

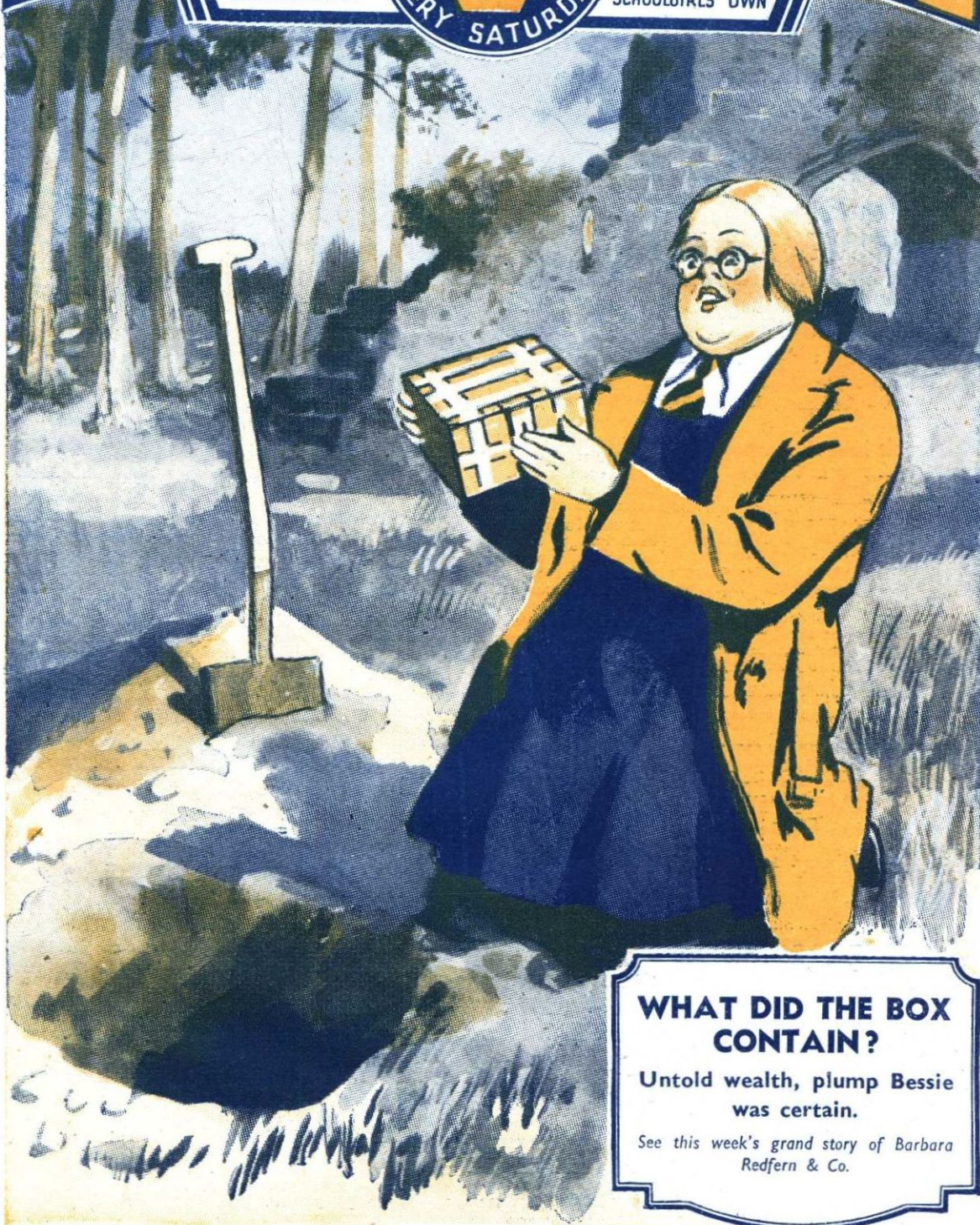
"BESSIE BUNTER'S TREASURE!" Delightful LONG COMPLETE
Cliff House story inside.

THE SCHOOLGIRL

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SATURDAY

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WHAT DID THE BOX CONTAIN?

Untold wealth, plump Bessie
was certain.

See this week's grand story of Barbara
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Fascinating LONG COMPLETE Cliff House School story featuring Barbara Redfern & Co.—



BESSIE BUNTER'S

Bessie's Lone Adventure!



"HAVE to get along," Barbara Redfern said anxiously.

"You're right, Babs," agreed her golden-haired chum, Mabel Lynn. "There's some stormy weather blowing up. Buck up, old Bess!"

"Old Bess," otherwise Elizabeth Gertrude Bunter, of the Fourth Form at Cliff House School, blinked up resentfully at her two study-mates.

"But look here, you know, I've only just started my tea!" she protested.

"Well, so have we all, old rolypoly-skin!" said Leila Carroll. "But I guess that doesn't mean we can stop to finish it. Look at the weather!"

Plump Bessie, from the luscious plate of prawns she was eating, cast a glance towards the window, by which stood Marjorie Hazeldene and Tomboy Clara Trevlyn.

The window belonged to the Ferry Tea-rooms at Sarmouth, and Sarmouth was a good five miles, as the crow flies, from Cliff House School, to which this party of six girls, all members of the school's Fourth Form, belonged.

And certainly the view from that window was not very reassuring. Perched on the rocky headland which overlooked the spot where the River Sark flowed into the English Channel, it was obvious, even to unweather-wise Bessie, that a storm was blowing up.

Very worrying that, in the circumstances. Had those circumstances been normal, Barbara Redfern & Co. would not have cared a jot. But down on the beach there was the boat which some ninety minutes earlier they had

hired from a fisherman in Pegg, and they were responsible for returning that boat in safe and sound condition before the afternoon was out.

"Apart from that, since the journey back had to be made by water, they were hardly anxious to get caught in a storm at sea.

"Bessie, come on!" gentle Marjorie Hazeldene urged anxiously.

Bessie, however, did not come on. Bessie was hungry. Someone—not Bessie—had paid for the food which was now spread before her, and Bessie just loathed the thought of leaving that tempting feed behind.

Apart from that, the plump one, who

in the world would the possessor of the biggest appetite at Cliff House be persuaded to leave that feed; they knew it. And, as it happened, perhaps it was just as well.

Bessie, lovable old chump as she was, might be rather inclined to make herself a nuisance on the homeward trip—especially if the sea was choppy. Barbara fished in her handbag.

"There we are—a shilling," she said.

"Oh, really, Babs, you—you might make it half-a-crown," Bessie said. "You know I'll let you have it as soon as my next postal order comes."

"A shilling!" repeated the Fourth Form captain firmly. She had been

Bessie the mysterious. Bessie the secretive. Bessie making the most staggering promises. Bessie even talking grandly about buying Cliff House School itself! No wonder everyone wondered, simply baffled by the amazing behaviour of the Fourth Form's plump duffer!

was not a good sailor, did not like the look of the sea.

"Oh rats! I'm not going!" she said.

"But, Bessie, we may be caught in a storm if we wait," Babs urged.

"No, we won't," Bessie retorted, and looked with hungry eyes at her plate of prawns again. "I suppose you can go without me?" she asked.

"Well, yes. But how are you going to get back?"

"Oh, bus," Bessie said carelessly.

"The bus comes along in half an hour, you know. As long as you lend me the money for my fare—just a loan, of course," she added hastily.

The chums glanced at each other. It was obvious that Bessie meant to dig herself in. Not for all the boat trips

deceived too often in the past by Bessie's fabulous postal orders. "Come on, kidlets! Don't get caught in the storm, Bessie."

"Oh, don't worry!" Bessie said loftily. "So long, girls!"

She waved a dismissing hand. Without troubling to watch the departure of her chums, she fell hungrily once more upon the prawns. Yum! They were fine! So was this ripping bread-and-butter! And there was jam to follow, and cakes, and that half meringue which Marjorie had left, to say nothing of the salad sandwiches which Leila had been unable to eat.

Bessie beamed. Lovely!

In record time the prawns disappeared, bread-and-butter with them.

—and Bessie Bunter, lovable “duffer” of the school.



The meringue followed, then the sandwiches, then the cakes—and Bessie paused.

“Hem!” she muttered.

Jolly nice! But she was still hungry. The flavour of those delicious prawns, despite all that had succeeded them, still lingered. How she could love another plate—just one other—but prawns and bread-and-butter were a shilling a portion.

“Oh crumbs!” Bessie muttered dolefully.

She glanced at the window again. The wind was still rising, though, to be sure, no rain was as yet falling.

Bessie felt for the shilling which Babs had lent her for her bus fare home. She hesitated—and then fell! Well, blow the old storm! Probably there wouldn't be a storm. Anyway, she had her umbrella, hadn't she? And, after all, she must keep herself nourished.

Acting on an impulse she knew was wrong, but which, for the life of her, Bessie found it impossible to resist, she summoned the waitress.

“More prawns, please,” she ordered grandly.

“Yes, miss!”

The prawns came. They tasted even better than the first lot. How lovely another plateful would have gone down!

Still, there it was! Prawns were gone! Money was gone! No sense in stopping on.

Bessie sighed and caught up her umbrella.

Or at least she caught up the umbrella she had brought from Cliff House. It wasn't her own. Bessie, in a hurry, had snatched the first one that came to hand from the stand in Big Hall.

With an apprehensive blink outside, she buttoned up her coat.

“Good-afternoon, miss,” the waitress said.

“Good afternoon!” Bessie stuttered. She strutted out as the waitress held open the door. Then she gasped as a tearing gust of wind came rushing round the corner, making a balloon of her macintosh, and almost carrying away her thick spectacles. With it came the first huge spots of rain.

“Oh, mum-my hat!” Bessie spluttered.

Too late she regretted the spending of that last shilling.

She hurried off up the street, taking the path that led through the golf links to the bridge.

Darker and darker became the sky. Then, with a rush, the rain descended.

“Oh, kik-crums!” Bessie stuttered. She struggled with her umbrella; with difficulty she got it open, and, holding it in front of her face, pressed on.

Like a fusillade of peas the rain rattled on its fine silk cover, almost halting Bessie in spite of her most desperately persevering efforts to make headway. Then—

“Whoa!” yelled Bessie.

There was a sudden crack and flap above her head. Bessie, clinging to the handle of the umbrella, found herself spun round in the sudden terrific gust of wind which hit her. Then the gust had passed.

And Bessie blinked. She blinked at the dancing broly still in her hand. She blinked in utter furious dismay. For that umbrella, alas, would never be the same again. The wind had not only blown it completely inside out, but had, at the same time, torn away quite a large slice of the cover.

Bessie looked at it and groaned.

“Oh crumbs! J-just look at that, you know,” she stuttered surprisedly.

No use looking at it, however. The

mischievous was done. Bessie, with an apprehensive vision of explaining away its shorn glory to its irate owner, dismayedly closed it again.

Head bent against the blast, she staggered on, using the umbrella as a walking-stick. She was soaked through now, more bitterly regretting with every hard-fought step the spending of that last shilling.

For a quarter of an hour she trudged, while the storm, so far from slackening, doubled in fury.

And then, at the side of the road, she saw Monk's Tower.

Bessie blinked at the tower—a tumble-down ruin of other days. Gaunt and grim amid a pile of its own debris it stood, a frowning monument of the past glories of the Middle Ages, when it had served as a watch-tower to the distant ruins of Monk's Folly.

Legend said that it had once been the haunt of smugglers, and in recent years an underground passage, which connected it with Smugglers' House, half a mile farther along the road, had been discovered.

Bessie's plump face brightened a little.

Well, anyway, inside the tower was dry. With a gasp of thankfulness, she hurried towards it, stepped over the debris in the doorway, and stumbled in.

Ah!

This was better! Here, at least, she was free from the blast of the storm.

She peered about her—at the shattered ceiling, the crumbling walls, at the little trickles of water which were making rivulets down them.

Then Bessie noticed, near the farther side of the wall, a spot where the debris had been cleared away from five flagstones. They stood out like an island of calm among the confusion of the debris. She tottered towards them.

Suddenly she halted with a gasp of fright.

What was that? Outside the storm raged; the wind whistled and the rain made a ceaseless hiss as it fell. But it was no storm-sound which had caught Bessie's ear. It was a sound from inside.

Visions of ghosts, goblins, and witches rushed into Bessie's vivid mind at once.

**By
HILDA RICHARDS**

Illustrated by T. LAIDLER.

She trembled, starting back, and then for the second time stood paralysed. For the middle flagstone in the space that had been cleared—

Look at it! It was moving!

Slowly, with a grinding sound, the huge flagstone was slipping back, disclosing a dark square aperture, illuminated faintly by a yellow glow from below. And then—

“Wow!” howled Bessie. For out of that hole had suddenly shot up a face.

The face was that of a man. He stared at Bessie. For a moment he seemed about to duck back into his hole, and then, as if thinking better of it, scrambled out. While Bessie, terrified out of her wits, goggled at him, he came towards her.

“Missy!” he said.

“Wow! Help!” Bessie howled.

“Missy!” He was before her, was gripping her arm. And Bessie, reassured by the warm and human pressure of his fingers, stared up into his

face. "No, don't be afraid," he said. "What are you doing here?"

"Oh kik-crumps!" Bessie stuttered. "I thuth-thought you were a ghost!"

"Rather a solid ghost, eh?" The man smiled. He had a black moustache and a rather blue chin, and in the midst of those dark surroundings his teeth gleamed with unnatural whiteness. "I frightened you, eh?" he said. "I am sorry. But what are you doing here?"

Bessie blinked. She had recovered her nerve then. The man looked like a gipsy, she thought—and she remembered suddenly that it was on her own school's property on which the ruin stood. Rather indignantly she said:

"I don't see you have the right to question me, you know. This ruin belongs to my school. Anyway, I'm only sheltering. What are you doing?"

The man looked taken aback at that question. Then suddenly there was another interruption. Out of the hole in the floor popped another face, giving Bessie, for a moment, the most frightful turn.

This time, however, it was a woman who levered herself out of the hole. Dark and swarthy like the man, she was, and dressed in a colourful, if cheap-looking, striped frock. She looked sharply from the man to the girl.

"Michael, what is this?" she asked. "Just a girl," the man answered, "sheltering from the storm. She says she belongs to the school. She says this is her school's property."

"Ah!" the woman said.

"Yes rather, you know. And you've no jolly right to go digging up the floor like that!" Bessie said indignantly. "I've a jolly good mind to report you to the Board of Governors, you know, scaring a girl like that! If I hadn't been a jolly plucky girl, with the courage of a lion, I mum-might have dud-died of heart failure or something."

"We are sorry," the woman said gently, and again there passed between her and the man a glance—uneasy, significant, warning! "We are sorry," she repeated soothingly. "Not for worlds would we have had this happen. But—" She paused, studying Bessie. "There is no one with you?"

"No, but—" "You look a clever girl," the woman said, and Bessie simpered a little. "You look the sort of girl who could keep a secret."

"Well, I am, you know," Bessie said. "I'm just the soul of discre-dis-tinct, you know. But what's that to do with this?"

"You look the sort of girl who would know what to do with money—much money! So much that you would be rich for life!"

Bessie blinked. "Money," the woman went on, steadily regarding her, "that would make your wildest dreams come true. Money for a new house, new motor-cars, servants! Money so that you could give your friends all and everything their hearts desired!"

Bessie gulped. What on earth was the woman talking about?

"Well, who—who wouldn't?" she said feebly. "But I still don't see—"

"Then listen," the woman cried, and caught at Bessie's arm. "Michael, I have decided," she said, turning to the man, "this girl shall share our secret. This girl shall be our helper and our mascot. Girl, tell me your name."

"Bub-Bessie Bunter," Bessie stuttered in alarm. "But—"

"Mine is Anna Smith. This is my husband, Michael Smith. Sit down, Bessie Bunter! Now listen to me, and

mark well my words. This afternoon you have stumbled upon our secret. It is only fair, therefore, that you should share that secret."

"But—but—" Bessie muttered uneasily.

"You have heard of the treasure of Red Rufus?" the woman asked.

Bessie looked at her. Bessie had heard of many treasures. There were several treasure legends connected with Cliff House and the surrounding countryside. And there were many other treasures Bessie had read about in books.

Red Rufus was certainly a new one, however.

"Red Rufus was a pirate," Anna Smith went on. "He roved the Spanish Main. With thousands and thousands of gold and silver pieces, and hundreds and hundreds of golden vessels, and stacks of jewels, he was wrecked off this coast some hundreds of years ago. You may have heard that he hid his vast treasure hereabouts?"

Bessie's face turned red with sudden excitement.

"Oh, dud-dear, and you mean thuth-that is what you're after?"

"That is it!" The woman spoke solemnly. "We have a clue to the treasure, Bessie Bunter. It lies here somewhere, concealed within these old walls. Some of it—just a little part—we have already found. Wait!" she added, standing up dramatically.

Bessie blinked. The man grinned at her, in friendly fashion. Down into the hole the woman disappeared. While Bessie wondered, her head in a whirl, she returned. She thrust out a hand towards Bessie, and Bessie caught in her breath as she saw what was in that hand. Gleaming, glittering, and round, a mound of silver coins held her gaze in fascinated awe.

"Oh, I sus-say!" she breathed. "You found those here?"

"Here," the woman said. "This is just the smallest portion, however. The rest remains to be found. You believe now?"

"Oh, rur-rather!"

"And if we share with you the treasure, when found, you will keep our secret? Remember, you are now a partner!"

Bessie could hardly speak then. She was aware of a sudden, choking excitement.

Treasure—and she to share! Treasure—so much that she would be rich—rich! Her eyes shone.

"But first," the woman said, "you shall take the vow. You will vow here and now not to say one single word about me, my husband, and the treasure, or of what you know. Not to your best friend, not even to your parents. You agree to that?"

"Oh, y-yes!" Bessie stuttered.

"Very well! Michael, take her hand. Now, Bessie Bunter, take mine. Now shut your eyes." And while Bessie, quivering, obeyed, the woman winked at Michael, who grinned back, showing his white teeth. "This is our vow," she said solemnly. "This vow, made between Bessie Bunter and myself, and Michael Smith. That from this moment we are partners; from this moment we promise to work together to find the treasure of Red Rufus, and when it is found, to share equally. If any of us breaks this vow, particularly Bessie Bunter, let her waste away and starve!"

Bessie shuddered.

"There!" the woman said. "Now we have done! Bessie Bunter, take this"—and she pressed upon astounded Bessie three of the silver coins. "Re-

member always the vow. Now you may go!"

"But, look here, you know, if I'm a partner, why don't you let me help?" Bessie asked. "And, anyway"—with a flash of suspicion—"how did you find out about the treasure?"

The woman paused. The man turned his face away.

"Because," she said, after a slight hesitation, "we found Red Rufus' chart."

"Well, where's the chart?" Bessie asked.

For a moment the woman looked non-plussed; but she rose to the occasion.

