

"LOYAL TO HER BOY CHUM!" Magnificent **LONG COMPLETE** story of
Cliff House School inside.

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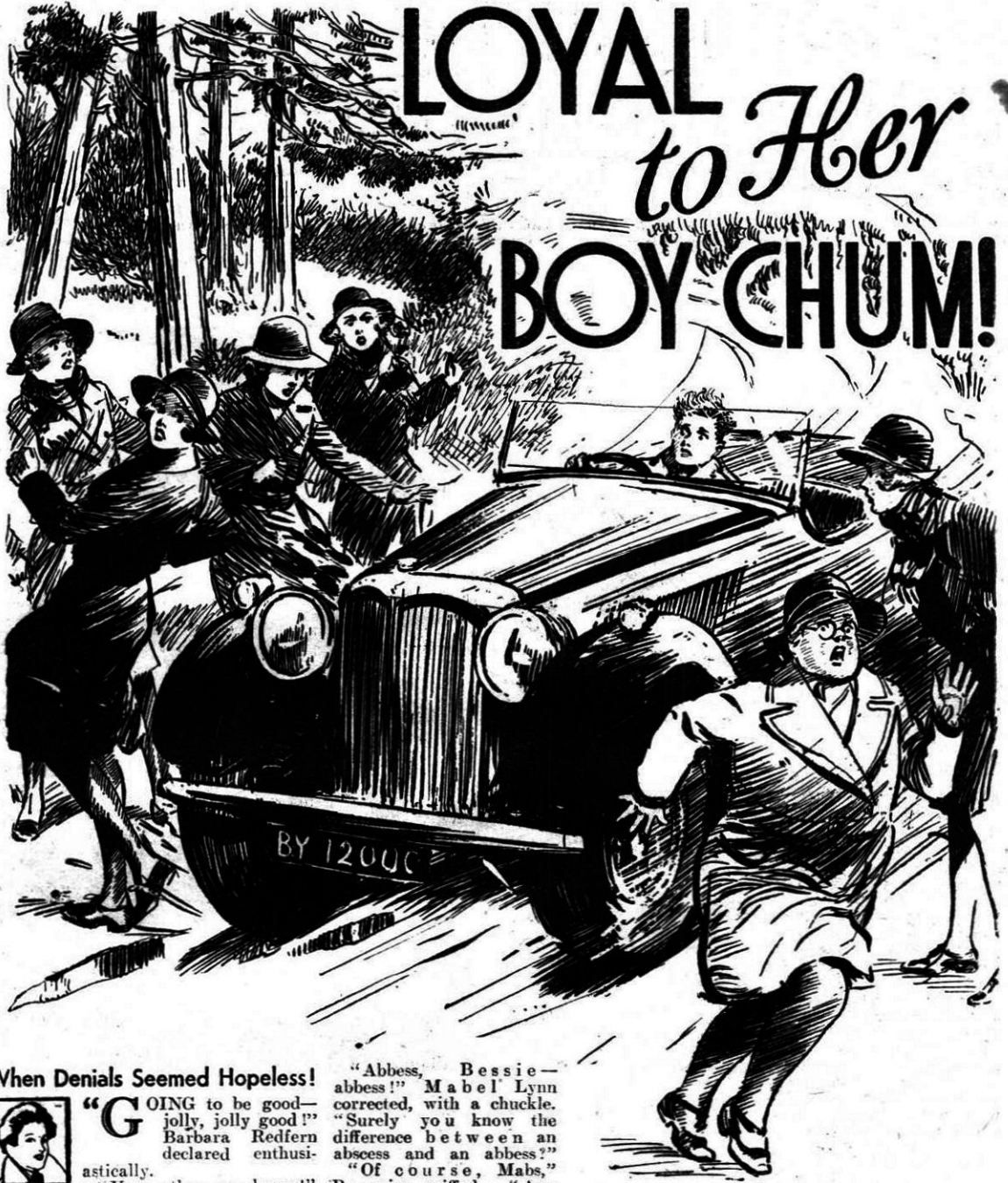
**"YOU CAN'T PUNISH
JIMMY!"**

Barbara Redfern's bid to prevent
a terrible injustice.

See this week's fine story of the chums of
Cliff House School.

Magnificent **LONG COMPLETE** story featuring Barbara Redfern & Co., of Cliff House School, and Jimmy Richmond, of Friardale Boys' School.

LOYAL to Her BOY CHUM!



When Denials Seemed Hopeless!



"GOING to be good—jolly, jolly good!" Barbara Redfern declared enthusiastically.

"Yes, rather, you know!" plump Bessie Bunter warmly agreed. "I think it's a jolly fine play—almost as good as I could have written, though not quite as clever, of course. There's only one thing wrong—"

"And that?" Mabel Lynn asked, with twinkling eyes.

And she and Babs regarded their stud-mate and chum expectantly.

"Well, that you ought to make me the leading lady, you know, instead of the 'abscess,'" said the plump duffer gravely. "It's not that I mind being an abscess—"

"A—a whatter?" gasped Babs.

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"Abscess, Bessie—abscess!" Mabel Lynn corrected, with a chuckle. "Surely you know the difference between an abscess and an abness?"

