

**"THEIR HEROINE UNDER SUSPICION!"** Magnificent LONG  
COMPLETE Cliff  
House School story inside.

# THE SCHOOLGIRL

No. 477. Vol. 19.  
Week Ending  
SEPT. 17th, 1938.

EVERY **2<sup>D</sup>**  
SATURDAY

Incorporating  
"SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN"



## LYDIA'S INSULT TO THEIR FORM-MISTRESS!

See this week's dramatic  
story of the famous chums  
of Cliff House.

Drama and mystery are strong in this magnificent Long Complete story



# Their HEROINE

## They Couldn't Believe It!



"OH CRUMBS! I-I wuw-wish she'd hurry up!" plump Bessie Bunter sighed longingly. "I'm fuf-famished, you know! Babs, I suppose I couldn't have one—just one—of these ripping eclairs—just to keep me from expiring until she comes?"

"Bessie, no!" Barbara Redfern spoke decisively, even though her eyes twinkled at her fat studymate.

"Just half a one, then?" Bessie asked hopefully.

"Not even a crumb," Babs returned sternly. "Miss Charmant will be here any moment now. Don't you know it's rude to start feeding before the founder of the feast comes along?"

Bessie sighed again as she blinked at the well-loaded table in front of her. "Never mind, old Bess," murmured golden-haired Mabel Lynn, the third of the famous trio of Study No. 4 in the Fourth Form corridor at Cliff House school.

From the other side of the table the American junior, Leila Carroll, grinned. Tomboy Clara Trevlyn sat on one side of her; gentle Marjorie Hazeldene on the other.

"You simply must wait until Miss Charmant comes, Bessie," said Marjorie.

Bessie sighed for the third time.

Certainly that well-laid table in the tea-room of the Cliff Cross Restaurant just outside Courtfield was enough to whet a far more delicate appetite than that of Bessie Bunter's. It groaned with good things. Sandwiches, pies, cakes, and cream, and pastries. Even the tea was ready, standing hot under its cosy in front of them.

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"She's late," Clara observed, with a frown. "That's not like the Charmer." Barbara Redfern, captain of the Fourth Form at Cliff House, cocked an eye at the clock. Miss Charmant, their Form-mistress, was late—nearly ten minutes late now.

"Oh, she'll turn up!" she said confidently. "Trust her! I expect she's been delayed at the school or something."

"You're sure she did say the Cliff Cross?" Mabel Lynn asked anxiously.

"Yes, quite sure, Mabs. She said she'd be along at half-past four."

"And nun-now it's twenty to fuf-five," Bessie groaned. "I sus-say, Clara, cover those eclairs up, will you? I kik-can't bear the sight of them; you know."

By

**HILDA RICHARDS**

Illustrated by T. LAIDLER

The Tomboy chuckled again as Bessie blinked forlornly through her spectacles at the goodies in question. But, despite her chuckle, she was a little puzzled and impatient. Miss Charmant, the pretty and idolized mistress of the Fourth Form, was usually so strictly punctual; and, apart from this "feed" which she had asked Barbara to order, there was quite a lot of other business to be done. Where was she?

"Well, I guess at this rate we shall get nothing done," Leila Carroll said resignedly. "Better send the tea back, Babs, and ask them to keep it warm. Anyway, what's the idea of meeting us here in the first place? Why couldn't we have had tea in her study and talked about things?"

"Because," Babs returned patiently, "Miss Charmant was anxious not to be disturbed. Apart from that, she thought

it would be rather a treat for all of us to meet in this place. And apart from those two things," Babs went on, "she's coming with us to Courtfield afterwards to choose the bookcase I've suggested we shall buy. That is, of course, if we raise enough funds."

"And it really is a ducky bookcase!" Marjorie put in. "And cheap, too!"

There was a general nod except from Bessie, who, with hypnotised eyes on the table, was fairly quivering with longing. The bookcase in question was undoubtedly cheap—just as undoubtedly as it was a real Queen Anne piece. That bookcase was designed, if they could raise enough funds, to be the Junior School's present to Miss Primrose, their popular headmistress, on the occasion of her birthday, a week hence.

For the purpose of raising the necessary funds, Babs, Mabs, Bessie, Leila, Clara, and Marjorie had been chosen as a committee. Miss Charmant, as the mistress of the highest Form in the Junior School, was to be treasurer.

And Miss Charmant, to talk over the details in a place of quietness, had ordered this private room and tea at Cliff House Restaurant.

A quarter to five now—creeping on to ten to.

Funny! Queer! Miss Charmant might have rung them if she knew she was going to be late. In rather gloomy and anxious silence they sat surveying each other. Then suddenly there was a sound from the car park outside; the squeal of brakes, followed by the bang of a door.

"That's her!" Babs eagerly cried.

She pushed back her chair. The others—all except Bessie—jumped up. In a crowd they rushed to the open french window which overlooked the car park.

Bessie watched them. Bessie gurgled. Then swiftly her arm was thrust out, as

of Barbara Redfern & Co.; and a very, very charming Form-mistress.



# UNDER SUSPICION

quickly withdrawn. But in Bessie's hand was now one of those tempting eclairs!

"There's her little red two-seater!" Babs cried. "But—I say!" she whispered.

And she stood stock still, her eyes opening wide in surprise. The others looked just as blankly.

For suddenly Miss Valerie Charmant had appeared—not, as they expected, walking towards the door of the restaurant, but walking in a way which caused them all to stare, along the lines of cars which were parked outside. They saw her stop. They saw her look round quickly.

"What the——" Clara muttered.

Babs blinked. What on earth was the matter with Miss Charmant? She seemed afraid somehow, shrinking, furtive. They saw her step up to a big green car; then, as suddenly, saw her retreat, hiding behind the bodywork of the car as the attendant at the far end of the park for a moment turned.

"What's she doing?" Clara muttered.

"Look!" Babs breathed. "Oh, my goodness!"

They looked, hardly able to believe their eyes. Was this Miss Charmant, the popular, adored mistress of the Fourth? Miss Charmant sneaking and hiding—Miss Charmant behaving like a woman who had some hideously guilty secret upon her conscience?

Now they saw her steal forward again as the attendant moved to speak to a car owner. They saw her hand go to the handle of the green car door. They saw that door come open.

And then—they were dreaming, surely?

Miss Charmant, with a quick, furtive look to right and left, had plunged her hand into the dashboard pocket of that car. Now the hand re-appeared, holding a white leather handbag. Quickly she opened it, quickly peered inside; and then abstracted something from it. Gently she replaced the handbag, and as she did so, the something she had taken from it fell.

In flustered agitation, Valerie Charmant pounced upon the object, scooping it up.

"Oh, mum-my hat!" Clara gasped.

"Babs——"

"Quickly! Back to your places! She's coming up!" Babs hissed.

"But what was she doing?"

"Sure seemed," Leila said shakily, "as if she was snaffling something."

Babs was a little pale, but fiercely she shook her head.

"Bosh!" she said shortly.

"But it wasn't her car, nor her handbag——"

"Still bosh!" Babs said. "Leila, what are you saying?" she asked half angrily.

"The Charmer's not a thief!"

Leila crimsoned.

"No, of—of course not," she said.

"All the same——"

"And say nothing," Babs said.

"Whatever she's done, you can bet she had a jolly good reason! I—I—hem!"

she added, and, with a miraculous effort,

"Very good; very good." Miss Charmant smiled again. "No, let me pour the tea out, please!" she added, as Mabs reached for the pot. "Help yourselves to sugar, will you, girls? I—I hope you won't mind, but I find I shall not be able to stop long, after all. I—I still have some rather urgent business." She paused, biting her lip for a moment. "I will look in at the shop on my way," she said, "and inspect the bookcase. By the way, Barbara, how much have you already collected?"

"Thirty shillings," Babs said. "But, of course, we haven't really started yet! Oh, Miss Charmant, let's go with you!"

"I'm afraid not this time. However——" she smiled again, though Babs noticed she threw a rather apprehensive look at the door. "Perhaps," she added, "you had better let me have the other pound, Barbara—as treasurer of the

**Miss Valerie Charmant, their adored Form-mistress, a thief? Why, it was impossible—simply absurd. So thought Babs & Co., so thought all the Fourth Form—at first. But then came doubts, doubts that grew and grew until at last only Babs & Co. were willing to fight to clear her name.**

regained her composure as the door opened and Miss Valerie Charmant, breathing a little agitatedly, came in. "Gig-good afternoon, Miss Charmant."

"Good afternoon," Miss Charmant said, but Babs noticed that the smile she gave them was a rather strained effort. "Hope I haven't kept you waiting? I—I had a spot of business to do, unfortunately."

"Y-yes?" Babs said.

"What's the matter, Barbara? You look flustered."

"Dud-do I?" Babs stuttered. "I—I'm sorry. Will you take a seat, Miss Charmant? Er! Nice afternoon, isn't it?"

Miss Charmant laughed.

"Very!" she said. "Well, here we are. You saw the man about the bookcase, Barbara?"

"Yes, Miss Charmant. I—I left ten shillings deposit on it."

I have a pound of my own to add to it, and a little collecting to do from the Lower School mistresses. Bessie, more sandwiches?"

"Yes, rather! I mum-mean, thanks!" Bessie said.

"Clara, you are not eating anything." "I—I'm not very hungry!" Clara blurted, flushing for no reason at all.

"And, Leila, is anything wrong with my hair?" Miss Charmant laughed.

"You've done nothing but stare at me since I sat down!"

"Oh, golly!" Leila said, and went a deep red. "It—it's very pretty hair!" she said with considerable emphasis, and it was Miss Charmant's turn to blush. "I—I like the way you do it," she added feebly.

Miss Charmant laughed; but she looked rather oddly at the six. Not all at once could Babs & Co. forget the

amazing and still unbelievable incident they had witnessed.

And it was obvious that Miss Charmant was anything but her normal self. Though she tried to act with her old, sweet gaiety, it was obvious she had some trouble on her mind.

Babs handed over the pound note. Miss Charmant drank another cup of tea and then, with a sigh, rose.

"I—I'm so awfully sorry," she said distressfully. "But you will forgive me, won't you? I hate running away so, but this—well, this is urgent! But I will look in at the shop, Barbara. Waitress, please let me have the bill," she called. "No, girls, don't rise. I can see myself off the premises all right."

She went off after paying the bill. A minute later they heard her little sports car starting up. Clara shook her head.

"Now, I wonder," she said, and stopped at the quick, significantly warning nod Babs gave towards Bessie. It was better to say nothing of this before Bessie. That dear duffer had a habit of unintentionally blurting out things which were better kept secret. "Oh, yes! Hem! Bessie, pass me one of those eclairs, old thing!"

"Sut-certainly!" Bessie mumbled, her mouth full.

And tea progressed—rather thoughtfully, with great intervals of a most uneasy silence. Had they really seen Miss Charmant take something from the white handbag, or had they dreamt it? But, of course, it was just silly, idiotic rot to suspect their adored Form-mistress of doing anything underhand—and anyway, it wasn't their business, was it? Oh stuff! The charmer was true blue! She just couldn't do anything wrong if she tried!

So Babs, so all of them, in different ways, were telling themselves, when suddenly, from outside, came sounds of a commotion.

A voice—a girl's voice—was shrilly upraised.

"I tell you someone has stolen something from my bag!" it announced. "Something jolly valuable, too! Who's been here?"

Quickly the chums glanced at each other. Babs rose. Quickly she stepped towards the window, and then she caught her breath as she gazed into the car park below. There, beside the green car, the door of which was open, stood a girl of about sixteen—a rather sallow-faced girl, good-looking in a sulky way, and in her hand was the white handbag which, a quarter of an hour before, they had seen in Miss Charmant's hands. Quite a little crowd was surrounding her.

Leila and Clara joined Babs at the window. They too stared.

"I tell you I left the thing in here! No, there's no mistake!" the girl shrilled. "Some thief must have sneaked into the car while I was having tea. They haven't touched anything else—only that!"

"Oh, my only aunt!" whispered Clara in dismay.

They turned away, each busy with uncomfortable thoughts.

The remainder of tea was a rather constrained meal. Somehow the sunshine of the afternoon had been blotted out. No longer were any of them thinking of Miss Primrose's birthday fund. Except for Bessie, who knew nothing, they all had a curious, unhappy feeling of guilt, of having been party to something which was not strictly above board. Babs, at least, was glad when at last that meal came to an end.

"Well, let's go!" she said resignedly, rising. "Bessie, wipe that chocolate off

your face, old thing! Got your macs, girls?"

"Yes, rather! Nothing else, I think?" Clara said, looking round. "Wait a minute though, there's a handkerchief on the floor. Whose is it?"

Quickly she stooped to retrieve the handkerchief, which was under the chair in which Miss Charmant had sat. She saw, even before her hand closed upon it, that it was the mistress', for the initials, "V. C.," were neatly embroidered in red in one corner. Quickly she snatched at it, hurriedly she straightened. And as she did so there came a flash in front of her eyes, the metallic clink of some fallen thing at her feet.

"What—" she said; and then Babs had swooped. From the floor she held up something—something which glittered.

It was—a diamond ring!  
And it had fallen out of Miss Charmant's handkerchief.

### What Did Lydia Find?



"THE question is," Barbara Redfern said worriedly,

"what are we going to do about it?"

That came an hour later, in Study No. 7, which was shared by Clara Trevlyn, Janet Jordan, and Marjorie Hazeldene. Janet, as luck would have it, was out—gone to the station to meet her father, who had returned with his circus from Europe. Bessie, in Study No. 4, was quietly dozing. On the table, in the middle of the five chums, the diamond ring winked and glittered, cheerfully mocking the nervously uneasy faces which regarded it.

"Well, we can't jolly well keep it," Clara decided.

"And who," Mabs wanted to know, "was suggesting that? At the same time, we don't know the girl it belongs to—"

"If it does belong to her, I guess!" Leila Carroll said.

"Well, she lost it," Marjorie pointed out.

"But it was in Miss Charmant's possession," said Babs worriedly. "Either we believe the Charmer came by this ring honestly, or she didn't. If she didn't, then it belongs to that girl. If she did, it belongs to the Charmer. Anyway, as far as we're concerned, it is the Charmer's."

"Then why," Clara sniffed, "don't we give it back to her? I, for one, would be glad to see the back of the thing."

"And I!" Marjorie put in, with a little shiver.

Babs paused. "But—how can we give it back to her? Supposing—just supposing—anything is wrong? It would embarrass her most dreadfully, wouldn't it?"

Another pause. Perplexed, the chums gazed at each other. Puzzled, uncertain, desperately striving to cling to their faith in Miss Charmant, and yet dreading what they had seen, and what they knew, it was not easy to make a decision.

"Supposing," Leila suggested thoughtfully, "we sent it to her anonymously—by post?"

"And suppose," Babs said, "it got lost?"

"H'm!"

Another pause. "There's only one thing," Babs said quietly at length. "We've got to give it back. As far as we're concerned, it belongs to the Charmer, and so the

Charmer's got to have it. But there's no need for her to know we've got anything to do with it, so I vote we wait until she's out of the room, and then leave it on her desk. I don't understand, I confess, but I'm jolly certain the Charmer hasn't turned thief all of a sudden. But this will prove it. If everything's all right, she's bound to make open inquiries as to where it came from."

"And supposing she does inquire?" Mabs asked.

"Well—" Babs shrugged. "That's all right, isn't it? We'll own up then. The only thing we're afraid of at the moment is the thing we're just afraid to say to each other—that Miss Charmant might not have come by this ring honestly. I hope to goodness she does make inquiries, that's all!"

"And if she doesn't?" Mabs inquired. "Oh, rats! She will!" Babs retorted stubbornly.

But did she believe that? She did not know. Fiercely loyal to Miss Charmant was Babs. Fiercely loyal were all of them. But their faith in their adored mistress had suffered some thing of a shock with recent developments.

"And here," Clara said suddenly, as she glanced out of the window, "is our chance. The Charmer's out now—there she is, walking across the quad to the Head's house. Come on, let's go!"

Babs nodded. Hastily she caught up the ring. Out of the door they all trooped, down into the mistress's quarters. Outside the door of Miss Charmant's room Babs halted. Just for safety's sake, she knocked, and receiving no answer, went in. The room, as she expected, was empty. Feeling like a thief herself, Babs tiptoed to the mistress's desk. In the exact centre of the blotting-pad, she placed the betraying trinket. Then she flew!

"O.K.?" Clara questioned.

"O.K.!" breathed Babs.

"Well, what now?"

"Just hang around until she comes back. Come on, let's go into Big Hall."

They strolled into Big Hall, which was deserted. It was a half-holiday at Cliff House, and most of the girls who were not seeking distraction in the swimming bath or on the playing fields were out. In a group the chums lounged on the steps of Big Hall, their eyes fixed on the headmistress' house, the cheerful red roof of which was visible among the trees. Then, all at once, Marjorie let out a deep breath.

"She's coming!" she said. The Charmer was coming! Her graceful form had suddenly emerged from the trees, was hurrying across the lawns. She came up, mounting the steps and smiling a little at the five girls as she passed before disappearing down the corridor into her own room.

"Now we shall soon know," said Babs. "Having seen us, she's bound to connect us with the ring, when she finds it."

They waited. Five—ten minutes went past. No sound, no sign from Miss Charmant. Fifteen minutes went by—and then suddenly an electric thrill ran through each one of them as they heard the mistress' door open again, and heard, without daring to look round, the mistress' footsteps tapping along the corridor towards them.

Babs flushed a little, wondering what she should say when Miss Charmant asked her if she knew anything about the ring. The footsteps came up. For a moment Babs caught a flagging in their rhythm. Miss Charmant was going to speak!

But, no! Miss Charmant passed on without a word.

"My hat! She didn't speak!" Clara said.

"And look, she's in her going-out things! She's going to leave the school!"

Babs stared. It was true, then! But no, no, no! It couldn't be true! It couldn't—couldn't! Dazedly she stared after the hurrying figure. Miss Charmant was almost running now.

Miss Charmant was going out. Miss Charmant, who must have found the ring, had not spoken a single, solitary word.

"She's getting into her car!" Leila muttered.

