

In this week's grand Cliff House story Babs & Co. set out to solve—

"THE SECRET OF THE PHANTOM BOAT!"

THE SCHOOLGIRL

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Incorporating
"SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN"



**THEIR MYSTERY
FIND FROM THE SEA—**
Claimed by An Old Enemy.
See this week's superb Babs & Co.
story.

Excitement and Mystery abound in this Long Complete story of the Cliff House chums.

The SECRET of the PHANTOM BOAT!



Out of the Fog!



"Oh, great goblins, look at it!" Clara Trevlyn cried, in consternation.

"Fog!" supplemented Barbara Redfern dismally.

"And just about as thick as a brick wall, I guess!" Leila Carroll opined. "Say, what do we do now?"

"Looks," Jemima Carstairs resignedly sighed, "as if we're marooned, fair comrades!"

"Oh, really, Jimmy, if you mean we've got to stop on this beastly island," Bessie Bunter bleated indignantly, "I refuse, so there!"

"And what," Mabel Lynn asked, "is the alternative, old Bess?"

But plump Bessie Bunter hadn't an answer for that. None of the six chums of the Fourth Form at Cliff House School had one, either.

Their plight was rather serious.

For it wasn't as if they'd been caught in a fog on the mainland. Here they were, a mile and a half from the cliffs of Kent, stranded on the deserted, uninhabited Belwin Island! In a world of eerie, cottonwool-like loneliness they stood, the only evidence of life beyond their own echoing voices the gentle murmur and lap of the sea at their feet.

"Let's shout?" Clara suggested. "Oh dud-dear!" stuttered Bessie nervously. "Oh crumbs! We—we shall all fuf-freeze to dud-death, you know!"

Barbara Redfern, recognised leader of the girls, glanced at her watch.

"Half-past three!" she said. "It'll be dark by five. And if we don't get off before it's dark, then we'll just have to stop here! The best thing we can do," she added, with anxious thoughtfulness, "is to risk it. After all, there's never very much traffic on the sea between here and the mainland—"

"And I," Jemima Carstairs chirruped, allowing the moist monocle she had been polishing to drop to the end of its cord, "have a pocket compass, old

Spartan! I'll be the jolly old guide—what-ho!"

"But—but suppose we're shipwrecked?" Bessie quavered.

"Then," Jemima gravely replied, "we'll all have to take old Clara's shoes!"—a rather unkind reference to the Tomboy's big feet, which brought a glare from that worthy and a chuckle from Mabs and Leila Carroll. "But cheer up, Bessica! There are worse things than drowning—what?"

Bessie blinked behind her thick, round spectacles. Bessie at that moment did not think so. Dumbly she looked at the wall of fog which hid the sea and dismally she looked at her friends. Yet even Bessie had the sense to see that it was either a case of taking the risk or remaining here on the bleak, desolate Belwin Island; apart from which, Bessie had had nothing to eat since dinner-time. She glowered bitterly at Jemima.

"If it hadn't been for your beastly idea, we should never have come to this awful place!" she upbraided. "But

none of you, of course, would adopt my suggestion to go and have a feed at the Hathaway Tea Rooms!"

"Alas!" sighed Jemima.

For it had been Jemima's idea, this trip to Belwin Island. Jemima, enthusiastic amateur antiquary as she was, had considered that the old ruins of Bellesta Towers near by had originally been the site of a Roman villa, in which relics might be found. For the last hour they had hunted and dug in the cellars of the towers, but not one solitary Roman relic had they unearthed.

"Well, here's the boat," Barbara announced from a few yards away. "And the sea's calm enough, goodness knows! Got the compass, Jimmy?"

"What-ho, Babs!"

"Then tumble in!"

The chums, not without trepidation, "tumbled in," Jemima taking her seat, compass in hand, in the stern. Bessie, glowering, sat next to her, while Babs and Clara seized the oars. Jemima caught the tiller.

"Hoist the old skull and crossbones!" she said cheerily. "One—two—three—off!"

Four oars dipped into the water.

In a moment it seemed the vague outlines of Belwin Island had disappeared and they were skimming through a weird, eerie world.

Splash, splash, splash! The oars worked with a will. Bessie shivered. Jemima, her eyes glued thoughtfully to her compass, shifted the tiller from time to time. Overhead a seagull screamed; far, far out at sea came the hoarse, piercing shriek of some vessel's fog-siren.

The boat ploughed on. Thank goodness, the water was smooth!

"Hallo!" breathed Jemima suddenly. "Just a minute, Spartans! Ship the old oars! What's that?"

The two girls shipped oars, staring into the blank wall of whiteness which surrounded them. Then they all looked at each other. For somewhere near at hand came a deep thrum-thrum!

"What is it?" Bessie gasped.

"Sounds," Jemima said, her face suddenly keen, "like a motor-boat—quite a pretty hefty and over-size old motor-boat, too! Sounds, too, as if it's coming this way," she added, as the thrum-thrum increased in volume, seeming now to vibrate in the fog.

"Oh kik-crums! They'll run us down!" Bessie stammered.

"Give 'em a shout!" Babs advised, and raised her own voice. "Ahoy, there!"

"Ahoy!" went the mocking echoes gambolling through the fog, and the thrum-thrum sounded nearer. Then—"Look out!" shrieked Jemima.

"Ahoy—"

Too late, she swung the tiller hard over. A big shape had loomed out of the fog, not six feet from them.

There came a frightened shriek from Bessie; a yell from Leila, and she, Bessie, Mabs, and Babs were flung together. The little craft shivered under the force of a violent impact; a smother of spray shot over them.

For one terrifying moment they glimpsed the big, black hull of the motor-boat; were deafened with the thunder of its engine and the roaring hiss of its wash. Like a giddy teetotum their own craft spun helplessly round, and four oars, one smashed, went flying into the white-blanketed sea. Then the motor-boat had gone thundering on, to be swallowed in the fog.

Clara was the first to recover herself. "Oh, mum-my hat! Wuw-what was it?" she stammered shakily.

By HILDA RICHARDS

Illustrated by T. LAIDLER

"Jemima, what's happened to the boat?" Babs asked, more practically.

Jemima shook her head.

"Tiller gone!" she announced. "And seeing that the old oars have gone to Davy Jones at the same time—to say nothing of my compass—I'd like to know what we're going to do now, forsooth? Pretty un-British, what—running us down like that?"

"They must have heard us!" Mabs broke in indignantly.

"Sure they must—and seen us!" Leila Carroll angrily opined.

Bessie blinked nervously round.

"Oh crums! I sus-say, I'm wuw-wet, you know! Have they gone?" she gasped.

Gone they had, no trace remaining of the phantom-like boat now, except a fainter thrum-thrum towards the shore. Their own craft was drifting idly, in what direction they did not know. Babs set her lips.

"Oh goodness! What the dickens are we going to do?" she asked. "The tide's on the turn, and when the tide turns—"

They stared at each other, faces suddenly a sickly white. They knew

Through fog or darkness swept the mystery craft, bent on some strange mission. Its appearance plunged Babs & Co. into a series of breathless adventures, and brought them a new friend who desperately needed their aid.



what Babs meant. The coast hereabouts, with its shallows, its strong, pulling undercurrents and sharp rocks, was as treacherous a place as was to be found along the whole southern boundary of Kent.

Once get caught in the powerful pull of one of its currents, and goodness knows what might happen. A swift rush towards some cruel rock perhaps—an irresistible tug out to sea. And that, with the fog—

Gurgle, gurgle! lapped the water round the side of the rowing boat. There was no other sound.

The phantom boat was entirely out of earshot now.

"Let's shout?" Babs said—not very hopefully.

They shouted, listening to the rolling echoes of their voices. They shouted again. Then they tensed.

For from somewhere near at hand came an answering cry—in a girl's voice this time.

"Ahoy! Who are you?"

"Help!" yelled Bessie. "We're macarooned! I mum-mean shipwrecked, you know!"

"Where are you?" came the voice again.

"On the sea, you know!"

"Oh stuff! Stop shouting potty instructions!" Clara Trevlyn sniffed. "Here!" she yelled. "Here! Got it? Here!"

They listened, tense and anxious. Then came the unmistakable sound of oars splashing into water. They shouted again. "Here!"

Nearer, nearer the oars' splashes sounded. Then Babs broke into a cheer as, out of the mist, appeared the nose

of a small boat, the dim figure of a girl straining at the oars.

"This way!" Babs called excitedly. "But the girl had seen them now. Expertly she brought her boat round, drawing alongside. It was a rather ancient and much-battered old tub, and in the bottom of it were half a dozen shiny mackerel. The girl herself—dressed in a dark jersey, thick skirt, rubber knee boots and a sou'-wester—blinked at them.

"Why, goodness, you've lost your oars!" she cried.

"And nearly," Clara said grimly. "Our lives as well! A big motor-boat ran us down! It wasn't their fault that we weren't tipped into the sea!"

The girl gave a start.

"A black motor-boat?" she asked.

"That's it!" Babs replied.

"So—so you've seen it, too?" the girl asked. "Oh dear, wait a jiffy! Steady there! Will you grip the gunwale and hold on, miss? Now, can you others step into this boat, please? It'll take all of us."

One by one they stepped in, the girl and Clara holding on to the gunwales of their boats. The girl, a very practical little sailorwoman, produced a rope, and the now derelict vessel of the Cliff House chums was fastened to its rescuer's stern in preparation for towing to the shore.

The girl took up her two long oars again.

"All right now?" she inquired. "I say, you're Cliff House girls, aren't you? My name's Betty Winwood."

"And a pleasure, sure, to know you!" Leila Carroll said warmly. "I guess you've done us a good turn, Betty. But what were you saying about the motor-boat?" asked the American junior.

"Do you know it?"

Betty Winwood looked at her curiously.

"No!" she said quietly.

"But you've seen it?" Babs asked. "Yes, I—I've seen it—twice." The girl's face overshadowed. "I—I call it the phantom boat."

"The first time was the other night. I was putting out my nets when it came rushing out of the blackness straight at me, with no lights on, its engine throttled down so that you could hardly hear it until it was on you. My boat was filled with its wash."

"And they didn't stop?"

"No," Betty's lips compressed. "But they must have seen me. The other time was two days ago—in a mist just like we've got now. It was about this time, too. I was in the boat again, returning from Belwin Island, where I'd been to collect sea shells from the cove, when the phantom boat bore down upon me. I shouted, and I knew they heard me, because I saw a man near the cabin staring at me. Then it—it had gone. It's so queer. Mother and I feel just a bit superstitious about it."

"Oh kik-crums!" Bessie said; and the chums, thrilled with a sense of the uncanny, stared at each other. What was this boat that came and went in mist and darkness without apparent thought for other people's safety?



No Mercy!

"**B**UT you must— simply must," Betty Winwood cried, once they had safely reached the shore again and grounded both boats on the shingle, "come and have a cup of tea. I—I'm afraid," she added, biting her lip, "I can't offer you more."

The chums gazed at her. Now that the thrill and fear of their disastrous trip were subdued, they were taking a deeper interest in the girl who had rescued them, who so strangely had shared, on two occasions, the uncanny experience which had been their own. "You live near here?" Babs asked.

"Yes," Betty nodded. "At Shorehome Cottage, about fifty yards up the cliff there. There—there's just mother and myself," she added, "and—I'm afraid I must confess it—at the moment we haven't many luxuries. Still, you are all very welcome, if you'd like it, to a cup of tea."

"Crumbs, I'd love one!" Bessie cried. "Well, if it's not giving you too much trouble—" Babs hesitated.

"Not a bit!" Betty laughed. "Still, you can do something for me if you wouldn't mind." She pointed to a pile of driftwood carefully placed out of reach of the tide at the foot of the cliff. "You see," she added a little shamefacedly, "we can't afford coal, so I have to collect what I can on the beach every morning. If you each take a few sticks—"

They did, wondering now a little uncertainly if they were trading upon hospitality which could be ill afforded. Babs and Clara and Leila took an armful each, and, led by Betty, toiled up the winding path that ended at the top of the cliff. The fog had thinned a little now, and as, panting, they stepped on to the level ground again they saw Shorehome Cottage, its red roof glistening in the mist, its ivy-clad walls bedewed and dripping.

"This way," Betty said. She turned towards the garden, which ran almost to the edge of the cliff; there, pushing open a gate, she let out a cheery hail. A door at the back of the cottage opened, and a middle-aged woman, still bearing traces of the refined good looks which must have been hers when she was younger, appeared. Betty beamed.

"Mother, I want you to meet some friends of mine," she said. "I met them, if you please, out at sea, in the mist. And—would you believe it?—they'd been run down by the phantom motor-boat. But come in!" she cried, when the introductions were affected, and looked at once so joyfully glad to find herself in other girls' company that Babs smiled. It must be a lonely life, she reflected, for such a pair.

A lonely life, yes—and rather a tragic one, she was to discover before long. Spick-and-span, neat, and shiny, that poor home. But what poverty existed there! Such poverty, indeed, that it was impossible to keep it secret—not that Betty and her mother attempted to do so.

"But—but how do you manage to get along?" Babs asked, when before the brightly spluttering driftwood fire, they sat drinking the steaming tea. "Haven't you a father, Betty?"

"Yes," Betty exchanged a look with her mother. "Daddy's been unemployed, you see," she added. "Two days ago he received an offer of a job at Sarmouth and went off! We haven't seen him since."

"Nor heard," Mrs. Winwood put in, shaking her head. "Dear daddy! I do so hope he is all right."

"And you mean," Bessie broke in incredulously, "you've n-no money at all?"

"Just a little," Betty smiled. "We manage to get along. We grow enough vegetables in the garden during the summer to see us through the winter; and I've got my boat, ten lobster pots, and some nets—and so, you see, we live on a diet of fish and vegetables. We're not grumbling, are we, mums—especially now daddy's got a job? And shells, you know," she added; "we do quite well with our sea-shell novelties."

"Sea-shell novelties?" Babs questioned.

"These." And Betty, with a little smile, got up; she went to a box in the corner, plumped it on the table, and opened it. The chums blinked as she began to produce things—delicate little picture frames made out of tiny sea-shells, bracelets and necklaces, scarfpins, and hat fasteners; an apparently endless series of little novelties, all manufactured from the loveliest and the most carefully selected shells they had ever seen. "Mother and I make these up and sell them in the shops," Betty said shyly. "We get the shells from the cove in Belwin Island."

"I say, they're beautiful!" Babs breathed.

The girl blushed pinkly. "Thank you," she softly replied. "But you should see daddy's! When daddy's at home he carves cameos from oyster-shells, and sometimes we get as much as half-a-crown each for them. But—but trade hasn't been so good since the crisis."

The chums glanced at each other. Babs felt something catch at her throat. Poor, poor Betty and her mother! What a fearfully plucky struggle they were making!

There was a short silence, which was broken by a thunderous bang at the front door.

Apprehensively Mrs. Winwood and her daughter stared at each other.

"Oh dear! That—that's Mr. Dawkins," Mrs. Winwood said falteringly. "Betty, w-will you open the door to him?" She glanced confusedly and apologetically at the girls. "Mr.—Mr. John Dawkins is our landlord," she vouchsafed.

Betty crossed to the door, pulling it open. A harsh voice sounded.

"You!" it said. "Is your mother in?"

"Yes, Mr. Dawkins, but—" "Then out of my way! I want to see her!"

Betty, as though she was of no account, was swept aside; and into the room, so tall that his head almost touched the beams of the ceiling, strode a broad-shouldered, powerfully built man, dressed in a long ulster overcoat, with a slouch hat pulled over shaggy-browed eyes, and a fierce and bristling moustache which gave to his face an expression of utter ferocity.

He glared at the girls, for a moment obviously taken aback to find so many visitors in the house; he glared at Mrs. Winwood, who, pallid and nervous, had tremblingly risen to her feet.

"Well, what about it, Mrs. Winwood? You know what I've come here for. Three-pounds-five is the money owing me for rent; and either you hand that over, or get out! Where is it?"

Babs flushed. Clara's eyes began to glimmer.

"I—I'm sorry, Mr. Dawkins!" Mrs. Winwood stammered. "I—I haven't got it. My—my husband—"

"Never mind your husband! Where's my money?" the man blusteringly repeated.

"Mr. Dawkins, please give us a chance!" Betty begged pleadingly. "We—"

"Chance? Chance?" He flung round upon her, while the chums, bunching together, stared at him. "Always the same tale! Give you a chance! I've waited long enough! I want that rent! Either I get the rent, or I sell you up—lock, stock, and barrel!"

"And then, I suppose," Babs asked contemptuously, "throw them out?"

"Hey? Of course I'll throw them out! Who asked you to put your spoke in, young lady? Is this your business?"

"I think," Babs said abruptly, and a murmur of approval went up from all her chums, "that it's everybody's business to see that people like Betty and her mother get fair play!"

Mr. Dawkins' face mottled with fury. "Are you talking to me?"

"Well, I'm not talking to myself," Babs answered spiritedly. "I think that—"

"I don't want to know what you think, miss! You save your speeches for the girls at your school! Mrs. Winwood, have you got that money?"

"N-no, Mr. Dawkins."

"Then that settles it!" And the bully, with a glare, turned towards the door again. But in a moment Babs had caught his arm.

"Wait—wait a minute!" she said hurriedly. "Mrs. Winwood—Betty, please let us help you out? Come on, girls, cash on the table. If we can raise the money between us we will— No, Betty, please don't refuse. If you want to repay it you can—later. Here's five boblets," Babs said. "I'm in funds."

"And here," Clara chimed in, "is three. That's eight."

"And here, you know, is one. And—and—" And Bessie gasped as she produced, with another shilling, her cherished good luck coin—a Victorian sixpence with a hole in it. "That's nine-and-six."

"And here's seven shillings," Jemima said. Jemima was well supplied with pocket money. "And two-and-six from me, I guess," put in Leila Carroll.

"I'm afraid I've only a shilling," said Mabel Lynn, flushing a little.

"Not nearly enough," muttered Babs, frowning down at the little pile of coins. "But perhaps," she added hopefully, "Mr. Dawkins would take this on account?"

Mr. Dawkins scowled.