"Not always do we carry it," she replied. "It is too valuable; but to-morrow, Bessie Bunter, you shall see it. Look! The storm has passed! The sun is breaking through the clouds again. Come to-morrow," she said.

"Come in the afternoon, but beware—think always of the vow!"

"Y-yes," stuttered Bessie.

Remembering then that she would be late back at Cliff House, anyway, she snatched up her battered umbrella.

"Gig-good afternoon!" she said.

"Good afternoon, Bessie Bunter!"

The two watched her as she tramped from the ruins. Like a girl in a daze, Bessie trotted on. Treasure—the treasure of the Red Rufus! Treasure for her—thousands and thousands of pounds, perhaps! Oh crumbs, if only she could tell Babs about this! But she couldn't. The vow!

Was she dreaming?

She looked at the coins still clutched in her hand—three of them—round, heavy, solidly silver. And where they came from there would presently be hundreds and hundreds more, perhaps. Bessie glowed. She was rich—rich—

In the ruins the man and woman looked at each other. The man grinned.

"Anna, that was marvellous!" he said. "Never, never have I seen a bit of finer play-acting. Did she swallow it, do you think?"

"She swallowed it—yes!" the woman nodded. "The fool believes! And because she is terrified by the vow she will not say anything. It may have turned out ill for us had she gone babbling back at the school. As it is—"

—she smiled faintly—"we have made an ally! I think, Michael, we may find that fool useful if we use her the right way!"

"And the chart?"

"Do not worry. To-night I will fake such a chart as shall deceive that num-skull utterly."

Bessie the Mysterious!



"WELL, where the dickens can Bessie have got to?" Barbara asked worriedly.

"Jimmy, you're perfectly sure she hasn't come back?"

"As certain," pronounced that strange girl, Jemima Carstairs, cheerfully, "as I am that my monocle's made of glass, old Spartan. All afternoon have I stood here, in Big Hall, setting out this merry old case of prehistoric specimens for the school museum. During that time, beloved, I have seen many girls come and go, but one Elizabeth Gertie was not among them. 'Tis a mystery!"

It was a mystery. Already it was ten minutes to seven. At seven o'clock outer gates would be closed.

And the worst of it was that Miss Bullivant was asking for Bessie. Miss Bullivant, the sour-tempered maths

mistress of Cliff House, and duty-mistress to-day, wanted to know if the lines she had given Bessie yesterday had been done.

Babs frowned anxiously. Oh, the old chump! She wished now that she had insisted on Bessie coming back with her, although the return voyage to Pegg had been rather choppy. Fortunately, however, she and her chums had reached the cove just before the storm broke.

"Found her?" Mabel Lynn asked, coming into Big Hall.

"No, I can't understand it, Mabs."

"Certainly is funny," Mabs frowned. "Well, let's go down to the porter's lodge," Babs suggested. "If we can only keep old Piper engaged in bright conversation he may forget to close the gates, and that will give Bessie a few more minutes. Let's go and ask him how his rheumatism is. You know how—"

"That, Barbara," a tart voice interrupted, "is utterly unworthy of the captain of the Lower School." And while Babs, her jaw dropping, swivelled round, Miss Evelyn Bullivant stalked forward. "I understand your desire to protect your friend, but please remember that the porter also has his duties to carry out. Take twenty lines! Has Bessie not come in yet?"

"Oh dear! N-no, Miss Bullivant," Babs stammered.

"Oh!" Miss Bullivant stiffened a little. "Very well, I will wait for her. And I think, Barbara, that you had better wait with me. It is now," she added grimly, "four minutes to seven."

Babs gulped. Mabs, catching her glance, threw her a sympathetic look.

Jemima, still working on the case of Stone Age specimens she was preparing for the museum, sighed a little, and shook her sleek Eton crop forlornly. A few other girls collected in Big Hall stood around, awaiting the arrival of the duffer of the Fourth with interest.

Minutes ticked away. Seven o'clock chimed. No Bessie!

Two minutes past seven—three—four. Then suddenly there was a step at the door; a little excited whisper went round from girl to girl. A fat, rosy-red face beamed into Big Hall. A pair of grey eyes, magnified by thick-lensed spectacles, sparkled brightly.

"Babs!" cried Bessie eagerly. "Bib-Babs, I sus-say— Oh dear! Oh crumbs! Oh, hal-hallo, Miss Bullivant! Fuf-fancy seeing you, you know!" Bessie added feebly.

"And fancy," Miss Bullivant returned tartly, "seeing you at this disgraceful hour! Bessie, where have you been?"

"Well, I was caught in the stut-storm, you know!" Bessie answered guardedly. "Indeed?"

"Yes, indeed! And—and I had to shelter, you know—though, of course," Bessie added hurriedly, "I never sheltered in Monk's Tower. I wuw-wouldn't dream of sheltering in that horrid place! I shush-sheltered in a field, you know—a big field, with grass and cows and things in it!" she added desperately, seeing the sudden strange, alarming look on the mistress' face. "There was no harm in me sheltering in a fuf-field, was there?"

"Bessie," Miss Bullivant said queerly, "What is that you have in your hand?"

"Eh—what? Oh," Bessie gasped, "you mean this? It's an umbrella, Miss Bullivant—at least, it was," she amended, gazing with sad reluctance at the forlorn remnant of that article.

"That's the worst of these shoddy, cheap umbrellas, you know. They can't stand up to really bad weather. I shall speak severely to the girl I borrowed it from for letting me take it out, you

know! I was soaked!" Bessie said indignantly.

Miss Bullivant was gazing at the umbrella, with a most extraordinary expression on her face. Then she spoke in a choking sort of voice.

"Bessie Bunter, do you know whose umbrella that is?"

"Eh? Nun-no!" stammered Bessie. "I just took it from the hall-stand, you know; thuth—that is, of course, I borrowed it from Babs—I mum-mean, Mabs—"

"It is mine!" "Oh crumbs!" muttered Bessie dismayedly.

There was a chuckle. Even Babs, despite her anxiety for her chum, could not repress a smile. Bessie's knees knocked.

"Oh dud-dear!" she said. "I—I didn't know it was yours, Miss Bullivant. I thought it was Rosa's, you know, or some other cat's! I mum-mean, of course— Oh, I say, dud-don't look like that, you know!" she went on nervously. "You'll kik-crack your glasses or something; and if you crack your glasses—well, you—you'll jolly well crack them, you know!"

"Bessie!" shrieked Miss Bullivant.

"Oh, y-yes? I—I'm here, Miss Bullivant!"

"You dare—you dare—" Miss Bullivant choked. "Have you no respect for other people's property? This is my best—my very best—umbrella! And you"—she had difficulty in getting breath—"will pay for it! For your impudence in borrowing it without permission you will take one hundred lines! For coming in late you will be detained after lessons to-morrow! And—have you done the fifty lines I gave you yesterday?"

"Oh crumbs! Well, you see—"

"They are doubled!"

And Miss Bullivant whirled furiously away.

There was a moment's deathly silence as she disappeared. Bessie pathetically blinked.

"Oh crumbs! Hasn't she got a temper!" she groaned. "Fancy carrying on like that about a measly old umbrella, you know!"

"All the same," Mabs said grimly, "you've got to pay for it! And, by the looks of it," she added, "the repairs are going to cost you the best part of a pound note!"

"Well?" Bessie asked loftily. "Well what?"

"Well, who cares about that?" Bessie asked. "A pound note—phoo!" she added disdainfully. "What's a pound to a girl of my wealth and position? She can have fifty if she wants them!"

"Fifty?" stammered Babs.

"Well, a hundred!" Bessie said, with generous recklessness. "Five hundred if she likes! What's five hundred pounds to a rich girl like me?"

"Oh, don't burble!" Babs interjected. "Where have you been, cuckoo?"

But Bessie did not reply to that. She was remembering the vow!

"Well, where?" Mabs asked patiently.

"Only sheltering, you know," Bessie said loftily—"just sheltering."

"In Monk's Tower?" Babs asked.

"Eh?" Bessie looked startled. "Who said anything about Monk's Tower?"

"You did! You blurted it to Miss Bullivant."

"Oh crumbs! Dud-did I?" Bessie looked quite scared. "But I didn't mean Monk's Tower, of course!" she said. "How ridiculous! I mum-meant Monk's Folly!" she added, with a flash of inspiration; for Monk's Folly was nearly a mile from the tower. "Rur-rather jolly in Monk's Folly, isn't it?"

Babs stared at her. With its legends



MISS BULLIVANT spoke in a choking sort of voice. "Bessie Bunter, do you know whose umbrella that is?" Bessie blinked. "Eh? Nun-no," she stammered. "I just took it from the hall-stand, you know." "The mistress quivered. "It is mine!"

of ghosts, Monk's Folly was a spot which, ordinarily, Bessie could not be persuaded to go within a mile of. Lonely and ruined, approached only by a footpath, it lay near the edge of the cliff directly above the four caves in the cliff-face which had been named Monk's Tomb. It was anything but jolly.

But that didn't matter now. What did matter was that Bessie was cluttered up with lines, had a detention, and a whacking great bill to pay into the bargain.

"And I suppose," Babs asked, when they reached Study No. 4, "you spent the boblet I gave you for your bus-fare?"

"Oh, really, Babs, dud-don't bring that up!" Bessie said offensively. "After all, what's a measly bob? Look here!" And she fished in her pocket and grandly tossed on to the table a great silver piece. "There you are, and thanks for the loan! Keep the change!" she said loftily.

"Bessie," Babs breathed, "where did you get this?"

"Oh, plenty more where that came from!" Bessie answered.

"Bessie!" Babs stared at her in alarm. "Bessie, no! Please tell me! This is a Charles I half-crown! It must be worth seven or eight shillings if it's worth a penny! Where did you get it?"

"Aha!" Bessie said mysteriously. And then her mouth shut. That stubborn look of obstinacy that Babs and Mabs knew so well settled upon her fat features.

All questioning after that was hopeless. Bessie's harmless fibs, her clumsy evasions, were more confusing, if anything, than silence.

Babs was a little anxious. What had happened to Bessie in that interval between her leaving Sarmouth and her return to Cliff House? Where had she got that decidedly strange coin?

But prep was the order then. With Bessie stolidly refusing to be drawn, they settled down to it. In the middle of it Bessie spoke.

"Babs—I sus-say, Babs—" she asked wistfully.

"Yes, Bessie?"

"Supposing," Bessie asked dreamily—"supposing you could have anything money could buy, what would you choose?"

"Oh, I don't know! A Rolls-Royce," Babs said jokingly. "Do get on with your prep, Bessie."

Bessie sniffed. She looked at Mabs. "Mabs, supposing somebody said to you, you could have anything you wanted, what would you say?"

"Eh?" Mabs grunted. "Well, a new box of grease-paints. Here, where are you going, Bess?" she added, as Bessie rose.

"Oh, out!" Bessie said. "But your prep—" put in Babs.

"Blow prep!" Bessie said haughtily. She stepped to the door. With a little notebook in her hand, out she trotted. Mabs looked at Babs and sighed.

To Study No. 7 Bessie went. Tomboy Clara Trevlyn, Marjorie Hazeldene, and Janet Jordan were at prep. Clara looked up as she came in.

"Sit down. Don't make a noise," she grunted; "we're busy."

"Oh, really, Clara! I've a jolly good mind not to ask you now. But supposing," Bessie asked cunningly, "that you could have anything money could buy, what would you choose?"

"Is there a prize for the answer, or is it just a clue in a crossword puzzle?" Clara queried.

"No, really! Be serious! What would you?"

"Oh, I don't know! A new pair of hockey pads. Shurrup!"

"And what would you choose, Marjorie?"

Marjorie smiled.

"Well, I think I'd choose the money," she said. "For the poor people of my father's parish, you see."

"H'm! And how much would that be?"

"Oh, about five hundred pounds!"

Marjorie said, with a smile.

Bessie wrote in her notebook.

"And you, Janet?"

"A new collar for my dog Gyp," Janet said, with a grin. "A gold one, you know, with his name and address in diamonds. But what's the wheeze?" she asked curiously.

Bessie, however, did not reply to that question. Looking profoundly thoughtful, she trotted off to Study No. 3, which housed Marcelle Biquet, Jemima Carstairs, and Leila Carroll. They, like Clara & Co., were at prep when she came in.

To them Bessie repeated her question. Jemima looked at her curiously.

"Is this going to be a birthday present, a Christmas box, or something you're going to save up for my old age?" she asked. "Supposing I say a new pair of suspenders?"

"That's not much of a present," Bessie frowned. "Still, they'd be worth something if they had gold fittings," she added hopefully. "What about you, Leila? Can you think of something?"

"Sure!" replied the American junior. "I'd like the half-crown I lent a certain old fattikins named Bessie Bunter a month ago!"

"Oh, would you! All right, then. You wait! What would you like, Marcelle?"

Marcelle laughed impishly.

"Ze Eiffel Tower!"

"Oh crumbs! How do you spell it? And what is it, anyway? Some beastly French thing?"

"Oui, it is French very well," Marcelle nodded seriously.

Bessie beamed. With a very pleased look on her face, she ambled back to Study No. 4. Babs and Mabs, still at prep, glanced at her as she came in, and Bessie treated them to an expansive smile. At the table she seated herself, gazing at her untouched prep with a rapt, glowing happy expression on her face. Babs looked at her curiously.

"Bessie, what are you doing?" she asked.

"Oh, n-nothing!" Bessie said.

"I can see that. But don't you think you'd better get on with prep, old duffer? You've got those lines to do as well, remember."

Bessie, however, merely sniffed loftily. Babs stared wonderingly, and then rose.

With a look at Mabs, she approached Bessie. Bessie, still poring over her list, did not notice her as she approached. Thoughtfully, tongue in cheek, she was gazing down, and Babs, glancing over her shoulder, stared a little as she read:

"PRESENTS FOR MY CHUMS.
Roles Rice Car for Babs, say £2.00.
Box of Grease Paints for Mabs, say £20.
Pair of Hockey Pads for Clara, say £5.
Marjorie, £500.
Gold Dog Collar for Janet (with Diamonds), say £500.
Suspenders for Jemima, say £5.
Leila, 2s. 6d.
I Fill Tower (?) for Marcelle, ?"

An extraordinary list, and with extraordinary seriousness and labour Bessie

had made it out. Babs chuckled a little.

"Bessie, what on earth's this?" she asked.

"Eh?" Too late Bessie guiltily looked up, too late put a screening arm around her list. "Oh, really, Babs, I wish you wouldn't come looking over my shoulder!" she said offensively. "I suppose I can make a few presents to my friends if I want to?" she asked indignantly.

"Why, of course, old Bess! But those will cost a fortune."

"Well, what of it?" Bessie asked. "What if it costs two fortunes? What if it costs half a dozen fortunes?" she asked recklessly. "Shan't I have the money to pay for it?"

And, snatching up the list, she left the room.

Babs stared at Mabs.

"Now what," she asked wonderingly, "has the old chump got into that thick head of hers now, Mabs? And where on earth does she imagine she's going to get all that money?"

"Ask me!" Mabs replied, not very helpfully.

Excitement in the Cave!



CERTAINLY this Bessie was a new Bessie. And, from Babs' point of view, a rather worrying Bessie, too.

For from the moment she had returned—late—from Sarmouth, Bessie Bunter had changed. She went about with a rapt, happy look on her face. Her thoughts obviously were up in the clouds. For Bessie, of course, though Babs did not know, was already mentally spending her share of Red Rufus' pirate hoard.

Very much to Miss Charmant's astonishment in class next morning, she informed her that the name of the English admiral who plundered the Spanish Main was Red Rufus. When asked later the name of Queen Victoria's first Prime Minister, she answered Michael Smith.

Requested by Miss Bullivant in the maths period to do a simple addition sum she gave the answer in pieces of eight. Asked to give the birthplace of Gladstone, she replied Monk's Tower! All of which added greatly to the gaiety of life in the Fourth Form class-room, and terrifically to Bessie's already swollen flood of lines. But Bessie didn't seem to care.

Babs did, however. Knowing the dear old duffer's blundering of old, she was a trifle scared. Time after time during the morning she questioned her plump chum. But Bessie, remembering that VOW, stubbornly shut her lips.

Break came. Bessie, surrounded by a laughing crowd, grandly invited them all to the tuckshop. Arrived there, she planked down two shining Charles I crowns on the counter. Aunty Jones, who kept the shop, stared.

"I'm sorry, Miss Bunter, I can't accept these. I only deal in English money."

"Well," Bessie glared, "that's English money, isn't it? And jolly good English money, if you want to know. It's worth pounds!"

"I'm sorry, Miss Bunter," Aunty Jones said determinedly.

"Wait a minute—" Saidie Macpherson of the Upper Fifth interrupted. "Bessie, let me have a look at those. Phew! I say, these are genuine!" she said, her eyes round. Saidie was an enthusiastic amateur numismatist, and knew a great deal about old coins. "Give you seven-and-six each for them."

Bess!" she added promptly, for Saidie happened to be in funds.

"Done!" Bessie beamed.

"But where," Diana Royston-Clarke wanted to know, "did you get them?"

"Well, I had a remittance, you know."

"Must be that postal order you've been expecting," June Merrett grinned. "We all know how overdue it is. This explains it. It was sent to our Bess in King Charles' day."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bessie, very happy, chuckled too. She didn't care what they thought. Bessie was thinking glowingly of the thousands more to follow, though Babs, wondering where those coins had come from, shook her head rather worriedly.

Afternoon lessons came. Lessons over, Bessie, in detention, was ordered to stop behind. Babs, Mabs, and Clara, with Marjorie Hazeldene and Janet Jordan, whom they had invited to tea, rushed off to Study No. 4 to prepare the meal. It was as Babs was laying the cloth, that she happened to glance out of the window, and then she jumped.

"Oh, my hat, look!" she breathed.

"Bessie! She's going out of gates."

"But Bessie's in detention!" Janet Jordan said.

They crowded to the window. There was no mistaking the fat form which at that moment was rolling hurriedly into the road, however.

"Oh golly! She's just asking for trouble," Babs said worriedly. "She hasn't done a single one of her lines, either. I say, never mind tea," she added anxiously. "Let's go after her."

They nodded. Faces were serious now. Bessie's latest outbreak might be funny, but it was obvious that Bessie was heading for trouble of the first magnitude. Tea from that moment was abandoned. Quickly they rushed for coats and hats, and scampered out into the quadrangle.

They reached the gates. Of Bessie, there was no sign.

"Now which way has she gone?" Babs muttered. "Wait a moment though. If I've got the right idea she'll be going to the place she visited yesterday."

"What's that?" Clara asked.

"Monk's Folly!"

"But didn't she mention Monk's Tower first?" Mabs asked.

"She did—yes! But when I questioned her she said it was Monk's Folly. Anyway, never mind. We shall probably catch her up."