That was true. The little red two-seater stood near the gates, as yet ungaraged for the night. Even as they watched, Miss Charmant clambered into it.

"Well," Clara asked bluntly, "what about it now? Obviously she's not going to inquire."

Babs bit her lip.

"She—she couldn't have seen it!"

"Then what is she rushing away like that for?"

"Oh stuff! She—she couldn't have seen it, I tell you!" Babs said. "She just couldn't! Dash it, she'd have been bound to speak to us! We were the only girls about—"

"Then," Leila said, "if she didn't see the ring, it must be still on her desk, I guess. Let's have a squint."

The idea was good, though, strangely enough, there was no eager move to obey it. Perhaps they all dreaded what they would find. All the same, it was one of those things which had to be done, and almost mechanically they found themselves tramping back towards Miss Charmant's door. Again it was Babs who pushed it open. Unconsciously holding her breath, she peered into the room.

And then, for a moment, she did not move.

The ring was no longer on Miss Charmant's desk. Miss Charmant had taken it! Miss Charmant had taken it with her!

"It—it's gone!" she thinly announced.

"Oh!" they all said. Babs withdrew. She had a faint feeling of sickness. What to believe, in the face of that evidence?

"Let—let's go back to the study!" Clara said, a little unsteadily. "My hat! The Charmer!" she muttered beneath her breath.

Staggered, amazed, they went back—in dead silence.

"Oh dear! What—what are we to do?" Marjorie asked, when they were in Study No. 7 once more.

Uneasily they stared at each other.

"Babs—" Clara said.

Babs shook her head.

"I—I don't know," she said slowly. "I—I can't believe it! No, I can't, even now! And yet—and yet—well, anyway, it's not our business!" she flared out, as if somebody had insulted her. "We've got no right to pry into the Charmer's affairs, have we? I don't and can't believe it! The Charmer's always been true blue, hasn't she? The Charmer's always been as straight as the day."

"Whoops! Steady, old thing!" Leila muttered. "Nobody's having a row with you, I guess."

"Well, why should we suspect her now?" Babs went on heatedly. "Honest people don't change to thieves all in a flash!"

"I know, Babs," Mabs said soothingly. "Don't get worked up over it. It's all right. I—I dare say she's got a reason for it," she added unconvincingly. "Anyway, we've got rid of the

beastly ring now, so let's forget all about it. What about a spot of collecting for the old birthday present?" she added brightly.

"Yes, rather; let's!" Marjorie chipped in eagerly.

Babs gulped. Liking and respecting Miss Charmant as she did, the shock of the discovery had numbed her. It couldn't be true! Of course not—of course not! And yet—

"Come on, let's collect!" she said feverishly. She just didn't think about it. "Clara, you and Marjorie take the left side of the corridor, will you? Mabs and I will take the right. Leila, supposing you look up the Third Form?"

"O.K.!" Leila said.

She smiled faintly, knowing very well, as they all knew, that the time for collecting was just about as unsuitable as it could be, with most of the girls out of the school. But any diversion would have been welcome in that moment.

So off—with a bustling activity there was really no justification for—they scooted.

Babs went down the corridor with Mabs to Study No. 1, which was shared by Lydia Crossendale, the snob of the Fourth, the sneaking Freda Ferriers, and Rosa Rodworth. Rather to Babs' surprise, Freda and Lydia were in, both savagely grinding out lines at the table. Lydia looked up with a scowl.

"Well," she ungraciously asked, "what do you want?"

"Money," Babs replied. "Money, old thing! We're collecting for Primmy's birthday present."

"Oh!" Lydia said. "Then you can blow Primmy and her beastly birthday present! Blow the whole school! Look at that!" she said, and pointed to a pile of sheets on her desk. "If you think I've got money for a school that gave me five hundred lines you can go somewhere else!"

Babs and Mabs blinked.

"Five hundred! Who ever gave you those?"

"The Charmer, dash her!"

"What for?"

"Haven't you heard? But no, you were snoring like grampuses last night. Well," Lydia said furiously, "Freda and I went to a dance in Courtfield—"

"And the Charmer caught you?" Babs asked.

"Yes."

"And gave you five hundred lines?"

"Yes."

"Jolly lucky, weren't you?" Babs asked. "If she'd done what she ought to have done she'd have taken you to Miss Primrose, and then you'd probably have got the sack. I think you've got off cheaply."

"Cheaply!" Lydia glared. "Cheaply!" she snorted. "Five hundred lines! You call that cheap? Cheap," she added, shrilling, "when I lost my gold fob in the bargain? I shouldn't wonder," she added vindictively, "if the Charmer doesn't know something about that!"

Babs started.

"Lydia, what are you saying?"

"Well, she was hanging about in the cloak-room," Lydia said. "She was waiting there when we came to get our clothes after the dance. That was how she caught us. I'd left the fob in my jacket pocket, and she was near the coat. Anyway," she added, "what was she doing in the cloak-room? And why, anyway, was she in the dance-hall at all? Even mistresses aren't supposed to be out at twelve o'clock at night!"

Babs frowned.

"You're sure you did lose the fob?"

"Of course I'm sure!" Lydia snapped. "And I'm also sure," she added "somebody pinched it! The last thing I did before I went in to dance was to feel in my pocket to see if it was all right. Anyway, you can clear out!" she said rudely.



"GO!" cried Babs, and with Clara and Leila helping her, she bundled Lydia Crossendale out of the room. The sneak had made an accusation to which none of the Fourth was prepared to listen.

Babs glanced at Mabs. She led the way out. But she was feeling a little worried as she went along the corridor. She knew that gold fob of Lydia's—a very valuable piece of jewellery which contained a tiny compass, and which, apparently, Mr. Crossendale had given Lydia as a present during the summer holidays. A large loss, to be sure. But the Charmer—

She was there—she—  
Oh, stuff! Rubbish! Was she going to link every silly thing which happened to get lost with the Charmer now?

She went into Study No. 2, shared by June Merrett, stolid Brenda Fallace, and the Hon. Beatrice Beverley. All three girls were out. Lydia, meantime, was gathering her sheets.

"There!" she said savagely. "I've done! My hat, my hand! I'm sure I'll never be able to move it again! You finished, Freda?"

"Five minutes!" Freda said. "Have a cigarette."

Lydia nodded, as with a groan she rose, eyeing with a smouldering eye the sheaf of lines on the table. The Charmer, dash her! She'd given her those. My hat, but she'd get her own back on her for that—somehow!

Not a reasonable or a very likeable girl was Lydia Crossendale. When Lydia made an enemy, she never rested until the score was paid-off. And yet she knew, in hating the Charmer for having given her those lines, she was wrong. She knew, in her heart, that she should have been grateful to Miss Charmant—except that Lydia's heart had no capacity for gratitude. As Babs said, "Miss Charmant could easily have reported her to Miss Primrose—and, in that case, five hundred lines would have seemed the smallest of punishments! When Miss Charmant, last night, had offered her the alternative of accepting her own punishment or being reported, Lydia had been jolly glad to accept the Charmer's.

But now—  
Well, her wrist ached, her back ached. Apart from that, there was the loss of her precious fob—how in the name of all that was worrying was she to explain that to her father?

Not for an instant, though she had found Miss Charmant in the cloak-room, did Lydia believe that she had stolen the fob. Not, indeed, until she had furiously mentioned the matter to Barbara Redfern, had the possibility occurred to her. Now that the germ was there, however, it gave her a queer sort of satisfaction to try to convince herself. Lydia was like that.

"You know," she said thoughtfully, as she puffed at the cigarette she had just lit. "I shouldn't wonder if there was something in it! She was standing jolly near my coat, and she hadn't come to catch us, otherwise she could have bowled us out in the dancing-hall. What was she doing there, Freda?"

"Ask me!" Freda unhelpfully replied. "Ninety-five, ninety-six—" she muttered.

"And she did look jolly guilty!" Lydia mused, still toying with the idea. "Ninety-seven," Freda answered, scribbling feverishly. "Ninety-eight. Oh, my hat! Five hundred!" Freda said, with a gasp of relief. "All finished, Lydia. What about taking them along now and getting out for a breath of fresh air?"

"Good idea," Lydia said. "And we'll jolly well ask her straight out if she knows anything about my fob! Gather them up. Come on!"

They left the room, Freda relieved

and not caring much about Lydia's fob. They reached Miss Charmant's room.

"Hallo, not in!" Lydia said, as there came no reply to her knock.

"Well, let's go in and leave them!" Freda suggested.

Lydia nodded. She opened the door. The room was empty. The two girls laid their lines on the table. Then Lydia paused.

"Wait a minute!" she said. Her eyes glinted. "Just wait a tick! Freda, that's the bag she had last night, isn't it? That one over there. Keep a watch at the window."

"But what—" Freda gasped. "And don't be a funk!" Lydia snapped contemptuously. "I'm not pinching anything!"

Freda blinked in fright as she crossed to the window. Lydia, with no real expectation in her mind of finding anything, picked up the brown bag. She opened it. She peered in. And then she gave a jump.

"Freda—" she cried.

"What?"

"Look here!"

And Freda, crossing to look, gave a gasp of sudden, wild astonishment.

### Lydia's Daring!



"I'D jolly well like to know what this school's coming to!"

Thus Lydia Crossendale in the Fourth Form Common-room after prep that evening.

Nobody took a great deal of notice. The Fourth, collectively and individually, were too busy. Clara Trevlyn, in company with Margot Lantham, Babs, and Amy Jones, was puckering her brows over the Lexicon hand she held. Gemma Carstairs, Leila Carroll, Marcel Biquet, and Gwen Cook, were indulging in a game of dominoes.

Near the fireplace, the owlish Terraine Twins were primly reading. On the blackboard, Rosa Rodworth was drawing weird diagrams and inviting Bridget O'Toole, Beatrice Beverley, Christine Wilmer, June Merrett, and Janet Jordan to guess their significance. In another corner, a fashion magazine across her knees, Diana Royston-Clarke was closely conning Paris Notes, watched by sleepy-eyed Bessie Bunter, whose cheeks were protruding and contracting as she masticated toffee.

Joan Sheldon Charmant, young sister of the Form-mistress, was assisting Jane Mills to roll her wool into a ball. Marjorie Hazeldene was busy with her embroidery. Only Freda Ferriers looked up at Lydia's remark.

"I'd like to know," Lydia remarked more loudly, "what the Fourth Form's coming to?"

"Pig!" said Clara Trevlyn absently. "Eh? Who's a pig?" Lydia said wrathfully. "Look here, Clara Trevlyn—"

"Or piggy!" Clara cried triumphantly. "My hat, that's it—piggy! Jolly good that!"

Lydia's face burned.

"Look here, you insulting cat—"

"Eh?" Clara looked up. "Who's insulting you now?" she asked jollyly.

"You are! You called me 'Piggy'!"

"I did? Don't be a bigger goat than Nature made you! Look!" And Clara pointed to her Lexicon cards which, rather untidily placed, spelt the word Piggy. "Don't be so jolly ready to take every allusion you hear to your own tender heart," she said, "even

though the description might fit you! Well, that puts me out, you girls—eh? You talking again, Lydia?"

"I said," Lydia repeated, between her teeth, "I'd jolly well like to know what this school's coming to! It's disgraceful, if you ask me!"

"Absolutely right!" agreed Clara heartily. "Then why not pack up and go, sweetheart? Nobody will miss you, and we'll be sights less disgraceful afterwards! Going to shuffle, Amy?"

"When," Lydia continued, "we've got a thief for a Form-mistress—"

"Eh?" Clara did look up at that.

Babs started. Every girl who heard that remark stared with sudden queer intentness at the snob of the Fourth, and Joan Sheldon Charmant quietly rose to her feet. Lydia's eyes glittered.

"Yes, a thief!" she repeated.

Angrily Joan approached her.

"Are you referring to my sister?"

"Yes, I am!"

"Then—" Joan said, drew a deep breath, and, before anyone could stop her, had angrily smacked Lydia across the cheek. "Perhaps," she added tartly, "that will teach you to think twice about insulting my sister again!"

"Oh golly!" gasped Clara. "Joan— Lydia, you idiot—"

For Lydia, reeling from the blow, was now flinging herself in a perfect fury against the proud, upright figure of Joan Charmant. In the nick of time, Clara caught her, pulling her back.

"Now, ninny," she cried, "chuck it! Want a mistress here?" she glowered.

"Well, make her apologise!" Lydia howled.

"Withdraw your remark, and I'll apologise quickly enough!" Joan retorted.

"My hat, let me get at her!"

"Lydia, stop it!" Babs cried. "If you will make rotten remarks like that, it jolly well serves you right! You must be mad!"

"But it's true!" Lydia hooted.

"Rot!"

"I tell you it's true!" Lydia shrieked.

"Freda can prove it! She is a thief—a rotten, sneaking, beastly, prying thief! Last night she pinched my gold fob—"

"Oh, chuck it, Lydia!"

There was an indignant uproar at once. Joan, stepping forward once more, was this time caught by Babs.

Everybody liked Miss Charmant; everybody admired Miss Charmant. That Lydia, of all people—

"I tell you it's true!" Lydia flamed.

"She's got the fob in her bag at this very moment! I know! I've seen it! Freda's seen it, too—"

"That's right!" Freda said.

"Bosh!"

"Rubbish!"

"Push her into the corridor!"

"I tell you—" howled Lydia.

Indignation became anger then. An insult to Miss Charmant was an insult to the Fourth. An angry crowd of girls surged towards Lydia.

"Make her apologise!"

"I won't!" panted Lydia.

"Give her a Form trial!"

"I tell you— Here, let me go—let me go!"

"For goodness' sake, wait a minute!" Babs protested. "Here, you ninnies, don't push me! Wait a minute—"

Wow! Babs shrieked, as somebody trod heavily on her toe. "Look here— Cave!"

The door was thrown open. Miss Charmant herself, her face full of annoyed bewilderment, stood on the threshold.

Silence fell.

"And what," Miss Charmant asked, "is the meaning of this? What's all this commotion, Barbara?"

Barbara flushed.

"We—we were having an argument."  
"Indeed! An argument, apparently, in which the whole Form were embroiled! What, pray, were you arguing about?"

Girls looked at each other. Lydia sneered.

"Nun-nothing!" stuttered Babs.

"Rather a great deal of noise to make about nothing, isn't it?" Miss Charmant asked, with a penetrating stare at the leader of the Form. "I feel that is hardly a satisfactory explanation, Barbara! You will each take fifty lines!"

And, amid deep, dismayed silence, Miss Charmant went out again. Lydia broke into sneering laughter.

"And that's what you get for sticking up for her! Fifty lines! All the same, I tell you it's true!"

"Will you shut up?" Clara said fiercely.

"No, I jolly well won't! I tell you that—"

Clara nodded at Babs. Babs nodded towards Leila. The three of them advanced upon Lydia. Without another word, they surrounded her. Clara caught one arm, Babs the other. Leila pushed from behind.

"Go!" cried Babs.

And, amid a cheer, Lydia was rushed across the room, and, while Bridget O'Toole slipped the door open, bundled into the corridor.

"And now," Babs said, "stop out, you cat!"

But, even as she shut the door, Babs was wondering uneasily, uncertainly.

Was there any truth in Lydia's accusation?

But there wasn't! How could there be? Lydia was just making it up out of spite, of course.

So she told herself, aware all the time of the shadowed doubt at the back of her mind.

There were no other disturbances. Call-over came presently; after that supper, and then bed. In the dormitory they found a scowling Lydia sulkily undressing. Joan Charmant gazed at her.

"Well, found your fob?" she asked.

"No, I haven't! How can I when your beastly sister's sticking to it?"

"You dare—"

"Oh, pax!" Babs interrupted wearily.

"For goodness' sake, don't start another row! Lydia, you ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourself!"

"Yes?" Lydia sneered. "Well, perhaps I ought; but this happens to be true! Oh, you needn't believe me if you don't want to! But I'm telling you the Charmer took that fob from my coat last night at the Courtfield Dance Hall! She's got it in her bag now! If she isn't a thief, why is she sticking to it?"

"Perhaps," Babs suggested, "you lost it and she found it? And perhaps," she added, "she doesn't know who it belongs to—"

"Well, in that case, why hasn't she given it up to the police?"

"Oh, be quiet and go to bed!" Clara sniffed. "Joan, don't throw that pillow; we don't want another row. It'll be a detention next time, and we're playing the Lower Fifth to-morrow."

Joan turned away. Lydia shrugged. The prefect on duty came to turn out the lights then, and the Fourth settled down for the night. The usual whispered conversation spread through the dormitory, to die away at last into sleepy whispers and finally silence. Everybody slept—

Except Babs.

She was lying awake, worried.

Why hadn't Miss Charmant spoken after the return of the ring? Could there possibly be any connection between her presence in the cloak-room of the dance hall and the disappearance of Lydia's fob?

Had—had the Charmer suddenly turned thief? But if so, why? In the name of all that was reasonable, why?

There must be some explanation—of course; until that explanation was forthcoming she was going to stick to the Charmer, was going to believe in her.

A mischievous ray of moonlight, peering through the dormitory window, shone full in her eyes.

Bother it!

Babs blinked. Then, deciding there would be no sleep with that twinkling beam playing upon her, resignedly rose. She went to the window, caught

still, blushing for no reason on earth, as she saw Miss Charmant coming towards her. Miss Charmant, a little awkwardly, paused.

"Oh! Good-morning, Barbara."

"Gig-good morning, Miss Charmant," Babs stuttered.

"Er—I—I wanted to say something to you, Barbara"—and Miss Charmant threw a look up and down the deserted corridor—"about the thing you left on my desk yesterday. I'm sorry I have not thanked you before. I suppose it was you?"

"Oh, yes, Miss Charmant!" Babs said, and felt at once enormously light-hearted. She knew of course to what Miss Charmant was referring—the jewelled ring. So Miss Charmant hadn't ignored the fact! Miss Charmant, if she had not spoken before, had spoken now.

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the blind, and paused, her attention caught by a movement in the gardens below. There a figure was striding quickly towards the mistresses' gate. Miss Charmant!

Miss Charmant going out at this time of night! Where?