"Thanks," he retorted curtly, "but I wouldn't have taken it if you'd been able to raise the whole amount. This is no business of a pack of schoolgirls, so please keep out of it! Mrs. Winwood, I give you till to-morrow," he added furiously. "Good-day to you!"

And in three gigantic strides he was across the room. With a slam that shook the little cottage, he had disappeared through the door. Clara's quick temper was roused as she saw the tears which came to Mrs. Winwood's eyes, as she saw Betty, her face pale, biting her lip.

"What a cad!" she cried. "A real specimen of a sporty old English gentleman—what?" Jemima added. "Does he always act like a lion off the leash, Betty?"

"Nearly always," Betty sighed. "Oh dear! But please," she added, "don't look so worried about it, and—thanks most awfully for—coming to the rescue," she whispered. "That was nice of you."

"But, Betty, what are you going to do?" Babs asked.

"Oh, we—we'll manage!" Betty said with plucky cheerfulness. "Perhaps I shall have a bit of luck with my novelties this afternoon. Look here," she added eagerly, "I'm going to Pegg, and this mist is lifting like anything. If you would like me to give you a lift as far as Pegg—"

"Thanks!" Clara said. "But before you give us a lift we want to have the first nibble at the novelties, don't me, girls?" And she glanced significantly at her chums. "I mean, of course, we want to buy some of them," she added. "That ripping picture-frame, for instance—that's just what I could do with for my brother Jack's photograph. Can we have the first pick, Betty?"

"With pleasure," Betty laughed, though she shook her head a little, as if very well aware of the generous motive behind that offer.

So the chums picked. Really, it was not such a charitable effort after all. The novelties, expertly and exquisitely made, were worth very much more than the girl asked for them, and, with the approach of Christmas and presents to buy, they were really doing themselves a good turn. Ten shillings changed hands before they had finished, and Bessie, with a sigh half of shame and half of relief, pocketed her treasured Victorian sapphire again.

Eventually, armed with their new treasures, they went off, Betty, happy again, among them, a basket of her home-made novelties upon her arm.

The fog had lifted considerably by this time, and even though dusk was falling they could faintly trace the outline of Belwin Island.

By the path that ran steeply down the cliff they reached the beach again, where the two boats—their own oarless and rudderless craft, which would have to be accounted for to Ben Barrowby when they reached Pegg, and Betty's stout but ancient old tub—were beached side by side.

They reached them. Betty laughingly indicated her boat.

"In you get," she said merrily. "We'll reach Pegg just before dark. We—" And then she stopped, gazing with sudden round-eyed consternation into the boat. "Oh!" she faintly gasped.

"Betty, what—" Babs asked. And then she, too, stopped; with incredulous eyes she stared at the bottom of the boat. For in the bottom of that boat was a huge piece of rock, and the stout if ancient timber underneath it was badly splintered, rendering the boat utterly useless and unseaworthy.

"Oh shucks!" gasped Leila Carroll. "Who did that?"

The chums stared. Who indeed? This was obviously no accident. Someone had deliberately hurled that rock into the boat.

"What a rotten trick!" Clara Trevlyn burst out furiously. "But why the dickens did they do it? Look, they've never even touched our boat! I can't see—"

"Just a sec!" broke in Babs keenly. "Betty, have you any enemies—anyone likely to do this?"

Betty shook her head. In face of this catastrophe she could not prevent the tears glistening in her eyes.

"I—I don't think so," she said falteringly. "Unless—" She paused, biting her lip, and then shook her head. "Oh, but that's silly!" she finished.

"What is?" asked Babs quickly. "Do you suspect someone?"

"Well—" Betty hesitated. "That phantom boat," she said uncomfortably. "I've got a feeling—oh, I know it sounds absurd—but—but I feel it means trouble for mums and me!"

The chums looked at each other. The phantom boat! Who were the people who ran that boat? Was it possible, as Betty suggested, that those mystery people wished her harm?

Before Babs could voice an opinion there sounded a scunch of shingle farther along the beach. The chums turned, and then stiffened. For approaching them was John Dawkins.

He came up. As if the chums did not exist, he looked at the boat. Then he turned to Betty.

"How did that happen?" he asked.

"I—I don't know," Betty stammered.

"Not much good now, is it?" he asked brutally. "Best thing you can do with that, Betty Winwood, is to sell it for firewood. I think," he added thoughtfully, "I can make use of it. Take ten shillings for the remains?"

"You mean you'll buy it?" Babs asked.

"Why not?" They looked at Betty. But Betty was shaking her head. Without that boat Betty was helpless. Upon that boat the poor living which Betty and her mother were making depended.

"Thanks. I—I'll try to repair it," she said.

"Well, I'll give you fifteen bob," said Dawkins insistently.

"No," Betty said.

"All right." He showed his teeth. "Have your way! But remember, young pauper, you're not in a position to pick and choose. I might," he added, with a hint of threat in his tone, "come and talk to you about this later, when you haven't got your fine pals clustering around you!" And with a scowl for the "pals" he mentioned, he strolled on his way.

"Pig!" Clara said. "Rotten, contemptible, bullying pig! Still, that doesn't get us anywhere! We've got to do something. Look here, Betty, have you an extra pair of oars?"

"Yes, I've an old pair!"

"Then," Clara said, "we'll row off to Pegg in our boat and see Ben Barrowby. Ben hired us the boat, you know. Babs, your cousin, Keith, is a sort of junior partner with Ben, isn't he? Ben and Keith will supply us with the tar and timber and stuff—they've got three or four old hulks on the beach there—and we'll come back to-morrow morning and help you fix things. How's that?"

"But—but the cost—" Betty said haltingly.

"Blow the cost!" Babs said. "Keith and Ben won't charge anything. A jolly good idea!" she added, and gave a glance of approval at the Tomboy whose jolly good idea it had been. "Oh, come on," she urged, "it's not so bad after all! With six of us working to-morrow, we'll have it done in no time. Well, Betty, is it a bargain?"

"Th-thank you," Betty said. "You—you're awfully kind."

"To which," Leila said, with a wide grin, "shucks!"



"THESE, Miss Primrose, are the girls!" said the man angrily. "They are the girls who, not satisfied with interfering in my business, have openly insulted me! I demand, madam, that they all be punished!"

The Tomboy Makes a Find!



"HALLO, here's Babs!"
"Babs, I say—"

"Babs, heard the latest?"

A crowd of cheerily excited girls was grouped in Big Hall at Cliff House when, towards six o'clock, Babs & Co. returned, having very satisfactorily arranged with Ben Barrowby and Keith Redfern for Betty Winwood to have her repairing supplies and also to fix up with Ben Barrowby the claim he would have to send to the insurance company for the damage done to his own boat. Babs puffed.

"Hallo! What's the excitement?"
"Excitement enough!" Jean Cartwright chuckled. "And as you're Form captain you'll have a big say in matters. The Charmer's just told us about it. By the way, Babs, the Charmer wants to see you as soon as you're ready! You know the Courtfield Charities Sale for the poor children of the district?"
"Rather!" Babs agreed.

"Well, we're going to run a stall," Jean said. "And the Charmer suggests that we start a fund and buy things right away. Of course, there will be prizes for the best stall, and all that."
"And we are going to win all of them, look you!" Lucy Morgan chirruped excitedly.

Babs laughed. Significantly she glanced at her chums, all of them carrying the novelties they had bought from Betty Winwood, and all of them simultaneously beaming as the same thought occurred to them.

The Courtfield Charities Sale, organised by Lord Courtfield, was one of those fine institutions which aimed at making the Christmas of the poor children of the district happy, and was most enthusiastically supported. Cliff House usually ran two stalls—one from the Senior and the other from Junior School.

But—here Babs knew an inward sense of glowing satisfaction—the fund to which Jean Cartwright referred was a fund contributed to by all the juniors, and the choice of the articles to be purchased or made for the stall was left to the juniors themselves. What a chance all at once to give their new friend Betty a leg up! What a chance to swamp her with orders for her shell novelties!

"And so," Jean said, "if you've got any ideas, Babs—"

"Ideas? Have I!" Babs chuckled. "Just wait till I've seen the Charmer," she said. "Meantime, Jean, will you get everybody together in the Common-room; we'll hold a meeting and form a committee right away. Mabs, old thing, take my parcel along, will you? I'll go and see the Charmer!"

And off Babs went at once to Miss Charmant's study. That very sweet mistress looked up and smiled as she came in.

"Why, Barbara, I've been waiting to see you," she greeted. "I suppose you've heard the news?"

"Yes, Miss Charmant."

"Well, do your best. I know," Miss Charmant said, with a smile, "that if anyone can bring credit on the Junior School, Barbara, it is you. You've five weeks in which to get your goods ready and prepare plans. I wish you all the best of luck!"

Babs laughed. Off she ran enthusiastically to the Fourth Form Common-room.

No less enthusiastic were the Fourth

Formers when she reached them. Mabs and Clara and the others had been showing admiring Form fellows the novelties they had bought from Betty Winwood. One and all were enthusiastic and admiring.

"I'd like a few of those things for private Christmas presents," Rose Rodworth said.

"So would I!" Bridget O'Toole put in.

"What about getting the girl along here, Clara, and asking her to bring more samples?" Sylvia Sirrett asked. "I love that little model of a boat—and how cute to use a musselshell as the hull! I should think," Sylvia added, "she'd do an absolutely roaring trade. Would she come?"

"Would she?" chuckled Clara. "You watch. We'll have her here to-morrow afternoon. Hi, Babs, what about getting on with the business of the stall?" she added.

Babs got on with the "business." With the Form in such a good humour, it went fairly smoothly. The scheme for the stall was outlined, Babs pointing out how cheaply and in what infinite variety they could get the novelties they required from Betty. A fund was started at once with an initial subscription of twenty-one shillings, a committee appointed to discuss ways and means, and a list invited of home-made articles.

Triumphant was that meeting—and that initial sum of twenty-one shillings very gratifying, especially as there were a shoal of promises of more to come. Twenty-one shillings at any time was a good sum to raise immediately, but it was even more pleasing when one reflected that it was the middle of the week and therefore between two allowance days.

Babs & Co. went to bed that night in the best of spirits. The following day was Thursday, and seeing that it was Benedict's Day—one of the historical dates in Cliff House's history that was always celebrated—was also a full day's holiday. It was a fine morning, too.

In the quad after breakfast, Babs, Mabs, Clara, Leila, Bessie, and Jemima foregathered. In great humour they wheeled their cycles from the shed and set out at a brisk pace towards Shorehome Cottage, in order to help Betty mend her so-strangely damaged boat.

"I wonder," Clara mused as they pedalled, "whether we'll see anything more of that phantom boat or that rotter, Dawkins? You know, Babs, I've been thinking?"

"Didn't hurt, I hope?" Babs teased. "No, don't rot." Clara shook her head. "About Dawkins—and Betty," she said. "Remember what he said when we offered him part of the rent yesterday—that he wouldn't have taken it from us even if it had been the whole amount? Why?"

Babs frowned. "Oh, he just wanted something to be nasty about, that's all," she opined.

"Think so? Well, then, what about Betty's boat? Funny, wasn't it, that somebody should have deliberately smashed that up? And funny," Clara mused, "that he should have been the first to come along afterwards and offer her money for it."

Babs stared. "Clara, what are you getting at?" she asked.

Clara regarded her queerly. "It doesn't make you feel suspicious?" she asked.

"Why, no," Babs admitted, after a moment or two's reflection. "Oh, snap out of it, Clara, old chump!" she laughed. "You've just got Dawkins on

the brain. Admitted he's an unpleasant specimen, but—well, bother it, you can't just go labelling him with crimes he's not guilty of because of that! You might just as well blame the owners of the phantom boat, as Betty herself suggested. After all, you've no proof against Dawkins."

"Nun-no, I suppose not," Clara admitted.

And yet—and yet—well, Clara had vaguely linked Betty's disaster with that man. As Babs, more sensible, more clear thinking, had said, there was no proof. There wasn't.

But—
"Oh rats!" Clara told herself crossly. They had come within sight of the sea now. A hundred yards from the shore was a black-looking rowing-boat with a girl hauling in on the end of a net.

"Well, tut-tut!" breathed Jemima. "Look at the boat! And look, mes comrades, who is in it!"

"Betty!" they all cried.
For Betty, out at sea in the boat they had come to help repair, it was.

"Betty!" they all yelled as she reached the beach.

Betty, windblown, turned the ends of her net in her hands. She waved one arm to them, threw the net to the stern of the boat, and took up her oars. In three minutes she was splashing through the surf in big rubber boots towards them.

"Hallo!" she laughed.
"But, Betty, the boat!" Babs cried. "I thought we were going to help you to mend it?"

Betty's cheeks turned a little pink. "Well, your cousin, Babs—"
"Keith?"

"Keith—yes." Betty's eyes glowed. "Oh, Babs, how proud of him you must be! He came along early this morning with the tar and timber, and when I came down to the beach there he was, already getting on with the job. We took the old board out and put the new one in next to no time. Look," she added, pointing towards the bottom of the boat where the bright new tar showed the extent of the repair.

The chums laughed. Babs glowed. If she required any other proof that Keith Redfern, her once ne'er-do-well cousin, was really making amends for his past, she certainly had it here. Good old Keith! He had certainly made an excellent job of it.

Jemima sighed. "And so, alas, we come too late!" she moaned. "Too tough! Seen anything of the creepy old spookship?"

"Nothing." Betty shook her head. "And don't want to," she added, with just the suspicion of a little shiver. "I say, what about helping me sort out my catch?" she added.

"What ho!" Jemima chortled. "Sou'westers forward, shipmates! Stand ready to man the nets and fall upon the whales! Tell us what to do, fair Spartan, and count on us."

Betty laughed again. She looked very pretty when she laughed, with the sun glinting on her pink, fresh cheeks.

"Wait a minute, I'll slew the boat round," she said. "Then each grab ends of the net and haul it up the beach. Try to pull evenly, though, and keep it clear of stones. Now, ready?"

They were. And gladly they hauled the net in, landing it high and dry upon the beach. It was not large, but it seemed to contain plenty, and they marvelled that Betty did this task by herself every morning. They opened it, peering eagerly forward.

To be sure there was not a great catch; the bulkiness of the net was largely accounted for by seaweed. But

among it there were four or five healthy-looking bass, two eels, one of which must have been four feet long, several nondescript fish, and innumerable shrimps. Betty glowed.

"Not bad," she said. "The best catch I've had for a week, I should think. I do believe," she added, her eyes shining, "that you've brought me luck, girls."

"Hallo!" Clara cried suddenly. "What's this?"

She bent forward, flinging a hand among the weed. Then, while the chums blinked, she brought into the light a wooden box.

"What ho, treasure!" Jemima beamed. "What is it, Clara?"

But Clara did not know. The chums curiously gathered round. The box, obviously, was of modern construction, its lid neatly nailed down to its body. It was innocent either of label or inscriptions, however.

"Intriguing, I guess!" Leila Carroll said. "Betty, have you anything to crack it open with?"

"Oh, I sus-say, you dud-don't think it mum-might be a bomb?" imaginative Bessie stuttered, nervously backing away.

"Well, I guess if it is it won't be much use after having been mixed up with the fishy-wishes!" Leila chuckled. "Whoops! Here comes Betty with a screwdriver."

Betty forced the edge of the screwdriver between the lid and the box. There was a protesting squeak of nails as it came away upwards, and eagerly they craned forward.

"Golly, watches!" Mabel Lynn gasped. "Six of them!"

Watches they were, each contained in a little chamois-leather case, each carefully packed in cottonwool in a compartment all by itself.

"Silver, too," Clara said, her lips pursing. "I say, what a find, Betty! These will fetch more than enough to pay your rent!"

But Betty shook her head.

"Oh, no!" she said. "They don't belong to me. I'll have to give them up to the police. Funny, though, how they came there," she added. "They must have been dropped off a ship or something. I'll take them to the police station later."

"You'll what?" a voice sounded behind them, and they all turned as John Dawkins came hurrying along the beach. He glared at the box Betty now held in her hands. "Betty Winwood, what are you doing with that?" he rapped.

"Well, I guess we've just found it," Leila Carroll put in resentfully.

"Who's talking to you?" He glared. "Now then, Betty, hand that over!" he stormed.

"Rats! It's Betty's! We found it!" Clara put in.

"Hey? Who do you think you're talking to?" he sneered. "I say hand it over. That's my property. I lost it yesterday."

And while Betty blinked, he made a snatch at the box, tearing it out of her hands.

"Mr. Dawkins—" Babs cried.

"Why, you beastly bully!" Clara said hotly. "No, wait a minute, you're not jolly well getting away with that! We found that—"

"Get away!" the man roared.

"I won't get away! You've no more right to that than we have!"

He glared.

"Ho!" he said. "Ho! So that's your tune, is it, Miss Cliff House Whippersnapper? Well, let me tell you something now! If you must have

an explanation—though I'm hanged if I know why I'm giving you one—I bought that box of watches from a man in Courtfield yesterday. I bought it," he added, "because I thought it would come in useful as Christmas presents for my nephews!"

"Sounds likely!" Leila sniffed.

"Can you prove otherwise?" the man blared.

"No. But if you bought that in Courtfield, how did it turn up in Betty's fishing net?"

"Because," the man said, "I lost it yesterday. When I came back here I

frowned. "Babs, do you think he was telling the truth?"

"I guess it sounds fishy to me!" Leila opined.

Babs shrugged.

"Well, anyway, he's got them," she said. "The watches don't belong to us, and if there are any inquiries made about them, we shall know what to say. Anyway, saves us a journey to the police station," she added practically. "Blow Mr. Dawkins! Betty, what do we do with this fish?"

Betty laughed. She looked, if anything, relieved to have got rid of the

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took my boat out. I left the box in the boat. Either it got washed overboard, or somebody threw it into the water. Anyway, it's not yours," he added. "And you girls—I'll trouble you for your names!" he added, glaring at Leila and Clara.

"Then," Clara retorted spiritedly, "you can jolly well go on troubling! What right have you to demand my name?"

The man glared at her. He looked at Leila. From Leila his eyes went to Babs, and grimly he nodded. Then, holding the box, he strode off.