But that, as it happened, was where Babs was wrong. For once Bessie had deceived her. While they took the path that led to Cliff Top Cottage and thence off to the Folly, Bessie was rolling hurriedly along to Monk's Tower, a mile to the north of it.

For half an hour, Babs & Co. walked fast, and presently in sight of the towering ruins that were the Folly, halted. There was no sign of Bessie Bunter.

Certainly it did not seem the sort of place that would attract their plump chum. Nevertheless they explored it.

Still no sign of Bessie.

"It must have been the Tower she meant," Clara grumbled. "She just pulled the wool over your eyes, Babs. Or perhaps," she added suddenly, "it was the Tombs?"

"You mean the caves?"

"Of course!"

They looked at each other. Had Bessie been deliberately putting them off the track by mentioning the Folly and then the Tower, when all the time she had meant the caves?

Anyway, the caves were directly beneath them. It would have been foolish not to put the idea to the test. If it

still failed, Monk's Tower was only a quarter of an hour's walk away.

So down the narrow, treacherous path which led from the lip of the cliff to the beach they climbed, and presently found themselves on the narrow shelf of sand between the surf line and the cliff. The coast hereabouts had formed a shallow little bay, dominated by the four great caves which went by the name of Monk's Tomb.

For a moment the chums stared at them. Marjorie Hazeldene shivered a little. Even on a bright and sunny day the caves of Monk's Tomb looked sinister. In the old days, when blood-thirsty pirates of the near-by Belwin Island had attacked Cliff Abbey and had killed the monks, these caves had been used as a burial ground.

No. 2 of our delightful New Series for
Your "Cliff House Album."

CLIFF HOUSE PETS

Bessie Bunter's
TING-A-LING

TING-A-LING, Bessie Bunter's famous Pekingese dog, is the Pets' House Imp of Mischief! He is a joker; a prankster, a player of parts. If there is one member of their community that must exasperate the more sedate pets of Cliff House, that one is certainly little Ting. But I doubt, even so, whether they do not love him as much as every girl in Cliff House does.

How could anyone fail to be affected by those soft brown eyes of his which can register in amazing succession such sad reproach, such pathetic trust, such admiring devotion, such glad delight, such impish fun and high spirits?

How harder still to resist Ting, when, without any order, he will sit motionless on his hind legs, little pink tongue lolling, head cocked inquiringly or puzzledly to one side.

He certainly seems to know that no one could possibly be cross with him—and wouldn't hesitate to take advantage of the fact.

Apart from his charm, Ting is actually an astonishingly clever animal. Once a circus dog, he has a range of really marvellous tricks. Put a box of alphabet bricks before Ting and he will sort out any letter you name. Ask him to spell a word like "cat" and he will do it!



Tell him to walk on his front paws, or do a somersault, and he'll obey you.

Those are by no means all of Ting's tricks, however. He can also ride a tiny tricycle. Amazing as it sounds, he just loves being dressed up. Like a performing seal he can juggle a ball on his nose.

But in spite of these accomplishments he is happiest when having a comfortable snooze on his plump mistress' soft lap.

But he can also be a bit of a pest. When other dogs in the House miss their bones they always know who to blame. Only the other day Pluto, Clara Trevlyn's Alsatian, was severely scolded by his mistress for having lost his new collar—which, most mysteriously, was later found in Ting's kennel, with Ting rolling it around the floor like a hoop and darting in and out of it as it rolled. I am afraid Ting plays his most artful tricks upon

Pluto, yet despite that, Pluto seems fond of the little chap—just watch him if anybody scolds or threatens Ting!

There's no doubt Ting is an imp—but a lovable one!

As you know, Ting, before becoming the pride and joy of Bessie Bunter's life, was a performer at Jordan's Circus. He has appeared both in the circus and in a film, and according to Bessie is the most wonderful, handsome, angelic, intelligent dog on earth!

"Come on!" Clara said.

And annoyed with herself at the momentary awe the caves had for her, the Tomboy boldly approached the largest.

The chums followed her, Marjorie biting her lip. Clara, striding ahead, reached the mouth of the cave first, and then abruptly halted. She glanced quickly at Babs.

"Listen!" she said.

They stood tense—and then jumped a little. For from inside the cave had come a most decided thud. It was followed by a sharp exclamation.

"Is that you, Bessie?" cried Babs.

Silence!

"Bessie!" Mabs shouted.

Silence again!

"The chump's in there," Clara breathed. "Anybody got a torch?"

But nobody, of course, had a torch. Nevertheless it did not matter. Rather fed-up with the mysteriousness of Bessie Bunter and the trouble Bessie Bunter

was giving them, they all plunged into the cave.

Files of shingle and seaweed thrown up into its mouth by the last high tide caused them to slip and stumble. Now away from the light which filtered in at the entrance they all stopped, huddling together as they found themselves in complete darkness.

Clara's lips pursed.

"Come on!" she said irritably. "Let's find her."

Rather angrily she tramped ahead. Babs & Co. followed. Then suddenly: "Oh!" came a shriek in Clara's voice, followed by a thud.

"Clara!" cried Babs.

"Don't—don't come any farther!" Clara's voice, strained and muffled, came back to them. "There's a great

hole here; I've pitched into it! I—I've hurt my arm, I think."

"Wait a minute," Janet said. "I think I've got some book matches." She fumbled feverishly in her pocket. "Yes, here we are," she said. "I had an idea I put them in my pocket after lighting the study fire this afternoon. Clara, where are you?"

"Just ahead. Go carefully."

A sickly light flared in the darkness. Two or three steps they took forward; then—

"Oh, Clara!" cried Babs.

The match went out, but not before it had disclosed the Tomboy. Not before it had revealed the pit into which she had fallen.

The pit, a full three feet wide, had most palpably been dug by human hands. Stretched from one wall of the cave to the other, it was about eight feet deep. The white face of Clara stared up at them.

"Strike another match, Janet," Babs

said tensely. She lay down. "Hold my legs, Marjorie, and Mabs. Clara, can you reach my hands?"

She stooped, leaning forward over the rim of the hole, extending her arms downwards. While Janet held the spluttering match, Clara caught at Babs' wrists, and, using her arms as a sort of rope, dug her feet into the walls of the pit, and climbed up, hand over hand. It was a useful trick, taught to them by Lady Patricia Northanson of the Sixth Form.

In a few moments, breathing heavily, she was back on terra firma again.

"Well, here we are," she grinned. "I don't think I'm hurt much. My arm's grazed and stings like fun. But who," she added, "cut this trench in the cave? And where is Bessie?"

"I've a feeling it wasn't Bessie we heard," Babs said slowly. "Bessie would have gone blundering head first into that hole. Even if she did know it was there, she couldn't have seen it without a light. But it's funny," she added, frowning—"dashed funny! Looks almost as if the pit has been dug as a sort of trap. Anyway, let's get outside and look at your arm, Clara."

They got outside, rather glad, perhaps, to abandon the chase. Clara's arm, as it happened, had sustained nothing worse than a severe scratching, where it had come into contact with the side of the pit during her fall. They washed the injury with sea water; a rather deeper scratch near the elbow Marjorie gently bandaged with a handkerchief. Then they looked at each other.

"Well, what about Bessie?" Mabs asked

"There's one spot, and one spot only now," Babs said decidedly. "That's Monk's Tower. Come on; let's go!"

And they went; but still puzzled, still wondering. Who had dug that extremely perilous hole in the floor of the cave? And why?

Bessie Keeps It Up!



BESSIE BUNTER, all unconscious of her chums' activities, had arrived at Monk's Tower

In the ruined apartment on the ground floor, she found Michael Smith and his wife already waiting.

"Ah, here you are, Miss Bunter!" Michael said. "You have come alone?"

"Oh, of course!" Bessie said.

"And you have said no word to anyone?"

"N-no," Bessie stammered. "But, I say, have you found anything?"

"Not yet. We waited for you," the woman said gravely. "For we are partners, Miss Bunter, and one shall not work without the other."

"I sus-say, that's nun-nice of you," Bessie beamed. "But what about the chart? You said you'd bring that."

"And I," Anna Smith purred, producing a crackling document, "have brought it, Miss Bunter. Here—" And while Bessie stared in breathless and delighted surprise, she unrolled the parchment, and spread it on a flat stone. "See! This is a plan of the Tower!" she said. "Here, where all the little red crosses are, parts of the treasure are hidden."

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

Not for a moment did she suspect that this ancient-looking chart had been skilfully forged within the last few hours.

"So you see," Anna Smith went on

seriously, "how necessary it is for us to work in harmony and peace. So many places we have to dig up, Miss Bunter; so many days it may take us. You see now why we were anxious that you should not report having found us here? You see why we have told you not to breathe a word to anyone? Should this news travel, half your school and the villagers would be here in no time."

Yes; Bessie saw that. Mentally she registered a terrific renewal of the vow. But she blinked as she said:

"But afterwards, when we've unearthed it all, I can tell my chums then?"

"Why, of course," Anna Smith smiled. "But now," she added brusquely, "let us get to work. You see this spot here, Bessie—about four or five feet from the tower, facing the sea? That is where you shall work this afternoon. Michael and I will work inside."

Bessie nodded eagerly. Thrilled and glowing, she took the spade which was offered to her. The man went outside with her, and indicated the spot at which she was to dig.

Then he left her, to vanish into the tower. Bessie turned up the first spadeful of earth. Very soft was that earth, amazingly easy to dig, considering the hard, flattened nature of the debris-strewn ground around it. It was indeed suspiciously easy to dig.

But that, in the fever-heat of treasure hunting, did not occur to Bessie Bunter. Never at Cliff House had Bessie been famed for either her athletic prowess or her energy; but even Clara Trevlyn would have had a job to keep pace with the fat one now in a digging competition. Soil flew with amazing speed in all directions.

And then—

The edge of Bessie's spade suddenly struck something. It was something which gave out a metallic ring. Sheer excitement made Bessie gasp. And then she caught her breath as she looked down into the hole she had made. For there was a box—a small wooden box bound with iron!

"Oh, kik-crumbs!" Bessie stammered.

She bent down. With a grunt she levered the box out of the hole. Feverishly she shook the earth from it. With suspicious ease the earth fell, disclosing a varnished surface, which might also have been suspicious had Bessie been in a mood to entertain suspicion. But she wasn't. With trembling hand she caught the lid and flung it open.

And there was—treasure!

Bessie almost shouted as she saw the coins. Then she felt conscious of a faint stab of disappointment. To be sure there were not a great many. About a dozen coins all told, some silver, some very large, and made of copper. Still it was exciting, and where that was, there was bound to be more. With a chuckle, she slipped the coins into her pocket, threw the box aside, and commenced to dig.

And suddenly she jumped; for voices—the unmistakable voices of Barbara Redfern & Co., though distant, fell upon her ears.

Spade in hand, Bessie guiltily jerked round. For a moment she blinked. Then she saw Babs, a good hundred yards away, ploughing across the field at the opposite side of the road.

For a moment Bessie gasped with dismay. The next she had thought of the vow. At all costs, Babs & Co. must not find her here. Flinging down her spade, she ran.

"Bessie!" called Babs.

Bessie did not look round. There was some dim idea of hiding in her mind.

In front of her, perhaps a hundred yards away, was a derelict barn. Bessie headed for that.

After her came the chums.

Bessie reached the barn, flew in through the doorless entrance and, spying a rotten ladder leading to the loft, breathlessly rushed at it and up it.

But alas for Bessie! She had not counted upon the age of that ladder. Just as she reached the edge of the loft the whole structure, with a crack and a crash, gave way beneath her. With a wild howl she just in time grabbed at the edge of the loft as she felt her fat little legs dangling in space.

"Wow! Help! Help! Rescue!" she bawled. "Oh dud-dear—"

Frantically she kicked out into space. One terrified blink she flung below. The floor, ten feet away, seemed as many yards to Bessie, and she bel-lowed afresh.

"Wow! Help! I'm falling! I'll be dud-dashed to death! Help!" she bellowed.

"Hallo! My hat!" came Clara's voice at the door. "Oh, great Scotland Yard! Look at our Fattikins! How did you get up there, Bessie?"

"I'm falling!" shrieked Bessie, clutching desperately. "Oh, really, Clara, you mean cat, dud-don't laugh, you know. Wow! I'm sus-slipping! I'm gig-going!" Bessie wailed. "I've gone!"

And she had. For the rotten wood-work crumbled at that moment beneath her fingers, and Bessie dropped.

But she need not have worried. Clara, Mabs, and Marjorie had run forward. With outstretched arms they broke the plump duffer's fall as she dropped. In a whirling heap they fell, all mixed up on the floor. Bessie sat up and glowered.

"Look here, you mum-mean cats, I might have fallen through the floor—"

"Right through to Australia, in fact!" Janet Jordan grinned. "But why, you chump, did you run away?"

Bessie adjusted her spectacles and glowered.

"Oh, rats! I—I dud-didn't run away!"

"Why, you old fibber, you know you did! We saw you at Monk's Tower—"

"Eh? Oh, no, you didn't—that wasn't me," Bessie said hurriedly. "That was another girl! What should I be doing at Monk's Tower, you know?"

"Digging," Babs said. "We saw you digging, Bessie."

"Me?" Bessie asked. "Me—digging? Ha, ha!" She laughed hollowly. "If that's a joke, I don't think much of your sense of humour! I wuw-wish you wouldn't talk such rot, Babs. Of course, I haven't been to Monk's Tower, and it's just ridiculous to say I've been digging!"

Babs glanced at her. She looked at her chums. Bessie, rather red-faced but most brightly anxious to prevent herself being questioned any further, shut her lips. Babs gazed at her.

"But what, you ninny, did you break detention for?"

"Oh, dud-did I?" stammered Bessie. "Well, I—I was going to Friardale, you know."

"Yes?" Clara asked unbelievably. "Then why, if you were going to Friardale, did you come this way?"

"Well, I—I— Oh, stuff!" Bessie ended crossly.

"Now, look here, old Bess—" Mabs started.

"Rabbits! You would spoil things!" Bessie said bitterly. "Let's get back to school. But—but thuth-thanks for rescuing me!"

And from then onwards Bessie's lips remained closed. Bessie was thinking of the VOW. Question as they would, there was no persuading Bessie to give anything away after that, and in a rather puzzled body they tramped back to Cliff House, there to be immediately pounced upon by Sarah Harrigan. The unpopular prefect's eyes were gleaming.

"Bessie Bunter, you will report to Miss Bullivant at once!"

Bessie pouted. But she went off. Rather wondering, and not a little worried, Babs & Co. went back to Study No. 4. There the delayed preparations for tea were resumed. But it was not until well after they had had tea that Bessie came in. Her fat face was rather glum.

"That awful cat made me do another hour's detention, you know!" she said aggrievedly.

Babs sighed.

"Well, you rather asked for it, didn't you, Bess? Sit down and have some tea—and tell us what you were doing digging in Monk's Tower this afternoon."

"Stuff!" Bessie said. "I—"

And then she broke off as the door opened and Fay Chandler of the Upper Third looked in.

"Hallo!" she said. "I say, Babs, Miss Charmant wants to see you."

Babs rose at once. She went to Miss Charmant's study. The popular Fourth Form mistress was looking rather grave.

"Sit down, Barbara," she invited. "I'd rather like to talk to you. Not about yourself—about Bessie."

"Y-yes, Miss Charmant?"

"I have just received a rather serious report from Miss Bullivant," Miss Charmant went on. "Apparently Bessie broke detention this afternoon. Apart from that, Barbara, she has not done one of the lines she was given yesterday and to-day. Barbara, what is the matter with her?"

Babs shook her head.

"I'm sure, Miss Charmant, I don't know."

"But you are her best friend, aren't you, Barbara. You have more influence with her than anyone else. Please do try to get her to be a little more attentive to discipline. If she goes on at her present rate," Miss Charmant finished up rather worriedly, "she will find herself threatened with expulsion. Talk to her, will you, Barbara?"

"I will," Babs said.

She went back to the study. Janet, Clara, and Marjorie had left then. Bessie, tired out after her excavations, was sitting in the armchair by the fire, a rapt expression on her face which told that her thoughts were not of her present surroundings or her present company. She seemed to have recovered her good-humour then, and beamed as Babs came in.

"Bessie!" said Babs.

"Oh, yes!" said Bessie.

"Do you know why Miss Charmant sent for me?"

"No—why should I? Haven't you done your lines or something?"

"Bessie, be serious. She sent for me because she wanted to talk about you," Babs said gravely.

Bessie shrugged.

"And she wants me to warn you, Bessie, that if you don't toe the line you'll be heading for expulsion!"

Bessie seemed in no wise put out.

"Well?" she asked.



THE fact that she was heading for expulsion didn't seem to worry Bessie. "If I'm expelled I can come back again. And how? Easy! Because, you know," the plump duffer stated seriously, "I shall just buy the whole school. They couldn't very well refuse to let me come back if I owned the school, could they?" Babs and Mabs just blinked.

"Well—" Babs stared. "Isn't that enough, you cuckoo? Do you want to get expelled?"

"No," Bessie said. "But what if I do? I can come back again, you know."

"Eh?"

"I said," Bessie repeated, "that if I am expelled, I can come back again. And how? Easy. Because, you know," Bessie stated calmly, but very seriously, "I shall just buy the whole school. They couldn't very well refuse to let me come back if I owned the school, could they?"

And while Mabs and Babs blinked at each other in wonder, Bessie, visualising the spending of the treasure still to be disgorged by the upturning of earth at Monk's Tower, settled down again.

That night she did not do prep. She made no attempt to get on with her lines. Strange, weird! Here was a side of Bessie Bunter's nature that even Babs had not suspected. Bessie, with her eyes wide open, was contemptuously walking into expulsion! No wonder Babs was worried.

Call-over came. After call-over, bed. Bessie, with the rest, went to the Fourth Form dormitory. Babs, more utterly perplexed than ever, lay thinking of the strange events of the day, but more particularly of the strange change in her fat chum.

She was awakened next morning by an urgent shake of the shoulder, and, looking up, blinked sleepily into Mabs' alarmed face.

She raised herself on one elbow.

"Babs," Mabs gulped, "Bessie—" Babs started.

"Bessie?"

"She—she's gone! Look!"

And Babs, blinking in sudden wild alarm towards the fat junior's bed, leapt from between the sheets.

For Bessie's bed was empty!

Investigations!



BESSIE BUNTER had other more important things to think of than school life.

School, Bessie told herself, was all very well; but when school started to interfere with her chance of making herself rich for life—well, then, blow it, school just had to go phut!

Very happy was the plump duffer, in spite of the trouble piling up around her. When not thinking of finding treasure, Bessie liked to make plans for the spending of that treasure, and it was to her credit that in all those plans her chums played a large part.

All night she had dreamt of the treasure—of digging it up.

And so Bessie Bunter was up this morning with the first gleam of dawn. An hour before rising-bell was due to clang, she was walking along the road that led to Monk's Tower, taking no heed at all of the threatening gale which seemed to be brewing.