Babs pulled down the blind. Thoughtfully she climbed into bed. Half-past eleven chimed from the old clock tower as she did so! Half-past eleven—an hour when all mistresses were supposed to be within the bounds of the school. Like any reckless Fourth Former, Miss Charmant was breaking rules. Why?

Babs went to sleep presently—a troubled, dream-haunted sleep. In the morning, when she awoke, Lydia was still muttering about her stolen fob. Babs, having washed and dressed, went downstairs and then suddenly stood

"Then thank you again, Barbara," Miss Charmant said, and walked off, leaving Babs with a sudden desire to skip and dance. Of course the Charmer was true blue. As if, for a moment, she would steal a thing!

Happily she went into breakfast, smiling all over her face. Lydia looked at her, scowled, and when Miss Charmant came in, glancing towards her, smiled, Lydia scowled again. The mistress' brows contracted a little.

"Lydia, why are you so bad-tempered?"

Lydia glared.

"Don't you know?"

"Indeed, Lydia, why should I know?" Miss Charmant asked quietly.

"Well, you were at the dance hall the night before last!" Lydia pointedly replied.

A breathless hush went round the

table. Girls glared daggers at Lydia, but some looked quickly at the mistress. Daring that, if you like—as daring as it was insulting. So persistently had Lydia kept on about that gold fob, so sure was she that Miss Charmant had taken it, that some of the more easily convinced girls, despite their liking for Miss Charmant, were beginning to be impressed. Everybody was staring now at the mistress. What would she say to that?

But Miss Charmant only frowned a little more fiercely.

"If," she said steadily, "you are referring to the fact that I caught you, Lydia, you should be grateful that I didn't report you. For harbouring malice, you will take a further fifty lines. Now get on with your breakfast."

More bitterly Lydia scowled. It seemed she was on the point of saying something else—and probably would have done if Miss Primrose had not arrived at that moment, forcing her to join with the others in standing to attention and wishing her the customary good-morning.

But Lydia had not forgotten, and her eyes were gleaming as later the Fourth Form marched into class. When Miss Charmant came in she did not stand up as the others did: she remained seated. "Lydia," Miss Charmant rapped sharply, "stand up this moment! What is the matter with you, girl?"

Lydia gazed at her sulkily. "You know!"

"I do not know! You are being very surly and disagreeable, however. If you are still harbouring a grudge because of what happened the night before last—"

"Well, I'm not," Lydia said. "It's not that. But anyone would be sulky if somebody had something stolen from them," she added challengingly.

Miss Charmant started.

"Stolen, Lydia? What has been stolen?"

"Well, don't you know?" Lydia asked, glaring, and a distinct hush went round the class. "The thing that was stolen," she said boldly, "was my gold fob."

Once again Miss Charmant started. Babs, watching her face, felt a little sense of dismay as she saw the expression that crossed it.

"Your—your gold fob?" she stumbingly repeated the words, but it was noticeable she no longer looked at Lydia. "I—I—please, girls, sit down. Lydia, remain standing. You lost your gold fob, you mean?"

"I had my gold fob stolen—in the cloak-room at the dance hall!" Lydia retorted boldly.

Babs caught her breath. Clara clenched her hands. That was practically an accusation.

"And what," Miss Charmant asked, "makes you think it was stolen?"

"Well, look how long it's been lost!" Lydia glowered.

"But don't you think, Lydia, somebody may have picked it up and not knowing to whom it belonged—"

"That doesn't alter the fact," Lydia interrupted. "If anybody had picked it up—and the place they picked it up from was my coat pocket—they'd have had plenty of time to hand it to the management or the police. If they did pick it up, they're still sticking to it, and if that's not theft, I don't know what is! I've phoned both the management and the police. I suppose," she added insolently, "that you didn't see anything of it, Miss Charmant? It was

lost in that cloak-room where you caught me—"

Now there was a deathly, awful silence. Babs felt every muscle of her body tense. Directly, insolently, Lydia was looking at the Form-mistress as she said that. Everybody else was looking at her, too. A little sigh went through the Form at it saw Miss Charmant's face change colour. Then, in a voice so unlike her usual tones, she said:

"I—I think, Lydia, you are talking a lot of ridiculous nonsense. Now sit down, please."

### A Split in the Fourth!



LYDIA did sit down; but she knew she had scored a triumph. Discredit her accusation last night as the Form would, there was no denying that, brought face to face with the issue involved, Miss Charmant had been shaken.

She had not denied, as sharply as she might have done had her conscience been clear, that she had not seen the fob. She had not even punished Lydia for what was, after all, downright and colossal impertinence.

The Fourth looked at each other queringly, significantly. Miss Charmant did know something about Lydia's missing trinket; her whole attitude seemed to give that fact away.

Work commenced in an unhappy mood. Obvious, after that, that the mistress was more than a little worried and harassed. Obvious, too, Lydia was feeling she had gained the advantage, was not going to let Miss Charmant down easily. Once or twice Miss Charmant glanced at her angrily as she muttered to a sniggering Freda Ferriers.

"Lydia," she said at last, "if you do not cease talking, I shall order you to stand out in front of the class."

"And serve you jolly well right, you cat!" muttered Clara Trevlyn.

"Well, I was only saying—" Lydia said loudly.

"I am not even slightly interested in what you were saying!" the mistress retorted. "Get on with your work."

"Ratty, eh?" Lydia chuckled to Freda under her breath, but got on with her work, only to receive the mistress' attention ten minutes later.

"Lydia, you were talking again—"

"Well, I was only saying—"

"You have no right to say anything in class," Miss Charmant informed her sharply. "I have warned you, Lydia, until I am tired. Now come out. Stand in front of my desk, with your back to the Form."

Lydia shrugged. She lounged out of the class. While Miss Charmant worked on the blackboard and the Fourth settled down again, Lydia, her eyes gleaming, picked up Miss Charmant's silver pencil and hurriedly rammed it into her pocket. For five—ten minutes, there was silence. Then—

"Lydia, you may go back to your place," Miss Charmant said.

"Thank you," Lydia answered.

"And do not let me hear from you again."

"Thank you," Lydia repeated, and took the silver pencil from her pocket, making a movement with it in her hand so that the mistress could not fail to see it. Then she turned.

"Lydia—" Miss Charmant called sharply.

"Yes, Miss Charmant?"

"What have you in your hand?"

"This?" Lydia looked at it. "It's a silver pencil," she said.

"You took it from my desk?" Miss Charmant accused.

The whole Form looked up. Lydia's face broke into a sulky smirk.

"Well, what if I did?" she asked.

"That pencil," Miss Charmant informed her angrily, "is not your property, Lydia. Taking a silver pencil without permission is tantamount to stealing."

Lydia's eyes flamed. If she had put those words into Miss Charmant's mouth, she could not have received more satisfaction.

"Well," she said, and insolently handed the pencil back, "you ought to know all about that, of course!"

There was an instant, deathly silence. The nerve, the utter cheek of the girl!

From the back of the class came a buzzing murmur; from the front a faint gasp. But the remark was not lost on Miss Charmant—and once again it seemed the Form had proof of her guilty conscience. Any other mistress would have instantly sent Lydia to Miss Primrose for that. Miss Charmant, eyeing her uncertainly for an instant, turned first white, then red.

"Lydia, sit down," she said unsteadily.

"Make her apologise!" Clara cried furiously.

"Clara—please sit down," Miss Charmant added, and there was a little quiver in her voice. "I—I—Barbara, will you please take charge until I come back?" she added hurriedly, and looked so white and worried that for one alarmed moment Babs thought she was going to faint. "I—I shall only be a few moments," she added.

"Yes, Miss Charmant."

Babs stepped out. Miss Charmant hurried from the room. But hardly had the door closed behind her than a rubber, aimed fiercely from Joan Charmant's desk, clumped on Lydia's ear.

"Now, you awful cat—" Joan cried.

In a moment Lydia was on her feet.

"Why, you rotten sister of a thief—"

"Oh, my hat! Be quiet!" Babs cried.

"Lydia—Joan—"

"Well, let her apologise!" Clara cried.

"Yes, rather! Go on, apologise, you cat!"

"Why should I apologise for something that's true?" Lydia furiously cried. "She pinched my fob!"

"Hear, hear!" cried Freda, and several of the girls nodded. "Dash it all," Freda added virtuously, "you must admit Lydia's got some excuse for grumbling. That fob cost five pounds."

"But Miss Charmant didn't steal it!"

Clara flashed out.

"Prove it!" jeered Lydia.

"Well, have you proved—"

"Please, please!" Babs pleaded. "Oh, you geese!"

She jumped on a desk, waving her arms. "Girls, girls, please listen to me—"

But the girls, taking sides now, were not listening to Babs. Tongues locked by the presence of Miss Charmant now broke into hot and wordy warfare. A dozen girls were on their feet. Lydia was fiercely tearing up her blotting-paper and rolling it into balls to aim at Joan Charmant. Joan was darting across the room.

"You cat!" she cried. "You awful cat! Just wait! Just—" and she dived as the blotter ball left Lydia's hands. The ball, whizzing harmlessly on, shot towards the class-room door just as it came open. And then—

Just as Joan reached Lydia, there came an electrifying voice.

"Bless my soul—"

"Oh crumbs, Miss Primrose!" Babs gasped.

Miss Primrose it was—a Miss Primrose, moreover, who was in the act of





"THAT pencil is not your property, Lydia," said Miss Charmant angrily. "Taking a silver pencil without permission is tantamount to stealing." Lydia's eyes gleamed. "Well," she said insolently, "you ought to know all about that, of course!" There was a deathly silence.

rubbing her cheek where Lydia's blotter ball had struck. Her eyes gleamed.

"Barbara, get off that desk! Get back to your places, all of you! How dare you? How dare you? Where is Miss Charmant?"

"She—she's gone out of the room, Miss Pip-Primrose," Babs stuttered.

"That is most apparent," Miss Primrose said starchy. "Where has she gone?"

"I—I dud-don't know."

"And she left you in charge?"

"Yes, Miss Primrose."

"I cannot congratulate you, Barbara, upon your handling of the Form," Miss Primrose said tartly. "Go back to your place. At the same time," she added angrily, "I cannot congratulate the Form upon its behaviour as soon as a mistress' back is turned. This is a class-room not a bear garden; and to help you to remember the fact you will all reassemble in it for one hour's detention immediately after dinner to-day!"

"Mabel Lynn, go and fetch Mary Buller. As you are so incapable of maintaining order during your mistresses' absence, perhaps you will behave more like the young ladies you are supposed to be under the eyes of a prefect."

The Fourth Form groaned. It smarted. An hour's detention—on such a glorious day as this! An hour's detention, when they had a cricket match on against the Lower Fifth!

"Oh, my hat!" muttered Clara. "Lydia, you cat—"

"Rats! It wasn't my fault!" hissed Lydia. "If that thief hadn't pinched my fob, it never would have happened."

"Silence!" Miss Primrose said. "Lydia, take an extra hundred lines!"

Lydia glowered. But then Mary Buller came in. Miss Primrose left, while Mary, with rather a grim glint in her eyes, settled down to take charge. Ten minutes later, Miss Charmant, still looking pale but somewhat relieved, entered the room. Dead silence greeted her appearance.

After that little more was heard from the warring elements of the Fourth Form, though everyone, stunned at the loss of the first hour of the afternoon,

was gloweringly silent. Some blamed Lydia; but there was no doubt that the fundamental cause of all their woes was Miss Charmant.

The atmosphere, in consequence, was far from pleasant; and perhaps Miss Charmant, sensing the hostility, was unusually stiff and thin-lipped as the morning wore on.

Break at last came—to everyone's relief. Immediately the Fourth were in the corridor, Lydia was surrounded. She set her teeth.

"Well, it isn't fair," she said—"it isn't fair! If Primmy knew what we were rowing about, perhaps she wouldn't have come down on us. I'm going to write to Primmy and tell her!"

"Lydia, you're not?" Babs cried.

"I am!"

"But look here, you idiot—"

"Rats! I'm going to write to her," Lydia stated obstinately. "I won't see her—she would only tell me to clear out without listening. But she'll have to read a note. Why should the Charmer stick to my fob? Why should we all be gated because she's turned thief? I'm going!"

"But—"

"Rats!"

And Lydia, with Babs, Mabs, Leila Carroll, and Rosa Rodworth at her heels, stormed off to her study. She reached it. Babs caught her arm.

"Lydia—" she cried frantically.

"Look here, listen to reason—"

"Bosh!" Lydia retorted, and she opened the door.

Babs set her lips. Not if she knew it was Lydia going to write to Miss Primrose. Not if she could help it was the mischief-making snob of the Fourth going to have her way.

As Lydia went into the room, Babs, and Mabs, and Leila, and Rosa stepped after her. Lydia glared.

"Look here, get out!" she cried; and then, seeing something on the table, started. "Why," she cried, "what's that?"

No need to ask what it was. There it lay, glinting and glistening for all to see. It was Lydia's gold fob.

"Well, what about losing it now?" cried Babs triumphantly.

"But—but—" Lydia's face was a study. "I did lose it! It was stolen!

Oh my hat!" she cried. "I see it! Can't you see it, either, you ninnies? The Charmer's put it back! That's why she went out of the room this morning—"

The girls looked at her.

"But if," Rosa objected, "she meant to steal it—"

"Which," Lydia said triumphantly, "was what she did mean to do. Isn't it plain? The last time I saw this it was in her bag. She meant to stick to it. She meant to keep it. She never thought, perhaps, that I'd kick up a shindy about it. Now that I have, she got the wind up and put it back—"

"Meaning," Babs said, "that all the time she didn't know it was yours?"

"Meaning what you like!" Lydia sniffed, but her eyes narrowed. "Whether she knew it belonged to me or not, that doesn't alter the fact that she's been sticking to it," she said. "And that doesn't alter the fact that she's still a thief!"

### News from Diana!



"THERE must—there must be some explanation," Barbara Redfern said

desperately.

"Hum!" Clara Trevlyn

grumbled gloomily.

"The Charmer would never have taken that fob."

"Oh, for goodness' sake, let's hear the last of that beastly fob!" Janet Jordan said irritably. "I'm fed up with it. The question is, seeing the afternoon's completely messed up, what are we going to do?"

Most of the Fourth was asking itself that question.

For the Fourth had just been dismissed after its hour's detention.

Half-past three in the afternoon, as Flora Cann of the Lower Fifth pointed out, was no time to start a game of cricket, especially with the evenings drawing in so rapidly.

So Flora, in that light-hearted way of hers, had fixed up a match with the Upper Fifth—which match was now being played off on Senior Side, while Babs & Co. gloomily watched.

Everybody, like Janet, was heartily sick of Lydia's fob. But the danger lay in the fact that the Form, as a whole, was heartily disgusted with Miss Charmant. Lydia, of course, had lost no time in spreading the story of the return of that fob. It seemed pretty obvious to everyone that the thing had been in Miss Charmant's possession all the time. A half-holiday completely messed up was not a thing likely to be forgiven.

Babs bit her lip. Despite her loyalty, she felt her doubts growing back on her. Also, like the others, she was at a loose end. It was too late for a walk, the tennis courts had all been collared, and the Third Form, grabbing Junior Side, were embarked upon a match, so that even cricket practice was out of the question. Apart from that, the Fifth Form cricket was not of a spectacular variety.

"Well, what are we going to do?" Bessie asked plaintively. "I vote, you know, we go into Friardale and have tea. Anybody got any money?"

Nobody had. Babs & Co. had contributed most of theirs to Miss Primrose's birthday present.

"Well, what about borrowing some?" Bessie added. "Babs, Diana's got plenty. You ask her!"

"Oh, stuff!" Babs said, and shook her head. Then suddenly she tensed. "Hallo!" she whispered. "Here's the Charmer. And—I say, look at the girl!"

They all twisted round. Sure enough, it was Miss Charmant who was striding up the drive. By her side walked a girl—a girl with a good-looking, though rather sulky, face.

"I say, that's the girl we saw at the Cliff Cross Restaurant!" Mabs breathed. "The one who—"

"Yes," Babs said. She cast a warning look at her chum. "I wonder—" she breathed, and broke off.

For the girl they all recognised at once as the girl from whose handbag that glittering ring had been stolen. What was she doing in Miss Charmant's company? Perhaps, Babs thought, it had something to do with the ring?

Miss Charmant, hurrying, cast a look towards them.

"Hallo, she's coming here!" Clara said.

But she was wrong. For a moment the mistress' step faltered. Then, with a quick look at the girl by her side, she walked on.

"Wonder who that girl is?" mused Clara.

They all wondered that, feeling a little mystified. Strange that they should find the Charmer in company with the very girl linked with that inexplicable incident at Cliff Cross. They watched as girl and mistress disappeared into the school. Then Margot Lantham strolled along.

"Hallo! Who's the Charmer's friend?" she asked curiously. "Know her, Babs?"

"No," Babs said, a little shortly. "Do you?"

"Not from Eve!" Margot laughed. "The Charmer didn't seem anxious that anyone should, either. I was in Big Hall when she came in; she shot the girl into her study as if she was going to cane her, or something. But, I say, what a life!" she sighed. "Anybody like to join me in an ice at the tuck-shop?—I've just received a postal order."

"Oh, good! I'm your girl!" Bessie said at once.

Margot laughed. Babs & Co. brightened a little. Eating ices at Margot's

expense was a diversion, at least, and gladly they all flocked off.

For half an hour they remained there, talking and eating. Girls drifted into the shop and out again, and presently they saw Miss Charmant with her girl friend hurrying past the door.

"Charmer looks worried!" Margot commented. "Babs, you don't think there's anything in Lydia's yarn, do you?"

"No," Babs said—but said it so fiercely that Margot positively jumped. "I—I'm sorry!" she stammered. "I—I didn't mean to jump on you like that. But come on!" she added. "It's nearly tea-time. Let's get going!"

They "got going." Back into the school they went. Diana Royston-Clarke, meeting them as they tramped up the stairs, stopped.

"Oh, Babs, can I have a word with you?"

"What about?" Babs asked.

"Well, the Charmer!" And Diana, looking round, paused as she saw that Lydia Crossendale, appearing round the end of the passage at the top of the stairs, had stopped. "I think, if you don't mind, I'd rather talk to you in my study," she said.