"Poof!" Clara said angrily, and then

rare treasure which had so unexpectedly turned up in her fishing-net. At her instructions, they loaded the fish into the two baskets she had brought down with her, and then, stretching out the net to dry, wended their way to the cottage, to be met by Mrs. Winwood, busily mounting shells on a square of cardboard.

Babs smiled.

"Still at it, Mrs. Winwood?" she asked. "I say, that work must try your eyes! And whoops! Betty, I've got something to tell you—something good! How many of these novelties have you got?"

"Oh, hundreds!" Betty said. "And you'd like to sell most of them?"

"Why, of course!"

"Then," Babs chuckled, "here's your chance! This afternoon, Betty, I want you to come to the school. Bring all you can carry. We're going to hold a sale of the novelties in the Common-room, and if you don't make your rent-money—well, I'll go to the East Indies!" And, gurgling, she told what had happened. "You'll come?" she added eagerly.

"Oh, Babs, of course! And—thanks!" Betty gratefully gulped. "What friends you are!"

Babs & Co. laughed. Friends they were—and, more and more liking Betty every fresh time they met her, tramped back to school in high good-humour. But immediately they arrived there a shock awaited them.

It came in the form of the sour-faced prefect, Sarah Harrigan, who met them in Big Hall.

"Hum!" she said. "Six of you! Barbara, Miss Primrose wants you all to go to her study immediately!"

"Oh crumbs!" Babs gasped. "What have we done?"

"Go and find out!" Sarah sneered.

Puzzled, they went.

And then, entering the headmistress' study in response to Miss Primrose's rather troubled "Come in!" they started.

For at the side of Miss Primrose's desk, looking somehow more ferocious and more towering than ever, was Mr. John Dawkins. And his eyes glittered as he saw them.

"These, Miss Primrose, are the girls!" he said angrily. "They are the girls who, not satisfied with interfering in my business, have openly insulted me. I demand, madam, that they all be punished! And especially," he added, glaring at Clara, "the one with the big feet!"

Such a Sale!



SCRATCH, scratch,

scratch!

"O n e hundred

and ten," Clara

Trevlyn grunted. "A n d

one blot! Blow!"

"Oh crumbs, my wrist is aching!"

Bessie groaned. "Stick it, Bess!" Barbara Redfern said cheerily. "Here, I've finished my lot! Let's have a go at yours. How many have you done, you lazy old chump? Only thirty? My hat! Here, start this sheet while I carry on!"

And Babs cheerfully drew Bessie's sheet towards her, and, in the worst scrawl she could manage, started on her plump chum's lines.

The six chums in the Fourth Form class-room were busy.

They were busy doing lines—Clara, three hundred; Leila, two hundred; a hundred each for the rest of them. Those lines they had earned as a result of Mr. Dawkins' visit to Cliff House.

But nobody, for once, minded lines. Nobody really cared. It was Babs' suggestion that they should get them out of the way as quickly as possible, because Babs wanted nothing to interfere with the reception of Betty Winwood and her novelties this afternoon.

And, working with a will as they worked now, the speed at which those lines were eaten up was little short of astonishing.

"There!" Babs laughed at last. "All done, kidlets! Look here, I'll run these off to the duty mistress—a good job it's Miss Belling; she won't

look too closely at them—and you others go and see the girls are ready in the Common-room. Bessie, see that everything's nicely ready for tea in Study No. 4. Won't be long, kidlets!"

And off Barbara scampered, gaily waving the sheaf of impots in her hand.

Gurgling with relief, Clara & Co. made their way to the Common-room. In various ways the sale of the afternoon had been advertised, and already a great crowd was gathered there, awaiting the arrival of the expected guest. Nearly all the Fourth were there; most of the Lower Fifth, a fair sprinkling of seniors, and a crowd of the lower Forms.

"Say, we're going to be busy!" Leila Carroll chuckled.

Busy they were going to be. And busy in very truth they were when some twenty minutes later, Betty, staggering under a great hamper which Babs helped her to carry, appeared in the midst of them.

By that time a trestle table was ready. Eagerly the girls clustered round as Betty, with the chums energetically helping, spread her novelties upon it.

"And now," Babs announced, "the sale begins, ladies! Don't rush!"

But there was a rush immediately. During the sorting-out process, half the girls had already made up their minds what they wanted. Such an exquisite array of novelties there were; at such absurd prices—some of the shell scarf pins only a halfpenny each.

"This way! Scarf pins and hair fasteners!" Babs laughed; and was almost breathless with the taking of money and thrusting goods into eager customers' hands.

"This way for dress novelties!" chortled Mabel Lynn; and the way those novelties went—especially among such girls as Diana Royston-Clarke, Grace Camperhill, and Lydia Crossendale—was truly astonishing.

"This section for gifts for the home, I guess!" Leila Carroll chirruped; and felt glad she did not work in a store.

"And here, mes comrades, if you want the dinkiest, duckiest, daintiest shell beads and boxes, is the old firm waiting to welcome you!" beamed Jemima.

Clink, clink! Money poured in. Betty, watching wide-eyed, just had the business of selling her novelties snatched out of her hands. From all corners the schoolgirls crowded.

And even that dear plump duffer Bessie paid over her treasured Victorian sixpence in exchange for a hat ornament.

It looked, when all was done, as if a hurricane had swept the table, and Betty's basket was nearly empty.

Later, in Study No. 4, which was shared by Babs, Mabs, and Bessie, Babs counted the money taken, and when she announced the really magnificent sum of four pounds, seven shillings and threepence, Betty was almost in tears of gratitude.

"Then—then that means," she said unsteadily. "Oh, Babs, it means that—that mother can pay the rent!"

Mean that it did.

A very happy tea followed in Study No. 4. Jemima, Leila, and Clara were there, too, of course. Betty was radiant with joy.

"Do you know, Babs," she cried, "I've sold nearly all my stock? I shall have to go to Belwin Island to-morrow and get more shells."

"And take us?" Clara asked eagerly. Betty laughed.

"Well, as the tide is on the turn

about seven, I'm afraid it will be rather early for you, won't it?"

But it was not too early—although plump Bessie rather shuddered at the idea of getting up very much in advance of rising bell.

In fact, dawn had hardly appeared in the sky next morning when Babs & Co. arose. It was a fine morning, with a nip in the air, and Clara enthusiastically suggested a cross-country trot to Shorehome Cottage—a suggestion the chums approved, all except plump Bessie, who decided to cycle there.

Clara & Co. took the nearest road, of course—through the south cove of Friar Dale Wood, and along the northern bank of the River Fallsweir to the creek by which the river emptied itself into the sea. Thereafter, their way lay along the sandy beach.

Exhilarating and health-giving, that trot. They were all glowing with health and not a bit puffed as they set off along the beach. Then, all at once, Clara, who was in the lead, stopped and swooped downwards.

"I say, wait a minute!" she said. She held in her hand a book—a rather heavy, leather-bound book.

"Pretty keen old eyesight, what?" Jemima murmured. "You ought to get a job at sorting in the rubbish yard, old Clara! What is it, forsooth?"

Clara opened the book. And the chums blinked at the strange series of words that stared out at them—words very blurred from the book's immersion in the sea, but words distinguishable, for all that. But such strange words.

"Shucks! What language is that written in?" Leila asked. "Mchith." Sure looks like a bit of Bessie's typing in Commercial Class, except that it isn't typing! Turn over, sister!"

Clara turned over. Again the same strange, unreadable words met their gaze. Jemima frowned.

"Code!" she said briefly.

"Code?" Babs stared. "But why should anybody want to write a whole book in code?"

"Because," Mabs chipped in, "they don't want other people to know what it is they've written, nunny! Still, it's fun. Keep it, Clara. We'll have a shot at deciphering it when we get back to school!"

Clara grinned. Tucking the book under her arm, she and the rest of them continued their trot. With the sun now brightly beaming in the east, they climbed the cliff path and cheerily strode up to the door of Shorehome Cottage. Babs knocked.

The door opened. Betty, her cheeks white, her eyes haggard, stared out at them almost for a minute as if she did not recognise them. And at the sight of her tragic, misery-laden face, the chums' bright spirits all dispersed. Babs took a concerned step forward.

"Betty!" she cried. "Betty, what on earth's the matter—"

Betty shook her head.

"The—money!" she gulped. "The money I took at your school yesterday! The money we were going to pay the rent with this morning!"

"Well?" Clara asked wonderingly.

"It—it's gone!" Betty said in a choked voice. "It—it's been stolen!"

Clara Speaks Her Mind!



WITH amazement, the chums heard that announcement; with still greater amazement heard the story of the theft. Mrs. Winwood, utterly crushed, was softly sobbing as they went in.

Betty blurted out what she knew.



A CHEER arose as Babs and Betty Winwood entered, the latter's hamper of sea-shell novelties held between them. There was little doubt that Babs & Co.'s scheme for helping their new friend was going to be a success.

Last night she and her mother had hidden the money in the tea-canister. This morning it was gone.

"And you've searched?" Babs asked. "Everywhere!" Betty hopelessly answered.

"But—but how did the burglar get in?"

Betty shook her head.

"That," she said, "is a mystery! Somebody must have had a key, because, you see, there isn't a trace anywhere of a window or a door being forced."

"And now—now," Mrs. Winwood sobbed, "we're bound to be thrown out! Mr. Dawkins was going to throw us out yesterday, but I begged him to wait till to-day. There's a knock," she added apprehensively. "Oh, goodness, I—I hope it's not him!"

It wasn't. It was Bessie, considerably blown, who had just arrived on her bicycle. But Bessie had news.

"I—I've just sus-seen that cad Dawkins!" she stuttered. "He's coming towards this house! And, do you know, though I said 'Good-morning!' the bad-tempered wretch didn't even answer!"

But nobody was interested in Bessie's trouble. Dumbly, angrily, they were all staring at each other. After all their efforts to help Betty—after all Betty's own hard work—

"You'll report it to the police, of course?" Babs asked.

"Well, yes. But that"—Betty miserably shook her head—"that will hardly bring it back, will it?" she said. "And—"

She gave a jump as a knock came at the door. With a significant glance at her mother's suddenly nervous face, she went to open it. The gruff voice of John Dawkins sounded.

"Well, where's the rent? Don't stand there, girl!" And, while Betty gave way, he stormed in. "Ho, you again!" he added, glaring at the chums. "Mrs. Winwood, where's my rent?"

"I—I'm sorry, but it—it's been stolen!" Mrs. Winwood faltered. The man scowled.

"Yeah?" he asked disbelievingly. "And that's the latest yarn, is it? Just fobbing me off, as usual—hey? You mean," he added violently, "you never had it in the first place? Well—" And then his eyes fell upon Clara's

salvaged book. Clara, watching him narrowly, saw him start. "Here, what's this?" he added abruptly.

And he strode towards the table. But, quick as thought, Clara had rushed forward. As the man's hand would have closed upon the book, she caught it up.

"That," she said defiantly, "is mine!"

"Where did you get it?"

"Found it!" Clara retorted. "And this time, Mr. Dawkins, you don't jolly well claim it!"

The man paused. He looked from one girl to another. His voice, when he spoke again, was almost mild-mannered in its tone.

"I assure you," he said, "I don't intend to claim it. Still, it looks interesting. A ship's log-book, isn't it?"

"I don't know," Clara retorted.

"Anyway, it's mine!"

"Oh, don't worry! I'm not going to steal it!" He laughed. "Mind if I have a look at it?" he asked.

Babs, catching Clara's eye, nodded. Anything, she felt, that might appease this bully and distract his attention from the purpose which had brought him here, was worth while.

Rather reluctantly Clara handed it over. Mr. Dawkins scanned it with keen interest.

"Code—eh?" he said. "I flatter myself I'm good at code. Like to sell it, young lady?"

"No!" was the instinctive reply that framed itself on Clara's lips. And then, looking at Betty again, she had a second thought. The book was of no use to her. It was a question, indeed, with all the excitement of helping Betty and preparing the Christmas stall, if she and her chums would ever have an opportunity to do more than get a glimpse at it, and a few shillings at this juncture would be a godsend to the Winwoods. "Well, how much?" she asked.

"Five bob!"

"Oh, stuff!"

"Seven-and-six, then?"

"Make it ten!" Clara decided.

"No; I'll met you half-way. Make it eight-and-six?"

Clara paused, glancing again at Babs, who nodded.

"Right!" she said.

The man grinned. He plunged his

hand into his pocket. Out of it he drew a handful of small silver, throwing several coins upon the table, among which was a sixpence.

"There!" he said, and glanced grimly at Mrs. Winwood. "Pity you can't pay your debts as promptly as that—Hey, what's the matter with you, girl?" he added, as an inarticulate gasp came from Bessie.

"Mum-my sixpence!" Bessie stammered, staring with round eyes at the money on the table. "Mum-my sixpence with the h-hole in it!"

"What?"

"Thuth—that!"

And Bessie went forward. She picked up the sixpence from the table. She held it up.

And while the chums stared and John Dawkins blinked, Clara's cheeks suddenly flamed with excitement. Bessie's sixpence with the hole in it! Bessie had paid that sixpence to Betty yesterday. Bessie's sixpence, which must have been among the money stolen from this cottage last night!

That sixpence was in John Dawkins' possession! John Dawkins, as landlord of this place, must have a key! Then John Dawkins was—

"Thief!" cried Clara.

Dawkins jumped.

"What—"

"Thief, I said!" Clara cried. "Yes, thief!" she hooted. "That sixpence was among the money stolen from this house last night! And it wasn't a burglar who stole it! It was somebody who had a key! You!"

"Oh, my hat!" cried Babs.

"Clara—"

"Well, what else?" Clara flung round, while the chums blinked and Betty incredulously stared. "What else?" she cried. "My hat, can't you see it now? Isn't Mr. Dawkins anxious to get Betty and her mother put out of this cottage? Mr. Dawkins knew they would be able to pay their rent to-day! Mr. Dawkins— Here, let me go!" she added, as the man, with a fierce snarl, gripped her by the shoulder.

"Yes, let her go, I guess!" Leila Carroll said hotly.

"Stand back!" snarled Dawkins, and as Leila stepped forward swept her aside with one thrust of his powerful arm. "Stand back, all of you! So I'm

a thief, am I?" he snarled. "I let myself into this cottage and stole this money? And you know all that because there happens to be among my money a sixpence with a hole in it? Pretty feeble evidence to accuse me upon, isn't it?" he added grimly.

"Well, how did you get hold of that sixpence?" Babs practically asked.

"How? How do I know? Can you tell where every penny that gets into your money comes from?" the man cried furiously. "Somebody gave it to me, obviously. But that doesn't matter. What does matter, is that you've insulted me. Not only insulted me, indeed, but tried to take away my character! I suppose you know, if I took you to the police, I could charge you?"

"Well, jolly well go and charge!" Clara said defiantly.

"I see!" His eyes glittered. "You need a lesson, obviously. Well, you shall have it. I am tired of you girls interfering in my affairs. Take your money, and I'll take this book; but, meantime, I warn you that I've stood as much of this as I am going to stand. Mrs. Winwood, I will look in later," he said furiously, and tucking the book under his arm, tempestuously strode out of the house.

"Oh crumbs! Wuw—what's he going to do now?" Bessie stammered nervously.

"I sus-say, I dud-didn't mean—"

"The man's a crook!" Clara furiously stormed. "I've thought so all along. I think it even more now." She picked up the coin from the table.

"Here, Bessie, your sixpence," she said. "You're sure it's yours?"

Bessie blinked at her talisman nervously.

"Well, it—it looks like it."

Babs looked at it. Very grimly, rather puzzledly, Babs was shaking her head. In accusing John Dawkins so outrightly Clara had been foolish—but then Clara always was a one to blurt the first thing that came into her mind. Suspecting Dawkins and accusing him openly were two different things. Bessie—

"You know," she added dubiously, "you might be barking up the wrong tree, Clara. After all, there may be scores of Victorian sixpences with holes in them."

"I tell you the man's a crook!" Clara said doggedly. "If it wasn't he who broke into the cottage last night, it was someone acting under his orders. And why," she added, "did he bust up Betty's boat?"

"Clara, you've no proof—"

Clara snorted. Proof or no proof, the stubborn Tomboy had made up her mind.

"Well, anyway, rats!" she said curtly. "Betty, take this eight shillings. That's an account for work for our stall. Now, what about the trip to Belwin Island? We've got to get back to school before breakfast, you know."

"Oh crumbs! Yes!" Bessie gasped. And so, without further ado, the Belwin Island trip was undertaken. An hour later, with a basketful of shells, they rowed back, John Dawkins for the moment banished from their minds.

Betty took them to Pegg, where they had no difficulty in getting the first bus which ran to Courtfield and on past the gate of Cliff House. But hardly had they arrived in the school, when fresh trouble came to them.

It came in the form of Miss Primrose who, meeting them in Big Hall, stopped with a thunderous expression on her face.

"Barbara—all of you," she said, "and especially you, Clara! I hear," she said sternly, "you have been insulting Mr. Dawkins again!"

Clara turned crimson.

"That rotter—"

"Clara, please!" Miss Primrose spoke sharply. "I understand," she said tartly, "that you dislike the man, but that is no reason for accusing him of criminal tendencies. Mr. Dawkins, very angry, has been here. He has told me what has happened and has requested me, under pain of making a complaint to the police, to prevent you from interfering in his business again."

"But, Miss Primrose—" Babs broke in.

"Barbara, be silent, please! I have heard the facts, and while I can understand your sympathies for the girl Betty Winwood, I cannot and will not allow you to cause friction between the school and Mr. Dawkins. You are all detained for this afternoon."

"Oh gosh!" cried Leila Carroll in dismay.

"And I forbid you—every one of you—to visit Shorehome Cottage ever again!" Miss Primrose went on. "If you do, I shall take more serious steps. Now go to your breakfast."

The chums, chastened, dismayed, went. But Clara's face was fierce. Not lightly was Clara going to relinquish her suspicion of Dawkins. Dawkins had his knife into the Winwoods—and, if it was possible, Clara was going to find out why. She said as much to Babs after the weary detention of the afternoon.

"But, Clara, you heard what Primmy said!" Babs said in alarm.