The gale was blowing hard when finally she came within sight of the ruin. Rather blown and hot, Bessie scrambled over the debris in the doorway, and sank down upon the upturned stone on which she had been shown the treasure chart yesterday.

With a sense of prideful possession, she blinked around her—and then remembered with a shock of disappointment that if she were going to dig she must have a spade. There was no spade.

"Oh crumbs!" Bessie murmured dolefully. "What did the Smiths do with it?"

She scouted round. Outside the wind howled, increasing in strength. The old ruin seemed to shake. But Bessie, caught in the feverish grip of treasure-hunting, never seemed to notice that.

There was another apartment even more dilapidated than the present one. Hopefully she went into it, staring around. Still no spade.

Rather disconsolately she came back. And then, questing once more, her eyes fell upon the clean flagstones by the side of the wall. She remembered then that Michael Smith and his wife had been working down there. Probably, Bessie thought, they had turned it into some sort of storehouse. After all, tools must be somewhere about. But how did one open the centre flagstone?

A problem, that. Obviously, the thing was worked by some secret mechanism. But where was that mechanism? Laboriously Bessie removed the surrounding debris, piling it against the wall. Agitatedly and frantically she stamped and pressed. The mechanism, whatever it was, refused to reveal itself.

At last, panting, she desisted, glaring wrathfully at the immovable stone.

Then, and then only, was it that she saw a projection upon that stone which she had not noticed before. It was a little knob.

Alert for any clue then, Bessie got down on her hands and knees and peered at it. She pressed it; she pulled it. Nothing happened. Then, seized with a sudden flash of inspiration, she turned it as she would have turned a door-knob. And then, as if a stick of dynamite had exploded beneath her plump little nose, she leapt to her feet.

Beneath her came a faint burring sound. The stone was moving!

Bessie's face turned red with joy. She almost danced.

With fascinated eyes, she watched as the great stone seemed to fold itself up beneath its neighbour, disclosing a great, square hole. Rather timidly Bessie peered down it, noting with satisfaction the stout wooden ladder which ran up from the unseen floor below.

Without hesitation now, she levered herself into the hole, and, catching the side of the ladder, began to descend. Ten, eleven, twelve rungs she counted before, finally, she stood on solid ground again.

"Wuff!" she muttered.

With interest she stared around her. Grey light, filtering through the trapdoor above, showed her her surroundings. It was obvious that she stood in a vault or cellar. Except for one solitary spade, which looked suspiciously like the one she had used herself yesterday, however, there was no sign of digging tools.

But there were signs of other tools in plenty. On an upturned barrel were three hammers, a long iron bar, forked at one end, which Bessie had no difficulty in recognising as a crowbar. On the floor near the barrel was a storm-lantern, and near it was a collection of candle-ends, and a box of matches.

Bessie chuckled. Strange how, in the grip of this treasure fever, she never even thought of fear. Eagerly she grabbed the matches, lit the lantern, and began a tour of the vault.

Presently she stopped, her pulses quickening as she found herself peering into a dark opening that looked like a

tunnel, and from which a decidedly nippy gust of air blew into her face. Now, where did that lead to? The open air, evidently.

She turned aside. Then suddenly she stopped, looking in amazement at a pile of cases which had been stacked against the wall. Her first thrilling thought was treasure, but her second glimpse dispersed that view. For the cases most decidedly were modern packing-cases. They were very strong, and when she tried to shift one, they proved to be very heavy, too.

"Now, what—" Bessie asked herself, and stopped.

For suddenly an alarming, if unbidden, thought had come into her mind. Supposing these cases, after all, were full of treasure? Supposing the Smiths were tricking her? Supposing they had found the treasure and stored it away in those cases?

A sudden sound made her start round, staring towards the tunnel.

From her lips came a gasp. For the sound was footsteps. Furthermore, shining in the narrow entrance to that tunnel was a light, and it was held in the hand of a man.

He came forward. Bessie blinked as she saw the face of Michael Smith.

"Oh, it—it's y-you!" she stuttered.

"Yes, it's me!" The man did not seem pleased, however. He looked sharply suspicious—for a moment most decidedly uneasy. "What are you doing down here, Miss Bunter?"

"W-well, I came to dig for treasure, you know," Bessie explained; "and—and I had to fuf-find the spade. By an accident I opened the flagstone—"

"Yes?"

"And—and I was just having a look round, you know," Bessie added, regaining confidence a little.

"Oh, I see!" The man laughed. "Rather a good hiding-place, isn't it?"

He chuckled. "I see you were investigating the cases?"

"Yes, rather! I say, what's in them?" Bessie asked, her suspicions returning.

"Oh, nothing—just nothing!" the man returned.

"But they're jolly heavy," Bessie said.

"Well, naturally. They're made of heavy wood. I got them along here to store the treasure in when we found it. Here, hold this lamp!" he bade, and handed it to her, and then lifted one of the topmost boxes—not the one Bessie had tried to move—and dropped it on to the floor. He flicked open the lid. "There!" he said.

Bessie blinked. The case was empty.

"Ah-hum!" she said. "Of course, you needn't have done that. I n-un-ever thought for a single moment, you know, that you'd dig the treasure up and hide it in these cases. But, I say, where's Mrs. Smith?"

The man looked at her oddly.

"She's at home," he said. "I came back here to get something." He paused. "Miss Bunter, I wonder if you'd do me a favour?"

Bessie, feeling unworthy for her suspicion, was ready to do anything.

"It won't take you long," the man said, "and when you come back we can get on with the digging. But my wife wants this—it's frightfully important." To Bessie's astonished amazement he groped behind one of the cases, producing a flat, brown paper-wrapped parcel secured by an elastic band. "You know the cottage between here and Monk's Folly, don't you? That is where we live. If you wouldn't mind, Miss Bunter—"

"Is it sus-something connected with the treasure?" Bessie asked eagerly.

"Oh, yes, of course!"

Bessie simpered. Any errand in the cause of the treasure was worth while. Willingly she took the parcel and departed. The cottage to which Michael Smith referred was not more than half a mile away, standing near the footpath which ran from here to Monk's Folly. But as Bessie reached the open air again she gasped.

Very, very boisterous the wind that blew in from the sea.

Still, Bessie did not mind that. Anxious to be done with her task, she made good headway. Even so she had to stop at times and catch her breath, so vigorous was the wind, and it took her all of twenty minutes to reach the cottage.

A rather tumbledown cottage it was. Breathlessly she reached up her hand to knock at the door.

As she did so a gust of wind shrieked in from the sea, lifting her hat. Bessie jerked up both hands to secure it, and as she did so the parcel dropped and spun away. Frantically Bessie chased after it.

The parcel brought up against an ancient water-butt. It had lost its elastic, and just as Bessie dived at it, the brown-paper flapped open. Breathlessly Bessie retrieved it, prepared to re-wrap it. And then she blinked.

For the object which the brown-paper had concealed was an exquisite little painting in oils.

Bessie stared. Her fat frame suddenly shook, her rosy cheeks turned deathly white. This picture—This—

Then she jumped as the door of the cottage opened and Mrs. Anna Smith looked out and spoke to her.

"Bessie Bunter! Come here at once!"

Dilemma for a Duffer!



"BARBARA, you do not know where Bessie Bunter is?"

The headmistress of Cliff House, recently returned from a convalescent holiday abroad, asked that question in very worried tones indeed.

Barbara Redfern, of whom Miss Primrose made the inquiry, bit her lip.

For it was break then, and Bessie Bunter most amazingly had been missing ever since rising-bell. She had left no message, no clue. A search of the school from end to end had failed to reveal her.

All Cliff House was asking the question then: "Where was Bessie Bunter?"

Only Babs could guess, but a guess was by no means knowledge, and she shook her head. But she had a suggestion to make.

"I'm sorry, I don't know," she said worriedly. "But, Miss Primrose—"

"Yes, Barbara, my dear?"

"I—if you wouldn't mind listening to a suggestion. You see, I know most of Bessie's favourite haunts," Babs went on, at which Miss Primrose slightly nodded in complete agreement. "It's just possible that Bessie may be in one of them."

"Yes," Miss Primrose nodded again.

"So, if—if—Babs said, flushing—"I could take three of my chums, Miss Primrose—"

"And search for her? Yes, that is a very good idea, Barbara," she said. "You may take Mabel, Clara, and Marjorie Hazeldene, and you will, of course, be excused lessons this afternoon."

Babs smiled and hurried away. In Study No. 4 she called an immediate council of her selected helpers

"But where," Clara demanded, "are we going to look?"

"Monk's Tower," Babs said.

"But what the dickens should the idiot be doing at that place?"

"I don't know, but I've got a glimmering of a notion," Babs said. "You know what weird ideas Bess gets into her head. You know how strongly she believes in hidden treasure and all that sort of thing. It's my idea that she found those King Charles pieces somewhere near Monk's Tower on her way back home yesterday."

"Oh, I say!" Mabs exclaimed.

"That, obviously, would lead old Bessie to think of treasure," Babs went on. "Yesterday we caught her digging at Monk's Tower. We interrupted her and she ran away. If you ask me, she ran away simply because she didn't want us to find the spot where she was digging. What would be more natural than she should get up early this morning and go off to dig again?"

It was a good theory, a shrewd theory. Knowing Bessie as they knew her, it certainly fitted in well. It was at least worthy of testing, and accordingly, with no thought of dinner, they set out.

The gale was still blowing, though at an appreciably less velocity, when three-quarters of an hour later they reached the tower. But Bessie wasn't in evidence.

They went into the ruins, unaware that from a tiny embrasure on the upper floor a man's face was peering out at them. Rather dismayed, the chums looked around at the fallen debris.

Still no clue to Bessie Bunter.

"Well, it seems as if your theory goes to pot after all, Babs," Clara said. "The old duffer's not here. Urh! Awful place!" she shuddered. "Looks as if it might fall to pieces any moment. But phew!" she whistled suddenly, staring. "Somebody's been here. Look at those flagstones in the corner, Babs."

Babs looked. They all looked. And the appearance of those stones, clear of the litter which lay piled up on every other square inch of the floor, struck them all very forcibly at once.

Babs approached them. At the same moment Marjorie uttered an exclamation.

"What's that?"

"What's what?"

"I—I thought I heard something—a footstep—" and Marjorie stood still. Then suddenly she pointed a quivering hand towards the corner of the ceiling directly above the ancient fireplace. "Look!" she shrieked. "The ceiling!" There came a crack; suddenly they saw that one of the great stones which formed the roof of the apartment was shifting. A rain of dust and mortar fell. Babs let out a scared shout.

"Out of it! The whole ceiling's going!"

Round their ears rained pieces of flying stone. With a thunderous rumble part of the roof above the cleared flagstones thudded down. Babs, gripping Marjorie, who stumbled, gazed up desperately, and—was it her imagination, or did she glimpse for a moment the forked end of a crowbar rammed between two of the heaving stones?

Then with a rush she had hurled herself through the door on the heels of Clara and Mabs, and only just in time, for, with a roar and a rush, a slab of masonry which must have weighed hundredweights fell in her rear. Out of the door rolled a great choking cloud of debris dust.

"Oh, my hat! Are we all here?" Clara gasped.

"Yes," Marjorie said shakily.

"But what started it?" gasped Mabs. "Yes, what?" Babs' eyes were glimmering. With a new understanding she was gazing at the ruin. "I saw a crowbar!" she said. "Somebody is in there—on the floor above. It would be an easy enough matter, considering the rottenness of the place, to cause the roof to collapse by levering out the keystone. Somebody," she added, "was afraid of what we'd find there. That was their method of trying to get us out of the way!"

"Then in that case," Clara said angrily, and made a step towards the ruin, only to be arrested by a shriek from Mabs. She pointed away from the tower.

to the hands of Michael Smith. It had been stolen!

Bessie's eyes opened roundly as that realisation came to her; her face turned white.

Then it was that the door of the cottage opened, and Mrs. Smith called to her.

Bessie turned, the picture in her hand. For a moment she hesitated. These people were thieves. They were using her as a sort of messenger. Indignation filled the fat junior's frame as she went forward.

"I sus-say, look here, you know—" she began indignantly.

"Come in!" And Mrs. Smith grabbed her by the shoulder. Then, as she saw



THE woman pointed at the picture. "If you say one word to the police," she told the dazed and horrified Bessie, "you'll be arrested—not only as a receiver of stolen goods, but as a confederate in the stealing of those goods!"

"Look! Oh, my giddy aunt! Look who's coming!"

"Bessie!" cried Barbara Redfern.

Bessie Bunter it was! But what a changed, what a guilty, what an utterly forlorn and pathetic-looking Bessie!

THE WHOLE world had changed for Bessie Bunter since the accidental glimpse she had received of that oil-painting.

For Bessie at once had recognised it. Every girl who had ever visited Courtfield Castle, the home of Lord and Lady Courtfield, would have recognised it.

It was the gem of Lord Courtfield's collection, and was known by the title of "Sunset in Venice."

And Bessie knew as soon as she glimpsed the painting that there could only be one explanation for its transfer

the painting still in Bessie's hand, she started. "Come inside!" she repeated, but there was a sharper, a more vibrant note in her voice now. "Where did you get that, Bessie Bunter?"

Bessie went inside. She blinked at the untidy state of the living-room.

A man she had never set eyes on before—a burly, bearded ruffian—reclined in an armchair by the fireplace. He was toying with a necklace which glistened and glistened in the light.

The woman closed the door. Very gently she took the picture from Bessie's hand. Bessie drew a deep and fearful breath.

"Look here, you know, that's stolen property!" she blurted out.

"Go on," the woman said sarcastically.

"Yes, rather! I know who that

(Continued on page 14)

OUT OF SCHOOL HOURS



Your friend *PATRICIA* writes to you each week, telling you of her own and her family's doings in that delightful way so typical of her. In this week's letter her small brother had been rather naughty; there are one or two how-to-make suggestions for you, and other news for schoolgirls.

WE don't want to be too serious, not with Easter—and holidays—so close, do we?

All the same, I expect my South African schoolgirls will be thinking of the great Cecil Rhodes this week, for Saturday, 26th is the anniversary of this famous pioneer's death (in 1902). He was born at Bishop's Stortford, by the way, a town, as you know, in Hertfordshire.

If you have to write an essay at school on Cecil Rhodes' life and work, you mustn't forget to include his well-known words—"So much to do—so little time to do it!" For surely these words will never die, coming as they did from a man who accomplished so much in such a short time.

● Naughty Heath

Don't small brothers—and small sisters, too, for that matter—love to scribble?

My young brother, Heath—whose full name is Heatherington, you know—is never happier than when he has a pencil in his hand, and his small kitten at his feet.

In fact, he was very naughty—Heath, not the kitten, bless it!—last week. He scribbled over the dining-room table.

Mother was frightfully cross with him, for the dining-room table is the light of her life. (It belonged to our grandmother before it was passed on to us.)

After a scolding, Heath was sent up to his bed for an hour—which is mother's way of punishing him. (And he had to undress completely, too, for that hour—which made the punishment all the more severe!)

Then, when father came home, he was shown the crayon and pencil marks on the table.

The result is that the table has to be completely re-polished. You can imagine Heath wasn't very popular, especially as re-polishing old walnut is a costly business.

All the same, we do make it a point to try not to nag in our family. So after Heath had apologised—as he did most sweetly—all was forgiven on the promise it shouldn't happen again.

"I'm a sorry boy, mummy," he said. "And Minkie's a sorry cat, too!" (As if Minkie had shared in the disgrace, indeed!)

Mother managed to keep a serious face, but I'm afraid your Patricia vanished from the room, for I simply had to smile.

However, the result of all this is that we've decided Heath must have somewhere to scribble, for evidently his art needs large dimensions in which to be displayed.

So mother and I went out and bought a huge stack of brown paper in large sheets. We have pinned this, with drawing pins,

all round the wall of Heath's nursery. Now, with a box of chalks, he can scribble away to his heart's content—on condition it is on the paper only, which can be replaced when necessary.

Father says he'll probably turn out to be a poster artist at this rate. But quite seriously, I think the infant has got a little talent for drawing—though it's a bit early to say so yet!

● For a Good Little Boy

Have you a habit of collecting boxes—any old boxes, from handsome ones to homely ones?

This, I confess, is a weakness of mine; I simply can't bear to throw any box away, always thinking that "it may come in handy."

If this is your weakness also, I now want you to look through those boxes and see if you have one that is taller than it is wide—and just the shape for turning into a castle tower.

For then you can make this very novel pencil box for a nice little brother or small cousin. (I've made one for a nice little brother and leave you to guess the

name!) I admit that the problem is to get the right box—but providing you have it, then the rest is easy.

You must cover it all over with paper, sticking this smoothly over the four sides. In black, or any colour you like, paint in windows and a very historical-looking door. Mark the battlements, too, and then cut these out.

There, that's done. Now all you have to do to make the pencil-box complete, is to stand a few coloured pencils or crayons in the "tower"—if the present is for a baby under six, or some pens and pencils if it is for a small boy who is a little older.

● A Little Lecture

Oh, and now I have just a little "talking to" for you—not serious, so don't swiftly turn over.

It concerns the addressing of envelopes. I received a letter the other day, but how it reached me is still a mystery. The post office sorters must be miracle workers!

The address was written right at the very top of the envelope. So, as you can imagine, it was almost obliterated by the stamping and date marks of the post office.

Envelopes, my pets, should always be addressed towards the *bottom* of the envelope, the name starting about mid-way down.

Lots of you, I know, write letters that are just about perfect, so you won't need this reminder. But I'm sure you'll forgive my mentioning it for the benefit of those who've not had so much experience.

● Boleros So Gay

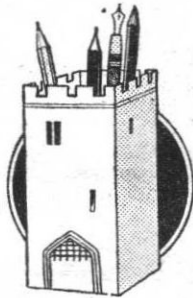
You know how often I have told you that boleros are smart for wearing over spring dresses?

Well, this year simply ALL the shops are featuring them.

I'm delighted, for I like the bolero jacket idea.

You see, boleros are so easy to make; they can be as gay as spring itself, and may be worn over the plainest frock, giving it a brand new look that simply shrieks "smart girl!"

The little bolero in the picture here was



made in a twinkling. It was a last year's summer frock that had become too short and too tight for the fast-growing owner.

First the skirt was chopped off the frock, above the waist line. Next, the collar was removed. Then an opening was made right down the front of this. A neat hem was made all round the neck and down the front—and, well, that was all.

The bolero was complete. Now, worn over a plain frock of navy or brown it looks charming, and no one would guess it was ever anything else but part of the frock.

Also in the picture you'll notice another little idea that I have thrown in for luck. Rather than waste the material from the skirt of the summer frock, this schoolgirl has made a hat band of it to trim her panama, and also bound the edge of the hat which had just been thinking of starting to fray. The cheery belt on the dark frock was made from the same garment, too.