Babs nodded. Margot, who had been invited to Study No. 4 to tea, went along with Bessie and Mabs. As soon as Diana's study was reached, Babs closed the door, unaware, however, that Lydia, a queer gleam in her eyes, was stealthily creeping up the corridor.

"Well, what is it?" Babs asked, staring directly at the Firebrand. "Wait a minute, though! In the first place, do you believe this yarn about the Charmer?"

"Well, no. At least, I didn't! But now— Oh, Babs, I hope I'm dreaming, but I'm dashed if I know what to believe! It was about ten minutes ago. I came into this room—"

"Yes?"

"And—there was the Charmer—at my desk!" Diana said. "One drawer was open, and she was fumbling in it. She blurted something—I was too surprised to hear what—and then left the room. Just now"—Diana paused, eyeing the captain of the Fourth queerly—

"just now I came to look for my silver watch, which I'd left in that drawer, and—"

"And it—it was?" Babs asked, her own breath almost stopping as she voiced the words.

"Gone!" Diana said simply.

Blankly they stared at each other.

Neither of them heard the faint chuckle which came from the partially opened door. Neither of them was aware that a figure, cheeks flaming with excitement, was speeding along the corridor towards the Fourth Form Common-room.

That figure was Lydia Crossendale's, and she had overheard all.

"Babs, you—you don't think—" Diana asked.

"No!" Babs said. "No!" she repeated, but the words seemed to be wrung from her. "Diana, don't—don't say anything about this!"

Diana shrugged. "I wasn't intending to," she said. "I may be a bad egg in a good many ways, but I like the Charmer. Queer, though, isn't it?"

It was more than queer. Her brain in a whirl, Babs went along to Study No. 4, where tea was already prepared; but hardly had she sat down to the meal when there was an interruption. Muriel Bond came in.

"Babs—"

"Well?" Babs asked. "Oh, it's rotten—beastly! But—but I think you ought to know Lydia's latest. She says that Miss Charmant's stolen Diana's silver watch!"

"What?" cried Mabs.

"And who," Babs asked, breathing a little heavily, "told her that?"

"Well, she said she heard it: and Diana came in in the middle of it. She wouldn't say anything at first, but when she was pressed she blurted it out. There's a dickens of a fuss in the Common-room."

Babs rose. Tea was forgotten then—except by Bessie Bunter. As Babs went out, Mabs, Clara, Janet, and Margot followed her, Muriel bringing up the rear.

Signs of commotion in the Common-room were not wanting as they approached that apartment. Lydia, once again, apparently, had got the Form by the ears.

They arrived to find Lydia, her face white with fury, and Jean Cartwright, the lanky Scottish Junior, in the midst of a furious argument. Fully half the Form were grouped behind Lydia; the rest—and a very poor rest—behind Jean. Of Diana, however, there was no sign. Neither—perhaps fortunately—was Joan Sheldon Charmant there either.

"It's a lie!" Jean was flaming.

"It's the truth!" Lydia hit back.

"And, seeing it's the truth, it's about time we did something about it! It's coming to something when we can't trust our own Form-mistress!"

"And who," Babs questioned, coming forward, "says we can't trust her?"

"I do!" Lydia cried. "We all do!" she added, with a glance at her followers. "You're Form captain, and it's about time you took a lead! We—"

She broke off suddenly as the door behind Babs opened, and into the room, very pale of face, stepped Miss Charmant.

For a moment there was deathly silence. Miss Charmant gazed round the room. One swift, penetrating stare she sent towards Lydia, and then faced Babs.

"Barbara—" "Watch your pockets, girls!" muttered Frances Frost. "Mind—Ow! Wow!" she yelled.

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"Frances, what is the matter?" Miss Charmant asked.

"Clara kicked my ankle!"  
 "Clara, please refrain from being clumsy!" said the mistress; and Clara crimsoned. "Barbara, I came to speak to you about the collection money. Have you got it all in yet?"  
 "Nun-no, Miss Charmant," Babs said. "I—I've still got six or seven girls to see."

"Then," Miss Charmant said, "would you mind seeing them as soon as possible, Barbara? I have been asked on the phone by the shopkeeper if we will take delivery of the bookcase as soon as possible. Apparently, he is selling-up his business, which is one of the reasons why we have been able to obtain the article so cheaply. I can leave that to you, Barbara?"

"Oh, yes, Miss Charmant!"  
 "And you will see me—when? About six o'clock, say?"

"Yes, Miss Charmant."  
 Miss Charmant nodded. She smiled at Babs, but it was noticeable that she did not look at any other girl in the room as she went out. The door closed. Lydia burst into a scoffing sneer.

"Oh, little fly, come into my parlour, said the old spider, and don't forget to bring your money-bags with you, so that I can pinch them! What an invitation! What's the answer, girls? Why, that she means to snaffle the lot!"

Babs took an impulsive step forward. "The answer," she said, "is this! And her eyes flashed as her hand swept round, and Lydia gave a gasp as she was thrust into the midst of her followers. "Now keep your rotten remarks to yourself! Come on, Clara! Come on, all of you!"

"But, look here—" Lydia hooted, and gasped as, rushing forward, Clara pushed her back. "Oh, mum-my hat! Here, listen to me!"

But nobody was listening to Lydia.

**Crisis!**



"HOW much?" Clara Trevlyn asked.  
 "Ten pounds four shillings," replied Barbara Redfern.

"Pretty good—what?"  
 Jemima Carstairs beamed. "Jolly good! What-ho! Did the dear old Charmer say anything, Babs?"

Babs shook her head. It was six-thirty that night, and she had just returned from Miss Charmant's study after handing over the remainder of the fund which had been collected for Miss Primrose's birthday present.

"She—she only said what a nice sum it was, and—and how well we'd collected," she said. "Not a word about anything else."

"But she looks worried," Mabel Lynn opined.

"Sure! Worried to death!" Leila Carroll agreed gloomily.

The chums themselves were looking worried enough. Incredible as it was, it seemed no longer possible now to believe that Miss Charmant was not the thief Lydia had accused her of being. Why, if there was an explanation of her actions, did she not speak out?

Supposing—as it must do if it were not checked—the scandal which was now running like wildfire through the school came to Miss Primrose's ears?

Opinion in the Fourth, long since divided, now threatened to split the Form into two camps. The latest development over Diana's watch had gathered half a dozen fresh supporters of Lydia Crossendale. Even those who still championed the Charmer—those

**MORE ABOUT BABS & CO.**



in  
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who still, in spite of their own common sense, stuck up for her—felt a weakening in their purpose every time they thought of that. If Miss Charmant wasn't a thief, what funny sort of game was she playing? Was there, in fact, any other explanation save the one that appeared on the surface?

Several times that evening there were fierce, wordy conflicts in the studies and the corridors of the Lower School. In the dormitory that night there was almost another full-sized row. Next morning Lydia was up before anyone else, and Babs wondered at the triumphant smirk on her face when she saw her after breakfast. She was soon to know.

The smirk was fully explained when in class, after Miss Charmant turned the blackboard which should have contained the map of China on which the class was working, she tottered back with a little gasp, her face turning deathly white.

For the map of China had been erased. On the board, in sweeping great letters, was written:

**"WE DON'T WANT THIEVES AT CLIFF HOUSE!"**

There was a momentary, painful silence. Babs' face flamed.

Miss Charmant stood looking at the blackboard. Then slowly she turned; slowly her eyes singled out Lydia. She said:

"Lydia, stand up!"  
 Lydia stood up.

"Did you write this?" Miss Charmant asked.

"Why," Lydia demanded, "should I have written it?"

"I am aware," Miss Charmant said steadily, "that you are conducting some sort of vendetta against me, Lydia. I really think, before it goes any further, that its cause should be cleared up. I suppose this comes of losing your job?"

Everybody held their breath. The Fourth felt that the clash between accuser and accused had come at last.

"Somebody in this school stole that job!" Lydia said spitefully.

"You're sure of that, Lydia, even though," Miss Charmant said, "the job has been returned?"

"How did you know that?" Lydia asked quickly.

"I have just said that I have heard things," Miss Charmant repeated. "I do not go about with my eyes and ears closed. Whatever your suspicions, Lydia, you have no right to voice them without proof. There are such things, you know, as mistaking another's intentions. Now," Miss Charmant added, "you will come and erase this from the board! For your action you will redraw the map of China which was on it, and, for being wilfully insolent, you will write out two hundred times: 'I must not let malice govern my actions and my thoughts.' Quickly!" she added, with an altogether new ring in her voice.

Lydia glared. For a moment she clenched her hands.

"And—supposing I don't rub it out?"

"Then," Miss Charmant said clearly. "I shall have no alternative but to call in Miss Primrose. Either you obey me, Lydia, or be reported to Miss Primrose."

There was a sigh in the room. Babs & Co. looked at each other. For the first time they smiled, bright-eyed, triumphant. Whatever appearances might say, whatever they might think, here was the Miss Charmant they liked and loved—Miss Charmant meeting challenge for challenge and yet, even though so dreadfully persecuted, still meting out mercy with justice. Was that a thief who had spoken? Was it a thief who could have met Lydia on her own ground like that?

Lydia scowled. It was one thing to provoke trouble in the Fourth—another thing to bring Miss Primrose into it. After all, Lydia had no definite proof.

She stepped out. Shakingly she erased the offensive message.

Peace—a rather wondering but still conflicting peace—fell upon the classroom once more.

There were no more incidents that morning. Babs & Co., happy and buoyant, felt confidence returning. But puzzlement was added to that confidence when, just before dinner, they met Diana Royston-Clarke.

"Funny," Diana frowned. "Jolly funny. But—you know I told you about my watch yesterday, Babs?"

"Yes."

"Well, I—I went to my drawer just now and—and there it was."

"You mean it—it's been returned?" Babs asked.

"Yes."

Babs drew a deep breath. Curious. But again was that the action of a

# OUT OF SCHOOL HOURS



*Patricia is a friend indeed—young, charming and understanding. With a delightfully happy knack of knowing just the sort of things which appeal to YOU, she gives you each week the most helpful suggestions on all sorts of schoolgirl topics.*

**D**O you just adore "dressing up"? My mother was saying the other day that when she and all her many brothers and sisters were small, they would often spend a Saturday afternoon in the loft, going through their mother's trunks and boxes. And, my goodness, the treasures they would find!

Lace fichus and feather fans. Velvet gowns, with skirts like tea-cosies. And hats the size of umbrellas—almost.

There would be black net mittens and satin slippers.

So no wonder they all had such good times!

"Girls don't seem to play as they used to," mother finished up reminiscently.

"No, mother pet, because modern mothers don't have as many clothes and hoard them like your mother and grandmother did," I reminded her sweetly.

At which, mother opened her eyes quite wide.

"Do you know, Pat, that had never occurred to me before!" she said.

And yet mother wouldn't dream of saving any of her clothes. She always turns them out for the local "jumble" sale.

The chief treasures in our loft are some rather hideous ornaments which I believe were wedding presents to mother—though to me they look as if they were won at a fair!—and some very hefty curtains, yards and yards of them, which mother can't bear to get rid of and which she is sure will "come in useful some day."

So now you see why your Patricia never spent her time as a small girl "dressing up," don't you? Because there was nothing to dress up in (if you can forgive such an awkward sentence, ending with two prepositions!).

As a matter of fact, I much preferred to be out of doors, for I had a lovely sand-pit, and there was also a tap for the garden hose, where I could fill jugs and any old thing with water.

And you know how small people love to puddle about with water, don't you?

But this love of "dressing-up" which mother apparently had so strongly is by no means absent from the family.

For example, there is nothing I like better than to trot round and see my rich friend, Esme. Very soon we dash up to her lovely white-and-pink bed-room and fish out all her new clothes.

There we spend a perfectly happy hour, just "trying on," in front of the mirror. At least, I do the "trying on"—hats, frocks, coats, and even shoes—while Esme does the admiring—or the opposite!

Then, when she comes to see me, just the reverse takes place, with your Patricia

making the "running commentary" on Esme as a mannequin. I know girls are supposed to be the only ones who like this dressing-up idea.

But you should just have heard the excitement when my young brother Heath (Heatherington in full) was presented with a "Red Injin" outfit.

He'll stand like a model of virtue while one piece of frippery after another of this is adjusted—though you dare ask him to stand still just a second while you brush his hair!

That's very different! And when the complete disguise is effected, from feather-tips to moccasined feet, he goes dashing off to his wigwam, shouting, "Thank you, squawk!"—the last word being a mix-up between squaw and tomahawk, I suspect!

## ● The School Bell

Perhaps those of you who're not starting school for a week yet won't be too pleased with me if I mention the "school bell" and bring you out of your holiday dreams.

But when I tell you that this particular "school bell" is a penwiper, then perhaps you'll be more interested.

You can make it in a twinkling, and it will look very jolly fastened by a drawing-pin to the side of your school desk. (Or aren't you allowed to stick drawing-pins in your desk?)

The "bell" is made of two pieces of thick, dark material. (A scrap from an old school tunic or even school bloomers would do very well.) You cut these pieces to a bell shape and sew them together at the top.

A second row of stitching makes a slot through which you can slip a spare pen for emergencies and exam-time.

Sew a bone or brass curtain ring to the top of the bell for hanging it up and a bead to the bottom to represent the "clapper."

## ● Famous Girl Guides

I wonder how many of you know to which Girl Guide patrol Princess Elizabeth and Princess Margaret Rose belong.

I expect you've heard, but possibly you've forgotten, so I'll just remind you.

Princess Elizabeth belongs to the Kingfisher Company—that's quite easy to remember, isn't it?

Her small sister—who is still a Brownie—is a member of the Leprechaun Patrol.

Now it wouldn't surprise me in the least if you weren't quite certain what a

Leprechaun is, so I'll tell you, then you can tell your chums when they ask!

A Leprechaun is a sort of spirtie or elf, but not a young one—an old one, more like a gnome, perhaps.

And in pronouncing the word you have to forget the "ch" and call it just an "h" instead to yourselves.

So that it should sound like "Leprehawn."

All clear now?

## ● A Simple Trimming

You who may not be very good at difficult spelling or grammar are quite likely real experts when it comes to needlework lesson.

So I'm sure you know exactly what bias binding is!

But did you know you can buy this in the shops, all ready pressed for use?

Well, you most certainly can, and if you have an early autumn frock which you think would look a bit smarter for a spot of colour, I would like you to buy yourself a card of "bias binding." And do remember that there are all sorts of pretty colours to choose from.

If you stitch this binding around the edges of collars, cuffs, and pockets of a plain dress, it honestly would surprise you how new it would appear.

Anyhow, if the idea appeals to you, but seems just a spot ambitious for you to tackle on your own, just mention it to mother. I'm sure she'd approve—and help.

## ● A Big Secret

Oh, just before I say good-bye I really must tell you about a per-fect-ly glo-ri-ous surprise that is coming next Saturday in this favourite paper of ours.

I would tell you more, but I've been "sworn to secrecy" until next Saturday—but I'll promise to tell you all then, my pets.

Meanwhile, it would certainly save your friend the newsgent from being buried under an avalanche of very intrigued schoolgirls next Saturday if you ran round to him now and asked him to save you your copy—just to make sure of being one of the first in the know!

Your friend,

*Patricia*



# THOSE PRECIOUS SUMMER DRESSES

*It will soon be time to put away your lovely summer clothes for a winter rest—unless you decide that with a little alteration they can be worn through the cold weather.*



**I**T'S a very tragic thought, but I'm afraid it must be faced.

Very soon now those lovely summer dresses of yours—your sun-frock, your very-best frock, your play-suit, oh, all of them—will not be suitable to wear, for October is approaching. And away they will have to go until next summer.

But before they actually land up in the trunk in the loft, I do want you to examine them all very carefully and consider possibilities.

That very-best summer frock, for example, which you wore to that birthday party—wouldn't that make a useful WINTER party frock?

I'm quite sure it would, and it seems such a pity not to wear it.

Let's just see what can be done to it to make it a little more suitable for winter party wear.

Bands of narrow velvet round the short sleeves would look very nice, especially if there were more bands round the neck or collar to match. Then three rows of velvet on the belt would just complete the picture and quite take away a too-summerly look.

A posy of artificial flowers at the waist is always a bright idea too—but that, of course, can wait till party-time is here.

## A USEFUL PETTI

Now that sunbathing frock. I've an idea it's going to be definitely too tight and too small for you before next year, if you go on growing at this rate.

So what about turning it into a useful petti? Yes, it may be brightly patterned—but the smart shops are full of very costly pettis with the most vivid designs all over them!

It would require very little alteration to change it. You could cut the shoulder straps a bit narrower, perhaps, and, of course, remove the belt. But that seems about all.

Worn under an autumn frock this would do you really good service, for, as you know, pettis always help a woolly frock to "hang" well.

Next, there's that fluttery voile frock which you liked so much. Yes, it was

pretty, wasn't it? But then, perhaps you've had it two years already and by next year you'll be a bit tired of it. So what can you do to get more wear out of it now?

I know. What about wearing it as a blouse under your week-end skirt.

That's one notion.

Or you can cut the skirt off and thread elastic through the waist and make a fascinating "top" to wear with pyjama trousers!

Yes, all are possibilities—but only if your clothes have already been well and truly worn.

## CARE FOR NEW CLOTHES

If they were mostly new this year then you must certainly do no chopping about.

Instead, they must all be laid away as carefully as grandma's bridal dress was.

But it's simply fatal to put clothes away if they are a spot grubby; you know that, don't you?

Any stain or mark, however slight now, will be more deeply engrained in the precious material after a long rest.

So there's lots of washing in store for you.

Silk garments should be washed quickly, allowed to get half-dry and should then be ironed. If they get quite dry and are then damped down again, this often causes shrinking.

Cotton garments may be treated a little less reverently, for they wash like the well-known "rag" of course—and still come up radiant and blooming.

But woollies—and among these I include your bathing suit, if you are not an all-the-year-round swimmer—should be washed as carefully as the most glamorous Eastern silks.

## WASHING WOOLLIES

First you should let just a little very hot water into a bowl, and then add a generous helping of mother's pet soap-flakes. Swish these around to make sure all are melted, and then add cooler water, so that finally the water in ONLY JUST warm—just as it should be for a baby's bath, in fact.