"Of course, Mabs," Bessie sniffed. "Any silly chump knows what an abness is. It's a sort of—of chasm—a dud-deep opening in the ground. Well, blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" she added indignantly.

But Mabs and Babs did, and so did Tomboy Clara Trevlyn, Janet Jordan, and gentle Marjorie Hazeldene, who made up the party of six Cliff House schoolgirls who were walking along the lane. They pealed with laughter.

Trust dear old duffer Bessie to mix up abscess with abness. Any near approach to the word she wanted was good enough for Bessie, though to be sure she should have known by this time what an abness was, for she was

playing the part of the Abbess Elreda in the play which they were now on their way to rehearse.

That rehearsal was to take place at Friardale Boys' School, since the play was to be a joint effort of the Cliff House girls and the Friardale boys in the forthcoming Christmas charities concert.

The play had been Mabs' idea—Mabs who, with the co-operation of Ralph Lawrence of Friardale, had written it; Mabs, who was to be responsible for the Cliff House side of the production.

"Well, what's wrong?" Bessie glowered through her thick spectacles.

"What the dud-dickens is funny about that? And what—"

Then she jumped, as from the end of the lane down which they were walking there came a sudden furious honk, honk! and a small green two-seater car, travelling at a tremendous pace, hurtled towards them.

"Oh kik-crums, look out!" she yelled.

Need for that warning, because at the very first glance it was obvious that the car was uttering out of control. Like some crazy thing, it was swerving from one side to the other as it roared at them, a white-faced boy in the driving seat desperately wrenching at the steering-wheel. Just in time they scampered to the hedges. Then the car was upon them—was roaring past them—throwing up a smother of mud.

"Hi!" yelled Clara, and spluttered, her mouth suddenly full of mud.

"Sto—" yelled Babs, and gave back, desperately clutching at her face where another blot of mud had landed.

From Marjorie, nearest the whizzing juggernaut, there went up a wail as a perfect wall of mud rose from under the wheels, and, shooting at her, drenched the front of the brand-new coat she was wearing for the very first time. Then, leaving them shaken, gasping, and furious, the car had gone.

And leaving them most astounded, too. For—

"Oh, my hat! Did you see who was driving it?" Janet Jordan stammered.

"Jimmy Richmond!" Clara gasped, with incredulous eyes following the zigzagging car as it shrieked round the bend at the top of the road.

Jimmy—Jimmy Richmond, their own chum, who was the captain of the Fourth Form at Friardale, and who was playing the lead opposite Babs in the play, and whom they were on their way to see! Jimmy in charge of a car; Jimmy going like a speed maniac, with no thought apparently for either his own safety or the safety of passers-by.

But there could be no mistake about it. They had all glimpsed his white face as he went roaring by. That glistening shock of fair hair with the unruly quiff that fell over his forehead was too conspicuous to allow of any mistake.

Astonishment momentarily held them. Then, as astonishment gave way to the realisation of the results of Richmond's madness, hot, indignant anger broke forth.

With dismay that made the tears glisten in her eyes, Marjorie was regarding the mud-splattered coat. As one of the poorest girls in the Fourth Form, new coats were rare luxuries for Marjorie Hazeldene, and she had scraped and scraped goodness knows how long to buy this one. She gulped.

"M-my coat!" she said feebly.

"Oh, poor old Marjie!" Clara cried feelingly. She glared ferociously up the road. "The beastly cad!"

"Just wait until we see him!" Janet threatened furiously. "Marjorie, take that coat off, old thing!"

Sympathetically they gathered round their unhappy chum. Gently the coat was divested. Clara, in the interval of rehearsing what she was going to say to Jimmy Richmond when she met him, produced the pocket-knife she always carried, and carefully scraped the thickest of the mud away. But it was obvious the coat would never be the same again.

"It—it's ruined!" Marjorie choked. Nobody denied that.

"Well," Clara grimly said, "we'll jolly well present the bill to the one who's ruined it! Ugh! I can still taste that awful mud in my mouth! Let me carry the coat, old Marjie," she said gently.

"But fuf-fancy, you know, Jimmy doing a tut-trick like that!" Bessie said indignantly.

"Well, it was pretty obvious he'd lost control," Babs said worriedly.

"You don't think Jimmy would have done a thing like that on purpose, do you? It's funny, though!" And she shook her head. "He's not old enough to drive a car!"

She felt shaken herself. Her own momentary flash of anger had evaporated then. Not like Jimmy Richmond, no; most certainly not like him. Carefree, happy, and healthily adventurous though James Richmond was, he would never have deliberately broken the law—as, of course, he must have done in taking the car out at all.

And most certainly the Jimmy Richmond she knew would never have driven in that reckless manner.

Always had Babs & Co. liked and respected sporting Jimmy Richmond of Friardale Boys' School. But there came a time when it seemed that Jimmy was vastly different from what they all imagined. Then it was that everyone turned against him — except Babs. And so unswerving was her loyalty to the outcast that soon her friends were turning against her, too.

Strange! What had come over Jimmy? If she had not seen him with her own eyes, Babs told herself, she would never have believed it!