"Blow what Primmy said!" Clara retorted. "Are we going to let down Betty?"

"No, of course not! But what can you do?"

"I can do a lot of things—perhaps!" the Tomboy answered. "Dawkins is a crook. He's got something against the Winwoods, apart from his rent. He wants to chuck them out neck and crop. Well, it's up to us to find out, I reckon. If that rotter's playing some tricky game, we ought to nip it in the bud. And the only way I can see of nipping it in the bud," Clara furiously went on, "is to find out all we can about him from Betty. I'm going to see Betty, Primmy or no Primmy!"

"But, Clara, when?"

"Never mind!" Clara said darkly. And from that point she refused to be drawn. Babs, realising the mood the Tomboy was in, vividly impressed by that determination of Clara to go and see Betty again, was disturbed. She was even more disturbed when, waking up in the Fourth Form dormitory in the middle of the night, she glanced at Clara's bed and saw that it was empty.

So Clara had kept her promise. Clara had gone!

Very quietly Babs rose; very quietly she woke Mabs, Leila and Jemima. Bessie she did not wake, for Bessie, dear old chump that she was, would be likely to be more of a hindrance than a help in an expedition like this. In whispered sentences Babs explained what had happened.

"The chump's gone off to Shorehome," she said. "We can't let her take the risk on her own. Come on!"

There was no dissent. Whatever Clara did for Betty concerned them all now, they felt. Without question the four chums dressed.

It was raining when they went out. This time they followed the road through the wood and along the cliff, keeping sharp eyes open and an ear alert for sign of their missing chum.

Presently the roar and swish of the sea came to their ears as, desperately clinging to their hats, they strode along the edge of the wind-swept cliff. And

then, all at once, Babs stopped and pointed.

"Look!" she said in a thrilled whisper.

Gazing in the buffeting wind and rain, they saw a light.

Once, twice, three times it flickered. "That's Clara!" Babs announced with conviction. "The old idiot's grabbed a torch. But what on earth is she doing so far along the beach?" she added. "That light's coming from near the caves."

"Well, come on!" Leila grunted. "Asking questions won't give us the answer, I guess! Best leg forward, sisters! Where's the path?"

They found the path, cautiously descending in the darkness. As they did so the light winked out again.

Funny, Babs frowned. For, if she were not mistaken, those lights came from somewhere near the great caves farther along the beach—caves which had been used by pirates and smugglers in the days of old. More than half a mile from the path that led to Shorehome Cottage they were. What was Clara doing there?

Wondering, they tramped along the soft sand. They passed the path which led to Shorehome Cottage; now they were approaching the caves, with the rain driving in from the sea in drenching sheets. Black it was here; even the whiteness of the chalk cliff gave no reflection.

Then from Jemima, forging ahead, there came an exclamation and the sound of a soft impact.

"What ho! Steady the buffs!" Jemima murmured.

"Jimmy, you ass!" came Clara's voice out of the darkness.

"Well, what in the name of the Crusaders are you crawling along the beach for?"

"Oh rats!" Clara said crossly. "Now you've spoiled everything. He's gone."

"He?" Babs loomed up. She stared in the darkness at Clara's face. "So it was you!" she said. "We thought so! What the dickens are you doing, here?"

"I was following Dawkins," Clara said. "He was with another fellow."

"And flashing a torch to do it?" Leila scoffed. "I reckon that's a potty way of playing detective!"

"Eh? Who was flashing a torch?" Clara asked.

"You were. We saw you!"

"Did you?" Clara snapped. "Then," she said, "you should have your eyes examined. Because, you see, I haven't got a torch! If you saw anybody flashing a torch it wasn't me—and it wasn't Dawkins either, because I followed him and his pal for over a mile."

"Then—then who was it?" Babs asked.

"How should I know?" Clara snapped. "Anyway, I'm wet! And," she added, "I haven't seen Betty yet. Seeing that you chumps have ruined everything, we might as well go along to the cottage. B-r-r-r!"

And Clara, decidedly peeved and wet, turned. Babs frowned. If Clara had not flashed that torch, who had?

Was it—could it be?—that somebody had been signalling from this spot?

The Phantom Boat Again!



"OH, I declare, you're drenched!" Betty Winwood cried, in consternation.

"And fancy being out at this time of night! Come in quickly and let's make up the fire. I'll get you something hot to drink. But please," she added, "don't make a

noise. Mother's not very well, and she's sleeping soundly for the first time in days."

And good-natured Betty, who had ushered her visitors in, fled away.

The chums gazed round appreciatively. They were still breathless from the buffeting of the wind, and the interior of the cottage, dimly lighted by an oil-lamp, with its dark blinds drawn, was a refuge indeed. Gratefully they doffed their wet coats. While Clara poked the fire, they all gathered round it until pretty Betty, carrying steaming mugs of cocoa, came in from the kitchen.

"And now," she added, "perhaps you'll tell me what you are doing here at this time of night—"

"And perhaps," Clara countered, "you wouldn't mind answering us a few questions, Betty? That, in the first place, was what I came for, but these idiotic chumps would come following me! Then, just as I was nearing this cottage, I saw Dawkins and his pal coming away from it."

"Away from here?" Betty cried. "But he hasn't been!"

"Well, I saw him, I tell you!" Clara retorted. "He was in the garden. He was talking to some other chap, but what they said I couldn't hear. Then they strode off down the path, and I followed. I had an idea, you see, that the rotters might be up to fresh mischief."

"Funny!" Betty said, pursing her lips. "Yes, jolly funny! You know, he said he was coming back this morning, but he hasn't been near the house all day. What was he doing, I wonder?"

"Something, you can bet your boots, that was no good!" Clara sniffed.

"Betty, what do you know about him?" "But Betty, as it happened, did not know a great deal. All she could tell them was that Mr. Dawkins had bought the cottage from their former landlord a month ago, and from the moment he had found himself in possession had been pressing them for rent.

"Hum! That doesn't help much," Clara frowned. "My hat! Listen to that!" she added, as the wind, rising in violence, shrilled against the windows. "I say, what's that? Thunder?"

They listened. Outside came the crash of sea upon the shore, the scraping of shifting shingle mingling with the hiss of rain and the whine of the wind. Above it came a deeper, more sinister roll.

"Thunder it is!" Jemima said. "Real spot of good old British weather—what? Hey! That was lightning!" she added, as a gleam momentarily flickered on the blind. "And—Whoosh!" she gasped.

This as a sudden roaring rush of wind smote the old cottage, shaking it, whistling down the chimney and extinguishing the light.

"Dirty work on the dark cross-roads—what?" Jemima burred. "All is dark and stormy. No, Betty old Spartan, don't strike a light—yet. Rather fun sitting here in the dark, listening to the mumbly voice of the jolly old storm! Babs, haul up the blinds, wilt, fair sweetheart?"

Babs, with a laugh, jumped towards the blind. With a swish it went up as she pulled upon the cord. There was something thrilling and a pleasantly comfortable sense of adventure in nestling in the old cottage, watching the storm without.

"Phew, what a night! Hallo!" she added in a startled voice, and blinked as the lightning flashed out again. "I say, come here, all of you!" she added. "Tell me, I'm not dreaming?"

"Why—what?" Clara asked.

"Wait till the lightning flashes again. Then look towards Belwin Island."

They came to the window, streaming now with rain.

"See!" Babs cried suddenly, and quiveringly pointed.

From behind Belwin Island, lightning had flamed into the storm-drenched sky. For a fraction of a second it shone, revealing everything with a brilliant light.

Clearly they could see the sharp pinnacles of rocks, the boiling foam. And out at sea, between the island and the shore, a boat was riding the storm. One glimpse they had of it—only one; but that glimpse was enough to thrill them all. For it was—

"The—phantom boat!" muttered Betty. "Out there!"

"And going," Clara said, "towards the island!"



"MUM-MY sixpence!" Bessie stuttered, staring at the money on the table. "Mum-my sixpence with the h-hole in it!" Clara Trevlyn's eyes blazed. For to her this was proof that the bullying man was a thief.

They stared and stared. But no sign of the vessel did they see again. The storm, a freak one of its kind, seemed to be veering away to the west now, and when the lightning flashed again it was far out at sea and weak in comparison with the first flash. But they had all seen the motor-boat. Betty looked worried.

"I—I don't like it," she said nervously. "Something bad always seems to happen when that boat appears."

"Oh stuff!" Clara cried. "Don't be superstitious, Betty! Well, what about getting-off, kids? Seems to me the storm's lifting, and we can't do much more here, anyway. Betty, keep your pecker up, old thing. If anything happens, let us know. By the way, heard from your father yet?"

Betty shook her head. "No. And—and that's another thing that's worrying mother. Because, you see, he promised to write as soon as he was settled down."

"Well, perhaps you'll hear tomorrow," Babs said. "Clothes dry, Jimmy?" she added.

The clothes were dry. The chums,

after thanking Betty again, went out. It was still raining, but the wind had died, and though it was decidedly slushy underfoot, they reached Cliff House in safety. Fortunately, their absence had not been noticed, and for once the chums congratulated themselves on being in luck. But their minds were all full of poor Betty and Betty's mother.

And the phantom boat. What was the secret of that strange, silent craft which never showed a light, which seemed to come and go only in darkness and fog?

All the next day they were thinking of that—and of Betty. But it was not till towards evening that the next development occurred.

That was after tea, when the chums, in company with several other girls, were clustered in Big Hall, hopefully awaiting the arrival of the postman, with the last mail of the day.

For the chums, not very strangely, were dead broke. The buying of Betty's novelties had cleared them out almost to the last farthing.

"Postman's late," Babs frowned, as, standing at the door, she peered into the darkened quad, above which a white mist was forming. "Hope to goodness he brings something for me."

"And for me, you know!" Bessie chimed in. "As a matter of fact, I am expecting a remittance from a titled relative."

There was a chuckle at that, for Bessie's titled relations were well known to exist only in her own fertile imagination.

"Lord Dishwater de Bunter—yes, we know!" Clara said wearily. "I expect that—Hallo! Somebody coming!" she added hopefully.

There was a footstep in the mist. The chums craned forward eagerly.

Then, out of the mist, a figure emerged—and a cry of surprise went up from all of them as they recognised

(Continued on page 14)

OUT OF SCHOOL HOURS



Week by week Patricia writes to you in that cheery, charming, and helpful way so typical of her. Whether you are "down in the dumps" or feeling "on top of the world"—Patricia is the ideal friend. For she is young enough to understand all schoolgirl joys, yet wise enough to be helpful over schoolgirl problems.

I won't tell you my wish—not until it comes true, but I certainly stirred quite correctly, three times, and wished solemnly. So it should!

And I hope all your Christmas wishes come true, too!

leaves, and arrange them in tallish vases around the house.

They will keep their lovely shade until spring, you'll find.

"FOUR pounds of raisins. Four pounds of currants. Two pounds of sultanas. A pound and a half of candied peel."

So murmured your Patricia to herself as she stood waiting (yes, in the rain!) at the bus-stop.

And I expect you have guessed where she was off to. Yes, to the shops, to buy the goodies for the Christmas puddings!

Don't you just love giving a big order at a shop? I know I do.

It makes you feel so important to give the assistant—perhaps even the manager himself—a long, long list, and then finish up by asking him to "send them, please."

I certainly found pleasure in my Christmas Pudding order. The stacks of crackers, the coloured tins of fancy biscuits, the glace fruits, and all the other specially-got-in goodies for the festive season, put me in such a happy mood of anticipation that I didn't even notice the rain.

Since then, mother has been making the puddings, with much assistance.

Olive, our maid—our r'Olive, as she is generally called—helped, of course. Then your Patricia, as the daughter of the house, certainly had to take a hand. Small brother Heath (or Heatherington in full) simply couldn't—and wouldn't—be left out, either.

We stoned raisins, chopped suet, grated breadcrumb, and sliced candied peel till our arms ached. Heath was allowed to do some of the weighing—at which he was extraordinarily good, I thought—even though I do like doing this part myself.

● Wish As You Stir

Then came the stirring!

Mother stirred first, and I could almost see that she was wishing for parquet flooring in the hall.

Heath went next.

He shut his eyes tight, screwed up his face, and clenched one fist. Then there was dead silence for perhaps three seconds while the wishing went on.

"I've done my wish, an' it's a secret one," he said as he jumped down from the chair on which he'd been standing. Then he gave a jerk. "Oh, no, I forgot something!" and up he leapt again.

Mother and I looked at each other and smiled.

For Heath had clutched the spoon frantically.

"An' with proper headlights that go on and off, too—please!" he gabbled out loud.

● In a New Style

Here is a new-style pinafore frock in the picture—one that is just right for chillier days, with its high neckline and close-fitting armholes.

It could so very easily be made from a summer coat that may have grown too tight for you (or that certainly promises to be too tight before next summer.)

The collar would have to be taken off and the sleeves cut out—and all these raw edges bound either with tape or bias binding.

A few extra buttons, and more buttonholes, would make it fasten right down the front.

Worn over a silky blouse it would look charming indeed.



● Preserving Beech Leaves

I hope you're all getting out quite a lot at week-ends this weather, just as you did in the summer.

It is not too late, you know, to find a few beech leaves left on the trees.

An awful of these, as a result of your walk, will simply delight your mother.

Each year most people mean to preserve beech leaves, but quite a number are not sure just how to go about it, and it often doesn't get done.

So I'll tell you here, then you can pass it on to mother, or try it yourself, if you are lucky enough to find some nice sprays.

You must pop along to the chemist and order some trade glycerine—which costs very little.

Pour this into a large jar, and add as much water again, so that the jar contains half glycerine and half water.

Then stand the ends of the stems in this mixture, and leave them there for about three weeks.

After that time, take the leaves out, wipe the ends, smooth out the crumpled

● Something to Sew

Now that party-time is here with the longer evenings, I thought that you young things who enjoy a spot of straight sewing—that is, sewing on new material—might enjoy making yourself a really useful slip.

This slip—or petti, if you prefer it—in the picture, would be just right for wearing under a dainty party frock.

You will require two and a quarter yards of material. I suggest artificial silk in white, peach, or green, with a tiny pattern on it. Artificial silk can be bought for as little as sixpence a yard.

The next step is the cutting-out.

You fold your material in half, so that the fold comes to the top—and then do a little measuring.

Measure nine inches from the side selvedge, and there place a pin. Now measure nine inches from the opposite selvedge and place another.

Start cutting at these marks, and cut straight down for ten inches.

Now you cut diagonally—that is, towards the bottom corners of the material. Round it off very slightly at the bottom—and the cutting-out is complete.

The sewing is very simple. Seam up both sides, and hem along the top and bottom. Make four little tucks back and front at the waistline.



A slip you can make to wear under party dresses.

Trim with lace, and make narrow shoulder-straps from the material you have left over.

Bye-bye now until next Saturday, my pets,

Your friend,

PATRICIA.

IT'S A SHAME TO BE SHY

An article of real help and understanding for those girls who are terribly shy—and would like to conquer it.



FIRST we'll try to see what causes shyness, then try to cure it, shall we?

Some girls, we know, are just charmingly shy, but others so painfully that they blush even when spoken to. It is this type of shyness that is such a shame, for it can spoil so many things for the shy one.

We all know about an "inferiority complex" vaguely. This is the cause of quite a lot of shyness.

So, shy ones, just see what your "inferiority complex" is. Once you have found it, you can then try to conquer it—and the victory is half won.

NOT AS RICH?

Some girls feel they are not so good as others. This is a common cause of that "inferior" feeling. Perhaps your family hasn't so much money as others have.

Instead of letting this knowledge worry you, think instead of the things your family has to be proud of. How hard your father works; how kind your mother is to all around her. That should make you proud of your background, and others glad to be your friend.

NOT AS CLEVER?

Another cause is perhaps because you think you're not as clever as other girls. Oh, no—you might not admit this; but maybe it is buried deep inside you!

If it is, fish it out, and examine it. Are you sure you're not? School lessons aren't everything, you know. Even if

you're not very good at these, that's no reason why you shouldn't excel at something else—perhaps just one thing.

So consider which talent you have, whether it is sewing, looking after the youngsters of the family, playing the piano, singing, dancing—or just being kind and sincere. Cultivate this gift and you'll excel at it, making others admire you for it.

NOT AS PRETTY?

Looks, though you might not admit this either, give some girls that "inferior" feeling. Just because they're not as pretty as others, they retire into their little shells. No wonder then that they are shy, and even colour-up when spoken to.

If it is your complexion which is at fault, well then, you must remedy it. That is up to you. But there are other faults in good looks that you simply can't put right.

Instead, you've got to make the best of your good points, for even the plainest girl has lots. Perhaps it is your hair, perhaps your hands. It may be your feet, and it may be your figure.

Keep your hair well-brushed and well-combed always; your hands soft and white, your feet trim and neat, with shining shoes and well-set-up heels; give your figure every chance. Walk with your head up, your shoulders down, and your spine and neck long. This will make you feel good, and when you get this way—well, it shows in your whole manner, and that shyness is forgotten.

NOT AS SMART?

It's very human always to wish to be as well-dressed as another girl, but if you let clothes worry you too much, that can help to make you very shy, you know.

So, quite obviously, since we are out to conquer this shyness, clothes-consciousness must be forgotten.

When you see a girl who is wearing, say, a lovely velvet party frock: and you're wearing your old blue crepe, be frank and admire her pretty dress. Tell her how ripping it is, and how nice she looks.

This will help the speaker enormously in getting over that feeling of "inferiority," for the very fact of your admiration makes you "one up" on her. Do you see what I mean?

Naturally, I'm not suggesting that you think this all out to yourself before you pay a compliment, otherwise that would be horrid.

But so many girls, you see, when they are aware that a girl is looking better than they are, they simply will not admit it. They keep the realisation close inside them, and often, in consequence, become cross and even jealous.

As you can see, by making yourself acknowledge and admire the prettiness of that frock, you have unearthed that little envy—and it is then forgotten, so that you can set to work to enjoy yourself in your "old blue," conscious that it matches your eyes, and that velvet doesn't suit you much, anyway!

THE THINGS THAT MATTER

There now, having discovered some common causes and suggested some cures of shyness, let's see how that once-shy girl can make herself more charming still, until that shyness is quite, quite forgotten.