# LOOKING AFTER GOLDFISH



*Just a word about those very quiet pets which ask so little that they're sometimes forgotten—goldfish.*

**H**AVEN'T you noticed how fashionable goldfish are becoming as pets? And I'm not surprised, either, for they are such decorative creatures—and really do give very little trouble or expense to their owners.

First, their bowl. This should be as large as you can possibly manage. Most people prefer the square tank shape nowadays—and certainly the fish like them better than the globe-shaped bowls.

All the same, I do realise that some families prefer to keep the goldfish in bowls, for various reasons. (It may be the expense of a new one, or it may be that the family cat gets too keen on fishing with his paw from the bigger tanks.) But, whichever you have, tank or bowl, do please see that it is as big as possible, and that there is plenty of room for the fish.

Water-plants in the goldfish bowl look very pretty indeed, and also the fish love to swim in and out and around them. In addition, plants give oxygen to the water, which keeps it fresh and aerated.

"Changing the fish" can be quite a business if you're not an expert. The simplest way of doing this is to catch the fish in a small shrimping net and place them in an ordinary bowl of water while you rinse out their "home."

## MEAL-TIME TREATS

Goldfish also like a change of diet, just as we do! I expect you feed yours on ants' eggs bought in packets, don't you?

Well, now and again give them biscuit crumbs and scrapings from toast as well. They also like tiny pieces of beef and the yolk of egg. Chopped macaroni is popular, too, in the goldfish world. So also are chopped garden worms—though I'm afraid my goldfish will have to go without these if I'm expected to catch the worms!

(Continued from page 11)

thief? Mysterious, baffling, the Charmer's conduct—but if she intended to steal things why, after she had stolen them, did she return them? What was the explanation? What was—

Clara, at that moment, came up the corridor.

"I say, Babs, see who's arrived again?"

"No. Who?"

"The girl that the Charmer brought into the school yesterday. She's in the Charmer's study now, and— Oh, Babs, Sylvia Sirrett has given me another five shillings for the presentation—she had a remittance this morning! Shall I hand it to you?"

"Yes, please; I'll take it to Miss Charmant after dinner," Babs said.

And after dinner she went down to Miss Charmant's study, the five shillings in her hand. She knocked, received no reply, and knocked again. Still no reply. Babs, opening the door, went in, intending to drop the money into the collection-box which was on the Charmer's desk.

The box was there, though Miss Charmant was not in the room. Babs wondered for a moment if she had gone off with the strange girl.

She regarded the box and smiled. Golly; but that must be heavy by this time, she thought. She dropped Sylvia's coins into it, and then started at the hollow wooden sound they set up.

Babs grabbed up the box and shook it. Her face paled. Except for Sylvia's coins, there was nothing in it!

What had happened to the money? Supposing—

Oh stuff! Babs told herself abruptly. Stuff! Miss Charmant had just changed it into notes, that's all. Miss Charmant—and then guiltily she wheeled, the box still in her hand, as the door opened and the mistress herself, with the strangest look on her face that Babs had ever seen, came into the room. Like a woman transfixed she halted as she saw Babs, box in hand.

"Barbara!" she cried. "What are you doing with that box?"

Babs blushed to the roots of her hair.

"I—I was only feeling it, Miss Charmant. I—I thought—well, after all—" Babs said, flustered and discomfited. "I—I have a certain responsibility in—in the handling of this money! I mean I just wanted to see how much we had."

"And—and you have looked?" Miss Charmant asked in a strange voice.

"Nun-no; only felt," Babs stammered. "But, Miss Charmant, there's nothing in the box! Have you changed the money, then?"

Whiter, if that were possible, the mistress's face became.

"Barbara—" she said weakly.

Babs' heart knew a quick, alarmed stab. In her horror she did not see the face of Lydia Crossendale staring through the partly opened window.

"Miss Charmant—the money—" "The—the money has—has gone!" Miss Charmant gulped. "I—I— No, Barbara, I—I can't tell you! But I will find it! I will, really!" she added. "Barbara— Oh, great goodness! How can I say it? Barbara, please, please say nothing to anyone about this—please! I—I will repay the money somehow."

Outside Lydia drew a hissing breath. Without waiting for more, she flew off to Miss Primrose. Two minutes later, while Babs, terribly shaken, was still with the Form-mistress, Miss Primrose strode into the room.

She was accompanied by Lydia.

"Miss Charmant," she said, and her eyes went from mistress to Form captain, "this girl complains that you have made use of certain funds collected by the Form. However libellous that complaint may be, it is my duty as headmistress to investigate it without delay. Have you this money?"

Weakly Miss Charmant tottered to her feet. Almost in a whisper her words came.

"No, Miss Primrose!"

The headmistress stared at her.

"Then where is it?"

"It—it has gone."

Miss Primrose's brows came together.

"Miss Charmant, where has it gone?"

"I—I am sorry, but—but I cannot answer that question!" Miss Charmant replied, and unsteadily gripped at the table.

## "Thank You All,"

says **HILDA RICHARDS**

for the many delightful letters received. Here she replies to just a few of them.



**BARBARA MALINS (Birmingham).**—Thank you so much for a sweet little letter, my dear. You would be in the Upper Third if you went to Cliff House. I do hope you'll enjoy your holiday at Bournemouth; I cannot imagine a nicer place in which to have a good time! Thank you for your Cliff House suggestion—I'll certainly keep it in mind.

**CHRISTINA ANDERSON (Angus, Scotland).**—I was delighted to hear from you again, Christina. So you are learning to type? Don't be discouraged if you find it difficult at first; do you know—though perhaps this should remain a secret—I and nearly all my fellow authors are very unreliable typists! There are always lots of mistakes in our manuscripts and letters. Yes, I answer all my readers' letters myself; as you say, it is a heavy task—but I love doing it! Afraid I haven't space here to reply to your other questions. Perhaps you'll repeat them next time you write, my dear, will you?

**"LAVENDER" (Suffolk).**—You would be in the Lower Third if you went to Cliff House, "Lavender," and your brother would be in the Lower Third if he were at Friardale. I'll certainly not forget your story suggestion. Thank you so much for it. Write again and tell me all about yourself, won't you?

**"IRMA" (New Zealand).**—You must be a very clever young person, Irma, to have written and acted in your own plays. I expect you were very thrilled when you went on tour, too. You would be in the Second Form if you went to Cliff House. Yes, I shall be featuring Mabs frequently in future stories. Write again, won't you, my dear?

**LINDA AND LUELLA LEE (Scotland).**—Thank you both for your very charming little letters. Goodness, you seem to have ever so many favourites at Cliff House; but I'll certainly try to feature them all whenever I can. And I will also keep in mind your other suggestion, regarding the "Celebrities." Write again, won't you, my dear?

**MILLY RIVERSTONE (Liverpool, Lancs.).**—So glad to hear from you, Milly, and to know you are enjoying my C.H. stories. The story you read, where Diana was under sentence of

expulsion, originally appeared quite a long time ago. Later, in another story, Diana was "reprieved," and stayed on in the Fourth. Marcia Loftus, however, was expelled, and Stella Stone has since left Cliff House.

**ELSIE AGAR (Sunderland).**—Thank you for a sweet little letter, my dear. I cannot put you in touch with any of those readers who write to me, owing to office rules—which even I must obey! So sorry, Elsie! You would be in the Upper Third, with Doris Redfern and her chums, if you went to Cliff House. Yes, Bessie has a brother named Billy, at Greyfriars School. She also has a younger brother named Sammy. Both brothers are very stout chaps!

**MARIE ENTICKNAP (Manor Park).**—What a very nice little letter. And so enthusiastic, too. But it was just a wee bit short, wasn't it, Marie? Next time you write, you must tell me all about yourself, and what you think of Cliff House, and so on. I shall look forward to hearing from you, so please don't forget!

**"SHEILA" (St. John's, Newfoundland).**—Delighted to hear from you again, Sheila, and to know you are still enjoying "Cliff House." Miss Keys is Games Mistress at C.H., and does not take a Form. You can write to Miss Melbourne and Miss Chester at this office, my dear. I'm afraid you will not be able to get the number of our paper you mentioned, as it is long since out of print. Write again, won't you?

**BETTY and PAMELA SMITH (Brighton).**—So glad to hear from you both, my dears. I passed your beauty hint on to Patricia, who was delighted, Betty. She has asked me to thank you for it. Thank you, Pam, my dog, Juno, is very well, and she sends you and your sister each a "woof."

## True Blue, After All!



"SHE'S a thief!" "No doubt about it!" "She's pinched the Form funds!" Uproar was in the Fourth

Form. For everybody knew now—and a shock of horror had run through the whole school at the news. Miss Charmant, honoured treasurer of the birthday fund, had appropriated that fund for her own purposes!

Lydia, full of gloating glee, had made the astounding fact known. Miss Charmant was shown up at last. Miss Charmant undoubtedly was a thief.

Everybody knew, too—thanks to Freda Ferriers listening outside the headmistress' door—that Miss Charmant, having failed to satisfy Miss Primrose concerning the money, had been given twelve hours in which to replace it or leave Cliff House for ever.

Cliff House hummed. And Lydia gloated. What a revenge for her!

But there were six girls who did not join in the general excited chatter. Those six, led by Barbara Redfern, were Mabs herself, Mabs, Janet, Clara, Marjorie Hazeldene, and Leila Carroll.

They, at the moment Lydia was thrilling in her triumph, were standing outside Miss Charmant's door.

Not two minutes ago Miss Charmant, with a face like paper, had walked into that room after her visit to the headmistress.

"There's some explanation—there must be!" Babs cried. "We've got to ask her! We've just got to help her! It can't be true! She shan't go!"

"Hush!" Clara muttered, with a choke in her voice. "Here she comes."

For the door of Miss Charmant's room had opened. Still with that deathly pallor in her cheeks, Miss Charmant had emerged. But she emerged with her chin tilted, her head held high.

One glance she cast towards the group

of girls, and made as if to stride on. But Babs, with breaking heart, caught at her sleeve.

"Miss Charmant—please, please!" she pleaded. "Miss Charmant, we've heard—we know! There's some mistake—some dreadful mistake! Miss Charmant, can't we help—please?"

The features of the mistress softened. "Barbara, thank you—but no!" she said, and gently removing Barbara's arm she hurriedly walked on. The six eyed each other.

"Well—" Clara said.  
"Well?" Babs flared round on her. "Well," she passionately demanded, "are we going to stand here like a set of ninnies—doing nothing? Are we going to stand by while perhaps the Charmer's heading for the sack?"

"But what," Leila demanded, "can we do?"  
"Help her!" Babs cried. "Help her! Oh, she doesn't want it, I know! But she's going to have it! Look! She's gone out! You can bet your boots she's gone out in such a tearing hurry because of this theft business! Well, if she won't let us help her of her own accord, we'll help her on our own! And the first thing," Babs said, "is to follow her and find out where she's going!"  
"Phew!" whistled Janet.

"Come on!"  
They blinked. But Babs, in that desperate mood, was irresistible. Not for nothing was she leader of the Fourth Form. Almost without realising it, the chums followed her. Miss Charmant had sped into the road now. They saw her climbing on to a Courtfield bus.

"We'll catch the next," Babs said. "It'll be along in two minutes."  
That was true. For on Courtfield Market Day the bus service ran double. Hardly had Miss Charmant's bus disappeared than the relief came along, and before they had reached Courtfield had almost caught up the first one. Only half a minute behind the first bus, it stopped at Courtfield Market-place.

"Look! There's Miss Charmant—getting out," Babs said. "She's making towards St. Mary's Lane. Come on!"  
They scampered off. Miss Charmant, walking rapidly, did not look behind her. Rapidly she crossed the square, plunging into the narrow, hedge-trimmed lane whose name Babs had mentioned.

The chums followed. They reached the end of the lane.  
"Walk behind the hedge," Babs said. "If she looks round, she won't spot us then."

It was an idea they were all quick to appreciate, and, sheltered by the hedge, they trailed along in the grass almost soundlessly. Then suddenly there came an exclamation from Miss Charmant.

"Eunice!" she called.  
"Hal-lo!" breathed Clara.  
They stood, peering through the hedge.

And then, prepared as they were for some surprise, they all blinked. Twenty yards up the lane was a girl. She started violently as she heard her name, and, twisting round, stared for a moment at the mistress; took a pace backward as though contemplating flight; then, sulkily, came to a standstill. It was the mystery girl Miss Charmant had on two occasions brought to the school!

"Eunice!" Miss Charmant hurried up to her. "Eunice, you bad, you wicked girl!" she cried. "That you could have let me down so after promising to go straight! Eunice, what have you done with the money you took from the collecting-box in my study?"

The chums almost jumped.  
"I—I didn't take it!" Eunice said sullenly.

"Eunice, please—no more lies!" Miss Charmant's face was grim now. "I have stood by you long enough! I have given you too many chances! At the school they think I am the thief—not you! This time you have gone too far, however! I want that money!"

"I tell you," Eunice said again, "I haven't got it!"  
The chums blinked bewilderingly, wondering at each other.

"No!" Miss Charmant's lips curled contemptuously. "You told me you hadn't got Miss Wallace's diamond ring when I asked you—yet when I looked in your bag, there it was! You told me you had not stolen Lydia Crossendale's fob—but I found it in your possession and got myself into a nice old scrape when I was trying to put it back in Lydia's pocket in the dance-hall so that she should never suppose it had been stolen. You told

"I would—and I will!" Valerie Charmant said steadily.

"But—but I never meant to steal it!" Eunice wailed. "I never meant it, Miss Charmant! You—you know I can't help it. Oh, please, please don't be hard! Give me another chance!"

"Give me that money!"  
"I can't! I've hidden it!"  
"I'll come with you to find it."

The girl whimpered.  
"All—all right," she said; but Babs, watching her, did not miss the cunning narrowing of her eyes. "Come on, I—I'll go and find it now," she added. "And, Miss Charmant, I—I'm so sorry!"

Together they tramped off. Dazedly the chums stared at each other.  
"Then—then it was that awful girl the whole time!" Mabs breathed. "Oh, my hat! She's been stealing things; the Charmer, to save her from being bowled out, has been trying to put them back in secret! We might have guessed something like that!"



**BABS** darted forward and snatched at the ticket Eunice had just bought. For Miss Charmant's sake, the girl had to be delayed.

me you hadn't stolen Diana Royston-Clarke's wrist-watch—when all the time I recognised that watch—and again, you little thief, I was caught in trying to put it back, and accused of stealing it myself! And now"—Miss Charmant's eyes blazed—"you have robbed my girls of the fund they built up out of their pocket-money! I, too, am judged for that. But this time, Eunice, you have gone too far!"

Eunice started.  
"What do you mean?"  
"I mean," Miss Charmant said quietly, "that if you do not return that money immediately, I am going to hand you over to the police!"

The girl stared at her. Quite obviously she had never expected Miss Charmant to take up that stern attitude, and quite obvious that the Charmer meant what she said. A swift change overspread her face. She suddenly burst into tears.

"Miss Charmant, you wouldn't?"

"We might," Babs said savagely, "but we didn't! My hat! I feel like kicking myself! But watch them," she added urgently. "I don't trust little Eunice! Where have they gone?"

"The cottage—just up the lane there," Janet Jordan said.  
They stood still, watching. Girl and Miss Charmant had disappeared now. Five—ten minutes went by—and then, suddenly, Clara jumped.

"Babs—look!"  
But Babs had seen. Two hundred yards away, having broken through the hedge higher up the lane, was the girl. She had a bag in her hand. One quick, hunted glance she gave towards the lane, then started off for the road that lay just ahead of her.

"She's diddled the Charmer!" Babs cried. "She's getting away! My hat! Go to the house—tell Miss Charmant! Hi!" she shouted.

The girl on the road looked round then. She ran.

"Come on!" Babs cried. "Marjorie, you go to the house—"  
Marjorie nodded. Off towards the house she pelted.

Like a hare the girl was running, and, having the advantage of the hard surface of the road, was making good progress. Desperately Babs & Co. raced in pursuit; but progress in the stubble was not easy, and more than once they stumbled, more than once fell. They were able to break through into the road at last. The girl was nowhere in sight.

"But she went this way!" Babs cried. "Up towards the station! Come on!"

On they pelted, gasping now. At the end of the road was Courtfield Station, and just as they reached it they saw their quarry dashing into the booking office. And a guard was shouting:

"All aboard for London! London train goes in one minute! Hurry there!"

Babs drew a deep breath. She saw the scheme now. Eunice, having left Miss Charmant stranded, was making a desperate getaway with the school funds. Eunice intended to decamp to London with the money. Exhausted as she was, Babs put on a desperate spurt.

She forged ahead of the rest, almost collided with a porter, and ran on. Eunice—where was she?

She saw her—at the booking office. Babs set her teeth. Desperately she hurtled forward. She reached the booking office, where the clerk was just in the act of getting a ticket. As Babs came up, he put it on the ledge.

"Third class single to London, miss. You'll have to hurry. The train—here!" he shouted.

For Babs, racing forward, had snatched that ticket from the ledge.

It was a desperate ruse. But she did not care. At all costs Eunice must be delayed! Eunice was not going to get away with this. Eunice, the awful cat who had caused their adored Form-mistress so much suffering.

While Eunice, with a gasp, turned and the clerk shouted, she swung round, and went flying back to her chums. In a perfect passion, Eunice founced after her.

"Thief! Thief! Thief!" she cried shrilly. "Stop her! Stop her!"

Babs gulped. She saw the station-master ahead of her. She saw her chums behind him. Eunice, screaming, was within five yards of her, then. The station-master, advancing, grabbed her by the shoulders.

"Call a policeman!" raved Eunice.

"Yes," Babs panted, "call one! Please do call one, station-master!"

"But what is this?" the station-master asked.

"She stole my ticket!" shrilled Eunice.

"Because," Babs said grimly, "she stole the Cliff House funds! She—"  
and then she paused as her chums surrounded her, as Miss Charmant, accompanied by Marjorie, appeared on the scene. "Miss Charmant," she gasped, "I—I'm sorry! This girl tried to cheat you—"

Miss Charmant's face was grim. Eunice turned. But for once she turned too late.

