expected a snub; but now, oddly enough, she did not mind if she were snubbed. For she did not feel at all as she had done in England.

"Miss Manders, if we give back Borki, the bushman will keep the trader. I'm sure he will."

"Silence, Norma! Please allow me to deal with this matter," said Miss Manders. "Crude though this bushman may be, he will appreciate that we keep our word and trust us."

Then, arriving at the coral beach, where the surf rolled up, she cupped her hands and called to the yacht.

But no reply came from either

Miss Chatterton—now vanished—or Belinda.

"Norma—get the boat. We will go to the yacht," she said.

Norma shot a look at Kit and Talia, and whispered softly:

"No freeing Borki!"

Miss Manders could not hear for the roar of the surf, and Norma, with Kit and Talia, went to the boat. Ordinarily the headmistress would request Virginia to accompany her, but Talia was needed for her knowledge of watercraft, and Norma had more influence with her than the headmistress herself had. Talia was shy with her, and as she would have to speak to Borki, and interpret, Norma would be a help.

Talia managed the small ship's boat well, and Norma and Kit helped, while Miss Manders, looking as alarmed as she felt, sat in the stern.

The small boat rode the rollers well; but it went up and down in a sickening manner that held the headmistress silent.

Miss Chatterton made her presence known, however, by a sudden, desperate cry.

"Help!"

A moment later they saw her on deck, waving wildly.

"My golly! What's happened?" breathed Kit.

"It's Borki!" answered Norma, in dismay. "I can hear her voice."

"But she's tied up," said Kit.

"Unless—phew! Has she got free? Surely Belinda wasn't duffer enough to let her get free?"

Talia, standing up, called shrilly in her own language, and they heard Borki yell an answer.

With alarm, Talia looked at Norma and translated.

"Borki is not tied," she said. "She go push Miss Chatterton from yacht!"

"Into the sea?" gasped the headmistress.

The girls pulled at the oars with all their strength, but the small boat drew nearer to the yacht at a sadly slow speed.

They could hear Miss Chatterton's angry shouts more clearly, and it was obvious that there was a struggle in progress.

The mistress could swim, but the sea was shark-infested, and who knew what her fate might be if she went overboard.

"Climb over, Miss Chatterton!" shouted Norma. "Climb over—we're coming!"

Better to climb into the canoe than to be pushed into the sea.

Then Miss Chatterton's shrill reply came:

"Borki is going to take the yacht to sea!"

Norma, as she heard that, gave a startled cry.

"My goodness—it's not on its mooring! She's cast it off!"

Borki, freed by kindhearted Belinda, had made her warder a prisoner, and now was sending Miss Chatterton from the boat.

The mistress, abandoning all hope of victory in the struggle, climbed over the side, groped for the ladder, missed, and then, as the yacht rolled, splashed down into the sea!

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