It would be wise for the once-shy girl not to go immediately to the other extreme, and to become forward and pushing. Instead, listen to what other girls are saying. Before you give an opinion, make sure it is a tactful one—one that will not wound any one else's feelings.

The once-shy girl will most likely always have the gift of modesty. She will never boast, or brag, and she will never want to "steal the limelight." This virtue alone will make her popular.

She will be quiet and reserved, and once that shyness has been conquered she will find other girls who would confide in her.

This is the highest compliment friendship can pay—for a sympathetic and understanding listener is better-loved than many who may be smarter, cleverer, or more beautiful.

GOOD LUCK FOR ALL

Lucky stones for each month of the year—and their meanings.

IT'S always fun to be able to know your own lucky birthstone—even when you can't afford to wear it!—and to be able to tell other people what theirs is.

So here are the lucky stones—and their meanings—for all the months of the year.

JANUARY—Garnet. This means constancy in friendship.

FEBRUARY—Amethyst. This jewel is said to be particularly lucky on Thursdays.

MARCH—Aquamarine. "Faithfulness" is what this stone stands for, and it is considered particularly lucky for people setting out for a long journey over the sea.

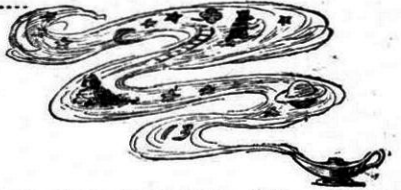
APRIL—Diamond. "Courage" and "Virtue" are represented by this stone.

MAY—Emerald. This lovely stone was once believed to be a charm for weak sight.

JUNE—Pearl. The symbol of purity is the well-beloved pearl.

JULY—Ruby. This stone is reputed to be able to repair broken friendships, to improve the memory, and to bring happiness.

AUGUST—Chrysolite. The ideal stone for gloomy people, for it is supposed to drive away all gloom and care.



SEPTEMBER—Sapphire. This symbolises "devotion" and was believed, like the emerald, to strengthen the sight.

OCTOBER—Opal. This is the "moon" stone. In Turkey it was thought that it came straight from heaven in a flash of lightning. It is particularly lucky when set in silver, which is the "moon" metal.

NOVEMBER—Topaz. The "money" stone, this is, and is said to bring luck in all business enterprises.

DECEMBER—Turquoise. This stone is said to change its colour on some wearers—particularly when there is a change in her affections.

(Continued from page 11)

Betty Winwood. She was almost sobbing as she reached them.

"Betty!" Babs cried. "What's the matter?"

"Oh dear! Oh, Babs!" Betty choked. "I—I don't know why I've come to you," she added, "but if you can, please—please do help me! Mr. Dawkins—"

"That had!" Clara cried.

"Dawkins has sent two bailiffs to the house—"

"Bailiffs?" cried Leila Carroll.

"Brokers' men," Babs explained, and shook her head. "Men who take possession until the rent is paid. And if," she added, "the rent isn't paid, they take the furniture!"

"Oh gosh!" Leila gulped.

"And—and they're there now," Betty said tremblingly. "They've given us till eight o'clock to-night to find the rent we owe."

"Oh my hat!"

"If we don't hand it over, they—all our furniture away!" Betty gasped.

"It—it's so upset mother that I've had to put her to bed. And—and, Babs—"

Babs bit her lip. Clara fiercely clenched her hands.

"Betty dear, don't upset yourself," Babs urged gently.

"I—I'm sorry; I can't help it! Oh, Babs, I—I went to Sarmouth to-day to find out why father hadn't written. I went to the firm where he had got his job—"

She choked. "Babs, he's never been near the place, they say. They haven't seen him."

In consternation the chums stared.

Betty's father missing; Betty's mother ill; Betty's little home threatened! Could any girl ever have been in a more pitiable, more dreadful plight?

"Oh, Babs!" Betty cried. "What can I do?"

For the moment Babs had no answer to that question. And before she could answer it, there came an interruption.

It came in the presence of Miss Bullivant, the bad-tempered mistress of the Lower Third, who loomed up angrily out of the crowd of girls surrounding Betty.

"Really!" she said. "Barbara, what is this? And who," she added, darting a look at Betty, "is this girl?"

"Please, Miss Bullivant, she's Betty Winwood."

"Ah!" Miss Bullivant nodded grimly. "I understand. I have heard from Miss Primrose some of the details of the recklessness which your acquaintanceship with this girl has landed you into. Betty, I am sorry. Please go."

"Oh, no, Miss Bullivant!" cried Babs. "Barbara, do not argue!"

"But, please, you don't understand—"

"I understand," Miss Bullivant rumbled, "that this girl's presence in this school is not desirable! How dare you argue with me? Betty, please go!" she added. "As these girls are forbidden to come to you, in future you must consider yourself forbidden to come to this school!"

Betty gazed at her. She half raised her arms as if in pleading; then, despairingly, dropped them. She turned.

"Betty!" cried Babs. "Oh, Betty, I'm terribly sorry—"

"It's all right," Betty muttered. "I—I see now I shouldn't have come here. Please, Babs, don't get into any more trouble for my sake—please! I—I'll manage—somehow!"

And she went; while Miss Bullivant flushed a little; while Clara, unable to hide her feelings, stared at her with

angry and glowering contempt. Babs crimsoned indignantly.

"She only came to see us, Miss Bullivant, because she wanted our help," she said. "And we had promised to give it. After all, when the bailiffs are in her house—"

"Barbara, I am sorry," Miss Bullivant said; but she did not look too certain of herself then. "If the girl is in trouble I do most sincerely hope she will get out of it, but it's no business of yours. No, please, not another word!" she added angrily as Clara opened her mouth. "Ah! Here is the postman," she added, as if relieved that an interruption occurred.

The postman it was. The chums looked glumly at each other as he handed the letters to Sarah Harrigan, and the prefect, sorting them through, flicked her eyes over the girls present.

"Barbara Redfern—two letters for you," she announced. "Clara Trevlyn—one for you. One each for Priscilla and Ermytrude Terraine. Leila Carroll—two for you; two for Mabel Lynn; one for Bessie Bunter."

"Ooo! Me?" cried Bessie.

"And one," Sarah announced, "for Jemima."

"Cheers!" that worthy said.

They took the letters. And because letters, however often received, were always such an event, they all ripped them open there and then. Clara Trevlyn was the first to cheer.

"Whoops! Ten boblets!" she cried in delight. "Good old pater!"

"And I sus-say, you know, my Aunt Annie's sent me five shillings!" Bessie beamed. "Oh crumbs! Is the tuckshop closed yet?"

"And I," whooped Babs, "have received ten shillings from mother."

"And I, fair beloveds, have received a whole jolly pound!" Jemima beamed.

"I've got ten shillings, too!" Mabs laughed. "From my Cousin Austin. What about you, Leila?"

"Ten boblets also, I guess!"

The chums looked at each other happily. What luck! Coincidental in a way, that, just when they were broke, they should all receive remittances by the very same post. A moment before they had not sixpence between them.

Now—

"Whoopee!" cried Clara Trevlyn. "I say, how much have we got between us?"—and rapidly she made a calculation. "Well?" she cried, and looked at her chums as if she had suddenly discovered something. "Babs, count it up!"

"Three pounds, five shillings," Babs said; and then, struck with the oddity of the sum, started. "Golly!"

Again they looked at each other, and in a moment the significance of the amount struck them all. Three pounds five shillings was exactly the sum required to settle Betty Winwood's rent.

If they had spoken they could not have read better the thoughts in each other's mind. Even Bessie, to whom the receipt of a postal order was more of an event than any of them, nodded.

"Let's go to the study," said Babs.

They hurried off. In Study No. 4 they faced each other. Just as if they had all agreed that the money was to be given to help Betty Winwood, Babs collected it. And each of them willingly enough parted up.

"Well, if I were superstitious, I should say that Fate itself had sent this!" Babs said. "What a shame that Betty didn't arrive after the post and not before! But the question is now, kidlets—how are we going to get it to her so that she can clear out those awful bailiffs?"

"That," Clara decided, "is easy. I'll take it."

"But what about call-over—and bed? You'd never be back."

"Well, who cares?" Clara said recklessly. "Anyway, I'm going. I'll take the chance. If you can cover me up—well and good. If not—then rats!"

And Clara, eager to rush to Betty's relief despite any possible consequences, took the money and stored it in her pocket.

But Babs & Co., naturally, were not going to let their tomboy chum take all the risk. While Clara was absent, Clara's tracks must be covered up.

Immediately they went into conference with that object in view. Grace Camperhill would be taking the roll. Grace Camperhill, Babs argued, would never know if somebody called Clara's name. Miss Wright, the short-sighted and absent-minded duty mistress for the day, would be turning out the lights, and if they rigged a dummy in Clara's bed—just supposing, of course, the Tomboy had not returned by that time—it would be easy enough to deceive her.

The Secret of Monk's Tomb!

MEANWHILE Clara Trevlyn, heart aglow, was speeding towards Shore-home Cottage.

It was dark now. A chill, damp mist hung low, but overhead a velvet sky was peppered with bright stars.

Clara was glowing, warm, joyful. At last she could save Betty.

She took the road to the cottage, and presently found herself walking along the cliffs. Quite casually she glanced out to sea, and then started. Hallo! What was that down there?

A light flickered out—once, twice, three times. It seemed to come from near the gigantic cave half a mile farther along the beach that Shore-home Cottage.

Clara stopped, tensing suddenly. Her mind, in a flash, had reverted to last night. Last night Babs & Co. had seen those lights—at the same time she had seen John Dawkins and his companion walking towards the caves. What did it signify?

Clara's lips came together. Dawkins and those lights were connected somehow, she was sure of that. Here, at last, was the chance she had been waiting; the chance which Babs & Co. had ruined yesterday. She was going to look into this.

And look into it she did—Clara was like that. Once an idea was born in her brain, that idea, before it was dismissed, had to have full rein. Cautiously she descended the cliff. Keeping to the soft sand that separated the shingle from the sea, she crept towards the cave.

And all at once the blood rushed through her veins.

For ahead of her she heard a voice crying out in the darkness of the night. She heard the faint thrum-thrum of a motor-boat's engine. Then she heard a metallic rattle as of a chain slipping overboard. Again the voice.

And this time the voice was unmistakably Dawkins'. It said:

"Steady there! Bring her over a bit—this way."

"Aha!" breathed Clara.

She crept forward. Now, she judged, she was not very far from the first of the caves; that gaping hole in the cliff face known as Monk's Tomb, in the middle of which ran a deep-water channel which penetrated far into the interior. And faster and faster pounded



her heart as she saw ahead of her the vague outline of a boat.

"The—phantom boat!" Clara breathed.

She could have cried aloud in her excitement then. The phantom boat—yes. Instinct told her that at last she had found that mystery vessel—and Dawkins, then, had something to do with that.

Inch by inch she crept on. The boat loomed larger. Tingling now in every nerve she stopped near the entrance to the cave and gazed at it—a black shape moored in the middle of the deep-water channel which penetrated into the cave.

Nearer she approached, until now she was on the very edge of the channel and, staring up into the cave, saw lights, heard voices and the crunching of feet.

What was going on here?

Clara did not know, but she was filled with a sense of discovery. What to do now? For what purpose was this strange boat, which came and went in darkness and fog, moored here?

With characteristic suddenness, Clara came to a decision. Well, why not find out its secret for herself?

The boat, as far as she could judge, was deserted. In a flash, she had kicked off her shoes; her coat followed them. For one second she hesitated before, with a great gasp, she slipped into the chilly water which swirled at her feet. The next moment she was swimming silently towards the boat.

Something—a rope—brushed against her hand. In the darkness she seized it, pulled upon it. The rope, obviously, was moored to the back of the boat. In a second she had found her grip, silently was swarming up. Cautiously she heaved herself over the gunwale.

No sound. Nobody about—good!

From amidships came a soft glow as of a concealed light. Holding her breath, Clara tiptoed towards it.

She had taken three steps when she halted. For, distinctly from below, sounded a voice.

"Help! Help!" it said, but with a weak and stifled accent. "Help! I'm a prisoner—prisoner—" The voice went on, and died into a muttering sort of mumble which seemed to suggest its owner was sliding into unconsciousness. "John Dawkins—"

Clara tingled with excitement. Somebody was down there—somebody who had been made a prisoner!

She crept along the deck. Towards the faint glow of light she made her way, and then suddenly spun round. Too late she started back as she saw the dim, vague figure which loomed above her, too late put up an arm to defend herself against the blow she saw coming. There came a swish in the darkness. Clara had a sensation as of her head bursting. A blur of light flashed up before her eyes, and she collapsed.

"ELEVEN O'CLOCK," Babs announced anxiously. "Oh, my hat! Where has she got to?"

Four girls, in the starlit darkness of the Fourth Form dormitory, anxiously stared at each other.

The four were Barbara, Mabs, Jemima Carstairs, and Leila Carroll; Bessie Bunter, as usual, was fast asleep.

Every minute they had been expecting the return of Clara Trevlyn, but of Clara, hours overdue now, there was no sign. Call-over had come and gone, and thanks to Babs, who had called Clara's name, her absence had not been spotted. A dummy in Clara's bed when Miss Wright put out the lights, had similarly prevented the Tomboy's detection. But where was she?

"You know, Spartans," Jemima spoke thoughtfully, "I've got a hunch. Something's happened to our beloved! Supposing one of us—your humble servant, for instance—trots along to the cottage and interviews merry old Betty?"

"Suppose, you mean," Mabs echoed, "we all go?"

"And to that," Leila replied, "I say hear, hear!"

It was a good idea. Fear for their absent chum's safety far outweighed now any thought of possible consequences to themselves.

"Right-ho!" Babs assented. "Leave Bessie, though. And no noise!" she warned as she levered herself out of bed.

Small necessity for that advice; the deep snore which came from Bessie's bed drowned all minor sounds, and in a few moments they were all dressed and ready, and trooped carefully down the

then we can go and get the furniture back."

"And—and you're going to the caves?" Betty gasped.

"Yes."

"Then," Betty decided, "I'm coming with you."

And come she did. With great dread in their hearts, the chums trod the path that led to the darkened beach. Above Belwin Island a weak moon was shining now, throwing a yellow-silver light upon the scene. Nearer and nearer they approached the caves.

No one spoke. Anxiety was too deep in all their hearts for speech.

Nearer—nearer. Now they heard the soft gurgle of water which ran from the mouth of the cave ahead of them. In the pale moonlight they glimpsed the great, cavernous blackness which was the yawning mouth of Monk's Tomb. But they did not glimpse, as Clara had an hour before, the hull of the motor-boat.



"LOOK!" breathed Babs. And dread filled their hearts as they saw. For on the bank was a coat and a pair of shoes. Clara Trevlyn's!

"Oh, Babs!" gasped Mabs. "What has happened to her?"

staircase into Big Hall. Without difficulty they raised the lobby window and climbed out, and breathlessly set their faces towards the sea. Twenty minutes later they arrived at Shorehome Cottage, and Babs knocked. Betty, her eyes red with weeping, stared out at them from a top room window.

"Oh, Babs, you—you've come too late!" she sobbed. "The men have taken the furniture away!"

"But Clara—" Babs cried. "Hasn't she been here?"

"No!"

The chums gazed at her in dumb consternation. Then if Clara hadn't been here, what had happened to her?

"My hat! I bet I've got it!" Babs cried, suddenly excited. "Last night—Clara was tramping along the beach; she saw something or heard something—probably Dawkins again. Remember what she said—Dawkins was heading towards the caves? She had it in her mind that Dawkins and the caves were connected. Betty," she added soothingly, "don't cry, old thing! Once we find Clara we'll have found your rent, and

Quickly they trod. Now they had reached the bank of the channel. And suddenly Babs stopped stock-still. With a quivering finger she pointed.

"Look!"

And dread filled their hearts as they saw. For on the bank was a coat and a pair of shoes.

Clara Trevlyn's!

Escape in the Mystery Craft!



"CLARA!" gasped Mabs after the first shocked, stricken pause.

Mabs' voice broke. She dare not voice the thought which was in her mind.

"She—she's had an accident!" Leila said hoarsely.

But Jemima, her own face pale in the moonlight, shook her sleek head.

"Not so," she said. "Not so! Clara went for a swim. Surprising—eh? But Clara swam for some reason—and not," Jemima keenly summed up, "to get to the other side of the channel."

She could have reached that by taking the path over the cliff—"

"You mean she swam for something that was in the channel?" Betty asked, and then stopped. "Oh, my goodness! Look!" she whispered.

For instinctively walking towards the channel they strode then into the very opening of the cave—and what they saw made them all pause.

Deep in the interior of the cave lights were flashing. They saw in the glow of those lights the moving figures of men, and at rest in the middle of the channel the black bulk of a big-sized motor-boat; they heard the sound of voices.

It was plain what they were doing. With their eyes growing accustomed to the light, they saw things more plainly now. They saw that, apart from the men carrying lanterns, others were staggering under bales and casks which were being loaded from the boat. Jemima pursed her lips into a low whisper.

"Well, well, well!" she breathed. "Remember the watches?"

"Yes."

"And the book in code?"

"Well?"

"Well!" Jemima looked keen. "What price smugglers?" she asked. "Wouldn't that explain, fair comrades, where those watches came from? Why the old phantom ship only sails in the dark and in fog? Spartan Clara was right, after all. Dawkins is mixed up with this gang, and—"

She broke off. From the stern of the boat had suddenly flashed a light.

"Hallo! Somebody signalling!" Babs said. "Look! Morse code!"

She read out the flashes as they came.

"I am Clara Trevlyn of Cliff House School. Am prisoner with Mr. Winwood on this boat. Fetch help."

"Daddy!" almost shrieked Betty. "Daddy! Then—then that's where he's been all the time!"

In startled amazement the chums looked at each other.

There could be no doubt now what had happened; no doubt of the activities of John Dawkins and these men. Dawkins was a smuggler; Dawkins had both Clara and Betty's father in his power. No wonder, Babs thought even in that moment, that Dawkins wanted to be rid of the Winwood family! No wonder he had made it impossible for them to pay their rent in order that he could throw them out. With the cottage so positioned that they could see every little thing that happened in the bay, the Winwoods must have given John Dawkins many, many uneasy moments.