Leila and Clara, guessing her intention, had stepped forward. Fiercely they grabbed hold of her.

"Thank you!" Miss Charmant said. "I am grateful, girls. Eunice, you wicked, wicked thing!" she cried. "You awful little schemer! I give you

your last chance? this is how you reward me! Now—"

"Oh, Miss Charmant, please don't send for aunt!" Eunice whispered.

"I have already sent for your aunt," Miss Charmant said. "She is on her way to Cliff House School to see me. Eunice, you will go home. There you will remain—"

"And there," Babs put in determinedly, "she will not remain, Miss Charmant! Eunice is coming back to Cliff House with us! And there," Babs added, her eyes blazing, "Eunice is going to own up before the whole school and tell what she's done!"

"Barbara, my dear, please!" Miss Charmant begged. "Let me handle this!"

"I'm sorry!" Babs said.

"Barbara—"

"I'm sorry!" Babs repeated doggedly.

"Miss Charmant, it isn't just your affair any longer! We want to see you cleared! We're going to see you cleared! I don't know the details yet, but I do know this: this girl stole the Cliff House funds. That's an affair which concerns all of us."

"But, Barbara—"

"Besides," Babs added, "she would have given me in charge. Well, it's my turn now if I want to give her in charge! And I will," she said fiercely, "if she doesn't own up!" And while Miss Charmant, pale but relieved, stepped back, Babs turned to Eunice. "Will you own up or shall I," she added threateningly, "call a policeman?"

Eunice wilted.

"I—I'll come and own up!" she muttered.

AND SHE DID. Before that afternoon was out, the whole school knew the details. Eunice Faversham, incurable little liar, thief, and hypoerite, was the niece of a friend of Miss Charmant's. Eunice, expelled from one school after another, had been the despair of her aunt's life.

Until at last her aunt had been faced with a big decision: should she send her to a home or not?

Then it was that Miss Charmant had stepped in. Valerie Charmant, believing that there was good in every girl, had asked another chance for Eunice. The aunt had given her that last chance—only on condition that if it failed, Eunice would go where she would give no further trouble. For a few days Eunice had settled down: had seemed to be honestly trying to reform—and yet, even then, she had been lying, stealing, creating trouble. Miss Charmant, desperately attempting to make good her opportunity to reform her, had covered up her sins.

Until at last—

"Well, it was hopeless," Miss Charmant told Babs & Co. when the weeping Eunice, in the company of a very stern aunt, had gone. "I am sorry to confess for once a failure; but Eunice was just too much for me. But I am grateful—and I am glad," she added softly, "to know, in spite of the most dreadful evidence against me, I have had staunch and loyal friends."

THE END.



When Clara Trevlyn, the boisterous, good-hearted Tomboy of the Cliff House Fourth Form, set out to help her chum, Barbara Redfern, she little realised the tremendous task she was undertaking. Babs' cousin Keith Harvey, a good-for-nothing young wastrel, was in trouble. But Babs was fully occupied with a most important job of work for the school. She could not spare the time, as Clara knew; and so, to save Babs from having to neglect either her cousin or the school, Clara took upon her own shoulders the worry and responsibility of aiding that scapegrace youth—in secret! But things did not go at all right for Clara. Deeper and deeper she became enmeshed in a web of circumstances; deeper and deeper into disgrace. And yet, the whole time, for Babs' sake, the Tomboy never breathed a word in her own defence! Don't miss this magnificent story. It appears COMPLETE next week—one of Hilda Richards' very best.



Drama and Romance in the Golden West.

# GIRL RIDER OF THE BLUE HILLS!



By  
**DORIS  
LESLIE**

## FOR NEW READERS.

FAY THORNTON lives on the Flying H Ranch in Texas with her father, ROBERT THORNTON, and her two little brothers, Ted and Bobbie. The ranch is small and not too prosperous. The Thorntons have powerful enemies in John Hampton, wealthy owner of a neighbouring ranch, and his daughter, Lucille. Hampton and his daughter do all they can to foster a rumour that Mr. Thornton is a cattle thief, and at last Hampton cleverly contrives to have Thornton outlawed. He goes into hiding in the Blue Hills, while Fay and a friendly young Englishman named Douglas Lester work to clear his name. One night Fay is going to ride out to her father with supplies when young Bobbie awakens and refuses to be left alone.

(Now read on).

## The Only Solution!

**D**ON'T leave me, sis! Oh, please, please don't go away!"

There was no mistaking the terror and entreaty in little Bobbie's voice as he made that plea, and he clung to Fay as though he never meant to release her.

Somehow, that anxious girl managed to smile; somehow she managed to keep her own feelings from betraying themselves as she fondled the youngster's golden curls.

"Of course I won't leave you, Bobbie," she whispered. "I'm going to stay with you until you're fast asleep again."

Bobbie sighed in contentment. But he did not close his eyes. Keeping his arms tightly wound about Fay's neck, he joined her in staring towards the window, through which the moonlight was streaming.

Fay's heart beat faster as she realised how wide awake the six-year-old youngster was.

What possible chance had she of lulling him off to sleep now? Not for a considerable time would Bobbie be in the mood even to think about it, and yet every minute she lingered here meant neglecting daddy.

Daddy, out there in the Blue Hills, a lone, hunted fugitive, hiding to escape arrest for a crime he hadn't

committed! He needed food and supplies; he needed encouragement and hope, and she could give him those things. Already Starlight, her pony, loaded with provisions, was saddled in the yard.

But even though daddy needed her in his own desperate plight, Bobbie needed her, too. She could not leave the little fellow to his terror of being without her.

"Oh golly," she thought, "what ever can I do?"

It was a faint sound from the doorway that made her turn her eyes in that direction. Instantly, she lifted one finger in warning and silently pursed her lips.

Nine-year-old Ted stood there; Ted, the elder boy, fully dressed, and with an expression of mingled rebellion and boyish uncertainty on his face.

## Six-year-old Bobbie brings a clue to the identity of the leader of the cattle thieves!

For Ted knew of the danger daddy was in, and loyal, affectionate young son that he was, had crept out of bed spurred on with the resolve to join his father in hiding and do what little he could to clear the fugitive's name. It was while Fay had been trying to persuade Ted to abandon his reckless idea that Bobbie had woken up.

But Bobbie mustn't realise the truth. It would worry him; perhaps leave an indelible impression in his childish mind that would linger for the rest of his life.

At that moment, as if sensing someone else's presence, the curly-headed youngster wriggled round. He gave a yelp on seeing Ted.

"Cooo, there he is! And he's got his clothes on! Ooo, I sus-say, sis, it isn't fair. Ted's having a game. He's all dressed and—and walking about. I want to get dressed and walk about, too. Where's my shirt?"

"Bobbie, please," Fay cried, clutching at his arm.

And then she paused, her eyes slowly lighting up.

Why not? Why shouldn't Bobbie get dressed? Why shouldn't he—and Ted as well—accompany her to the Blue Hills? Not to visit their father—that would be both unwise and dangerous—but to call at the shack of one of their cowboys, Lefty Mason, and spend the night there?

Hope surged into Fay's heart. Golly, it was a great idea; the very thing she needed to solve her problem. It would enable her to leave the ranch without delay, and she could go on to their father after installing the boys at the Masons', knowing that they were both safe and sound, and perfectly happy.

"Come on, then, you young imp!" she exclaimed, jumping up from the bed. "Off with your pyjamas. You're coming for a moonlight ride."

"Whoooppeee!" Bobbie yelled excitedly.

"I'm going, too!" said Ted from the doorway, more as a dogged statement of fact than a question.

Leaving Bobbie to begin dressing himself, Fay crossed to the elder boy and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Ted," she said, too low for Bobbie to hear, "I think you're a fine, brave, loyal chap to want to share daddy's troubles like this, but he would only be more worried than ever if you were with him. And I know you wouldn't want that. You do understand, don't you, Ted?"

Put like that, in a way he hadn't considered before, Ted saw how foolhardy his project was. Frowning, he ran his fingers through his lank dark hair.

"All right, sis," he said gruffly. "And—and say!" He caught at her hand. "Guess I'm sorry I was a bit sore just now, only—only it makes me so hopping mad to think of daddy being in this rotten fix all because of a pack of mouldy crooks—"

"Sssh," Fay warned, nodding towards Bobbie. She smiled and put an arm around Ted's neck. "That's all right, old man. It makes me mad, too. But we'll put everything right between us, won't we?"

Young Bobbie decided to take a hand in the conversation at this stage, proudly displaying himself for inspection.

"Look! I've done it!" he crowed. "Aren't I getting clever, sis?"

"My goodness, you certainly are!" Fay cried, eyeing him in admiration. "Shirt, dungarees, stockings—and shoes! I never thought you could do it."

"Ted isn't the only one who can dress himself these days," said Bobbie, with an air of importance. "Come on!" he challenged Ted. "Race you to the corral!"

But Fay put a stop to that even before it had begun. No, she told them. She didn't want any commotion in case they woke the cowboys up. She wanted them to go as quietly as they could until they were well away from the ranch.

"And then you can make as much noise as you like," she promised.

She did not explain that the real need for caution was that the ranch was being watched from the back, and that if she was seen riding off she would be followed, in which case there would be no chance of visiting their father without betraying his whereabouts.

Indeed, if it hadn't been for the assistance of Douglas Lessiter, her young English friend, in purposely leading another group of watchers on a false trail, she would not have had even this opportunity of slipping out.

Bobbie and Ted revelled in the order for stealth. It seemed grand fun to them. On tiptoe, stifling giggles, they crossed the yard; with scarcely a sound they helped fetch their ponies from the corral and saddle up; and with really comic caution they rode, one on either side of Fay, down to the trail.

For the first few minutes Fay was filled with apprehension lest their departure had been spotted after all. But by the time they were cutting across open ground, half-way to the Blue Hills, her qualms began to fade.

No sign of pursuit; no sign even of life anywhere about the moonlit landscape. They had succeeded in giving the watchers the slip.

She left the boys at the Masons' shack with swift explanations, and then, having seen them snugly tucked up in the big spare bed, set off across a broad valley for another part of the hills.

There was an atmosphere of tranquility about the whole world that contrasted queerly with her turbulent emotions as she neared the rugged cliffs.

Everything was so peaceful it was difficult to believe that such drama and menace lurked in these parts. But it did. Somewhere amid the Blue Hills cattle thieves had their secret hideout. That was one reason why daddy had gone into hiding. Not only to escape capture at the hands of his former friends, but also because he might discover the lair of the very men for whose activities he had been blamed!

Keenly Fay peered about her as she rode. She dare not take any risks. At the slightest sound or movement she must turn off her course, for it was imperative that no one should discover where daddy was.

But the coast seemed clear enough as she rode into a wide valley that cut a path right into the heart of the mountains. For over a mile she went, and then turned into a narrow, steeply rising avenue between the rocks—an avenue which, threading its way upward by devious twists and turns, ended at a rocky shelf some fifty feet from level ground.

It was only a narrow shelf, but along its length were a number of natural caves.

Fay, dismounting in the shelter of some rocks, removed her laden saddlebags, trailed the reins over Starlight's

head to prevent him wandering, and then, heart beating swiftly, darted forward.

She made for the largest cave of all. In the dim opening, with the moon casting her shadow beside her, she halted.

"Daddy," she called softly—"daddy, are you there? It's me—Fay!"

A figure loomed up out of the pitch blackness—a figure, tall and lean, whose face was wreathed into a smile of delight, despite its haggardness.

"Fay, lass!"

"Daddy!"

Two voices, vibrant with joy, sounding as one. Next instant they were in each other's arms; the saddlebags dropped unheeded to the ground.

It was a wonderful moment for them both—this reunion.

"Well, I told you I'd make it, daddy," Fay playfully chided him, as she drew back and picked up the bags.

"There's everything you want in these. But let's sit down. We'll be hidden by the rocks then. And you've got to start eating right now, I guess. You look simply ravenous."

Mr. Thornton was ravenous. The good things Fay had brought soon began to disappear, and while her father ate and drank, so she tried to buoy up his spirits.

"Douglas is up to something, daddy," she told him. "I don't know

turned in, only a short while before the dawn of another day. And, thoroughly worn out, she fell asleep at once.

Quite a jolly little party sat down to breakfast in the Masons' cosy kitchen next morning—Fay and her brothers, and three-year-old Tina and her parents, Lefty Mason, and his wife.

By common consent no reference was made to Mr. Thornton's trouble until the meal was finished and the youngsters sent scampering into the garden, and then Fay, taking Lefty on one side, gave him some instructions regarding the work of the Flying H. Shortly afterwards Lefty rode off, and Fay went in search of her brothers.

She, too, would presently have to return home, but there was no reason why Bobbie and Ted shouldn't stay here the rest of the day. Mrs. Mason welcomed their visits; they were such company for little Tina.

Fay soon found Ted. He was suffering in silence, while Tina, having induced him to lie at full length on the ground, was pretending to be a nurse, and bandaging one of his legs with a long roll of cloth.

"Bobbie?" Ted said awkwardly, jerking his head off the ground. "Oh, I guess he ambled off! You know what he is, sis. Last thing I saw of him he was chasing 'maginary rustlers with a pop-gun near the cliff."

"I'll soon find him," Fay chuckled, and strode away.

But she didn't find Bobbie. She discovered neither sight nor sound of him when, reaching the cliff, she explored a little gully that he must obviously have entered.

"Bobbie," she called—"Bobbie! Where are you? Bob-ee!"

Farther into the gully she went. She reached its end, and then, still calling his name, stopped in gathering dismay. Before her was a vast boulder-strewn hollow, hemmed in by the towering walls of rock, and scarred here and there by narrow but deep, treacherous ravines.

But there was no trace of the missing youngster. Bobbie had utterly vanished!

**You will all be told  
FULL DETAILS OF OUR  
WONDERFUL SURPRISE  
NEXT WEEK**

**And it really is the loveliest  
surprise ever—concerning  
something which you will be  
able to treasure for many,  
many years. You simply must  
not miss next Saturday's issue.**

what it is—you know what a queer fellow he can be when he likes—but I reckon it's mighty important. He seems to think so, anyway. If only you can keep your pecker up, daddy," she finished, trying to create the impression that she was feeling quite hopeful about everything herself.

"well, I reckon we may have put matters right by a few days."

Her father looked up over the top of a sandwich.

"A few days, honey?" he said. His face shadowed. "I'm thinking that might be a little too long."

Fay knew of what he was thinking—the sheriff's posse, scouring the mountains for him. In a few days they could practically comb every foot of territory between here and Redland Gulch, so that he would be run to earth, no matter where he was.

Fay bit her lip. She mustn't let daddy see her own worry. So gaily, seemingly lighthearted, she chatted away on all sorts of comparatively trivial subjects—the cattle, the recent carnival event in town, the Flying H cowboys, and how loyally they were standing by her, and, of course, Bobbie and Ted.

So well did she succeed in her efforts that her father gradually brightened, and it was a far more contented and satisfied Fay who left him, and rode back to the Masons' shack. There she

**Bobbie's Amazing Adventure!**

"COOO, this is 'xciting!" Bobbie murmured.

And on he crept, his chubby cheeks flushed, and his little hand trembling as he tightly gripped a toy pistol, complete with cork and string.

For Bobbie was on the trail. What he was on the trail of, or where he'd find it, or how he would get back to the Masons' shack, were questions that just didn't enter his youthful mind. And if they had, Bobbie would instantly have dismissed them.

He was on the trail, and that was all that mattered. Goodness knows how far he was from his starting place! Must be miles and miles—perhaps fifty or a hundred, he reflected, with a little giggle of delight. But it was gorgeous here. Tons and tons of rocks, heaps and heaps of bushes, plenty of thrilling holes, and a really fascinating-looking gap in the mountain over there.

Bobbie was making for that gap, behaving as though hemmed in by desperate enemies. From boulder to bush, and from bush to boulder he dodged, flinging himself flat on the ground at the critical moment, and banging away with the pistol.

Pop, pop, pop! it went, until the string couldn't stand the strain any longer, and away shot the cork.

Bobbie, crawling after it on hands and knees, hastily grabbed it up, rammed it into the barrel, and made a scampering dive for that alluring gap.

In a breathless rush, he reached it. A heap of boulders and rocks guarded one corner. Bobbie, filled with the spirit of adventure, and convinced that he was about to come to grips with the enemy, scrambled up them until he was able to cock one eye at the hollow the other side.

Inch by inch he raised his head. A little higher—now—now he could—now he could—

And then Bobbie started; he blinked; he stared.

Carried away by his own make-believe though he had been all this time, he hadn't expected his romancing to turn into reality. He'd been prepared to imagine someone was in the hollow. Instead, he found himself gazing down at a real, live group of mounted men, all wearing masks, who were slowly riding out of the hollow.

"Coooo," Bobbie said, gulping. "Coo, I sus-say." His eyes widened. "Rust-rust-rustlers," he breathed, in awe. "Rustlers! Golly, real ones, too, with masks an'—an' guns an' things."

His amazement fled. He didn't feel the least bit scared. All he knew was that he was face to face with rustlers—cattle-thieves—and that he'd got a gun!

Almost falling off the rocks in his eagerness, Bobbie sprang erect and levelled the gun down at the unsuspecting little party.

"Hands up!" he piped. "I've got a bead on you thugs!"—the latter statement being copied from what he had overheard cowboys saying.

The effect on the men was almost ludicrous. One automatically flung up his arms. One grabbed for his gun holster; another shouted "Scatter!"

And then a big-built man, more stylishly dressed than the rest, gave a roar of laughter.

"My stars, it's only a kid—a kid with a toy gun, fellows! Why, good gosh—" He reined in, staring up at Bobbie. "It's one of Thornton's kids. Quick! Grab him!"

"You leave me alone," Bobbie shrilled. "I'll—I'll shoot you!"

But there was a little tremor of apprehension in his voice as the men, springing down, dived towards him. His struggles were useless, and the cork, hitting one of the men on the forehead, merely bounced off, fetching a guffaw from the "victim." Within thirty seconds Bobbie, struggling and kicking, with a hand clasped over his mouth to stifle his suddenly terrified screams, was being borne off.