Your friend,

PATRICIA.

SOME PRESENTS TO MAKE FOR EASTER



IT seems to be growing quite the fashion to give presents at Easter-time, and I know all schoolgirls like the idea!

Here are some very simple little gifts that you might like to make for your friends and relations. And not only are they easy to do, but they cost very little as well—which is very important.

THE EGG-COSY

Who wouldn't welcome the cheery Cockerel Egg-cosy on Easter morning? He's just the thing for keeping the egg of that late-comer down to breakfast nice and warm.

To make him you will require two pieces of thickish material—felt, if possible—measuring three inches each side. Then you'll require another small piece, perhaps in a different colour, to make the head and tail.

With the picture here to guide you, you could soon cut out a cockerel's head and feathery tail from this, I'm sure.

Tuck these pieces between the two squares, and then join the squares round three sides. Sew a button on the cockerel's head for an eye and add just a few running stitches in black cotton to make him more real.

EGGS IN BASKETS

Even the plain threepenny Easter Eggs made of chocolate will take on a very expensive look, if you do them up attractively before presenting them to the young members of your family. I think the ideas in the picture will appeal to you.

Say you have a plain egg covered in silvery paper, then why not make a little "basket" for it to stand in? You can make this with a ring of cardboard. Join the ends with glue, and then paint it.

If the egg has no silver paper over it, then collect all you can—even odd pieces, and arrange the paper artistically, so that it looks like flower petals, curling over the chocolate part which peeps out. Stand this one also in a ring.

Another egg can have a piece of ribbon tied around it first before it is stood in its little basket made of a strip of cardboard. All will look very expensive.

DECORATIVE HANDKERCHIEFS

Handkerchiefs are always a welcome present, aren't they? Schoolgirls especially love them, for they do lose so many.

If you can spare threepence to buy a pretty silky hankie for your chum at school, I want you to choose a plain one.

Then, with your pencil, sketch the letters of her name all over it. Now embroider these letters in as many different colour cottons as you have. (You need only use a plain running-stitch for this, of course.) It would make a lovely present to tuck into a blazer pocket.

The other hankie here has tennis balls embroidered over it—all in different coloured wools or cottons. Then your chum's initial can be sketched and embroidered quite big in one corner.

Clever schoolgirls will be able to make some—or all—of these little gifts in time for Easter.

NEW LAMPSHADES

To cover lampshades sounds very difficult, doesn't it? But actually it is easy, providing you have the wire frame first.

Any discarded or shabby lamp-shades that you have at home, could be re-covered so attractively, and look almost better than new.

You will require a strip of dainty silk. First measure all the way round the bottom of the lamp-shade, and the height of it, too.

Then cut the silk material just half an inch longer than the distance round the bottom and three-quarters of an inch higher than the depth.

Place the material over the wire frame, and sew all round the bottom first, just turning the material over the wire frame. Seam up the sides, where the ends of the strip of silk meet.

Next, run a thread all round the top, and gather this up to fit the top wire. Fasten this off, and sew it in position as you did around the bottom.

There—what could be easier—and look more expert.

—AND PRESENTS TO BUY!

Now, what about some little gifts that you will want to buy. It'll mean saving-up, I expect—if you don't raid your money-box!—so you'd better start collecting pennies right away.

Let's start with father, as we have left him out of the how-to-make gifts.

He'd be thrilled with some packets of seeds for the garden. Can't you imagine him sowing them on Bank Holiday? Buy one packet of expensive seeds, or three packets of cheaper ones, and select flowers that you know grow well in your garden.

If you live near a market you might even buy some seedlings, already growing, that will flower in no time.

A bundle of raffia or garden twine is another present that would be welcomed by the keen gardener. And do select dark green for preference, for this is so much less noticeable among the blooms.

Three pairs of shoelaces, nice long ones, two of black and one of brown is another little gift notion. A pair of braces are always useful and quite inexpensive. So are sock-suspenders, if father wears them.

Cuff links, studs and tiepins can also be bought for under sixpence.

For mother you might like to buy a new belt for her spring frock. Mind you choose a bright colour.

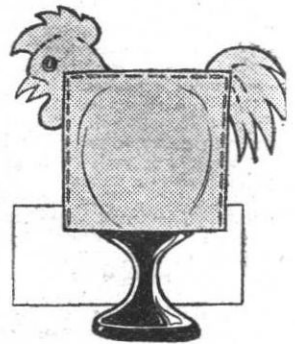
A little comb for her handbag, a notebook for shopping, a little case for holding precious pound notes—all would be very popular, I'm sure—and can be bought from threepence upwards.

A chum might like a geometry set for sixpence. She'd love a coloured silk scarf to tuck into the neck of her coat or to wear round her hair.

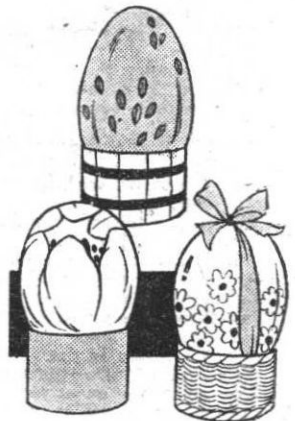
A card of hair-grips would be "just what she wanted," while a "luxury" present might be chosen from a pot of good cold cream, a bottle of setting lotion for keeping the hair neat after it has been washed, a packet of shampoo, a bundle of "orange sticks" for doing her nails.

These suggestions can be bought from threepence up to sixpence.

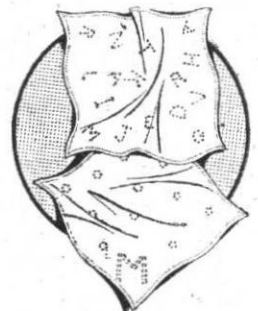
And if you wrap them nicely and put them in a pretty box or a cardboard egg, they'd look as valuable as a much more costly gift.



An Egg-Cosy for Mother or Grandma,



Eggs-in-baskets for the "Babies,"



A Lovely Gift for a Chum,



Mother would love these,

(Continued from page 11)

picture belongs to," Bessie said warmly. "It belongs to Lord Courtfield, and is worth goodness knows how much. And if," Bessie added, glowering, "you think I'm going to cart stolen property about—"

She paused, not liking the quick look which passed from man to woman, observing at the same time that the man rather hastily thrust the gleaming necklace into his pocket.

"So you recognise it?" The woman drew a deep breath. "And what, now, are you going to do about it?"

"Well, I'm jolly well going to the police!" Bessie stated.

"Indeed!" The woman smiled silkily. The man rose to his feet. "Think well, Bessie Bunter," the woman warned. "Think well before you do reckless and rash things. Remember the vow! Remember, Bessie Bunter, that you are our partner in all things. Remember you have been working with us; that you have agreed to take your share of what we found."

Bessie blinked. "But not stolen stuff!" she pointed out, and blinked nervously at the door. "I nun-never—"

"No?" The woman smiled again. "Supposing," she asked, "this is stolen stuff? Supposing the treasure we agreed to share with you was all stolen stuff? Supposing those coins we gave you were stolen stuff?"

"Oh!" Bessie drew a deep breath. "Oh, then—then I think it's jolly mummey, you know, tricking me like this! Let me go!"

She turned towards the door, but the woman headed her off.

"Wait a minute," she purred. "Oh, yes, wait a minute, Miss Bunter! Now," she said, changing her tone, "just listen to me, you great fool! It's about time you knew where you stood, and it's too late to draw back now. I may as well tell you—the stuff is stolen! Those coins we gave you, and which you spent, were stolen, too. And if," she added, "you say one word to the police, you'll be arrested—not only as a receiver of stolen goods, but as a confederate in the stealing of those goods. You understand?"

Bessie gazed at her in round-eyed horror. For a moment her knees shook.

Too late, she now repented of her rash impetuosity at taking these people at their face value. Only dimly she understood, though her mind was whirling with horror at the realisation of her own dreadful situation.

There never had been any treasure. Unwittingly she had been made the tool and the accomplice of a gang of thieves! The treasure had been a story invented by this treacherous woman on the spur of the moment, to fool her when, by accident, she had stumbled upon the gang's hiding-place!

"Then—then—" she stuttered. "But the chuch-chart—"

The woman sneered. "My work," she said. "Rather clever, wasn't it? My idea, too, to make you dig where you'd find treasure—the treasure already having been planted for you. The coins you took from us and spent were part of a stolen collection. Well, are you going to tell the police all that, Bessie Bunter?"

Bessie's face was white then. Dazedly she stared at her, hardly noticing that Anna Smith was swiftly removing the wooden frame of the painting.

She was a thief! She was the accomplice of thieves! Blindly Bessie turned to the door.

The man guffawed. Mrs. Smith opened the door. As Bessie went out she put a rolled-up canvas into her hand.

"Yours, Miss Bunter," she said smilingly.

Bessie, without realising she had it, her mind bemused and dazed, staggered out. Only when she arrived outside did she look at the thing in her hand, and then jumped.

For it was "Sunset in Venice." She trembled. Mrs. Smith's face peered mockingly from the window.

"Your share of the treasure, Bessie Bunter," she called, and closed it rapidly. The man in the room glanced towards her.

"Isn't it a risk to give her that?" he asked.

"I don't think so, Jackie," the woman shrugged. "The fat fool will be too numb with fright to say a word. I know her sort. That's stolen property; she knows it. While she has it in her possession she'll be too terrified to say anything. Because, what can she say? How to account for stolen property without giving away the fact that she is in league with the gang who stole it? That canvas just keeps her involved, you see. And after to-morrow, what does it matter? We shall be far away!"

The man chuckled admiringly. But Bessie, blundering on her way, gingerly holding the canvas as if it were something that might at any minute turn and bite her, was almost crying. It wasn't true—it couldn't be true! Nobody could possibly have played a trick on her like that!

Now what was she to do? She dared not go to the police! She dared not tell Babs and Mabs! At the same time, she had this awful thing! Oh, dear, if this were found on her—

The very thought made Bessie jump. For an instant she thought wildly of pitching it away. It wasn't hers. But no—no, she couldn't do that. That would be as bad as stealing it! If it wasn't hers to have, it wasn't hers to lose.

Ah, here was an idea! She'd jolly well go back to Monk's Tower now. She'd jolly well force Michael Smith to take this awful thing back. And then, once she had got rid of it, she'd tell Babs and take her advice!

Bessie hurried on. But just in case anybody should meet her en route, she buttoned the canvas into her coat.

Stumbling, gasping, thinking only of her new plan, she came at last within sight of Monk's Tower. And then suddenly she halted. Her fat cheeks turned flabbily white as she heard a voice. And, staring, she knew then that to carry out her project at that moment was impossible.

For from the direction of the Tower, already rushing towards her, were Babs, Mabs, Clara, and Marjorie!

In the Enemy's Power!



"Oh, dud-dear—" For the twentieth time Bessie Bunter heaved that forlorn, rather pathetic sigh.

Barbara Redfern glanced up from the cover of the programme she was sketching for the forthcoming Cliff House concert. Mabel Lynn, engaged in making a plan of the stage she would use in the production of the playlet she had written for the concert, glanced up, too. Bessie was writing lines—or was writing them in the intervals of those self-pitying sighs.

"Bessie, what's the matter?" Babs asked gently.

"Oh, nun-nothing!" Bessie stuttered forlornly.

"Lines getting you down?"

"Nun-no," Bessie said unhappily.

"Still thinking of what Primmy said?"

"Nun-no!" Bessie said. "Oh, dear!" She bent to her task again. Very worried, Bessie looked. Gone now was that careless, flamboyant Bessie of yesterday and this morning. Gone that conceit. No more talk of fortunes!

Bessie Bunter had returned to earth with a crash. And yet Bessie was still as big a mystery as ever. For she still most stubbornly refused to say on what mission she had been engaged at Monk's Tower; refused, with most astonishing stubbornness, to give any account for her recent actions.

To Miss Primrose, on being brought back from her truancy, she had said she had gone out to meet someone. That was all.

It was lucky for Bessie that Babs was her friend, and that Babs, at this particular moment, stood high in Miss Primrose's estimation. For it was Babs who had pleaded with the headmistress not to be too hard on Bessie.

With the result that Bessie had been left off with three detentions, and instructed to work off the mass of lines she had collected within the week!

There was silence for a moment or two. Bessie scribbled on. Then suddenly she broke off with a groan.

"Oh, dud-dear!" "Bessie, old thing, what is it?" Babs asked worriedly.

"Oh, nun-nothing," Bessie said. "Nun-nothing! I—I was only just thinking, you know. I—I suppose I can think if I want to? But—but—Babs?"

"Yes, old Bess?" "Supposing—er—supposing," Bessie blurted anxiously, "you helped a thief? Supposing you—you had stolen property, you know—"

Babs looked startled. "Bessie, what are you talking about? Why do you ask a question like that?"

"Oh, nun-nothing! I—I'm gig-gigging to write a story for the 'Cliff House Mag,' you know," Bessie stammered, rushing out the first excuse which came to her mind. "And this girl I'm writing about, you know, gets in league with—with a gang of burglars. She receives stolen property—"

"A real crook of a girl, eh?" Babs asked.

"Eh? Nun-no, of course not. She's a jolly nice girl, really, as honest as—as the day, and most frightfully good-looking, you know—"

"Well, I must say she doesn't sound it."

Bessie blinked pathetically. "And—and she's caught with some of the stolen property, you know," she went on anxiously. "I was just wondering what would happen to her?"

"Well, does she know it was stolen?" Babs asked.

"Y-yes." "Then," Babs said, "I should say she'd get sent to a reformatory. Oh, my hat, Bessie, what's the matter? You look quite white!"

But Bessie shook her head. She was feeling white then. She felt, in fact, so weakly terrified all at once that she decided to go and get a drink.

Babs frowned a little anxiously as the door closed behind her.

Mabs looked up from her plan. "Now, that won't do," she said thoughtfully. "If I put the bed there it will block the exit from the left. The stool's here, the table here— Oh, my

hat, what a muddle this is! Babs, can I have your help?"

"With pleasure!" Babs agreed. "It's Scene No. 1," Mabs said. "Look! I'll arrange it on the carpet. That's the stool—" She grabbed up a cushion. "There's the table." She put the coalbox beside it. "Now I've got to get the bed in. What can I use for a bed? Oh, here we are!" and she grabbed one of the big, square cushions from the settee. "Now, if I put that—hallo!" she breathed. "Babs, what's this?"

Babs, staring at the settee, saw the small oil painting laid flat, which the removal of the cushion had revealed. Mabs picked it up.

And then she jumped. "Babs, we know this!" Babs nodded, her eyes wide. She knew it. Half the school knew it. No need to tell them that that was Lord Courtfield's "Sunset in Venice!"

"Mabs!" Babs' voice was strained.

"That's it," Babs nodded. "Lord Courtfield's! Bessie's got hold of it somehow—goodness knows how! It's preying on her mind. She believes she's a thief, and an accomplice of thieves. Somebody obviously has been tricking her. Mabs, better hide this again. If that was seen, goodness knows what might happen! Meantime, let's find Bessie!"

But Bessie, when they searched, was nowhere to be found. Not until call-over did they see her again, forlorn, miserable. It was, of course, impossible to speak to her then. It was impossible to talk to her at the supper which followed. After supper came bed. During all that time no chance whatever of a private talk with the poor old duffer.

And in the Fourth Form dormitory—Babs, more worried than she had ever been before, could not sleep. She was wondering, wondering, trying desperately to piece things together. How

"At the cottage between the Tower and the Folly, you know! Oh, d-d-dear—" and Bessie stirred restlessly. "Pip—please don't send me to prison," she moaned. "I nun—never meant to do anything wrong—"

But that was enough for Babs. In the darkness she rose. Then quickly she awakened Leila, Clara and Mabs, telling them to dress. Without question they obeyed. In a group they crept downstairs, and slipped out of the school through the lobby window.

"Now, what's the giddy game?" Clara asked then.

Babs told her what Bessie in her sleep had said.

"And what are we going to do?" Leila asked. "We're going," Babs said determinedly, "to the cottage near Monk's Tower. I think," she added grimly, "this needs a little explanation from Mr. Michael Smith! He's probably the merchant too, who sent the roof



BESSIE gaped in bewilderment at her helpless chums. "For goodness' sake, turn that torch off!" Babs hissed. "If those villains see us—Bessie, you've got to free us—quickly!"

"Mabs, remember what Bessie was just saying—about stolen property?"

"Oh, my aunt!" Mabs stuttered. "Babs, you don't mean—"

"I don't know!" Babs bit her lip. "It does seem the old duffer has got herself into some awful scrape, though. This was what was on her mind when she asked those questions. She—" and then hurriedly, guiltily she wheeled, the canvas behind her, as the door opened. With startled face she confronted Clara and Leila Carroll as they came into the room. "Oh!" she gasped.

"Well," Clara said, staring. "What's the matter? You look like a couple of conspirators!"

"D-do we?" Babs asked. Then she swiftly made up her mind. "Come in," she said. "Close the door. Lock it, Leila. Clara, I want to show you something."

She showed it. Clara started. "Why, that's—"

had Bessie obtained possession of that stolen picture? What connection was there between her and the rascal, whoever he might be, who had driven them from Monk's Tower that afternoon?

Ten o'clock chimed, eleven, half-past eleven, and still she was wide-awake. Then from Bessie's bed came a restless mutter.

"But I'm not a thief!" she said plaintively, obviously talking in her sleep. "I never thought you were a thief, Michael Smith! Oh, how I wish I'd never met you!"

Babs' eyes gleamed. She leant forward. Once before Bessie had talked in her sleep like this, and when Babs had questioned her she had answered. She whispered:

"Bessie, where did you meet him?"

"At Monk's Tower, you know!"

"And he told you he was looking for treasure?"

"Yes!"

"Where does he live?"

toppling about our heads this afternoon!"

"But why don't we go to the police?" demanded Clara.

"Because we've got to get old Bessie out of her mess first. Come on!"

They went on, not quite sure in their minds how Babs' objective was going to be achieved, but willing enough to follow the Form captain's lead.

To reach the cottage they had to pass Monk's Tower, and hardly had they come within sight of that sinister place than Babs halted with a sharp intake of breath. They all stopped.

"Look, a light!" Babs breathed.

A light in the tower there was. For a moment the glow shone from the ruined doorway, then it was gone!

"Come on!" Clara said.

They nodded, and cautiously crept forward. In a few moments they had reached the Tower, silent now and in darkness. Rather nervously, with vivid memories of their near escape of the

afternoon, they entered it. Babs, who had brought a torch, shone it round. Then she stared.

"Look!" She pointed to the flagstones. Once again, in spite of the load of debris which had fallen from the ruined roof that afternoon, they had been cleared. "Seems fishy!" Clara said. "Looks as if—" And then she spun round with a gasp.

For suddenly another light flashed behind her. Two men entered the room. One a dark-eyed, blue-jowled ruffian.