"Well," Mabs said, with a little shiver, "what do we do—go for help?"

"No. Snaffle the boat," Jemima said coolly.

"But, Jimmy—"

"Snaffle the boat," Jemima repeated. "Up guards and at 'em! Once we get aboard I can handle it. You seem to forget my well-known skill as a motor-boatist. Mabs, you wait here—just in case of accidents. If we do happen to get snaffled, run and tell the coastguards what's happened. Lead on, Babs!"

Babs gulped; but she, like the others, was determined then. The plan was a desperate one, but its very boldness might ensure its success. It was obvious that the smugglers were off guard. It seemed, as they warily crept up the bank, that there was nobody aboard the boat.

"Careful!" Babs warned. "Nearer and nearer. Then they heard Dawkins' voice.

"All right, that's finished," he said.

"Come into the tunnel, men."

Jemima's eyes gleamed.

"Now's our chance!" she breathed.

"Quickly! At the motor-boat! Forward, girls!"

She herself took the lead then. Forward she crept. Nobody was about now; all the men, having finished work, had returned into the tunnel.

Hereabouts the channel was narrow—so narrow, indeed, that the side of the motor-boat touched the bank.

Jemima crept forward. With one eye on the tunnel, she cast off the mooring rope. The boat drifted backwards in the grip of the current.

"Now!" Jemima cried.

And she leapt upon the deck.

No sooner had her feet touched the deck than the chums and Betty were after her. While Babs ran to the cabin door, fumbling with the bolts, Jemima sprang to the wheel. Swiftly she got the engine roaring.

"Hi, hi!" came a yell from the tunnel. "What's happening to the boat?"

But the chums were working fast then. Jemima, cool, keen, stood at the wheel. Out of the tunnel rushed Dawkins just as the boat chugged onwards. With one terrific leap he attempted to board it, missed, and went splashing into the water. There came a chorus of yells, a sudden crack as somebody fired a revolver.

"We're away!" Babs gasped.

Away they were, with the craft gathering speed now. Along the channel they chugged, while shouts filled the channel.

In open sea, Jemima smartly slewed her round, heading her course for the Pegg station. Joyfully Leila and Babs smashed open the cabin door. In a few moments, while the boat still chugged along, they had wrenched it open. Clara, looking dazed, stood before them.

"Babs!" she cried.

And—

"Daddy!" sobbed Betty, and threw herself into her father's arms.

AND NEXT day—what a sensation! What a break, as Leila said, for the local papers, who put the whole story across their front pages.

And what a shock for everybody who knew him to hear that John Dawkins was chief of the smugglers the coastguards had been after for weeks past! And what a haul when, thanks to the Cliff House chums, the tunnel in the cave was searched and all the smuggled goods discovered!

For Dawkins, thanks to the prompt action of the coastguards, was arrested. In a few hours the whole of the gang, who had scattered with the loss of their boat, were captured, too.

In triumph Babs & Co. were escorted back to school after a night spent in the coastguard station, and in triumph were hailed next morning when the news became known, and Miss Primrose, glowing with pride, told the whole story from the platform in Big Hall. A great and terrific triumph indeed for Babs & Co.

But that triumph was as nothing when, later, Betty and her father met them; for Betty had news to impart.

"Babs, I want to tell you—I want to tell you, and I want to thank you," she said, happy tears rolling down her face. "We both want to thank you for all you've done for us—"

"And especially Clara!" Mr. Winwood put in.

"Oh stuff!" Clara said, turning red. "I did nothing. But tell us, Betty—what's happened about the furniture?"

"We got it back!" Betty cried and laughed. "But guess—and here's some big news. Daddy, as you know now, suspected Dawkins' game. Dawkins was afraid of him, kidnapped him, and made him a prisoner. And—how can I tell you? But, Babs, all the time there's been a reward of five hundred pounds for the capture of these smugglers. And—"

"Your father's got it?" Babs cried.

"Yes!"

"Oh, hurrah!"

"Thanks to you!" Betty said mistily.

"Thanks to the finest and most marvellous friends a girl's ever had! Babs, we—we'll never ever lose sight of each other again, will we?"

"No!" Babs said emphatically. To which the chums added a joyful: "Hear, hear!"

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

The staunchest of friends! Such have been Barbara Redfern, of Cliff House School, and Jimmy Richmond, of Friardale Boys' School, for a very long time. And so it is that when the shadow of disgrace falls upon the formerly popular Jimmy, Babs stands by him through thick and thin, refusing to believe what everyone else feels has been proved to the hilt. Even though it means making a sacrifice herself, Babs remains—



This superb LONG COMPLETE story of the Cliff House Chums—

—appears in next Saturday's issue. Be sure not to miss it.

By HILDA RICHARDS

Are You Reading This Wonderful Romantic Story?

Princess to Save Leiconia!



FOR NEW READERS.

PAMELA COURTNEY, an English girl living in the romantic little Balkan kingdom of Leiconia, is asked to impersonate the Princess Sonia. Sonia must go abroad in order to save the country—but nobody, except Prince Alphonse, must ever suspect that Pamela has taken her place. Thrilled beyond measure, Pamela agrees. She is so like the princess that a wig makes her Sonia's double. Her chief adviser is the Grand Duke Bernard, who does not know of the masquerade and whom she dislikes and suspects. She learns from a young Leiconian, **PAUL NALDI**, a secret helper of Princess Sonia, that the duke is plotting to seize the throne. Pamela, in disguise, goes to a peasant festival with Paul, taking vital papers. In the middle of the festival, soldiers arrive and say that the festival is to be disbanded. The captain of the soldiers says that it is by the order of the princess!

(Now read on.)

Before the Peasant Chief!

IT is by the order of her Royal Highness Princess Sonia. The festival is to disband at once. All who resist will be placed under arrest!

The stillness and silence of utter stupefaction descended upon the flare-lit, decorated forest glade as the captain of the Civic Guards, having uttered those dramatic words, turned to beckon to some of his followers with a flashing sword.

Pamela was appalled.

All around her she saw the peasants exchanging looks. Then murmurs began to break out; faces became shadowed with anger. Her own blood boiled—but for a vastly different reason.

Naturally, the peasants would believe that Princess Sonia had ordered their festivities to be broken up in this heartless fashion. But then they did not know the truth; did not even suspect that the girl they looked upon as their princess was at this very moment standing among them, clad as one of themselves, a shawl drawn about her face to hide her identity.

And Pamela, hands clenched, knew something else besides.

This was an attempt to discredit her in the eyes of the peasants. She had given no such orders. The Grand Duke Bernard had done that, to sap her already waning popularity.

A wave of anger, surging through Pamela, robbed her of all self-control.

Before she realised what she was doing, she had leapt away from Paul's side and caught at the bridle of the captain's horse.

"Stop—stop!" she cried. "It's a mistake! The princess gave no such order. She—she—"

She broke off. The peasants were staring at her in astonishment. The captain, swivelling round in his saddle, looked at her, frowned, and then gave a roar of jeering laughter.

"So-ho!" he taunted. "The princess gave no such order! I"—he tapped his chest—"I imagined it, presumably! Or, maybe, you are even suggesting that I gave the order myself?"

"No. I—I—" Pamela began desperately.

But the rest of her words were

A PRISONER OF THE PEASANTS! Princess Pam in Danger of Being Unmasked.

drowned in the soldiers' mocking laughter. The captain of the guards rode forward. The peasants, sullen and resentful, scattered before the oncoming horses. Pamela's outburst was forgotten.

In one respect she was filled with relief. She'd nearly given herself away that time! But relief was short-lived. As she stood there and watched the breaking-up of the festival, the herding of the peasants to one end of the glade and the ruthless dismantling of stalls, she almost wished that she had revealed herself to the soldiers.

"Oh, Paul," she whispered in a choking little voice, "if only we could do something!"

Granite-faced, Paul shook his head.

"But we can't, old thing," he said fiercely. "The Grand Duke's been fiendishly clever this time. He's made things dreadfully bad for you—"

"I wasn't really thinking of myself, Paul. I meant the peasants. It's so hard

on them. They've done nothing to deserve this."

They were helpless to do anything. The work went on. At last the glade was cleared of everything that had made it such a picture of gaiety and happiness a short while ago. Wet, smouldering fires filled the air with reeking fumes; litter covered the grass; the maypole, broken in two, its gaily coloured ropes trodden into the ground, lay forlornly by itself.

Caravans and carts had been formed into a long, snake-like line, and the men at the head now awaited a signal from the captain of the guards.

Paul and Pamela, squatting on a pile of trestles in one of the carts near the end of the line, stared towards the front. Very similar were their thoughts at that moment.

"We've got to see the chief of this band of peasants as soon as we get to the village," Paul said. "That's where he's been in conference."

"You mean—the papers?" Pamela answered.

Paul nodded.

"The papers," he repeated. "About the only thing I can think of that will stop the peasants doing something pretty desperate. What a stroke of luck we've got them!"

Instinctively Pamela felt beneath her shawl. Still there! She mustn't lose them whatever happened. Those papers, which she herself had taken in secret from the grand duke's desk, had originally been sent to the palace by these peasants for approval. They would relieve the peasants of certain taxes. They simply couldn't fail to restore a little of the princess' prestige with these people.

"And perhaps," she said, "they'll make the peasants think that there was a mistake to-night, after all."

At that moment the captain of the guards shouted an order. Slowly the caravans and carts got under way, winding in and out of the forest until they reached the road to the village.

The village—actually composed mostly of caravans—was at the foot of the mountains. Arriving there, the guards

By

DORIS LESLIE

rode away. Instantly pandemonium broke out, and the furious peasants swarmed towards the chief's caravan.

The door was closed, but there was a light inside. A runner had already brought the news to the chief, and as the crowd gathered about the caravan, the door opened. The chief, a commanding figure, tall and dark, with thick, wavy hair and a drooping moustache, appeared.

The shouting died away.

"My people," he cried, "I ask you to be patient! I know your feelings, because they are mine, too, at this moment. But we must not be rash. We must consider actions before we take them. That is what I am doing now with your council. I ask you to await our decision calmly."

Paul, darting up the steps, seized his arm.

"A moment with you, sir, if you please," the lad begged. "It is of vital importance. I have the papers from her Highness—"

The chief's face became transformed with incredulous delight.

"You have them, young man?" he demanded. "You have them now? You have?" he addressed Pamela, as Paul drew her beside him. "Of all the miracles! Come in—come in!"

Smiling broadly, Paul stepped to one side, bowing for her to enter the caravan. But sudden caution held Pamela back.

Danger! It was facing her now—the danger which had been ever-present, though not so threatening as now, all through the festival; the danger that she might be recognised as the princess.

One glimpse of the sleek, black wig she was wearing—which, completely hiding her own golden hair, was the only disguise she needed to turn her into the real princess' living counterpart—and the game would be up. She'd be known at once.

Swiftly, she thought. Was there time to take off her wig without anyone noticing? She might do so while pretending to remove her shawl. But it was not to be. There wasn't time. Paul was urging her to go in. If she hesitated any longer suspicions might be aroused.

And so Pamela, pulling the shawl well in front of her face, to obscure it as much as possible, went into the van and stood in the darkest corner she could find.

No mistaking the chief's excitement; no mistaking the excitement of his four councillors who gathered round Pamela and her young friend as soon as Paul entered the dim-lit van.

Hands trembling with eagerness, heart filled with immeasurable joy, Pamela produced the papers from beneath her shawl. Keeping in the shadow as much as she could, she handed them over.

"But this is wonderful!" cried the chief, while his councillors craned about him. "Young fellow, I congratulate you! And you, my dear, I greet as a loyal, courageous member of our community. But, tell me—" He looked at Pamela, allowing the papers to be passed among his henchmen. "How did you obtain them?"

It was Paul who explained, swiftly, glibly. Pamela, he said, had done the princess a favour some time ago. Using that as a lever, she had induced the princess to give her the papers.

"Magnificent!" cried the chief. Pamela was clasping her hands, her face aglow.

"May I—may I tell the others?" she asked.

"You have earned that privilege, my dear," was the benevolent reply. "Go

to them now. Tell them of this wonderful happening. It will turn bitterness to joy. It will—" He stopped, frowning. "But I am at a loss to understand this, all the same. If her Highness believed that we were plotting against her to-night, then why in the name of goodness— Ah, well!" He sighed and shrugged. "What does that matter? We have the papers. Our taxes need trouble us no longer."

Before turning to the door, Pamela caught a glance from Paul. Almost imperceptibly she nodded.

So that was the excuse given by the grand duke for the raid upon the festival. He had told the Civic Guards that the peasants were plotting against the princess!

"Well," Pam mused exultantly, "his little scheme's turned out less successfully than he hoped. The papers have done the trick!"

She opened the door. The crowd without eagerly moved nearer. Joyful words were hovering on her lips when she—

"Stay!" The chief's voice, hard and imperative, sounded behind her. "What is the meaning of this?"

Pamela turned. One of the councillors, darting forward, thrust her back into the room, shut the door, then stood with his back to it.

"What—what is the meaning of what?" Pamela asked, her heart racing. "This!" snapped the chief.

Papers in hand, he stepped forward, indicating a space on each with a shaking forefinger.

Wonderingly, Pamela looked at them. "Unsigned!" snapped the chief. "And, unsigned, these papers are absolutely useless!"

Accused by Paul!

A SENSATION of utter weakness stole over Pamela. Desperately, she fought against it, trying to keep her mind clear, trying to grapple with this staggering revelation. The papers were not signed!

Quite stunned she felt, as much with astonishment as with horror. For she hadn't realised that the papers needed signing; hadn't even given it a single thought. Why should she have done? The nature of the papers had not been explained to her, except that they would free the peasants of some of their taxes.

Why, if she'd known the truth, she could have prevented this blow with a few strokes of the pen! Oh, if only she had known; if only—

"Well, we are waiting," came the voice of the chief again. "Speak, girl! What does this mean?"

Pamela roused herself. The chief and his men were regarding her strangely; Paul, behind them, looked stunned.

"I—I—" she stammered, gulped, and then began again. "I can't understand it, sir!" she said hoarsely.

"When I got the papers—" "Ah!" exclaimed the chief. "When you got the papers, yes. Tell us how you got them. We have not been told that!"

"When—when they were given to me—" "By whom?" the chief demanded sharply.

"By—by—" Pamela said, frantically trying to invent some plausible sort of story. "Why," she rushed on, "by—by one of the princess' maids, of course! And when I got them I naturally thought they were in order. If I'd known they weren't, I would never have brought them here!"

"A likely tale," jeered one of the men, a thin-faced fellow with a livid

scar down one cheek. "Her Highness, whatever her faults may be, is scarcely likely to have overlooked the most essential part of the return of our papers—her signature!"

"You mean," said another, thoughtfully fingering his chin, "her Highness knew they were unsigned?"

"Yes! And this girl, too." The man with the scar flung out an accusing hand towards Pamela. "She knew. In my opinion this is an attempt on the part of the princess to humiliate us even further. You're a traitor!" he hissed, whirling upon Pamela.

White-faced, terrified now lest she should be recognised, Pamela drew back into the shadows.

"I'm not—I'm not!" she cried. "I didn't know the papers were unsigned. And neither did the princess. She—she couldn't have done, or she wouldn't have sent them here. Listen, please! You've got to believe me—"

But the faces of the peasant council registered only disbelief and condemnation, while Paul was biting his lip, clearly worried and nonplussed.

The thin-faced man, glancing at Paul, sneered.

"And look at young Naldi!" he jeered. "Accomplice written all over his face. A pair of traitors together, that's plain. Milos!" He turned to the chief. "I suggest that we detain these two—keep them under guard while inquiries are made. I, for one, do not trust them. At liberty, they are a danger!"

Quickly, the chief came to a decision; so quickly that neither Paul nor Pamela had time to grasp the full implication of the thin man's demand.

"As you say, Benno. They shall be held captive until we are satisfied of their innocence—or their guilt." His face set. "You others—take them away!" he rapped.

Three men closed in.

Back leapt Pamela. She was thinking of what would happen at the palace if she were missing all night. A panicky search, rumours of all sorts, and the grand duke certain to turn her absence to his own traitorous ends!

A sudden inspiration burst upon her. "Give me the papers!" she cried. "Let me take them to her Highness. I'll get them signed this time. I swear I will. Give me two hours—an hour—just time to get to the palace and back, and I promise on my honour the papers shall be returned to you just as you want them!"

She caught at the chief's arm.

"Please—just an hour—"

And then she stopped; she stopped in utter stupefaction, not because the chief had turned away in scornful dismissal of her plea, but because Paul, who had been looking utterly at a loss until now, had begun to speak—and speak the most incredible words.

"You—you little turncoat!" he said fiercely. "Benno was right. You are a traitor. You betrayed me. I can see it all now. I believed in you. I thought you were with us. I trusted you. And what did you do—what did you do? Let me down, got me tainted with your own treachery. And now," he ended, his voice ringing with contempt, "now you want to wriggle out of it and leave an innocent person to face the music!"

For a moment Pamela stared at him in dream-like horror. Then a cry burst from her lips.

"Paul—oh, Paul, you don't know what you're saying! You're—you're joking! You don't mean that. You—you can't—"

But Paul had turned his back upon her. Simultaneously two of the council

caught her arms and hustled her through the doorway.

Sick and dazed with shock, offering no resistance, she was marched past the curious crowd towards one of the other caravans.

Paul had turned upon her! Paul, her dearest friend, whom she had always been able to trust implicitly!

Desperately she tried to find some excuse for what he had done. But her mind was in a whirl. She could think of nothing coherently. Oblivious of everything, she allowed herself to be marched across the encampment and bundled inside a caravan.

Not until a key clicked in the lock, and the sound of departing footsteps and voices heralded the beginning of a strange quietness, did she fully realise what had happened.

And then, trembling, she looked about her.

She was in a spick-and-span caravan, lit by the flickering, mellow rays of an oil-lamp suspended from the roof.

Almost unconsciously she tried the door. It remained fast. Round she spun to the window. Her lips tightened. Barred!