The party, turning round, rode for over a mile, and then, in a large gorge, where a number of lean-to wooden huts had been erected against the mountain-side, they dismounted.

"What's the idea, boss?" one of the men asked the big-built leader. "That kid's going to be a sorter hindrance, ain't he?"

"Not on your life," was the reply. "That kid might be pretty useful—if he knows where his father's hanging out. I reckon we'll be safer when Thornton's nabbed—especially if we nab him. If the kid does know—and I figger he must do, to be knocking around these parts—I'll get it out of him. Keep watch, Niblo! And you, Shorty!"

He signalled one of the others. "Park yourself by the stream. We daren't take chances with the sheriff

"HANDS up!" cried Bobbie, boldly thrusting out the toy pistol. Instinctively the men stiffened, raising their arms. But in a moment they would see who it was, and Bobbie would realise his danger too late!



that, and was dearly wishing for the safety and comfort of his father's presence now.

But the rustler chief scowled, before hastily summoning another smile.

"No he isn't, sonny. You know that. He's in hiding, isn't he?"

"Hiding?" said Bobbie, staring. "But—but daddy isn't. Leastways I—I don't think so."

The rustler chief eyed him narrowly. Difficult, eh? Well, he knew how to deal with kids. Kindness first, and if that failed a spot of bullying.

"Look, sonny," the man exclaimed, and fishing a watch and chain from his pocket, dangled it enticingly in front of Bobbie. "How'd you like that all for yourself? See? That little hand goes round; you can watch it, I guess. Go on. Take it in your mitts. It's yours now."

"M-m-mine?" Bobbie stammered. "Oh, boy!"

Rapturously, he seized hold of the treasure—for treasure it was to him; something he'd always longed for with all his youthful heart. A real, man-sized watch—and a chain, too. And, gee, didn't it look swell, hanging from one of the braces of his dungarees!

"Coo, I sus-say, wait till Ted sees this!" he whooped joyfully.

The rustler chief grinned. So kindness had done it; a little bribe.

But the ruse didn't achieve its object, after all—for the simple reason that Bobbie had no information to give. In vain the rustler chief tried to make him talk. He tried more bribes and promises, and finally, his face suffused with rage, he sprang to his feet, convinced by now that Bobbie was deliberately defying him.

"Give me that strap, Sam!" he rapped. "Thanks!" Deftly he caught it, and then, seizing the startled Bobbie by the scruff of the neck, hauled him to his feet. "Now, you lying little tyke," he barked, "either you tell me where your father's lurking in these hills or you have a dose of this!"

"OH GOLLY, what ever can have happened to him?"

In a tone of dread Fay spoke. With despairing eyes she stared about her, standing full-length in the stirrups, scanning the country for miles around.

But still no sign of her missing brother. More than half an hour had

nosing round. Now for that kid," he ended, and strode over to where Bobbie, a little tearful now, and still held by the arms and legs, was clinging to his last remaining shreds of courage.

"You—you're all a nasty lot of thieves, and I'll tell my daddy about you!" he was gulping.

At a gesture from their leader the men released Bobbie and gathered round in a circle. The big man, hands on hips, halted before the boy. He was smiling now.

"Don't be afraid, little fellow," he said kindly. He ruffled Bobbie's curls. "Come and sit down. I want to chat to you about that daddy of yours, as a matter of fact. Just sit down next to me and then we can really start being friends, can't we?"

A glare at the encircling men, a hasty gesture, and down they all squatted. The leader, seating himself, drew Bobbie down beside him.

"There, that's better, isn't it?" He chuckled. "We're not goin' to hurt you, old man," he went on ingratiatingly. "Only you scared us, you know, popping up like that with that gun—didn't he, fellows?"

"He sure did!" came a chorus from the masked circle.

Bobbie blinked around him, none too certain about things.

"But—but," he began, "you are rustlers, aren't you?"

"Rustlers? Ha, ha, ha!" The big man set the fashion for a roar of forced laughter. "Course we're not rustlers. We're trying to catch 'em—that's why we've got these masks on, so's they won't know us. And your dad can help us, I guess," he added, in a confidential whisper. Intently, he looked at Bobbie out of the corner of his eyes.

"Know where he is, sonny?"

"Why, sure," said Bobbie, ingenuously. "My daddy's at home."

He pointed vaguely down the gorge, and there was a rather yearning look on his face, for he honestly believed

elapsed since she had made her startling discovery, and though she had fetched her pony and searched everywhere, Bobbie seemed to have utterly and completely disappeared.

"Guess I'll go on as far as that gap," Fay told herself, "then I'll go to town and get help. If—only I knew whether he was all right!"

She sent Starlight forward. Slowly a gap in the hills drew nearer.

And then—all at once—  
Round she whirled, startled by the clippity-clop-clop of a horse's hoofs. Next instant a young rider, in immaculate garb, appeared around a corner. Fay, recognising him at once, spurred towards him with a cry of joy.

"Douglas—oh, Douglas! I'm so glad you're here!" She caught at his arm as he reined in. "Bobbie! He's got lost! I haven't the faintest idea where he is, and—Douglas—"

"But I have, old thing," was the young Englishman's astounding assurance. "He's in there." He nodded towards the gap, then drew Fay behind some rocks. "Don't raise your voice—and don't ask any questions, but I spotted Bobbie as I was making for Masons', and I'm going to get him. But listen! I want you to keep out of sight, and be ready to take Bobbie the moment I come back. Got it?"

"Why, sure," said Fay, in wonderment. "But—but what's the matter?"  
"Oh, nothing much!" was Douglas's airy assurance. "There may be a little bit of bother, that's all—nothing I shan't be able to handle, though," he added, and grinned. "Oh, and just one other thing!"

"Yes?" said Fay, her heart thumping, as something of the truth began to dawn on her.

"If I get no chance to have another word with you, remember this—things are moving fast—about your dad, I mean. Don't let them find him, whatever happens. It may ruin everything if you do. And, above all, don't let John Hampton get away with anything," he added, a strange look in his eyes. "I'm going to get Bobbie now!"

Swiftly he swung his mount around; swiftly he rammed home his heels. Then, with a clattering burst of break-neck speed, he went charging out of sight.

Trembling a little, Fay sat there astride her pony. She still felt dazed; still could not quite grasp what all this meant. Bobbie in that gap; Douglas making a desperate dash into it; and—

Crack, crack, crack!

A series of reports reached Fay's ears. Their significance was unmistakable. Revolver shots! Her face blanched. Oh, horrors! so that was it. Bobbie had been kidnapped, and Douglas, utterly regardless of his own safety, had gone to the little fellow's rescue!

### The Rider on Fay's Trail!

AN eternity seemed to drag on its way while Fay waited. Then came the sound of a skirmish, and Douglas burst into view, crouching low over his horse's neck, and with one arm wound about a diminutive figure clad in dungarees.

Fay's whole being throbbled with relief. Bobbie—he was safe. Douglas had rescued him. But no, he wasn't safe yet! None of them were, for there was certain to be pursuit.

Douglas, charging up, reined in his mount to a slithering halt. Thrusting

a bitterly sobbing Bobbie into Fay's eager arms, he panted out a series of quick-fire sentences.

"Rustlers! They'd got him. I spotted them on my way here. But—quick!" He flung a glance behind him. "Out of sight. They're after me. I'll lead them off, though. Don't worry if I don't come back. I've a job to do. Only, remember what I told you about your dad and Hampton. So long! You'll be all right now."

Tugging on the reins, he went tearing off again, this time deliberately cutting across open country. Fay knew his idea. To lead the rustlers away from her.

And Douglas succeeded admirably in that little ruse. When Fay, having backed Starlight behind some rocks, peered out, whispering and fondling comfort to her distraught young brother, she saw Douglas, some four hundred yards ahead of a band of masked men, riding like the wind.

He was too far away for his pursuers to notice that he had relinquished his burden, and undoubtedly travelling much too swiftly to be caught.

With a sigh of relief, Fay looked down at Bobbie.

"There, darling," she whispered, giving him a hug, "you're with Fay now. There's nothing to worry about, so we'll go right back to Ted and Tina, shall we?"

Bobbie gulped back a sob.  
"P-please, sis," he said, and snuggled more closely than ever into her fond embrace.

**B**UT, CHILD-LIKE, Bobbie soon recovered from his alarming experience.

Long before the Masons' shack hove into sight, he was prattling away nineteen to the dozen, telling Fay everything that had happened, only, of course, from his own romantic angle.

"Well, we must thank Uncle Douglas for getting you away from those nasty men," Fay said, smiling fondly. "And you won't ever wander off like that again, will you?"

"No," said Bobbie. Then he blinked excitedly. "But—but I can tell Ted all about it, can't I? Ted's never seen a real rustler. Oh, boy, wait till I see him!"

And when at last young Bobbie did see his elder brother—

"I nearly caught a lot of rustlers!" he crowed, with a manful expansion of his little chest. "You've never even seen any rustlers, but I have, and coo, they weren't half scared! One of them was so scared he gave me this—to make me go away!"

Whereupon Bobbie proudly produced the watch, which had in the meanwhile slipped down inside his dungarees, and was now somewhere near his ankle.

"Golly!" gasped Ted, while little Tina, hysterically shrieking: "Tick-tock! Ooo, please, I want to listen!" rushed over to thrust it against one ear.

Fay's heart leapt as she saw the watch. A clue!

Waiting until the youngsters' excitement at the production of such an envied prize had subsided, Fay asked to be allowed to see it. She turned it over, prising at the back with her nail. With a click the lid flew open. She peered at it, her eyes lighting up as she saw some initials engraved there.

J. H.  
"My—my golly!" she gasped. "Bobbie! Tell me," she cried, turning to him eagerly, "what was the chief of the rustlers like? Was he big—he was?—and dark, with black eyes and hair? Good—good! And—and did he have a moustache? He—he did!"

She almost swayed then, so strangely weak did she feel. Never had she experienced such a staggering shock in all her life. For, incredible though it seemed at first, the description of the rustler chief, together with those initials, told her clearly and indisputably that that person was none other than—John Hampton!

J. H.—John Hampton. And John Hampton was big-built, dark, and moustached. John Hampton, their enemy, was leader of the very rustlers for whose misdeeds daddy had been forced to become a fugitive!

Fay's eyes flashed. No wonder Hampton had tried to shift the blame on to daddy—in order to save himself. And no wonder he had tried in so many other despicable ways to ruin them all, and drive them out of town!

But—and a feeling of wild exultation, of almost uncontrollable triumph, surged over Fay—but what a tremendous difference this startling discovery made. She knew now who the rustler chief was, and where he could be found. This was proof of daddy's innocence!

Then she frowned. Proof, yes; but only to them. Rather despairingly Fay realised that the watch would scarcely convince the sheriff of the guilt of such a prominent citizen as the wealthy owner of the Lazy T Ranch. How, then, could she turn it to daddy's advantage?

"I'll see daddy. I'll go to him again to-night," she decided all at once. "It'll be safer then."

Far safer. There would be less chance of being spotted by any of the rustlers who might still be hanging about. And besides, she must visit the Flying H Ranch first to see how the cowboys were faring.

That evening, just as dusk was setting in, Fay rode away from the Flying H. She had no qualms about her brothers this time, for they were still staying at the Masons' little home, whither she had dispatched a couple of the cowboys just in case of trouble.

A-quiver with excitement, the incriminating watch buttoned in her breeches hip-pocket, Fay rode towards the Blue Hills, having first made a wide detour to throw any possible watchers off the scent. But that ruse had failed, as it happened.

Lucille Hampton, supercilious daughter of their enemy, and just as dangerous a foe in her own way, had ridden up to the yard of the Flying H to do some spying.

And, noticing the trail of Fay's pony in the dust, she had followed it, finally spotting Fay herself, an ant-like figure in the far distance, as she topped a rise in the rolling plain.

"My goodness!" Lucille breathed. Her face lit up exultantly. "So that's the game. Visiting her father, I'll wager. Right—ho, my girl! I'm going to be in on this!"

And, spurring her magnificent thoroughbred forward, Lucille gave determined chase after the girl she hated.

What a chance! What a wonderful stroke of luck! For if Fay Thornton did lead her to her father's hiding-place, all she had to do was to ride into town, inform the sheriff, and—presto!—Robert Thornton would be caught within an hour!

**THIS exciting serial is leading up rapidly to a stirring climax, and in next Saturday's chapters you will read how two mysteries are cleared up in amazing fashion.**

Another topping COMPLETE story, featuring—

# COUSIN GEORGE and The Imp



**"No band practice here!" declared officious Cousin George. So Hetty went out. But not far. Being the Imp, she meant to get her own way. She did not realise it would mean both George and his headmaster diving into a swimming pool for a school hat.**

## The Scheme That Went Astray!

**N**OT if we play ever so quietly, Cousin George?" asked Hetty Sonning, the Imp, meekly. "No," said Cousin George, in his firmest, most manly tone. "I've said before, and I'll say it again, while I'm in this house, you're not having band practice here, Hetty. Now let the subject drop!"

And George Sonning, Hetty's cousin, and her senior by two and a half years, bent his attention to his school work, frowning heavily.

The Imp sat in another chair, and frowned, too.

It was evening, and, as it happened, she had no homework to do—nothing really worth doing, anyway.

But she was not merely looking around for some way of killing time, for she and her friend Jill and one or two others had something most important to do.

The Imp had started a junior school band with the intention of organising later a school dance, at which it could play. And while she knew comparatively little about music, she did, at least, know that the great secret of band playing is rhythm and noise—especially noise.

Hetty sighed. Life was indeed hard when, in one's own home—temporary home though it was, with an aunt and cousin—one could not hold a band practice!

"Aunt's away," she mused aloud, Cousin George looked up. "I am aware that mother is away," he said, "but Nellie, the maid, is at

home, and we don't want her giving notice, which is what any right-minded girl would do, rather than suffer the torments of your band."

"I don't think she would, because I should ask her to play the triangle," smiled Hetty. "And that would flatter her."

"Oh, for goodness' sake, Hetty, keep quiet," said Cousin George crossly. "I have work to do, and I can't do it with a fearful din going on. You'd better give up the idea of this band."

Once again he bowed to his work, and Hetty eyed him measuringly. There were times when her Cousin George was really firm, and, being her senior, he took unto himself the right to order her about as though she were one of the fags at the school where he was a lofty prefect.

He was being firm now, as she knew. Nothing would make him change his mind.

"You'd better phone Jill and the others to tell them it's postponed," he said gruffly. "Hurry up, and then come back and swot up history. You need to, the little you know."

Hetty rose obediently from the chair, but with such a quiet manner that her former boarding-school mistress, had she been there, would have warned Cousin George to be on his guard.

"Watch out, laddie, watch out!" her headmistress would have said, although naturally in more stilted and refined language.

The Imp went to the door, opened and closed it quietly, and then, going to the telephone in the hall, called Jill's

number, and was almost instantly speaking to her friend.

"Well?" said Jill. "How's the old bear to-night?"

"Bearish," said Hetty.

"Then we can't come along! Is that what you've rung to say?" sighed Jill.

"Wrong!" answered Hetty coolly. "I've rung to say come along in half an hour's time."

A gay "whoopoo!" came from Jill. "My golly, he's given in! You've talked him round?" she asked, amazed.

"Well, not exactly," the Imp smiled. "He said so long as he was in the house he wouldn't let us play. So he's going out."

"What? I say, that's pretty decent of him!" said Jill, surprised.

"Oh, he doesn't know he's going out yet; I haven't told him. But he is," said the Imp calmly.

A moment later she hung up. Slowly mounting the stairs, the Imp thought carefully.

Having told Jill that Cousin George was going out, the thing to do was to get him out.

She passed into her bed-room, put on a hat and coat—not her school hat, however, nor her school coat, but the outfit she wore on special occasions—then quite casually glanced in at the Common-room, as she and Cousin George called the room allotted to them.

Seeing her, he stared intently. "Hallo! Going out?" he said sharply.

"Yes," said Hetty, in a guarded way.

"Just a minute before you go," said Cousin George, putting down his pen. "Where are you going?"

"Well—just out," said Hetty, with considerable hesitation.

Cousin George, his brow dark, jumped up.

"I've had enough of this nonsense!" he said grimly. "I want to know where you are going at half-past eight in the evening. To the pictures?"

"No," said Hetty. "I'd rather not say, if you don't mind, Cousin George, because I feel it would upset you."

Cousin George's lips pursed.

"You're going somewhere you think you oughtn't to go," he said shrewdly.

"No, not at all," said Hetty.

**By IDA MELBOURNE**

Then she suddenly closed the door and hurried downstairs.

As she reached the hall, Cousin George rushed on to the landing.

"Hetty! Stop! Unless you tell me where you are going, I shall forbid you to go out. You understand? And if you openly defy me, I shall report the matter to mother. I'm sorry to take this line, but I must. While she's away I'm in charge!"

The Imp answered back hotly: "You won't let me do anything, Cousin George. You won't let me have band practice. You won't let me go to the Lone Star—I might be a prisoner—I might really—"

Then she fairly jumped out of the house and banged the door.

Slam! On the stairs Cousin George stood transfixed in sheer horror.

"The Lone Star!" he gasped aloud. "That roadhouse! Why—why, she's crazy. If the headmistress caught her there—if anyone saw her there at this hour, why—"

Cousin George, suddenly conscious of his responsibility, went charging down the stairs with such a rush he skidded

the last three and slipped up on the mat.

Recovering, he snatched his cap from the hook behind the door, and hurtled down the house to the shed opposite, dragging out his cycle.

Mounting as he ran, he went whizzing down to the gate at the end of the drive.

In her present mood, going to the forbidden roadhouse seemed just the reckless thing Hetty might do; and Cousin George felt partly to blame.

"Gosh—I was a bit too high-handed—comes of being a prefect!" he muttered in dismay. "If she gets caught by her headmistress there—phew—"

And then, realising that he did not want to be caught by his headmaster there, he tucked his school cap in his pocket as a precaution.

The red rear light of a motor cycle showed ahead in the dark, and Cousin George bent grimly to his pedals in pursuit.

Jill's brother was evidently giving Hetty a lift, or else that friend he had heard so much about, Bob Biggs.