Something gleamed in his hand. "So sorry," he said mockingly, "to inconvenience you young ladies. But will you please put up your hands? You see," he added slowly, "we have no use for visitors such as you when we are preparing to make our departure. I thought you might have taken the hint when I toppled the roof on you this afternoon, but apparently you are very stubborn. Quick!" he added fiercely.

Hearts thumping, Babs & Co. raised their hands above their heads.

"Jackie, tie them up!" Jackie, the bearded ruffian, came forward, producing a length of cord from his pocket. While Michael Smith, a sneering smile playing about his lips, covered them, Babs & Co.'s hands were securely tied.

"Good work!" Smith approved. "Now open the trap-door, Jackie. It's a great shame to threaten and bully you young ladies like this, but I am sure you will appreciate my measures when you know how necessary it is for me to leave this coast before dawn, without anyone being the wiser. Turn about now, and no nonsense! Get down the ladder there."

"But look here—" Clara flared. "Get down!" the man snarled.

Sick at heart, very alarmed, the chums turned. Threatened by the revolver, they were forced to descend the ladder into the cellar below. The man, Jackie, flashing a torch, shepherded them together as Michael Smith joined them, indicating the tunnel-like entrance which Bessie had found yesterday.

"Quick march!" he rapped. There was no help for it. Into the tunnel they trailed. A cold wind struck at their faces. The smell of the sea rushed to their nostrils. For five, for ten minutes they marched on. Then suddenly ahead they heard the booming of the surf, saw a pale glimmer of moonlight. The torch flashed upon the wall.

In the stone were fastened stout rusty rings—relics of the old smuggling days, when prowlers of the night had moored their boats in this tunnel at high tide.

"Fasten them up," Michael Smith ordered.

Clara struggled in vain. She and her chums were each tied by their hands to one of the rings in the wall. The man Smith flashed his torch into their faces.

"And there," he sneered, "I think you will be safe and out of mischief, young ladies. I sincerely hope," he added mockingly, "that you will find some means of making yourselves heard when the morning arrives, otherwise who knows how long you may be here? Sorry I can't stop and chat. I have work to do. So long!"

"You scoundrel!" cried Clara. The man laughed. He turned away, walking towards the sea. They saw him and his companion vault a deep trench, and suddenly Clara jumped.

"Oh, my hat!" she breathed. "Babs, do you realise where we are?"

But Babs had already realised it. They were in one of the caves of Monk's Tomb! That trench the man had just

jumped was the one into which Clara had fallen the other day. She began to see now why such a trap had been made. She began to see whole heaps of things, and wondered why she had never connected Clara's adventure with the mysteriousness of Monk's Tower before. But one fact, terrible and inescapable, was drumming in her mind.

She and her chums, helpless, leaving no clue as to their whereabouts; were in the power of a stick-at-nothing gang of scoundrels! And what—what would be their fate if they failed to obtain help before the morning tide rolled in?

Bessie to the Rescue!



BESSIE BUNTER woke with a start.

Bessie had been dreaming.

Anxious and worrying those dreams, mingled with Red Rufus and Michael Smith and Barbara Redfern, with hovering like a hideous background the stolen picture of "Sunset in Venice!"

Worried and harassing dreams, but dreams at least out of which had been born an idea. And that idea—at all costs to get rid of the incriminating picture which she had in her possession!

Sitting up in bed, Bessie thought it all out. Her impulse was to take the picture to Lord Courtfield. That, however, couldn't be done! Lord Courtfield had probably missed it by this time, and would put the matter in the hands of the police at once.

But there was no reason why she should not carry out her idea of the

morning and throw it back at Michael Smith! And what better opportunity than now?

Bessie climbed out of bed.

Normally, darkness scared Bessie, but Bessie was not alarmed at this moment. Fear of prison was greater than her fear of darkness.

Down to Study No. 4 Bessie crept. There she retrieved the picture and armed herself with a torch. Climbing out of the school by the lobby window, she puffed her way towards the tower. She arrived to find the place silent, deserted.

But Bessie's resolve still held. She knew the secret of the flagstone. With the flagstone open, she clambered down the ladder into the cellar, peering this way and that. And then suddenly she jumped.

For from the tunnel on her right came a faint, muffled cry.

"Help!"

"Kik-Clara!" Bessie stuttered in stupefaction.

"Help!" came the cry again—in Babs' voice this time.

Bessie gasped. Babs and Clara here! Babs and Clara in danger!

She hesitated a moment, seized with nervous fears. And then resolutely she set her face towards the tunnel. Soft and deep her feet sank into sea-washed sand, yet some instinct stronger than her own intelligence warned her not to flash a light. The cry came again, nearer this time.

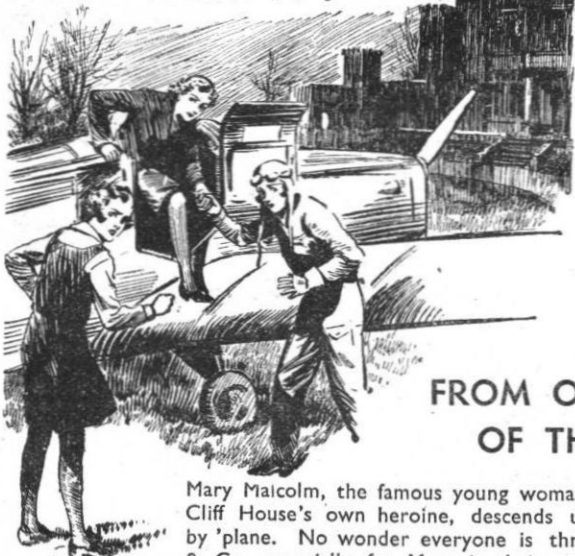
"Help!"

Bessie blundered on.

And then suddenly she saw the mouth

(Concluded on page 20)

The SPEED GIRL'S SECRET STOWAWAY!



FROM OUT
OF THE SKY—

Mary Malcolm, the famous young woman motorist, and Cliff House's own heroine, descends upon the school by plane. No wonder everyone is thrilled—and Babs & Co. especially, for Mary is their very dear friend.

But Mary hasn't come on a social visit. There's a desperately urgent reason for her startling arrival. *She is hiding a fugitive!*

Naturally, Barbara Redfern and her chums rally round, with Clara Trevlyn, Mary's cousin, well to the fore—someone else, for spiteful motives, tries to discover Mary's secret—and in no time the Cliff House friends are involved in the most breathlessly exciting adventure. Don't miss this magnificent story. It appears—**COMPLETE**—Next Saturday, and is written by YOUR very own heroine, HILDA RICHARDS.

Further magnificent chapters of that wonderful adventure story—

The JUNGLE HIKERS



FOR NEW READERS.

TERESA FORRESTER, self-possessed and resourceful, and

LUISE RAYMOND, her more timorous chum, are on their way to meet Teresa's parents in Africa when they become stranded.

With a quaint native girl,

FUZZY, as guide, they set off by canoe. The canoes were stolen by Fuzzy from a warlike tribe, who come in pursuit of the chums! They escape, but miss their steamer and continue by canoe. When they help a white hunter to get to Mongohu, which is said to be haunted, he gives them a talisman ring to show a native king. Later, the native porters desert with all the baggage. The chums pursue them!

(Now read on.)

Parted!

"COME on! Bambo's our one hope! He'll have to carry all three of us!"

Teresa knew that the young elephant, Bambo, was strong enough to bear their combined weight, or she would not have suggested it; but there was still the doubt as to whether he would agree to do it.

Already the war-cries of the pursuing warriors sounded nearer, and they were eager for vengeance, anxious to recapture Fuzzy, whom they took to be a princess of some importance.

Fuzzy, taking her pet elephant's trunk in her hands, spoke to him in soft, pleading earnestness, explaining how much depended upon him. And even though he might not be able to understand the human words, he realised that something was expected of him.

Luise was the first on his back. Teresa hoisted her up; and then, helped by Fuzzy, followed.

"Fuzzy, run alongside!" said Teresa. "Here they come!"

The warriors were in sight, and now they had seen the girls. Waving spears, they approached, furious and vengeful, knowing that it was one of the girls who had set fire to the grass deliberately. They had been tricked. Their prisoner had been rescued while they

beat out the flames, and they hated to be fooled.

There was no time for Fuzzy to climb on to Bambo's back. Her business was to get him moving, and that she did in a way of her own, luring him on with some luscious, specially-plucked fruit.

Bambo lumbered on at no great speed at first, but Fuzzy quickened her pace, and the young elephant followed suit.

Adolphus, the chimp, swinging from his tree-branch, dropped on to Bambo's back, and seemed delighted, quite unaware of the peril that threatened.

Looking back, Teresa saw a fleet-footed warrior run ahead of the others. A spear was poised to be flung, and in a moment it would whistle through the air.

Too often she had seen the accurate flinging of a native spear to doubt that this would find its mark.

"Look out! Duck!" she yelled.

Adolphus did not know what ducking

THE PORTERS HAD STOLEN THEIR BAGGAGE, BUT TERESA KNEW HOW TO GET IT BACK—BY PRETENDING TO BE A MAGICIAN!

meant. Quite happily, he sat there in the direct line of fire.

The spear whistled just as Fuzzy turned. But it was not aimed at her. True to its mark, the spear hit Bambo.

The poor little elephant squealed, and then, in terror, hurried on.

Fuzzy, quick as a flash, pulled the spear from his flank. The wound was slight, and could barely have hurt Bambo at all, but it scared him badly, and he went into a gallop.

In wild rage, Fuzzy turned back to the warrior.

Beside herself with fury, she was in no mood to count the odds. Not caring how many men there were to face, she charged towards them, the spear in her hand.

"Brutes, evil-doers!" she cried in their language. "You hurt my elephant—I hurt you plenty bad."

And, swinging the spear, she brought it low along the ground as the warrior who had flung it raised his animal-skin shield to protect his face.

It was his shin she struck, with terrific force.

His yell of pain rent the air, and he hopped on one foot, then on to the other, next doubling in agony.

Fuzzy, satisfied that justice, however rough, had been done, then poised the spear to fling it at the others; and, brave men though they might be, they dodged sideways as they saw her wild fury and blazing eyes.

The spear whistled at them, and, missing a man by inches, became pronged in a tree-trunk, droning as it vibrated.

Next moment the others charged on, determined to capture Fuzzy and take their chance—despite her denials—that she was a valuable princess.

Fuzzy backed from them, turned to run after the elephant, and then stood stock-still.

Bambo had bolted! With Teresa and Luise on his back, he was now out of sight.

And Fuzzy—she was alone with the warriors. Panic filled her; there was need for desperate action. Unarmed now, she had a dozen armed men charging at her.

If Fuzzy, then, had lost her head, she would have been captured; even if she had raced down the path they might have caught her.

Cunning came to her rescue, and she jumped sideways, rushing to the safety of the tangled bush. For there, her smallness and agility would help her, whereas their greater size and weight would be a handicap.

By
ELIZABETH
CHESTER

Nimble she tore through the undergrowth.

But the warriors did not abandon the chase; they spread, in the hope that she would turn and run into them.

Three of them rushed along the path, for they guessed that although she had gone into the bush she would soon turn back to the path in order to catch up with her friends.

But Fuzzy was far too artful for that; she went straight on through the tangled bush to where, not so far away, she could hear a snarling roar that she knew well, and understood. A lion!

Fuzzy was not afraid of lions. They were dangerous when hungry, or when attacked, but since she had been a tiny girl she had played with lion cubs, and even with great grown lions.

Easing her pace, panting a little from exertion, she crept forward and suddenly came upon him.

The lion was trapped, caught in a net, and now seemed too exhausted to struggle! Such nets were used often by natives, and, cleverly placed, they could ensnare wild animals, whose limbs could not be dragged free. The more they struggled the more they became exhausted, until finally they were an easy prey for the cowardly men, who crept forward to finish the cruel victory.

Fuzzy approached carefully. For the lion, in terror, might struggle, and reach her with his claws.

But she had a desperate plan to outwit the warriors!

Softly she whispered to the lion, creeping forward on all fours, so that if by chance any of the warriors should be near they still might not see her.

The lion ceased snarling, although his lips twitched, showing his fangs, as his large golden eyes fixed upon her.

In her soft, gentle voice Fuzzy tried to persuade him that she was a friend, and used the terms of endearment with which she had long ago learned to soothe the cubs that had been her playfellows.

Yet even though the lion was still now, it might move with lightning speed when she was near.

A yard from the animal she paused, and, facing him, drew from her belt the hunting-knife which Teresa had given her.

The blade was sharp, and Fuzzy, hardly breathing, reached forward, ready to snatch back her hand should the lion try to lash at her.

With one swift stroke of the knife she ripped the front of the net.

The lion, with a slashing movement, tore the net even more; and again Fuzzy used the knife at the side and back. At the same minute she heard a yell from a warrior.

"There she is!"

From all sides the warriors closed in, and Fuzzy, her heart thumping, crouched low, while the lion kicked himself free and stood looking at her, understanding that it was her he must thank.

"Lion—brave Simba," she murmured tremulously, "help me, please, as I helped you. Bad men come—look, look—"

The warriors suddenly became aware of the lion—and he at the same moment of them. With a terrific roar, he braced himself for a spring.

He knew that they were men who laid traps, enemies—he saw their spears, and on his flank was a scar which one had made months ago.

Fuzzy pointed and spoke, and the warriors, with wide, bulging eyes, stood in stark terror.

"She speak to lions!" yelled one.

"She is witch!"

"Run—"

They ran as the lion rushed, crashing in all directions, yelling with terror, and Fuzzy, knowing that they could escape, because the lion was already exhausted, did not wait to see what happened. She turned at once, and, with renewed energy, worked her way back to the path in the direction taken by the runaway Bambo.

Her thoughts now were all for her friends and her pet elephant, thundering through the jungle.

"It's Now or Never—"

TERESA clutched on to Bambo's ears. It was the only grip she could get, for the young elephant, head down, was charging along as though he expected a dozen more spears to pierce his hide.

He thundered through the jungle, not noticing if there were low tree branches ahead that might wipe the passengers from his back. He would not have cared even.

Fuzzy, his mistress, was gone, and he was in a terrible panic, wanting nothing but flight, to get as far from this evil place of sharp spears as he could.

Luise was in front of Teresa, and Teresa's arms stretched round her to reach Bambo's ears, while right at the back Adolphus bumped up and down, clung to Teresa with a tight, almost suffocating grip.

"Look out for branches," panted Teresa. "Here's one! Duck flat—flat—"

Frantically Luise flattened herself, almost falling over Bambo's head. Teresa leaned down sideways, and nearly dragged Adolphus from the elephant's back. And well that she did, too, otherwise that branch would have caught him in the face and swept him off, perhaps even stunned him.

As it was, the twigs and leaves grazed their backs.

"And more ahead," warned Teresa.

"Stop, Bambo—stop—"

But Bambo was going slightly downhill, and had got up good speed. If proof were needed that he was able to carry their weight with ease, this certainly gave it.

Sooner or later, though, they would be cleared from his back and hurled to the ground, with limbs broken or damaged, stunned; it needed little imagination to warn them of the awful dangers.

"Luise," Teresa gasped, shaken and bumped so that she could hardly get words out, "let me change—front of you!"

It seemed to Luise an almost impossible feat. Bambo was bouncing and banging so much that any move seemed certain to throw them off. But they had to change. For Teresa had a plan—a desperate way of stopping the young elephant's mad, headlong flight.

More branches—just missed by inches—and then they headed for a low, crooked tree and thicket. Bambo would charge through it—heedless!

Teresa struggled, leaning to the right, while Luise leaned left. Then, while Luise clung to her, she swung her right leg round, kneeling with her left on Bambo. It was tricky work, but the need was desperate, and Teresa, always cool, did not lose her head. Nor did Luise now, knowing that only she could keep Teresa in safety.

After a moment of struggling, Teresa found herself back to front on Bambo's head. But to swing round was not difficult.

Then came the testing-time. For the danger-point was near. Bambo, slowing slightly, seemed inclined to swerve, and Teresa knew that she must not delay.

It was a terrible risk she took; but Luise luckily did not guess just what she intended doing.

Teresa's plan was to lower herself down Bambo's trunk, forcing his head down by her weight.

Flinging her arms wide, Teresa managed to clutch on, and Bambo, feeling the added weight, threw up his trunk and grasped her.

For one terrible moment Teresa supposed that she would be flung to the ground beneath his trampling feet, but the shock of finding Teresa in his grasp was so great that Bambo lifted her up to try to get rid of her.

His pace slowed, and his mighty feet slithered on the ground, for by stopping he could best be free of this new menace—and menace he took it to be.

"All right, old fellow!" said Teresa soothingly. "All right, then! Steady! Whoa!"

Bambo came to a standstill hardly more than a yard from the crooked tree against the low branch of which he would have shattered his burden. Then, quaking slightly from reaction, he allowed Teresa to drop from his trunk, and she soothed and petted him.

Luise scrambled down from his back, and let out a prolonged gasp.

"However we escaped I just don't know," she said tremulously. "Teresa, what a chance you took! My word, just think—suppose you had fallen!"

"If I had," agreed Teresa, still holding Bambo's trunk, "I should have been run over by an elephant. Bambo's a darling, but his brakes aren't so good."

"They worked at the end, thank goodness!" said Luise, in relief. "But I thought we were done for."

Teresa looked back down the path for Fuzzy, but she was nowhere in sight, of course. Bambo's speed had really been terrific, considering his weight.

"Well, here we are," said Teresa, looking about her. "Thanks for the nice ride, Bambo, old fellow! Let's look at the spear mark. Don't touch him, Luise, in case he bolts again."

Luise examined the mark made by the spear. It was a flesh wound and not at all serious, painful though it had been in the first moment or two.

"We'd better wait for Fuzzy," said Teresa. "If only we had the first-aid kit we might put a wad of lint over it, and keep it in place with sticking-plaster."

Adolphus still remained on Bambo's back. He had got used to the odd motion of this mount, and he wanted more. It was an easy way of getting about the jungle, quite unknown to his mother, clever though she had been. But Adolphus would have to wait some time before he had another ride.

"He's like a kid on a roundabout!" laughed Teresa breathlessly. "He wants another ride."

"Well, I don't!" gasped Luise, and became serious all at once. "Oh, Terry, do you think Fuzzy's been caught?" she asked anxiously. "What are we to do? We must go back. We must! We can't just desert her. Those awful warriors could capture her and hold her prisoner."

Teresa looked grim.

"If only she could have clung on!" she sighed. "This was the one thing I never wanted to happen—that we should be parted. If we go back, can we evade capture?"

Luise had no wish to go back. She shivered at the mere thought, for here she felt so safe. And yet to stay here would be to desert Fuzzy.

Teresa tried hard to think of a way

of rescuing Fuzzy if she had been caught.