And then it was that the full desperateness of her position dawned upon her.

The mistake over the papers was a blow; so was Paul's inexplicable conduct. But this was the most terrible blow of all.

She, Princess of Leiconia, was now a prisoner in one of the encampments of her own peasants, unable to help herself in the most vital crisis of her masquerade.

The palace officials would be frantic at her absence; the grand duke would see in it a chance to strike at her again—and she could do nothing whatever to defend herself.

She must stay here, there was no telling how long. And every second of that stay weakened her already waning popularity with the peasants!

The Hidden Message!

CLOMP—clomp!

To the strangest of sounds, Pamela stirred. She opened her eyes, blinked in the narrow shaft of sunlight that streamed on to her face, and then startled, sat up.

"Goodness!" she gasped, staring about her. "Where—where— Oh!"

And in that simple ejaculation was revealed all the crushing despair that suddenly descended upon her like an avalanche.

The caravan—the encampment—the peasants—Paul—and her imprisonment here!

It all came back to her now. Last night seemed like a nightmare. She did not remember falling asleep. She had sat on the bunk, thinking, scheming, speculating, for hour upon hour.

And now, here she was, facing another day!

But what was that noise? It had wakened her. Ah! There it was again—a clumping sound from the door.

Hastily drawing her shawl about her head, Pamela slid off the bunk.

Who was the visitor? Her heart leaped with hope. Paul? Then hope died. No. It was a woman. She could hear her humming.

Pam's heart stood still.

A stranger! Supposing she was recognised? Swiftly she ran to the dressing-table, and peered into the tiny mirror. A few deft tugs at her shawl, and it was not only completely hiding her wig but shrouding her face in shadow as well.

Then, stepping to a dim corner, Pamela waited, hands clenched.

The door opened at last and in came a stout, pleasant-faced woman bearing a tray, which she placed on the table.

As Pamela, keeping her head down, watched the woman anxiously, she spotted several men outside the van. So the chief was taking no chances!

But the woman—had she noticed anything suspicious? Apparently not, for to Pam's palpitating relief, she looked at her with an expressionless face that certainly held no hint of recognition.

"Good-morning!" she said. She nodded towards the tray. "Your breakfast."

"Good-morning, and thank you!" Pamela said quietly. "Please what time is it?"

"Ten o'clock."

With which the woman made to withdraw. But Pamela detained her.

"Just one more question," she said. "Paul Naldi—is he all right?"

"No thanks to you—yes," the woman retorted, with the first sign of feeling. "But if you're hoping to see him, you'll be unlucky."

The woman stepped out. The door closed and was locked. Pamela heard her talking to the men, but she did not listen—did not want to listen. Neither did she want to eat, even though she slumped down into a chair before the loaded tray.

"I'd never have believed it of Paul," she murmured. Abstractedly she toyed with a roll. "He knows what I'm doing for Sonia. He knows what it means to me—and her—why, to everyone in Leiconia who's loyal to the princess—that I should be free. Oh, golly!"

In sudden agitation she twisted the roll in her hands.

"What ever are they imagining at the palace? And the grand duke—I wonder what he's doing?"

Those were terrifying thoughts. If she did succeed in escaping from the encampment, more trouble would be awaiting her at the palace.

"Unless I can think of a jolly good explanation for leaving the opera like that and being away all night," Pamela muttered, and was about to toss the roll back on to the tray when she started.

"Why!" she exclaimed, staring at it in surprise. "I didn't do that!"

For there was a little hole in it. And there, on the table, lay a jagged portion of bread that had obviously been dug out and then pressed back into position.

Pamela, peering at the tifty cavity in the roll, gave a cry of excitement. There was a small ball of paper inside.

"A note!" she breathed.

With feverish fingers she drew it out and unfolded it. A glance at the bottom sent her heart leaping. From Paul? Yes!

The note, scrawled in such tiny block capitals that she could only just make them out, ran as follows:

"Cheer up, old thing. Sorry to shock you like that last night, but simply had to. Explain when I see you. Important thing is this. Got plan to rescue you. Be ready—dusk to-night. Please go on trusting me. PAUL."

Pamela, eyes aglow, re-read those words half a dozen times.

"Go on trusting me!" she breathed. "Oh, how wonderful! Then—then Paul is really still my friend. And he's going to release me to-night. I'll be able to get back to the palace." Then a little frown crossed her brow as, taking some matches from the mantelpiece, she burned the note in the fireplace. "But—but he still hasn't explained why he behaved like that."

That certainly was a problem. But not so important a problem in view of everything else. Pamela felt it could wait until to-night.

"And meanwhile," she chuckled, delighted and relieved enough to be in the mood for joking, "I'm peckish—jolly peckish! And that spaghetti looks delicious! Oh!" And she paused, looking extremely thoughtful. "My wig!"

Better get rid of that while she had the chance. Without it, no one would suspect who she was. But a close look at it would be sufficient to convince any of the peasants that, no matter how sensational it might appear, their prisoner was the princess herself!

So, as quickly as she could, Pamela removed the wig and hid it under the mattress. The task took several minutes, for the wig had been specially fastened to stay in position, no matter how it was knocked about.



FIERCELY Paul pointed at Pam. "You're a traitor!" he cried. Pam staggered back. Why was her friend turning upon her in this amazing fashion?

Then, again wearing the shawl, Pamela sat down to breakfast.

The morning wore on. Pamela found it increasingly difficult to curb her impatience. Golly, but how time dragged! Once the monotony was broken when dinner was brought. That was at two o'clock, she was told in response to her query. The afternoon dragged by.

Maddeningly, slowly the sun sank behind the mountain-tops. But at last the shadows lengthened. It became cool. Pamela found her prison quite dim.

Never had she welcomed nightfall so much as now. Leaving the window, she sat down. But suspense wouldn't let her stay there. Up she sprang, to pace the room, sometimes going to the window again, sometimes listening at the door, then resting on the edge of the table for a while, then going back to the window, over to the door, now hurrying to the window once more—

But abruptly she halted, spinning round. It was so dark now that she could hardly see the door. But she heard it—heard the lock click, heard the handle turn, and then saw a sudden gap of light as the door was thrust open and a silhouetted figure stood framed in the aperture.

"Pam," whispered a voice. "Oh, Paul—you've got here! I thought you'd never do it! Quick! Inside—"

But there was no need to urge Paul to do that. He had closed the door almost before Pam finished speaking. He was carrying a bundle, she noticed, which he dumped on a chair. Then he stepped to her side.

"Poor old you," he said softly. "You don't know what sort of a cad I've been calling myself after the way I treated you yesterday. And you, Pam, you must have thought me a pretty nice sort of rotter!"

"Well, I don't know about that," Pam said breathlessly. "I did wonder what ever had come over you, I'll admit. But why did you turn on me? You had some reason?"

"The best in the world, old thing," Paul whispered back. "Don't you see, we'd have been absolutely helpless if both of us had been made prisoners? One of us had to remain free to try to release the other. You were for it in any case. That meant I'd got to stay at liberty. And the only way for me to do that was to pretend you'd tricked me."

Pamela laughed. She felt happy enough for anything now.

"Clever Paul," she murmured. "Thank you," he smiled. "But come on! We've got to hurry. The council's made its decision." Paul looked grim as he began to undo the bundle. "The peasants are going to march to the palace to-night and stage a demonstration at the gates, demanding that the papers are signed!"

"What!" Pam gasped. "Paul, if I'm not there the grand duke will see the peasants. He'll turn the guards on them. There'll be worse trouble than ever!"

"From them—and him," said Paul tensely, looking up. "You can bet he'll guess that you gave the peasants those papers. This is bad, Pam. But you'd never put things right, Pam. Nobody could."

"But we can if we act now," Pam said, eyes gleaming. "When do the peasants start? Not for an hour? Oh, grand! That gives us a chance. But what's your plan, Paul? And what?"—she pointed—"are those for?"

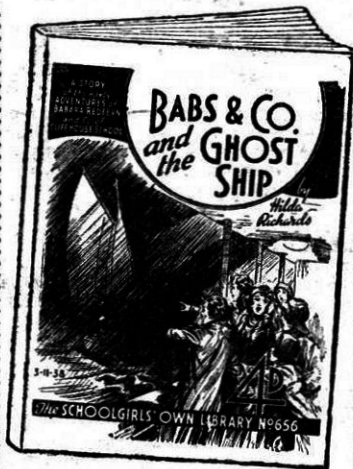
She was indicating the contents of the bundle, which were now revealed as a complete outfit of peasant clothes, almost identical with those Paul wore.

"Disguise," he said briskly. "Some of my togs—for you. Now, this is the idea—"

In growing excitement, Pamela listened while he explained his scheme. Simple, it was at the same time rather ingenious. Dressed in those clothes, she would, in the darkness, pass for Paul. She was to slip out, make her way behind the row of caravans to the nearest exit—for there was a high stockade on three sides of the encampment—and boldly walk past the guard.

"I'll go out by another exit," Paul concluded, "and we'll meet at the back of the inn near by. I've horses waiting

THRILLS and MYSTERY with your CLIFF HOUSE CHUMS in this magnifi- cent story—



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there. Good luck, Pam! And keep your pecker up!"

Next moment he had gone. Pamela, wasting no time, changed into the unfamiliar clothes. The shoes were heavy and cumbersome, the thick stockings awfully rough after the beautiful silk hosiery in Sonia's wardrobe; but Pamela didn't mind.

Before she crept out she crammed her wig into one of the pockets of the jacket. A moment in front of the mirror, while she made sure that the little Alpine hat showed only a minimum of hair, and then she had set off.

Nobody saw her creep down the caravan steps. There were few people

about, indeed. Without encountering danger she hurried along beside the vans until, quite suddenly, she saw the peasant guard, leaning against the stockade beside the opening, his arms folded.

She drew in her breath. Her heart was pounding. But, keeping her head averted, as though deep in thought, she approached the man.

"Better hurry if you want to catch them up," he said casually.

Pamela, not knowing or caring to what he referred, nodded all the same. She also gave a little salute that partly obscured her face as she drew level with the man. A moment's breathless suspense, and then she was through the stockade, outside the encampment—free!

Once she had turned a corner she broke into a run, and she did not stop until the turrets and gables of the White Deer Inn loomed in sight.

It was then the appearance of Paul, riding one horse and leading another, that brought her to a halt at the side of the road.

"Well," she greeted him breathlessly, "I did it!"

"Good for you!" said Paul, but in a peculiar tone that caused Pam to study him sharply.

"Why, what's the matter?" she asked. Paul gave a despairing gesture.

"Everything, Pam," he muttered. "We're too late!"

"Too late," Pamela repeated. Incredulously she looked at him. "But how can we be? We've plenty of time. The peasants don't start for nearly an hour, and we can take the short cut to the hollow oak and get into the palace grounds through the secret passage."

"The peasants," came Paul's startling reply, "left five minutes ago! I saw them pass here myself. No, Pam, we're sunk. We'll never reach the palace before them. And even if we did, you'd have no time to change and go to meet them—pacify them."

He ran a hand distractedly through his wavy hair. Utterly distracted was Pam, too. This was a terrible blow, just at the moment when everything was working so smoothly for them. And now—

But all of a sudden her eyes lit up. With a spring, she had reached the empty saddle.

"I've got it, Paul!" she cried, grasping his arm.

"An idea?" said Paul, with little hope in his voice.

Pamela's eyes danced excitedly; her cheeks were flushed.

"The idea! But there's no time to spare. Look, Paul! I'll go to the palace alone!"

"Alone?" echoed Paul. "And I—"

"You race after the peasants—delay them—detain them—do anything you like," Pamela said. "But they've got to be held up so that I can get to the palace first. And you can do it, Paul. Say I've escaped—say you saw me bolting through the woods. That'll delay them."

"It's a great wheeze!" Paul enthused. He gripped her hand. "Best of luck, Pam! I'll do my darndest!"

With a wave, he went clattering away. Pamela, taking hold of her own reins, watched him disappearing down the road for some seconds, and then, urging her horse forward, swung it away at a tangent.

Next second she was tearing across a field for Tolari Forest.

A RACE against time! So much at stake! Breathless excitement awaits you in next Saturday's chapters.

Thrills and Adventures Galore come to Hilda Farrel & Co. when they are—

Guests at Mystery Manor!



FOR NEW READERS.
HILDA FARREL, with her chums, BERYL LORIMER and JUDY BROUGH, and her clever dog MARCUS, go to Hawley Manor for a holiday as paying-guests. The manor is owned by the father of LAVENDER MORTIMER, with whom the girls become friendly, and is the Mortimers' means of livelihood. A strange woman is "haunting" the house, using secret passages, in one of which the girls find a paper referring to hidden treasure. A woman detective, THELMA HARKNESS, arrives to solve the mystery. Shortly afterwards the chums find a secret passage leading from the manor to an old mill. A guest, MIRANDA BATES, also discovers this, and while searching in the secret passage sets fire to the mill, just as Hilda & Co. reach it from the open.
(Now read on.)



By
ELIZABETH
CHESTER

find Miranda, her husband dressed to join the rescue party. "It can't spread to the house," Lavender assured them. "The Old Mill's too far away; but it's a lovely old relic and we mustn't let it burn if we can help it."

Beryl, tottering under the weight of a pail of water, led the way with Lavender's father, who was carrying two fire-extinguishers. Mr. Bates came along some minutes after, armed with two pails.

But by the time they reached the mill the flames seemed to have taken hold, and Hilda had been beaten back from the ladder, her hair singed, her face scorched by the heat.

"There's an old stand pipe near that cabbage patch," said Mr. Mortimer briskly. "Get the hose from the tennis courts, someone."

Hilda and Judy rushed for the hose, while Lavender and her father, shifting the ladder, used the fire-extinguishers from another angle.

One wall was alight now; but Hilda

flames; a bucket at a time was hardly any help at all.

A gang of people swinging buckets from hand to hand was needed. Again Hilda swamped in a bucketful, and the flames sizzled merrily and spluttered.

Unheeded, Marcus continued to dig, his powerful paws loosening the earth so that it went tumbling down into the tunnel.

As the earth rained about her, and she felt the inrush of cool night air, seeming icy after the heat inside the mill, Miranda clawed and struggled her way through the earth and stones.

Marcus, poking down, suddenly saw her. He gripped the lapel of her coat in his teeth and tugged—tugged with

Fighting the Flames!

"WATER, quick!"
Hilda Farrel rushed towards the manor house, where a ladder rested by the wall near the tennis courts.

There was a pond near by, and close to the tennis courts an old pail. One would be little use, but it would help while others were being fetched.

"Go to the house, Beryl—rouse Lavender!" cried Hilda.

Beryl fled to the house, while Hilda and Judy went for the ladder, hurrying with it, heavy though it was, back to the Old Mill, the floor of which was now blazing and roaring.

Resting the ladder against the window, Hilda climbed up, while Judy was filling the bucket at the pond.

None of them knew that Miranda had started the fire by upsetting a candle—they did not guess that she was now crouching in the narrow tunnel at the entrance to which Marcus was digging.

That tunnel was a secret way into the mill from outside, but it had been filled in.

Marcus could sense that someone was there, and his digging became more frenzied than ever.

It had been his lost bone that he had tried to break through this barrier to seek; but there was something more urgent now.

Judy hurried to the ladder, and Hilda, reaching down, took the bucket from her, and then, while Judy steadied the ladder, swamped the water through the window.

That done, she dropped the bucket, for Judy to fetch another load from the pond.

But the mill seemed doomed. Gallons of water would be needed to douse these

THE MYSTERY PROWLER STRIKES AGAIN—AND THE YOUNG HOSTESS OF THE MANOR DISAPPEARS

such strength that Miranda was able to scramble out.

Judy and Hilda were too busy on the ladder to see what had happened, and Miranda, panting and frightened, did not stay to help, but scuttled away in the darkness.

She had been saved from a terrible fate. But for Marcus she would have been trapped in that tunnel with smoke slowly filling it, and no other means of escape but into the flames!

Yet Miranda did not give Marcus even a pat, all her thoughts in this crisis being for herself. Her one idea was to run, to escape!

Beryl by this time had roused Lavender, who at once fetched a fire-extinguisher and called her father, Mr. and Mrs. Bates, hearing the confusion, demanded to know what the trouble was, and then, while Mrs. Bates rose to

and Judy had fixed the hose to the stand-pipe and were playing the jet on to the flames.

"How on earth did it start?" gasped Lavender.

"We saw a light in the mill—a flickering light. Then the flames started," said Hilda. "It looks as though someone fired it deliberately."

As though confusion was not already bad enough, Mrs. Bates arrived, running hard, panting and gasping.

"Miranda, where is she? She's not in bed!" she cried.

But although they all heard those words, not one of them connected Miranda's absence with the fire.

"Where can she be?" cried Mrs. Bates. "Oh, something dreadful has happened, I'm sure. Miranda!" she called at the top of her voice.

Miranda's voice answered her shakily from some yards away.

"I'm here, mother! I came out to see the fire!"

"Oh, my darling! I was so afraid. I went into your room and found it empty!"

Miranda joined the group and artfully asked how it had happened, desperately anxious to clear herself of any suspicion.

But no one connected her with the Old Mill, and, anyway, they had no time to spare for worrying or conjecturing. It would be all they could do to save the mill.

With the hose playing, however, the flames were gradually subdued, and when the fire had almost died out Thelma Harkness arrived on the scene.

"Was anyone inside?" she asked. "Are we all here? Hilda—Judy—Beryl—Miranda?"

"All here," said Mr. Mortimer. "I'm afraid you have been rather late in detecting this fire, Miss Harkness."

The girls chuckled at that; but the detective shrugged without concern.

"I was nowhere near the scene. How did it happen?" she asked, and turned to Hilda. "You were here, I suppose?"

Hilda again told all she knew—little enough—and Mr. Bates clucked his tongue.

"It sounds like a deliberate act of arson," he said. "Who could have had a reason for being in the mill?"

"Ah!" said the woman detective grimly. "That must be gone into later. A fire might be convenient to some people perhaps."

Hilda knew to whom she was referring, and gave her an angry look. For

the detective's broad hint was accompanied by a stare.