**B**UT THE Imp had not gone down the drive at all. As Cousin George swept through the gates at speed, she came into view from the bushes, opened the door of the house, and walked in.

The telephone-bell rang almost as she closed the door, and she whipped off the receiver, hearing a girl's voice.

"Hallo, Jill—it's O.K.," she said. "It worked—"

But she recognised then that the voice was not Jill's; it was an older voice, slightly affected.

"This is not Jill, but Violette Sibley—"

Violette Sibley was the daughter of George's headmaster, an intelligent girl who appreciated Cousin George's conversation and admired his sophisticated manner.

"Can I speak to your cousin, Hetty?" she said.

"He's out," said the Imp.

"Out? Oh, what a pity! I want his advice on some photographs I'm pasting in my album. And apart from that I'm doing something for father, and I've forgotten some of the boys' names. Father's out, you know, and won't be back for some time, as he's gone to the Lone Star—"

"Wha-a-at!" yelled Hetty.

"The Lone Star—the roadhouse," said Violette. "Haven't you heard? There's some talk of using it for a gymkhana, and—"

"He's there now?" breathed the Imp.

"Now or very soon," said Violette. "But I can't very easily get in touch with him. How long will George be?"

The Imp let out a dull groan of despair.

"Oh, about—about an hour," she said. "When he comes in he'll ring you."

Then she hooked up the receiver and stood blinking at it.

A moment before she had been chuckling at the thought of Cousin George cycling to the roadhouse entirely of his own volition, foolishly thinking that she had gone there.

But now she did not see anything very funny in it.

Cousin George, arriving there, would hunt for her—in vain. But the headmaster might find George even without any hunt.

What would Cousin George say then? That he was looking for Hetty?

The Imp frowned anxiously; for she knew that he was not a sneak, and would realise that telling the headmaster that might mean the information being

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.

## BETWEEN OURSELVES



**M**Y DEAR READERS,—I've so many lovely things to chat about this week that I simply haven't a moment to spare, so you will forgive me if I plunge straight into them, won't you?

First of all, that thrilling surprise which I referred to last week. It really is one of the most magnificent, glorious surprises you could desire. I won't give away the whole secret now—I shall be happy to do that next week—but I will say that it concerns something which you will be able to treasure for a long, long time. Remember, then—next Saturday you'll learn everything.

Now I have another exciting item of news for you; exciting and yet, in one respect, disappointing, perhaps. Very shortly we shall be saying good-bye to Fay Thornton, of the Blue Hills. But there, don't be too sad, all of you. Good things have to come to an end sooner or later, you know, and, after all, if they didn't then there'd never be any opportunity for new things to take their place, would there?

And that would never do—as you'll agree, I know, when you discover what is to take the place of our popular Western story. It's something different, novel, glamorous—thrilling! But more of that also next week!

Finally, we come to the latest story of Barbara Redfern & Co., in which Hilda Richards has cleverly blended all the fascinating features of life at a school like Cliff House with the drama and pathos that comes to one of the girls who, unwittingly the cause of an accident to her friend, takes upon herself a certain task that friend has to fulfil.

Tomboy Clara Trevlyn is the girl; Babs is the friend. There is a cycling spill, for which Clara is chiefly to blame, and Babs is hurt. Not seriously, but it means she cannot meet a young cousin of hers, a certain Keith Harvey, rather a wastrel good-for-nothing who is in trouble.

So Clara deputises for Babs; Clara shoulders the worry and responsibility of helping that young fellow fob out of his scrape. She dare not tell Babs, for Babs is engaged upon a most important task, and if she thought her cousin needed her she would be forced to neglect that task.

Things do not run smoothly for unselfish Clara, however. She finds herself in difficulty, unable to explain what she is doing. From bad to worse her position grows, until finally—

But I won't spoil your enjoyment of this superb story by giving away its most dramatic moments. You must read it for yourself next Saturday. As usual, of course, our next issue will contain another topping COMPLETE "Cousin George and 'The Imp'" story, more of Patricia's delightful pages, and the final gripping instalment of "Girl Rider of the Blue Hills," which contains at least one very big surprise!

And now, au revoir for the moment. With best wishes.

Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.

passed on to Miss Wilmot, her headmistress, with whom he was quite pally.

George would not sneak. But if he did not, what excuse could he possibly give for being there?

None. There would be no excuse, and no reasonable explanation.

The roadhouse was not out of bounds, but the Head had said that he did not wish any of the boys to go there unaccompanied by their parents; and that if he learned that the rule was disobeyed, he would make inquiries as to the parents' attitude, and then, if that coincided with his own, stern measures would be taken.

Cousin George, being a prefect, would be held more to blame than a junior for defiance of the headmaster's expressed wish—which, after all, was a command.

There would be one obvious penalty. Cousin George would cease being a prefect. He would be reduced to the ranks in disgrace.

"Oh golly!" murmured the Imp in dismay. "And all my fault. He'd never face Violette again—he'd never lift his head. Poor old George."

There was one thing to do—and one only. Since she was to blame, she had to take the penalty. For whatever the Imp's faults, no one had ever accused her of cowardice or meanness.

"This," she told herself dismally, "is where I go like a lamb to slaughter, and if I am copped, serve me glad."

Some excuse had to be given for Cousin George's being at the roadhouse—if he were caught. There was only one to give, that he had gone to find Hetty, and Hetty herself, taking the risk of consequences, had to be there to prove it true and just.

But back of her mind there was a faint hope—two faint hopes. One that he would not be caught if she were in time—and two that there might be some other excuse.

It was that latter hope that sent her upstairs to the lumber-room where, grovelling in a corner, she took out a Guy Fawkes mask and a faded, discarded school cap.

## Too Much of an Imp!

**C**OUSIN GEORGE, conscious that he had better not be seen in the place, searched in the Lone Star roadhouse very guardedly. It was a gay but harmless spot, with a band playing, people dancing, and a few still loitering in the swimming pool, although by this time there was a nip in the air that only the hardiest could withstand.

There were cars in plenty in the park; the restaurant was crowded, as was the cafe, while there were even a few people at the brightly coloured tables adjoining the swimming pool.

Cousin George looked warily in at the dancers, surveying them anxiously, half-expecting to see Hetty doing the Lambeth Walk.

But unless she was deeply disguised, she was not there.

"Funny—where can she be?" he muttered.

At that moment a hand touched his arm and he whipped round.

Just behind him stood Hetty!

"Found you!" he snapped. "Hetty, you disgraceful, disobedient—"

"Sss!" she hissed. "I came to warn you—"

He stared. "You came to warn me? Hetty, this is pretty well—Wah!" he ended, with a gasp.

For at the end of the corridor, framed

in an archway in which was a bright light, stood his headmaster, Mr. Sibley.

"Yes, yes, the pool looks good by night," he boomed.

Cousin George, ashen-faced, fell back. "The Head—" he muttered.

"Yes; just what I came to warn you. Violette told me on the phone," said the Imp quickly.

"Violette!" he gasped. "Does she know that I'm here? You don't mean you told her—"

"Of course not," the Imp whispered. "And another thing, I didn't leave the house at all. You just rushed off down the drive like mad, and I guessed you were here. But don't argue—we've got to hide."

They dodged back down the corridor; but found themselves trapped, for the only exit from it was into the brightly lit restaurant, where it was hardly safe to go.

"We're done," said Cousin George huskily.

"We're not. If the worst comes to the worst, say you came here to find me," urged Hetty.

He grabbed her arm. "Quiet! Didn't you hear what he said? Listen!"

The Head's voice carried well.

"Yes, Miss Wilmot," he boomed, "I think we shall be able to judge the possibility of a gymkhana here rather more easily with the swimming pool practically deserted."

And there came in reply, bird-like and mincing, the voice of Hetty's very own headmistress.

"Oh, my golly!" said Hetty. "We certainly are sunk."

Cousin George quaked in dread. If the Head spoke to him he knew that he would lose his nerve, stammer, and fluster in a guilty manner, and that would just mean being relieved of his prefectship.

"Heads down and bunk. It's our one chance," he said fiercely.

"Ass!" said Hetty.

"Wha-at?"

"As a way of getting clear it's not good," Hetty corrected herself.

And it most decidedly was not, for the sight of a youth and a girl rushing, heads down, for an exit would attract just the attention they did not want.

"Well, if you're so full of good ideas," said Cousin George coldly, "what do you suggest?"

Hetty mused thoughtfully. Hope No. 1 had failed—they had not got clear—but Hope No. 2 remained.

"The one chance is if there's a junior from your school here," she said. "Then you'd have good reason for being here—chasing him. As a prefect that would be your bounden duty."

Cousin George hardly managed to control his impatience.

"And that's our one hope, is it—that there's a chap from the school—"

He broke off because the Imp had dodged aside.

"Look there—talk of luck!" she cried.

Choosing a moment when the Head and Miss Wilmot were looking through the windows of the dance hall, Hetty made a spring, clambered on to the low parapet between the decorative arches opposite, and climbed over.

Cousin George, a second late in getting from the mark, moved forward with the same idea; but a sharp voice called:

"Good gracious—Sonning!"

George pulled up with a jerk, his heart sinking into his boots.

"W-why—Mum-Mister Su-Sibley?" he said, with as much genial surprise as he could manage.

"Sonning, is it possible?" boomed the Head, advancing. "That you—a prefect—"

Something hurled through the air and smashed against the wall only two feet from George's head. It squashed there, and some of it fell to the ground.

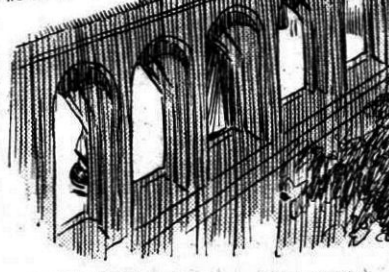
Then came a mocking, cracked voice.

"Yah, Sonning—boo—"

The Head and Cousin George rushed to the parapet and stared into the gathering darkness, to see a crouching figure amongst the tables there. But though the figure crouched, a school cap was visible, and a pale, grinning face.

"A school cap," said the Head.

"Sonning, some boy threw a tomato at you! Look, there it is—"



"THERE he is, sir! There's the young rascal!" cried Cousin George. He and his headmaster stared at the Imp's crouching figure. Hetty's heart stood still as she held up the mask. Would the headmaster be deceived?

Cousin George stiffened and drew in a deep breath. Saved!

"Yes, sir—I'll get him all right," he said, and clambered over the parapet.

For some odd reason the thought did not strike Cousin George that that face was a little unreal and mask-like, nor did it seem to him a coincidence that so shortly after Hetty saying that their one hope was to see a junior there one should appear.

There was a touch of Aladdin's lamp about that sudden appearance, which, had George been in a calmer mood, might have given him pause for thought.

"My gosh! You young rotter, coming here!" he shouted. "Stop! I'll know you again—"

The crouching figure dodged neatly, swung open a door, and disappeared inside. Cousin George, charging against the door, recoiled as it refused to open.

"All right, sir; he's trapped here!" he shouted.

The Head came hurrying forward, followed by Miss Wilmot.

"Well done, Sonning! Smart work," said the Head. "I guessed that your true reason for coming to this place was that you knew someone else was here."

"I thought so, sir," said George truthfully. "That's why I came in on the hunt."

But he did not add that it was Hetty he had hunted, not this victim.

"No use pushing the door, my lad; and you may as well let me open it," he said.

From behind the door came a whispering, and he listened intently, hoping to recognise it instantly, and almost collapsed; for the voice obviously was not that of a schoolboy at all. It was a schoolgirl's voice—the voice of his own impish cousin Hetty.

And he had cleverly trapped her!

"Oh, my goodness!" Cousin George panted, and nearly fell over.

"Stand aside, Sonning, and let the lad come out!" said the Head grimly.

At any other time the Imp would have giggled; but she had nothing to giggle about now. She was trapped. For on the other side of the door was the Head and her own headmistress. While behind her was the service-room.

If she bolted into the service-room where waitresses' voices could be heard—what then?

"Of two evils," says the proverb, "choose the lesser."

Hetty, drawing back from the door, accepted the advice, and, prepared for anything, instant capture above all, opened the service door softly and stepped into the room.



High Jinks for the Head!

"POT of coffee for three!"

"Two vanillas, one strawberry—"

"A cupper coffee, white, and a poached egg—"

There was babble in the serving-room as waitresses kept bobbing in and out, calling orders and collecting them on trays, which they skilfully whisked over others' heads.

The Imp removed the school cap and the mask, conscious that the sight of the two together at close quarters might cause fright, screams, and the crash of crockery.

For a minute or two longer Cousin George might pretend to be forcing the door—but the moment the Head took a hand the door would fly open, and she would be caught.

Then—bang! would go George's alibi. The Imp shot a quick look about her, and suddenly a ray of sunlight seemed to light the gloom. For, beside her on a row of hooks, were caps and aprons.

She snatched down the nearest cap and tied it hurriedly on, wrapped an apron about her, and leaving the mask on the ground and tucking the cap under the apron, marched boldly across the serving-room.

A tray with some dirty cups stood near by, and as the waitresses had their own affairs to attend to in a rush, none needed her.

Taking up the tray, she whisked it in the air, and went hurrying across the service-room just as the Head's voice was heard.

"Has anyone here seen a schoolboy?"

"Yes," said several girls.

"Where?" he asked excitedly.

"Well," said one with a giggle, "in all sorts of places."

The Head scowled as there came a titter.

"I mean within the last few minutes in this very room," he said coldly.

"You seen one, Gertie?"

"No. You seen one, Maud?"

"No."

The Head went to the other side of the pool, and Hetty whispered to George softly:

"Keep them here—I'm bunking—"

"Gosh—y-you—" gasped Cousin George, seeing the cap and apron more clearly than Hetty's face.

"Sssh—do something—attract attention," muttered Hetty.

"Wait a bit—that cap—whose is it?" he asked anxiously.

"Yours."

"Mine—"

Hetty dodged back then, as the Head looked across.

"Have you seen him, Sonning?"

Hetty gave George a push, and he just managed to save himself from toppling into the pool; then taking the school cap from the apron, she hurled it into the pool.

"His cap!" she cried.

Cousin George turned and gaped, for there, floating on the water, was his cap, an old one, as he saw at a glance.

With a vague idea of proving an alibi, he jammed on his own new cap.

"That cap—get it, Sonning!" cried the Head.

"Get a pole! Quick! Do not delay."

George, only too eager to get that incriminating cap, rushed to find a pole,

And if he could not tear out the lining and his name before handing it to the Head, he would eat the whole cap!

But the Head waved him back.

"No, my boy. You are young for this night air and might contract a chill. I will change. I am determined to find the name in that cap."

"Yes, sir—but let me go," begged George earnestly. "You're getting on a bit, sir—middle-aged and all that!"

"Don't talk like a fool, boy!" said the Head. "I am going in."

And leaving George quaking, he found a cubicle, hired a costume, and ten minutes later appeared on the edge of the pool to take the plunge.

George, meanwhile, had mounted the steps to a diving board.

"I'll show you just where it is, sir," he said, with a reckless idea in mind.

And leaning right over, he fell in.

It looked like an accident, but it was one of the most ingenious ideas he had ever had, for he dived down slightly ahead of Mr. Sibley.

By not staying the Imp missed a treat, but wisely she had scurried home as quickly as she could.

Cousin George, quickly though he had dived, and neatly though he had grabbed the cap, lost in the finish, for the Head snatched it from him.

"You clumsy, careless fellow, falling in!" he said. "If you had to do it, why not have done it before and saved me the trouble of undressing?"

Then, while Cousin George stood limp and ill at ease, the Head walked to the brightest light, the cap in his hand. He stared at it and scowled.

"Fooled," he said. "This cap has no lining—and no name!"

Cousin George forced himself to appear mortified.

"Then we shall never find whose cap it is, sir!"

The Head, with an angry gesture of exasperation, threw the cap back into the pool, turned to the cubicle and dressed; but first he urged Cousin George to hurry all the way home and have a hot bath.

When Cousin George, teeth chattering

arrived home, he heard the blare of rhythm and gritted his teeth.

Determined to put an end to the din, he marched along to the lounge, whence the sounds came, put his hand on the doorknob, and then hesitated.

After all, he reminded himself, Hetty had taken a grave risk to save him from the Head, and but for her—the thought made him shudder more than even his damp clothes did.

He partly opened the door, just enough to hear Nellie doing some pretty classic stuff with the triangle; then he closed it, hurried upstairs, and got himself a hot bath, with mustard added.

And even he had to admit—to himself if to no one else—that heard from a distance through the floor and closed door, and above the running of the bath taps, the dance band didn't sound at all bad. There was rhythm—there was pep.

And but for the fact that after the bath he found the message from Violette, he might have looked in to give a little advice to the bandsters. As it was, he went to advise Violette about her photograph album.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

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The Head stared about him, looked under a few tables, and then toppled forward as he collided with a waitress.

Came a terrific crash of china, and Hetty scurried through the far door into the open air.

"Waitress," said a woman at a table, in a haughty, angry voice. "How much longer have I to wait here?"

"There you are, madam," said the Imp, and plonked down the tray of crockery on the table. "Help yourself."

The woman gave a faint squeal, and the Imp dodged on into the deepening dusk of the swimming pool, where now the fairy lights were coming on.

Cousin George was safe, and now all that remained was for her to escape. Unfortunately, however, the Head, Cousin George, and her own headmistress were hurrying from the service-room.

The Imp dodged into a darkish spot, and for safety, kept on her apron and cap.

"No one here, sir," said Cousin George.

but long before he could do so the cap had sunk.

"It's sunk, sir," said George. "Gone for good."

"Net at all. It is resting on the bottom, and I can see it— Ah, here is a bather!"

But the man who came from a dressing cubicle was in his walking clothes, having just finished a dip.

"Pardon me, my dear sir," said the Head, "but a school cap belonging to one of the lads at my school has been flung into the water. Could you get it out?"

The bather regarded him coldly.

"Me? With all my clothes on? Why can't you?"

The Head frowned.

"It would hardly take you a moment to remove your clothing again, and having been already immersed—"

"I'm not half-witted," said the man tartly. "Good evening."

The Head glowered after him and Miss Wilmot clucked her tongue.

"Leave it to me," said George eagerly.

"I'll get it out—"