"If only we were near those porters, and could get our luggage," she said. "We can't be far from them—not at the speed Bambo was going."

"Oh, if only we could!" sighed Luise.

Teresa, in determined mood, marched on to the tree that had blocked their way and nearly brought their doom. It was large and crooked, but by climbing it she could get a view of the surrounding country.

As she reached the tree she gave a shout.

"Luise, come and see what I've found!"

Luise ran forward, filled with excitement, arriving just as Teresa, pushing past the tree, picked up a topee. And only a glance at it was necessary to tell Luise that it was their own.

"The porters didn't turn aside. They came this way—and look!" said Teresa, thrilling with a further discovery.

She pointed ahead to a damp stretch of ground. On the far side of a large puddle was a distinct footprint in the

And on foot they would be faster than the girls.

"What shall we do?" asked Luise. "Nothing risky, Teresa. I've had enough of risks for a little while. What I really want is a nice quiet rest for a bit."

"As soon as we get the luggage we'll have it," promised Teresa. "But we can't take chances. We've got to scare those boys thoroughly."

Luise was looking less frightened now, and there was a bright glow in her eyes, for really their spell of bad luck seemed to be over.

Bambo, by running away, had done them a good turn. Without that burst of speed they could not have caught up with the boys, who might soon wander from the track and be lost.

At the moment the boys doubtless thought that they had put on such good speed themselves that they could not be caught. And really there was little reason why they should think that the girls had even a chance of pursuing them; for, so far as they knew, Teresa, Fuzzy, and Luise had been taken prisoner. What they were more likely

branch, and put part of it on his back, so that the rest dragged. Do elephants sometimes catch branches, and drag them?" she asked.

"Luise, what a brainwave!" said Teresa, in delight, and proudly slapped her friend on the shoulder. "Jolly good! A wizard idea. Of course, that would give us all the cover we want."

In a moment Teresa and Luise were plucking at a small branch, and Teresa, using the knife at her belt, hacked it off without much difficulty.

One idea led to another, and Luise suggested giving the branch to Adolphus, who seemed disinclined to dismount.

Adolphus was quite willing, especially as there was fruit on the branch. After a little experimenting, Luise mounted behind him, and made sure that the branch gave cover, while Teresa followed, holding another which she dragged along the ground.

Anyone standing in front of Bambo would think that he was dragging the other one as well—caught, perhaps, to his tail.



WHEN Bambo, with Luise clinging to his back, got near the natives Teresa shouted in a hollow voice: "Rascals! I come to you in the form of an elephant!" The dishonest porters stood there stricken with terror.

soft mud. Water was oozing into it, but it was not yet filled.

"It's filling fairly quickly, so they couldn't have passed here more than a minute ago," said Teresa. "Here, I'm going right up the tree. Give me a bunk up!"

Teresa climbed the tree, and from her lofty perch had a view of the winding path, which had been hidden before.

Straggling along it, still bearing their loads, were the boys—their own porters—and their own luggage.

"Only a hundred and fifty yards ahead!" she exclaimed. "And they're slowing—not even running! It's now or never, if we want to get our things back!"

Bambo Speaks!

TERESA'S natural instinct was to rush after the porters and challenge them; but she never acted on impulse. It would be easy, perhaps, to take command again, but if the boys had determined to sell the luggage they might resist, or even run

to fear was pursuit by the warriors, although even that was remote.

Now, feeling safe, the porters would go at normal speed to sell the luggage to the white trader.

But not if Teresa could stop them! "We can't leave Bambo. And how about Fuzzy?" Luise asked.

"Fuzzy will follow, and once we get the luggage back, we can just wait for her," decided Teresa, thinking and planning while she spoke. "And, as for Bambo—ahah!"

She snapped her fingers, and Luise nearly skipped for joy.

"You've got an idea?" she asked. "Bambo—yes," said Teresa. "He can help. He can lead, and—"

"And we can follow close behind?" exclaimed Luise. "Yes, my goodness, that's an idea. We could take cover behind him."

The idea was good; for the sound of his heavy steps would cover theirs. Moreover, his bulk would ensure that they were hidden—unless their feet could be seen through his.

Thinking of that, Luise had an idea. "Well, suppose we tear down a small

It was well thought out, and Teresa tested it carefully.

"But mind," warned Luise, "if old Bambo, or rather young Bambo, bolts, I shall jump off."

And, to make quite sure of being able to do that, should the need arise, she seated herself as far back as she could.

In quite gay spirits they set out on their adventure. It was not until they were close to the boys that the thrill began. Bambo walked at an easy pace, but quickened when Teresa encouraged him. Then she made an odd noise—odd for an elephant—that drew their attention.

None of the natives wanted to be trampled on, and they fell aside.

At a few yards distance Teresa shouted.

"Rascals, I come to you in the form of an elephant!" she called. "You thought you left me prisoner. You mean to take things along white man to sell."

Seeing only the branches and elephant, but hearing Teresa's voice, the

Black boys' eyes almost popped out of their heads.

They were superstitious, and believed in magic.

They gathered together shakily, and Teresa held her breath. It was touch and go. If the boys were really deceived, one more word might send them fleeing.

But as they hesitated there, half-

paralysed, Adolphus, filled with curiosity, moved the branch a little.

Then one of the black boys found voice.

"There is someone hidden in the leaves!" he shouted.

Luise's heart almost stopped beating, and Teresa groaned aloud. Just when success seemed nearly theirs, Adolphus had ruined everything.

But Teresa's mind was quick, and as she saw the branch move an idea came. Even yet the situation could be saved.

WHAT ever idea can Teresa have to save her plan from disaster?

You will learn the answer to that vital question when you read next week's instalment of this fine story.

"BESSIE BUNTER'S TREASURE!"

(Concluded from page 16)

of the cavern some distance ahead of her, the moonlit beach beyond. And just beyond the mouth of the cave she saw two men and a woman working frantically, loading a boat with those same packing-cases she had observed in the cellar yesterday. Michael Smith and his wife, Anna—and that other villain who had been in the cottage. They were getting away!

"Oh, mum-my hat!" gasped Bessie. "I sus-say—"

She blundered on. Then she gave a gasp. In the darkness of the tunnel Clara's voice sounded again.

"Who's there?"

"Clara!" cried Bessie.

"Oh, my hat! Bessie—"

"But look here—I sus-say, you know, what are you doing here?" and Bessie shone her torch on the prisoners. Her jaw dropped.

"For goodness' sake," Babs hissed, "turn that torch off. If those villains see us—Bessie, don't make a sound. You've got to free us—quickly. Come here. That's right. Now run your hand along my arms until you find the cords my hands are tied with. Got them?"

"Y-yes!" stuttered Bessie.

"Undo them!"

"Oh dear—"

"And buck up, old dufferkins!"

Bessie blinked. But the urgency in Babs' voice made her hasten. Even so, working completely in the dark, it was a good five minutes before Babs was free. Meantime, the two men and the woman were still loading.

"That's right!" breathed Babs.

"Where's the torch? Good egg—I've got it! Bessie, undo the others—quickly. I'm going to fetch the police."

"The pip-police?" gasped Bessie.

"Oh, Bib-Babs—"

But Babs, flying up the passage, had gone!

Only Just in Time!



A VALIANT enterprise, that—but how one second's reflection might have told Babs how hopeless it was!

For the nearest police aid was at Friardale—and Friardale was four miles away. Four there—four back.

In the mouth of the cave the two men and the woman still worked. Bessie, in the darkness, perspiringly groaned as she untied Clara's bonds.

"Oh, goodie!" Clara gasped then. "Well done, Bess! Tackle Mabs now. I'll free Leila."

Grimly she set to work on the American junior, while Bessie, blundering in the darkness, groped her way towards Mabs. At the same time, there came a cry from Michael Smith.

"Hey, you, in there!" he shouted. And he moved towards the cave, flashing his torch, whose powerful beam

cut the darkness like a miniature searchlight.

Clara groaned. It seemed then that the game was up with a vengeance! Desperately she turned back to Leila, fumbling with her bonds.

Smith was in the cave now. The torch beam shot forward. For a moment it rested upon Clara, then swept on Bessie, flooding her rotund form. Bessie, the light full in her eyes, stood and blinked.

"That's done it!" Clara groaned.

Done it, undoubtedly, it had. The very presence of the fat junior told Smith at once that something had gone wrong. They saw him stop. In his hand appeared the menacing revolver again. He shouted back to his companions.

"Jackie, Anna, this way!"

The chums dared not move. Nothing could save them now.

But couldn't it? They had forgotten one thing—Bessie Bunter's expert powers of ventriloquism.

Very strangely still Bessie stood, her eyes gleaming excitedly, even if her knees were knocking.

Nearer, nearer the gang came on. Now they had reached the edge of the trench. Now they were preparing to vault it. And then, suddenly, from the mouth of the cave:

"Hi! Stop! Stop there! Men, seize that boat! Surround the cave!"

"The police!" shrieked Clara.

Even she, in that moment, was deceived. Michael Smith, in the very act of taking off his leap, turned with a shout, and, in turning, missed his footing and went diving head first into the pit of his own making. Jackie and the woman paused, flinging round.

"Clara, free Mabs!" Bessie hissed.

"It's me! I'm ventriloquising."

"Oh, my hat!" Clara gasped.

No more time wasted in words, however. While Clara jumped for Mabs, Bessie rushed for Leila. Even so, she did not forget her task.

"Surrender, you scoundrels!" cried the voice at the mouth of the cave.

"Put up your hands! I sus-say, Mabs, is that getting looser?" Bessie whispered anxiously.

"Yes. Quick, Bess!" Mabs gasped.

"Gee, thanks!" Leila gasped, free at last, and, rushing to Bessie's aid, helped her to free Mabs. "Bessie, keep it up a bit—then bunk!"

"Stand still!" Bessie's assumed voice roared, contradicting every previous order. "Dud—don't you dare look round. Oh, mum-my hat! Scoot!"

They scooted. Michael's shrieking voice followed them.

"You fools! You fools! It's a trick! The girls are getting away! They're tricking you. Hang you! Get after them!"

"Oh, great grandfathers!" Clara gasped. "They've spotted the wheeze. Come on!"

Panting, they pelted on. But the darkness hampered them, and they were soon overtaken.

"Got you!" Jackie panted. "Thought you could trick us, eh? Well, you'll see! Anna, give us a hand. If they struggle—you know what to do! Get 'em back to the boat, quick! We—"

He never finished. For the sound of heavy feet came clattering down the ladder that led to the trapdoor of the cellar.

A sudden light cut through the darkness, and while Jackie and Anna Smith whirled, three Air Force officers, revolvers in hand, came rushing forward. There was a sharp, barked command:

"Put 'em up!"

And Jackie and Anna slowly "put 'em up."

While Clara, Mabs, Leila, and Bessie breathlessly scrambled to their feet, Babs, her face white, rushed on the scene.

"Oh, Clara—Bessie!" she sobbed. "Thank goodness we came in time! I—I didn't fetch the police, after all," she added. "I—I stopped at the aerodrome on the way and asked for help there! I—"

And then Babs, worn out, reeled, and would have fallen had not Clara leapt to her aid.

NEXT MORNING—in Miss Primrose's study. Babs, Mabs, Bessie, Leila and Clara there, and the headmistress herself, beaming and proud. She coughed.

"I have just heard from the police, girls," she said. "It seems that you have rounded up a gang of scoundrels whom they have been trying to catch for some time. Apparently, the gang were not only housebreakers and burglars, but smugglers, too. In the circumstances, I cannot, of course, punish you. I must add a word of warning to you, Bessie, however. In future, be careful of making chance friends."

"Y-yes, Miss Primrose. And—and I'm not gig-going to be sent to prison, or anything?"

Miss Primrose smiled.

"No, my dear. You were simply the tool of unprincipled rascals. It is thanks largely to your foolishness that the gang was caught. You may go."

And Babs & Co. went. But in the corridor outside Bessie frowned.

"You know, I think I shall go back and tell Primmy off," she said.

"Cos why?" Leila asked.

"Cos she said it was my foolishness," Bessie said indignantly, "when all the time it was my jolly intelligent cleverness that led to the downfall of the gang, you know. Anybody would think I didn't know they were crooks all the time!"

"And of course, you did?" Babs chuckled.

"Well, what do you think?" Bessie glowed.

"I'll tell you that some other time, old Bess!" laughed Babs. "Meantime," she added, catching her fat chum's arm, "what about a little spread at the tuck-shop to celebrate it all? Cream puffs or meringues, Bess?"

"Oh, both—a whole plateful of each," Bessie beamed. "Kik—come on, you girls!"

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

(Now turn to page 16 for particulars of Next Saturday's lovely story of Barbara Redfern & Co.)

COMPLETE this week. Another topping laughter-story featuring irrepressible—

GIPSY JOY

The Rich Girl Romany



"My nephew Archibald will be an example for you!" declared Joy Sharpe's governess. He was—an example of boyish cunning and deceit. But thanks to Nakita, her gipsy self, rich girl Joy forced him to behave like a circus clown!

"Dear Archibald!"

"**W**HETHER or not, Joy, you are allowed to come with me and Archibald to the village fete will depend entirely upon your conduct."

As Joy Sharpe heard that solemn warning her heart sank; for she dearly wanted to go to the village fete, which promised to be quite exciting. But from the mere tone of Miss Retcham's voice it was fairly evident that her chances of going were not great.

"Yes, Miss Retcham," she said meekly, and sat down in her chair at the school-room table.

"And, furthermore, Joy, I shall expect that essay on Queen Victoria to be finished by the time I return," added the stern, grim-faced governess.

Joy stifled a groan. Considering all the many thousands of words that have been written about Queen Victoria, Joy should not have found it difficult to write two hundred and fifty on the same subject. At least, Miss Retcham thought not. But Joy was not a born biographer, and essay writing was not one of her delights.

"In any case, Archibald and I will go to the fete," Miss Retcham added.

Then Joy asked the question that was in her mind. Who was Archibald?

"Old Mr. Brown, Miss Retcham?" she asked. "The man who sells papers at the corner of the High Street?"

Miss Retcham fairly barked at her, and her eyes flashed.

"Do you think I should allow myself to be escorted to the fete by the newspaper seller?" she demanded. "Archibald Brown indeed! I am referring to my nephew."

"Oh!" said Joy in surprise and interest. "Is he coming here, then?"

"He is coming here," said Miss Retcham; "and I have every reason to think that he will be a good example for you, Joy. He is well-mannered, serious-minded, diligent, and studious."

He sounded very dull, but Joy did not say so.

"I am taking him to the fete, although gaiety and frivolity do not appeal to him now that he is older," added the governess. "At fourteen he is unusually serious; and I am hoping, Joy, that you will admire him and look up to him. I am going now to meet him at the station, and had you written even half that essay you might be accompanying me. As it is, you will stay here."

Bang! went the door, and Miss Retcham went on her way to meet Archibald.

Joy Sharpe settled down at the table with a sad sigh. Outside, birds were singing and the sky was blue. There was more than a hint of spring in the air.

But Joy could not be free and happy and gay; she was to stay indoors—and all because of Queen Victoria.

"Just as if," she sighed, "anything I can write about old Queen Victoria can matter! If I wrote something new it wouldn't be true; and if it's true, everyone knows it already. Silly nonsense!"

And she jabbed her pen into the inkwell and stared at the sheet of paper.

But, instead of thinking about Queen Victoria, her mind drifted to the open fields, to the fete, and to Archibald—that model boy, old beyond his years, a pattern to all.

She put down her pen, rose restlessly, and went to the window. The spring called her—and so did her pup, Tinker, barking from the garden below.

"Why should I stay in?" she asked herself. "If I were only a gipsy—a real gipsy—out in the fields—"

All at once she made up her mind. "Tinks, I'll come," she said. "Goodness knows what pother and bother it'll mean, but I'll come."

And, although she knew that she was taking a risk, that there might be trouble ahead, she turned to the door, shivering a little with excitement.

The essay had not been done, but Joy was an optimist; so she told herself that if she took Tinker for just a short run she could rush back, her mind cleared by the fresh air and in the mood to think of hundreds of things about Queen Victoria that could be dashed down on paper in record time.

She hurried up to her room—a little conscience-stricken and anxious, yet gay at the thought of pleasures to come.

Tinker had found his way into the house, and, charging into her bed-room, went at once to the wardrobe, scratching at the door.

"Yes, I know what you want—Nakita," said Joy. "And that's what I want. Silly old Tinks, I really believe you prefer a poor gipsy girl to rich Joy."

She opened the wardrobe and took out a frock. It was a pretty gipsy frock, although a little shabby and worn; but to Joy it was a fairy mantle, for it spelled happiness and freedom.

To Tinker it was almost as magical, and at sight of it he turned round three times in sheer high spirits.

By IDA MELBOURNE

"Nakita—here she is!" said Joy. "Two minutes, and she'll really be gone—and quiet little Joy will have disappeared."

Tinker never knew the whys and wherefores of all this; but he sat down, thumping his tail, his tongue lolling out, waiting.

Even when the frock was on he knew that he still had to wait; for next came the process of darkening face and hands.

The routine was unvaried. Joy Sharpe, with her face dyed, a colourful scarf about her head, and wearing that pretty frock, was Joy no longer; she became Nakita, the gipsy girl.

And only Tinker, her dog, knew the secret. Even though Miss Retcham had met Joy face to face in that guise, she had never recognised her, and so confident was Joy that she had not a moment's anxiety on that score now.

Wearing the frock, face stained, she crept from her bed-room and down the deserted corridor to the back staircase.

BETWEEN OURSELVES



MY DEAR READERS,—In these days of progress, when members of the once-called "weaker sex" are competing with men in almost every sphere of activity, we don't let ourselves get surprised when we learn that "Miss or Mrs. So-and-so" has won a great motor-race, or performed some meritorious flight by plane. It's just what we've come to expect.

There are almost as many heroines these days as there are heroes. Maybe some of you actually know such a heroine; maybe some of you are lucky enough to be like the Cliff House girls, and have one of these real-life heroines for a friend.

And now, of course, I'm hinting at Mary Malcolm. You know, that intrepid young lady who can drive a racing car at speed with the most accomplished male rivals; who has already been featured in the Cliff House stories, and whom Babs & Co., like all the other girls at the famous school, adore.

For undoubtedly Mary Malcolm is a heroine to Cliff House. No wonder everyone is thrilled when Mary, like a bolt from the blue, suddenly descends upon the school in a plane, actually landing on the playing-fields.

But Mary hasn't exactly come on a social visit. Babs & Co. speedily discover there's a far more urgent, desperate reason for her startling appearance. Exactly what this is you'll discover when you read next week's fascinating **LONG COMPLETE** story of the world-famous chums, entitled:

"THE SPEED GIRL'S SECRET STOWAWAY!"

That'll give you some idea of the story, of course. In fact, I'm sure it'll fill you with excited impatience for next Saturday to arrive. But I'll just add that Babs & Co. have the most thrilling time of their lives.