"We'll have to go into it when the fire is out," agreed Hilda. "There may be clues."

Miss Harkness turned to Mr. Mortimer.

"Let no one enter the mill before me. Nothing must be disturbed," she said.

"Very well, Miss Harkness," said Lavender's father. "You shall have every possible assistance."

Rather to the surprise of them all, the flames were completely subdued, although smouldering wood, giving forth acrid fumes, was still hard to douse.

"It's out," said Hilda in immense relief. "Hurrah!"

"Hurrah!" agreed Lavender. "And now, I think we'd better all go in and wash and have some coffee or tea or something."

"I shall remain," said Thelma Harkness. "The guilty person may return, or the fire may start again. Not being afraid of either eventuality, I will spend the remainder of the night in the Old Mill, if someone will kindly bring me cushions and blankets."

In merry mood after the excitement, the rest of the house-party returned to the manor, and only Marcus did not get the credit he deserved.

But Miranda could not mention how he had rescued her, of course, without revealing that she had actually been in the Old Mill!

Marcus did not mind, however; it had been a little alarming, but good fun, and in the hope that Miranda had found his bone and brought it out for him, he barked beside her all the way until she

drove him off in anger for fear someone should try to reason out this peculiar change in Marcus, who had hitherto disliked her.

But no one understood, and Marcus, despairing of Miranda's mind brightening, gave it up as a bad job.

Hilda, however, did not abandon the problem that was worrying her—who had fired the Old Mill, and why? Had the treasure been found and was this the means to cover up all traces? Or had the fire been an accident that might help to bring the treasure to light?

"I only hope," she said to Beryl and Judy, as they returned to the house, "that we shan't be blamed for it, but I bet Thelma Harkness tries to fix it on to us."

"Let her try," said Beryl in scorn. "She couldn't fix a stamp on a letter, she's so dumb. A detective, poof!"

"Poof it is," Judy agreed. "But I've an idea that Hilda is right. We shall be blamed for this."

Hilda yawned sleepily.

"Ah—well, let the night and the morrow bring what it may, girls. I'm dog tired, and I'm going to sleep—so fast asleep that almost nothing will rouse me, not even the ghost."

To which Beryl made no reply, because the mention of being aroused by a ghost sent a shiver of dread through her.

Nevertheless, she fell asleep. They all slept, Judy, Hilda, Beryl, Lavender—even conscience-stricken Miranda; and the only one awake was the one who crept, silent of tread and wrapped in a dark cloak, along an upper landing of the manor house!

Your Editor's address is:—
The SCHOOLGIRL Office, Fleetway House,
Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

BETWEEN OURSELVES



MY DEAR READERS,—Doesn't time simply fly? It only seems a day or so since I was telling you about Claudine—that's my niece, you know—and the affair of her small brother's fireworks.

And yet, yesterday afternoon, I had another visit from that impetuous but well-meaning young lady, inviting me to her parents' home for Christmas.

Christmas! My goodness! I hadn't realised the festive season was so near, had you? Claudine had—in a practical way—for she told me she has already bought my present, and she's certain I'll adore it.

I'm not quite sure how to take that—whether to interpret it as a sign of my niece's really generous nature, being in a hurry to make itself felt, or whether Claudine wanted to make certain I didn't forget her present.

However, I'm not likely to do that. From what I know of Claudine, she'll probably come with me to buy it—at her own invitation.

And now, letting Yuletide take its own time about approaching us, we'll turn to next week's splendid programme, shall we?

Top of the bill, of course, is the superb COMPLETE Cliff House story:

"LOYAL TO HER BOY CHUM!"

which features Barbara Redfern and Jimmy Richmond, that popular young fellow from Friardale Boys' School.

Now, as you older readers know, Babs and Jimmy have always been staunch friends. In fact, all the famous Co. have been friends with Jimmy. Jimmy is the sort of chap you can't help liking and admiring.

Well, in this magnificent story something happens. I won't say exactly what it is, but it is of a particularly despicable nature, and there seems little doubt that Jimmy Richmond is the culprit.

Everyone thinks so, anyway—all Jimmy's own friends, and all Babs' friends, too. Only Babs can find it in her heart to believe Jimmy's innocence. She knows Jimmy; he's true blue, she's convinced.

Other things happen, just as disgraceful, and Jimmy becomes an out-cast, an object of contempt and indignation. But Babs still clings to her faith in him. There's a mistake. She knows there is. But can she possibly prove it?

There you have a rough idea of the theme of Hilda Richards' latest story, which will enthral you from beginning to end. Don't miss it, will you?"

As usual, next Saturday's issue will contain further splendid instalments of "Princess to Save Leiconia," and "Guests at Mystery Manor," together with more of Patricia's Bright and Interesting Pages.

If you want to make sure of avoiding disappointment, order your copy without delay.

With best wishes,

Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.

"Follow Me . . . Treasure!"

ALL was silent in the old manor house when the sound of the old clock's tolling the hour of three in the morning died away.

There was peace, and anything less like a haunted house it would have been hard to imagine. But that silence lasted only a short while, and then there came the faint sound of creaking boards.

Marcus, alert for slight noises, however tired he was, lifted his big head as the sound came to him, and, rising, went to the door and sniffed.

The creaking sounds continued at intervals of a second or so, and then grew fainter.

Marcus whined, but Hilda, dead to the world, did not stir, and presently, hearing no more sounds, he returned to his bed, flopped down and closed his eyes.

But his whine had given some warning, for farther down the corridor the dark-cloaked figure waited, listening. Then, reassured when Marcus' whine was not repeated, it passed on to Miranda's room.

That girl was too sound asleep to hear her door being opened, and the soft footfalls of the stealthy figure creeping into the room. She was not even disturbed by the dimmed rays of an electric torch which, filtering through a blue silk handkerchief, rested for a while on the dressing-table.

Then the light went off, and the silent figure, taking from a pocket of its cloak a piece of chalk, wrote a message on the mirror.

The message written, the torch was switched on for a moment to show the way to the door, and then off again as the figure crept out. But the closing door clicked, and it was that which roused Miranda where all else had failed.

Awakening with a start, she looked

about her, heart thumping, and then dropped her head back to the pillow, listening intently. But by that time the intruder was too far away for her footsteps to be heard.

It was at Lavender Mortimer's door that the mystery wanderer of the night now paused. Very softly turning the handle, she went inside and, groping craftily, picked her way to the bed.

There she stooped and whispered close to Lavender's head.

"If you would solve the mystery of the treasure—follow me!"

Three times the words were spoken, and presently Lavender stirred with a sensation of uneasiness. She did not move, but with heart beating fast, listened.

She could see nothing in the darkness; she could hear nothing—and yet she had the conviction that someone was in the room.

"Who's there?" she whispered, her throat dry, her voice husky.

She hardly expected a reply, even though she asked the question, and when from the darkness an answer came, her heart jumped to her mouth.

"Follow me. Do not speak," said a voice. "And you shall find the treasure."

Lavender sat up in bed and groped for the light switch that hung above her head; it took her a second or two to find it, and before she could turn the switch she heard the click of the closing door.

Blinking in the bright light, she sat up, staring about her, the thumping of her heart shaking her whole body.

"I must have been dreaming," she told herself. "Must have been. And yet I could have sworn I heard a voice. I'm sure—"

And then her heart stood still, the blood in her veins was chilled, as her bed-room door opened, very, very slowly.

"Follow me," a soft voice said. "Do not speak. Do not summon help. Obey, and you will find the treasure."

Scrambling out of bed, Lavender flung herself at the door and opened it, but the corridor was in inky darkness save for the patch of light from her own room.

"Where are you? Who are you?" she called softly.

"Do not speak," replied the voice.

Lavender, wide awake now, was less afraid. She turned back into the room to slip on her warm dressing-gown and slippers and then, taking a flashlight from her drawer and concealing it in her hand, stepped into the corridor.

"Where are you?" she whispered.

"Here! If you show a light I will disappear. Take heed."

But Lavender held the light ready. Once she had seen the face of this mystery person, she did not care if she disappeared the next moment. She would know the face again.

"I am coming," Lavender whispered.

The figure walked ahead of her, and Lavender followed, waiting for a chance of meeting her face to face. They turned to the left, down a long corridor, and then at the far corner of the house the woman ahead stopped.

"Wait here," she said.

Lavender pressed her thumb to the torch button. A shaft of light cut the darkness, and the beam, shaking a little owing to the excited tremor of her own hand, shone upon the all-black hood of the mystery woman.

But Lavender's expectation of seeing the woman's face received a set-back; she could not even see her eyes, for the hood covered the whole head, with two



holes cut in the material through which to see.

Even the eyes were shadowed by the material so that they could not be recognised; but, at least, Lavender saw the woman's hands, clasped before her.

The hands were long, and old-looking—an old woman's hands, white and frail.

"Who are you?" faltered Lavender.

"A friend. If you would learn the secret of this old house, follow me. Do not speak."

Thereupon the strange hooded woman turned to the left, and pressing with her weight against the wall, caused it to swivel, one portion swinging into the corridor, the other going into the darkness beyond the wall.

The rays of Lavender's torch searched that darkness, and she stepped forward.

"In there—the treasure," said the mystery woman.

Hesitating, walking warily, Lavender stepped forward, and then with a gasp of surprise, saw by the rays of her torch that behind the oak panelling was a thick wall in which a door stood open. Beyond it was a room.

Eager with expectation, she moved forward through the doorway in the brick wall. She saw a Jacobean table, Jacobean chairs, a bed, tins of food, with a tin-opener lying near, a large earthenware jug of water, and fruit.

Amazed and puzzled that this complete hideout should exist unknown to her in her own home, Lavender went farther into the room.

Unprepared for treachery, she did not hear the closing of the door; she suspected nothing until she turned and found the wall solid behind her.

With a gasp of fright, Lavender sprang forward and beat upon the solid stone door.

"Let me out!" she cried. "Let me out!"

But not a word came in reply, and presently, breathing heavily, her hands bruised, she desisted, to turn and stare about her prison. No windows—only ventilators, high up in the walls. Tinned food, fruit, water. All at once she understood the reason for those things being there.

They were for her—while she was a prisoner!

In a flash she realised what this would mean. There would be no one to manage the house, to see to the guests' welfare, to help with the breakfast—cook—make beds!

DESPERATELY Hilda & Co. fought the flames, trying to save the Old Mill. They did not see Marcus helping Miranda, the cause of the disaster, to escape from the secret tunnel!



Frantically she shouted and hammered the walls, but all she achieved was bruises and huskiness; for this room had been specially built nearly three hundred years ago for a royal fugitive—and so built that no sound of his movements could be heard by spies!

Marcus Brings New Evidence!

MIRANDA yawned and stretched her arms as the sunlight, streaming through her window, awakened her. It was long after dawn—long past the time when her morning tea should arrive, and looking at her watch, she sat up with a start.

"No tea—" she said petulantly.

"Well, my goodness—"

And groping for the bell-push, she touched the button and kept her finger down, not being the kind of girl to show consideration to others or to be helpful in difficult situations.

While still ringing the bell, she glanced towards her mirror. And then her eyes almost started from her head. Dropping her hand from the bell-push, she sat bolt upright, her mouth agape.

Scrawled on the mirror was a message written with chalk.

"You set fire to the mill. Never go near it again; never mention what you saw, or the truth will be told. TAKE CARE. The treasure is mine."

Miranda, quaking with fright, scrambled from her bed, and in a panicky flurry jumped to the mirror and rubbed off the chalk with her handkerchief.

"That woman—that mystery woman saw me," she told herself. "But only she knows—"

Relieved that the incriminating writing had been so easily obliterated, Miranda returned to bed, but she could

not easily recover from the effects of shock the message had given her.

She dreaded to think what would happen if her father or mother knew that she had sneaked out to the Old Mill at night, and that it was she who had caused the fire—even though accidentally.

"Hilda doesn't suspect," she consoled herself by thinking.

Hilda, indeed, had no suspicion that Miranda was involved in the fire, and at the moment, hardly thinking at all, was stretching and yawning.

"Golly—the time!" she murmured. "Hey—Marcus—hail smiling morn! Look at the time."

She glanced at her table, where the morning tea was placed as a rule, but she saw nothing; and rather surprised, she scrambled out of bed.

In the corridor, Judy and Beryl joined her.

"Hallo! Wonder where Lavender is?" said Judy. "No tea."

"Overslept perhaps," yawned Beryl. "Poor Lavender, y'know, having to get up so early. It must be dreadful at times."

Downstairs bells were ringing, and Hilda guessed who were pushing the buttons.

"The Bates family," she said. "I bet they'll make a fuss about not having tea. Let's go down and find Lavender."

In dressing-gowns and slippers they went along the corridor, halting when they saw Lavender's father approaching, in greater haste than usual, and looking deeply concerned.

"Lavender is not in her room," he exclaimed. "Nor downstairs."

"Not?" said Hilda, taken aback. "She can't have left the house, surely? Is she at the Old Mill, do you think?"

"I cannot imagine where she is," said Mr. Mortimer in distress. "There is breakfast to see to, and it is late already. The woman has arrived to cook, but there are no instructions for her."

"Oh!" murmured Hilda, dismayed, and then she brightened. "Well, we can see to that. But where is Lavender?"

They went to her room and looked in. Her bedclothes had been flung back, and her day-clothes and shoes were missing.

"She has dressed and gone out," said Hilda, in puzzlement. "Although—hallo—my goodness! Her nightdress isn't here, or her dressing-gown."

"Having a bath, perhaps—taken her clothes down to dress there," said Judy.

They went to the bath-rooms, but Lavender was not to be found, and presently they were searching the house from top to bottom, calling her name. In growing alarm Hilda hurriedly washed and dressed, then decided to go to the Old Mill just in case Lavender had gone there and forgotten the passage of time.

"Wait a bit," said Judy, as Hilda started off. "I vote we search the secret passage first. She might be there—might have had an accident or be shut in."

"It's worth trying," Hilda admitted. "I suppose if she slipped and sprained an ankle she might be trapped in that tunnel."

Beryl decided to remain to help with breakfast and get morning tea for Miranda and her parents, if they wanted it, and so Hilda and Judy set out to explore the secret passages.

Marcus had to be called, for he had

slipped out for a breather, and he came back with his feet muddy.

"Oh, you duffer, look at that mud!" sighed Hilda. "No time to wipe it off now, though. So step warily, old boy!"

Starting with the secret passage leading from Hilda's room, they went swiftly along it, the bright torch showing the way.

Marcus, pushing ahead, barked excitedly and quickened his pace, easily outdistancing the girls. Then all at once there came the muttering of an angry voice, a snarl from Marcus, and a sharp cry.

Hilda gave a shout of triumph as the rays of her torch shone upon the cloaked figure of the mystery woman.

But like Lavender she was disappointed that she could see nothing of the woman's face—only the slits in the material through which the eyes shined.

"It's the detective!" breathed Judy. "That's the cloak she wore!"

"No, no—the hands, look!" Hilda exclaimed.

The woman did not move, but stood facing Marcus, hands folded before her—and the hands, white and old-looking,

"Marcus, come back!" called Hilda frantically.

Unheeding, he cleared the gap in the floor with one grand spring, and went tearing around the corner. They heard his snarl, the woman's gasp—and then came the metallic click of a door or panel being fastened. A moment later Marcus returned, just as Hilda and Judy reached the gap in the floor.

In the bright rays of the torch Marcus' eyes shone with pride. For in his jaws he held a clue—something he had captured from the woman after a brief struggle, although what it was he did not know.

Hilda, gaping at it, thought at first that it was a bone, and then just stared, while Judy uttered a little gasp.

For quite clearly they saw what that odd-looking object was—a wax model of a pair of clasped hands!

Hilda, recovering from shock, backed and called Marcus, who sprang over the gap in the floor, and placed his trophy at her feet, not knowing what it was, yet proud of it.

Together, Hilda and Judy studied that quite excellently made model, realistic when seen from a distance so that it would appear to be two hands clasped in natural manner—old-looking hands.

"My goodness!" breathed Hilda, as the truth dawned on her. "You see what this means? The woman held this in front of her, with the cloak sleeves hanging just over the wrists. It wasn't her hands we saw, but this. And that means that she needn't be old at all. She only wants anyone who sees her to think she is!"

Judy's eyes were round, and there was something near to admiration in her expression.

"How artful—how cunning!" she said. "Then, after all, it might have been *Thelma Harkness*?"

Hilda nodded thoughtfully. "Thelma Harkness," she murmured, after a minute or two. "Playing at mystery figures—pretending to be old—fooling us! Why? What's the idea?"

Judy gave a soft whistle. "I wonder. Do you think—can she—could she be the mystery woman—the only woman here, in fact? Oh, no—that's just wild!" she ended.

But Hilda did not think so. "My golly, I'm beginning to see daylight!" she said. "Thelma Harkness has been pulling the wool over our eyes. She's bluffing! She may not be a detective at all!"

Judy looked at her, staggered. "Oh gosh, if only we could prove it!" she murmured.

Hilda, thrilled, took her friend's arm and squeezed it.

"Shush! So long as she doesn't think we suspect, we can. I've got an idea. We may be wrong. But if we're right—if she really is the mystery woman she's pretending to catch—we can prove it!"

"How? How?" asked Judy. "Come on, and I'll show you," said Hilda; and, turning, still holding the wax model she led her friend back down the secret passage.

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Next Saturday, remember, in

THE SCHOOLGIRL

made it certain that she was not *Thelma Harkness*, even though the hooded cloak she wore was almost exactly the same as that the detective used to explore the secret passages.

"We've got you. You're trapped!" said Hilda grimly.

Then in an odd, mechanical voice the woman replied.

"Call off your dog. He is standing on a trap. If he stays he will fall fifteen feet!"

Hilda moved her torch so that the rays now shone on the floor where Marcus stood, and she saw that there was indeed a trapdoor beneath him.

"Marcus, here!" she called.

He hesitated, then obeyed; and well that he did so, for as he moved back the panel in the floor opened downwards.

"Do not try to follow," said the woman.

She turned, and with short shuffling steps went out of sight around a sharp bend in the narrow corridor. That was too much for Marcus. Suddenly wheeling, he chased after her.