One of their treats is a ride with Mary in her superb car. Only a

Five minutes later she was in the wood not far from the house, romping and dancing and skipping with Tinker.

She ran with him until she was breathless, until even he was tired; then she eased up, to give a start of surprise as she heard the village clock strike.

"My golly—that essay! And Miss Retcham will be back!" Nakita murmured.

It would never do for the governess to arrive home first and find the school-room empty. For that fact alone might start a train of thought and suspicion that would end with detection.

Nakita tripped lightly to the lane and looked along it. Then she pulled back her head again sharply.

For Miss Retcham was already coming down the lane, and at her side was a nondescript-looking boy who wore large glasses.

"Archibald," said Nakita, staring intently.

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.

selected few of the chums are favoured with that wonderful honour, and—gracious!—how proud they are!

Wouldn't you have been proud if you'd been one of them? But—just a moment! That's given me a fascinating little thought. Suppose you had been Mary; supposing it had been your car, and you were inviting the girls for a ride—say six of them, no more. Now, think very carefully, puzzle and ponder, and then make up your minds—which of the chums would you have taken?

A delightful speculation, isn't it? And I don't think you'll find it so very easy to solve, either. But do your best. It's sure to be great fun, especially if you get together with some friends and decide to make separate lists, and then compare them. And I should be delighted to hear the results!

Dear me, I'm full of requests this week. Now I want to know what you think of the series of:

"CLIFF HOUSE PETS."

I know I asked you the same question last week; but you *do* forgive me for repeating it, don't you? I'm so eager to know just how you feel about our new feature. You see, I'm anxious—one might even say determined—to give ALL my readers exactly what they want and I can only do that by discovering what they want, can't I?

So, when you've a moment to spare, just drop me a line. And if you've any suggestions to make—well, so much the better.

Next week's issue will contain another "Pet"—No. 3—for you to add to your collection, which, in most cases, I know, means pasting it into an album made from an ordinary exercise book. (Remember this tip, all you without albums!)

And, of course, our programme will be completed by all our usual features. "Gipsy Joy" will be there once more, as carefree and irrepressible as ever; "The Jungle Hikers" will continue their adventures in the wilds of Africa; and Patricia, our very own friend and adviser, will be represented by more of her Bright, Breezy, and Instructive Pages.

You won't miss all these topping treats, will you? But there—as though you could!

With best wishes,

Your Sincere Friend,
THE EDITOR.

Fascinated, despite the need for urgent speeding home, Nakita remained there watching, wondering if she dare step out into the open and start a conversation.

It would be fun to see how stately Archibald behaved to a gipsy girl, and if he would still use his jaw-cracking words.

But Nakita had no time to find that out, for a woman friend of Miss Retcham, cycling from the other direction, dismounted.

The governess introduced her nephew, and then the two women chatted. Nakita was about to turn away when she saw something that gave her a shock.

Archibald, the model of perfection, was slyly drawing a comic face on his aunt's back.

"Golly!" Nakita gasped.

But that was not the only odd thing that Archibald did. While his aunt and

her friend were in deep consultation he artfully stooped, and, unseen by either of them, loosened the valve of Miss Retcham's friend's rear cycle tyre.

"Pardon me," came Archibald's voice, as he lifted his cap, "but you appear to have punctured your rear tyre, ma'am!"

"Good gracious, yes! One can hear the air hissing out!" said Miss Retcham. "Tut-tut-tut!"

"Look, a hobnail!" said Archibald, touching the tyre, and then holding out his hand, palm up.

Nakita fell back, dumbfounded.

Archibald, the supposed paragon, was a practical joker.

At that moment Archibald's voice came again.

"Oh, aunt, someone has drawn in chalk on your back. Joy, I suppose. How very naughty of her! I will brush it off."

Nakita took in a hissing breath.

"So that's Archibald, the model boy," she murmured indignantly. "That's the good little boy who's going to the fete while I'm left behind! My word, we'll see about that! And if he thinks he can fix that chalking on me he's mistaken!"

Then, picking up her long frock, she raced as hard as she could go over the fields for home.

Miss Retcham, convinced by now that Joy had made the chalk marks on her jacket, would arrive home in blazing temper. What, then, if that essay were not even started, let alone finished?

Joy Gets the Blame!

NEVER in her life had Joy written an essay at such speed. She had rushed down all she knew about Queen Victoria, and panic seemed as a spur to her mind.

"Queen Victoria was born on May 24th, 1819, and she died on January 21st, or so, in 1901, or maybe '02," she wrote. "So she was eighty-two years old when she died—or nearly, anyway, and if she had lived another eighteen years she would have been a hundred, and have lived through the Great War, if she had not died of a broken heart during it, which is quite likely."

Of course, as perfect essays go it was hardly a polished opening; but it stated facts, some of which were correct.

"A lot of famous people were born and lived and died during her reign," rushed on Joy, glancing up from the paper as she heard steps in the drive, and then her governess' voice. "Some of them were famous as scientists, others as painters, poets, playwrights, engineers, architects, bridge builders, Empire builders, body builders, carpenters, candlestick makers, soldiers, sailors, explorers, big-game hunters, and all sorts of different things. And, of course, some weren't famous at all. But Queen Victoria outlived them all, except, of course, those who died before she did."

Heaving a sigh, Joy lifted her pen. Never had she written at such a rate. Words seemed to flow from under her pen; ideas came without effort. In fact, until she started the essay she had no idea how much she really did know about Queen Victoria.

The door of the school-room was burst open, and Joy, with a quick look at her hands and a dab at her face with a hanky to make quite sure that she had left no dye to give away her change of identity, jumped up in exaggerated surprise.

"Oh! Miss Retcham!"

But it was not Miss Retcham; it was Archibald. He peered into the room and beamed.

"You are Joy Sharpe? I am Archibald Retcham," he said.

"Oh, are you?" said Joy grimly, and wondered how she could accuse him of his trick when she was supposed to have been in the school-room at the time.

"Yes," he said, taken aback a little, and then suddenly produced from behind him a box of chocolates. "A little gift."

Joy took the box, and felt a stab of remorse for being so rude. But as she looked up to thank him she caught an odd glint in his eyes, and suspicion flashed into her mind.

Was Archibald, the practical joker, likely to give her real chocolates? He wasn't. The chances were that the chocolates were filled with mustard.

Joy put the box down, but gave brief thanks, and was still speaking when Miss Retcham entered.

"What's this? You have given Joy chocolates? Tut, tut! You shouldn't have done that, really. But there, you were always a sweet, generous lad."

Archibald smirked, and Joy frowned. "Joy!" said the governess sharply.

"What a look to give! Is that your expression of gratitude? Good gracious, you certainly do not deserve to be given presents, especially after what you did to my jacket."

Joy, prepared for the accusation, could not really pretend to be surprised, although she tried.

"Your jacket, Miss Retcham?" she said, and craned a little to see her governess' back.

"Ah, you know where to look then?" said the governess angrily. "How dare you draw silly faces on my jacket. It is a vulgar, gutter-snipe trick!"

"I didn't draw it," Joy said simply. "And it was not there when you left the house."

But Miss Retcham had other ideas. "For this, Joy, you will not go to the fete, after all, and you will write out two hundred lines."

"But, Miss Retcham," insisted Joy, "I didn't—"

"Silence. Where is the essay?"

Joy turned to pick it up from the table. She looked in vain, for the essay in some mysterious manner had disappeared. She looked on the floor, under the blotter, and then shot a look of suspicion at Archibald.

"Did you move my essay?" she asked.

"I?" said Archibald. "Good gracious, no!"

Miss Retcham, of course, did not understand why Joy should suppose that Archibald, the paragon, had done such a thing, and she blazed in fury.

"How dare you make such a suggestion, Joy? Archibald, take back those chocolates!"

"He's welcome to them," said Joy hotly. "I wouldn't eat them, anyway."

"Indeed—and why not?" asked Miss Retcham, her cheeks crimson. "Because he is my nephew?"

"I don't like practical jokers, Miss Retcham," Joy said. "And I don't like eating chocolates filled with mustard or something of that sort."

"Mustard?" asked Archibald, shocked.

"Well, try one," said Joy, holding out the box, pretty sure that her guess was right.

To her surprise, Archibald opened the box, took a chocolate, and ate it. Miss Retcham, glaring the while at Joy, also took one, and munched it with evident pleasure.

"I shall confiscate this box, Joy," she said sternly. "And as for your essay,

I refuse to believe that you have even started to write it. It cannot have disappeared. Get down to it at once!"

Out of the room Miss Retcham stamped, followed by Archibald, who paused only to give Joy a consoling slap on the back.

But it was not just a slap—it was also a chance for him to pin the missing essay to her frock.

Joy sat down and leaned back in her chair, quite dismayed and feeling beaten, utterly defeated. As she leaned back she pressed the pin that held the paper hard into her skin, and she shot forward with a gasp.

Trusting her hand behind her back, she found the essay, and a quick tug brought it into view!

Her instinct was to rush out of the school-room to tell Miss Retcham, but instead she remained quite still, thinking.

Miss Retcham did not know Archibald's true nature, had not even begun to suspect him, and she would not believe a word against him, as Joy had sense enough to see.

Already the governess believed that she had chalk-marked her coat, that she had been rude to Archibald without any justification, had insulted him, rebuffed his kind offer of chocolates, and accused him of hiding an essay that had not even been started!

With folded arms, Joy sat at the table, and her thoughts turned to carefree Nakita.

Nakita wouldn't care what Archibald did. No one could ever blame Nakita, or punish her. No one—

It was then that Joy jumped up from her chair, her eyes sparkling, every trace of gloom gone from her face. For suddenly through the darkness of worry and despair had come light.

There was a shock coming for Archibald; he was going to meet Nakita,

and smart though he was, the gipsy girl might prove to be just one too many for him.

Amusing—Thanks to Nakita!

NAKITA, the gipsy girl, crept warily through the bushes in the large garden of the Gables, that rambling old house where Joy Sharpe lived.

The only other person in sight was Archibald. He was busy sniffing spring flowers, and as he sniffed he artfully sprinkled the daffodils or tulips with pepper.

Nakita watched him carefully, and then, picking up a large piece of earth, she threw it.

Her aim was good, and the piece of earth clouted Archibald on the side of the head. He reeled and gaped round. "Who—who threw that?" he gasped.

Nakita, smiling, rose into view. "Me, mate," she said in coarse gipsy tone. "And a pretty good shot, I calls it, right on the old listener."

"What did you do that for?" demanded Archibald, in wrath.

"Eh? Just to let you know I'm here," said Nakita sweetly. "Say, your old listener ain't half a size. Well, I've never seen such a whopping, funny-looking thing, flapping about the place."

"You can shut up about my ear," said Archibald, a hot colour mantling his cheeks. "It may be a bit big, but it's as good as yours. Anyway, I have got a nose I can smell scents with," he added, a cunning glint coming into his eyes. "I bet you can't smell anything in this daffodil."

Nakita strolled forward, and revealed for the first time that she carried a bundle. That was part of the plot she had in mind, and she had planned very



NAKITA watched in astonishment. Archibald, whom she, as Joy, was expected to look up to as a model of good behaviour, was drawing a face on Miss Retcham's back. But that wasn't the end of the trick, as Nakita soon discovered!

carefully to bring about Archibald's downfall.

Pretending to sniff deeply, she put her nose to a daffodil.

"I can't smell anything," she said.

Archibald, wondering how she could take a deep sniff and not sneeze, decided he had forgotten to pepper that one, and sniffed it to make sure.

He took a deep breath, and then his head shot back and he gave a shuddering sneeze. Two more shook him, and Nakita watched, stifling giggles.

"Got a cold?" she asked innocently.

Archibald glared at her and dabbed his nose.

"No, I haven't," he said sulkily, for, oddly enough, he didn't like amusing other people by being caught in his own traps. "Anyway, what's that parcel? The washing?"

Nakita looked right and left and then behind her.

"Sssh! It's for Miss Joy," she said. "Only no one else must see it. Get me? I'll tell you a secret. There was a boy coming here this afternoon wearing a red beard and dressed as an old retired sea captain—see?"

"A boy dressed up—a lark, you mean?" said Archibald eagerly.

"That's it—a lark. Only he's backed out, and here's all the make-up. Miss Joy'd better have it back, and she'd better know as the boy isn't doing it."

There was no mistaking the gleam of interest in Archibald's eyes. He was taking this in—and it was taking him in, too.

"So Joy's expecting a boy to come here dressed up with a false red beard, eh?" he mused. "I suppose she was going to play a joke on the governess, eh?"

"That's the idea!" agreed Nakita. "To see about the wireless licence or something. Only seems like it's all off now. Anyway, here's the bundle with the stuff. And you'll be a pal and take the message?"

"Rely on me," said Archibald, winking.

With a friendly wave, Nakita left the bundle, and slipped away through the bushes.

"Phew! Of all the simple duffers," she chuckled.

And swiftly she returned to the house to change into her own self again as Joy Sharpe.

Ten minutes later, to her surprise, she was summoned to her grandfather's study. He was looking stern and reproachful, and Miss Retcham stood beside him.

"Joy, I have heard the full recital of your strange, almost incredible behaviour," said her grandfather. "It is not sufficient punishment that you are debarred from attending the fete. Something more drastic is needed—"

The door of the room opened, and the parlourmaid looked in.

"There's a gentleman to see Miss Joy," she said. "He's come about the dog licence."

Joy's heart gave a jump. Archibald had fallen into the trap! He had arrived, disguised. Now for it.

"Ask the man to come here," said Miss Retcham to the maid, who turned away, and, as soon as she was out of the room, let out a soft, irrepressible giggle.

For the man in the hall certainly looked odd—very odd, in ill-fitting clothes, a sea captain's cap, and a red beard and moustache. But he did not look like Archibald. As disguises go, it was reasonably good.

"Now, Joy, as to your really disgraceful behaviour—" began her

grandfather, when the door opened again and the maid looked in, smiling faintly.

"The gentleman says that he must see Miss Joy in the hall, and the dog, too," she announced.

Joy rose at a nod from her grandfather and hurried out ahead of Miss Retcham.

In the hall, Archibald was confidently chuckling to himself, preparing for plenty of fun pulling Joy's leg.

"Hrm! Your dog licence," he growled, as she approached. "I want to endorse it."

"Why, what ever are you dressed like this for, Archibald?" Joy piped.

Archibald reeled as though he had been struck a blow.

"Arch—I—wh—what do you mean?" he babbled. "Mum—my name's Sidney."

"Don't be so silly, Archibald," said Joy in a clear, bell-like voice. "Goodness, what a way to dress yourself up!"

Miss Retcham's step was heard, and Archibald turned pale and quaked; for if his disguise were penetrated, he knew that he would receive no mercy from his aunt.

Muttering to himself, he clutched at his beard, but it was glued firmly on. Next he tried to dodge, but Joy barred his path.

"If you confess, Archibald," she said swiftly—"if you own up to your aunt that you did all the things I'm blamed for, I'll let you off. If not—"

He gritted his teeth and glared at her, but he did not reply.

Miss Retcham came striding forward, adjusting her glasses.

"Who are you—and what do you want?" she demanded.

"I—er—I—er—um—"

Joy's eyes twinkled.

"He's a circus clown, and he wants to show us a few tricks, in case we can employ one, Miss Retcham. He's just a funny man who goes about amusing people."

The governess almost gaped in surprise.

"I have never heard of such a thing. What use for a clown could we have here, pray?"

"Perhaps it's a trick," said Joy, as Archibald edged to the door. "Perhaps he really came to steal the silver. I doubt if he can even do the simplest circus trick."

Miss Retcham instantly saw the reason in that argument, and jumped between him and the door.

"No. You certainly don't escape. If you are a circus clown, show us what you can do."

"Pretend to be a dog," said Joy.

Like a hunted animal, Archibald looked about him; but the parlourmaid was watching from one door, and Joy's grandfather was peering from another. He was trapped.

"I—er—I'll do a trick or two, ma'am," he said unasily. "And if you give me twopence, I'll go."

The unfortunate Archibald then crawled about on all-fours, picked up a bone of Tinker's from under the hall-stand, and pretended to gnaw it, until Miss Retcham looked on in blank amazement and Joy chuckled.

"Now stand on your hands!" Joy commanded.

Archibald did so, only to collapse and bump his face on the floor.

"Oh, isn't he a scream, though?" chirped Joy. "I thought that was awfully funny."

She handed him a vase of flowers and asked him to empty it over his head.

Gloomily Archibald took it and obeyed. Water squelched down his neck and over his face, while Miss Retcham watched—not at all amused.

"The man is either a loon," she said, "or else he entered the house hoping to steal. In either case, he must be detained, pending inquiries. Joy, stand back!"

Joy stood back and whispered softly: "Bunk—to your room!"

Archibald heard, and he understood. He charged up the staircase and disappeared from sight, rolled under his bed, and there struggled with his beard and wig.

When the gardener searched the rooms a few minutes later the mystery man had disappeared; but Archibald came into view with a rather red chin. The beard had been almost a fixture.

"Oh, hallo, Archibald!" said Joy, going up to him. "Have you a message for me from a gipsy girl?"

Archibald did not speak; but his look was enough. If ever he saw that gipsy girl again—

"She saw you make the chalk marks on Miss Retcham's coat," said Joy. "And she also saw you let down the cycle tyre. What's more, she can prove that it was you who had the beard and things. I should say it's about time you confessed."

Archibald gaped.

"Con-confess?" he stammered.

"If you want to get off lightly," Joy told him.

Archibald, hearing the hue and cry and confusion aroused by the hunt for the red-bearded burglar, felt a shiver of dread. He had to choose the lesser of two evils.

"All right," he said sullenly, "I'll confess."

It was half an hour later that Miss Retcham looked into the school-room where Joy was just polishing off her essay.

"I think we will go down to the fete, Joy, you and I," she said.

"But Archibald, Miss Retcham?" asked Joy, as if surprised.

"Archibald?" A shadow crossed the governess' face. "Archibald has an urgent reason for going home, Joy. Provided you give me your word of honour that you did not do the things I accused you of—"

"I didn't—really, I didn't, Miss Retcham," protested Joy.

"Very well," said the governess graciously. "In that case, let us go to the fete. I accept your word, Joy—and in the circumstances I must return you the chocolates."

But although they were returned Joy did not eat them. Miss Retcham tried one just before they were leaving, but no sooner did she scrunch it than she shot into the air, ran round in circles, clasping her face, doubled up, hopped and skipped, and finally made a rush for water.

There was a dark, brooding expression on her face when she returned to Joy, and with no more ado she took the box of chocolates and threw it on to the fire.

That done, there was no bar to their happiness, and Joy at the village fete had the time of her life—even Miss Retcham enjoying it!

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

BE sure to meet our lovable harum-scarum again next Saturday. And don't forget to tell all your friends about her.