Rather helplessly, she shook her head. Clara, frankly, was furious. Like Babs, Clara was fond in her own tomboyish way of Jimmy Richmond, but Clara was fonder still of her chum Marjorie, and any hurt to Marjorie unfailingly provoked the Tomboy's wrath. Richmond was likely to hear some plain speaking when next he found himself face to face with Clara.

They walked on—in rather grim silence. Presently, ahead of them, the iron gates of Friardale School came into view, and Pimm, the porter, with a pleasant smile, let them in. A boy, hurrying out of the near-by tuckshop, came eagerly forward, raising his cap.

"Cheers, girls!" he said. "I've been waiting for you! Lawrence told me to take you along straight to the prefects' room—that's where we're having the rehearsal. But I say, what's the matter?" he added in concern. "And what's happened to your coat, Marjorie?"

"Is Richmond in?" Clara asked quickly.

By HILDA RICHARDS

Illustrated by T. LAIDLER

"Why, no—at least, I don't think so; he went out just after dinner. Why?"

"Never mind," Clara said; but the look on her face was grim.

Oddly the boy gazed at them. Babs, intercepting that glance, flushed a little, and wondered vaguely and rather angrily why she could never really bring herself to like this particular boy. For to be sure Gilbert Hillier had never treated her with anything except the utmost courtesy.

Certainly there was nothing about Hillier to breed repulsion. Perhaps he wasn't as strong and athletic as Jimmy Richmond, but he was a good-looking boy, and might even have been really handsome were it not for the way in which he had his hair cut short. She did her best to smile back.

"Pretty rotten mess on your coat, Marjorie," he said sympathetically. "If you'll give it to me I'll take it to the matron and ask her to dry it for you. Yes, please!" he added, as Marjorie made some feeble demur, and very gently but very firmly took it from her. "Had an accident?" he asked.

"Y-yes," Marjorie faltered.

He nodded. Together the group strolled into the school. Beams and smiles greeted the chums as they were led to the prefects' room, which had already been fitted up with platform and wings, and where half a dozen Friardale fellows were gathered. Douglas Coutts, of the flaming red hair, grinned as they came in.

"Chips!" he greeted cheerily. "How goes it, girlies? Lawrence told me to tell you he won't be long—just been called away by the Head. Know your lines yet, Babs?"

"Not all," Babs laughed. "But getting on, you know! Oh!" she added, and started as the door was pushed open and into the room strode a fiery-faced youth with a great shock of fair hair.

"Jimmy!" she cried.

"Hallo, Babs! Hallo, Clara! Hallo, all of you!" Jimmy Richmond called breezily. "Sorry I'm late, but I've just come from Hollands' sale, where I've been buying some props on the cheap. And phew! Was there a crush?" he added, laughing. And then, aware of something in the attitude of the girls, he blinked. "I say, what's wrong?"

"You're sure," Clara asked, her eyes gleaming a little, "that you haven't got anything else to be sorry for?"

"Eh?"

"Clara—no!" Babs said hurriedly. "Let me do the talking. Jimmy, what were you doing in that car?"

"Car?" Richmond stared. "What car?"

"You know what car! The green two-seater," Janet said.

"I?" said Jimmy, looking blank.

"Oh, chuck it!" Clara said roughly.

"Don't pretend, Jimmy! You know jolly well you were in a car—buzzing like anything along the South Copse Road!"

"And you jolly well nearly ran us over, you know!" Bessie said warmly.

"Well?" And Richmond laughed. "If it's any consolation to you, I wasn't in a car, and I haven't been on the South Copse Road for days. In any case, I haven't a driving licence, so I'm not likely to drive a car!"

There was silence. Clara grunted rather angrily. Babs, watching the boy's face, frowned, for the first time

struck by doubt. Richmond's astonishment was so genuine that unless he were acting with consummate skill, he must be speaking the truth. But Clara did not look convinced, and Marjorie, with the memory of her hideously splashed coat still in her mind's eye, was shaking her head.

Nobody noticed in the pause that the door came open, and nobody saw for the moment the tall, athletic, handsome-looking senior who stepped into the room.

"You deny it?" Clara asked.

"I don't even know what you're talking about!"

"Then," Clara said, her eyes glimmering, "let's refresh your memory. Deny it or not, you were in that car, Jimmy Richmond—six of us saw you. The car was a small green two-seater, and when you rushed by us you jolly well splashed poor old Marjorie from head to foot and ruined her new coat—"

"This!" nodded Gilbert Hillier, holding the coat up.

"But I tell you—" Richmond cried.

"I think," a voice behind him put in—a rather angry voice, "you've said enough, Richmond! Thanks, Clara—thanks, girls"—and Ralph Lawrence, the games captain of Friardale School, stepped forward. "That," he said quietly and a trifle bitterly, "was my car, Jimmy Richmond—and I've only had it since the motor show! I suppose you'll deny now that you ran the dashed thing into a hedge just off the South Cope Road?"

"Phew!" Hillier whistled.

"But I tell you—" Richmond said desperately. "My hat, what is this?" he added, glaring round. "I tell you I haven't touched your car!"

"No?" Lawrence's face was dark. "And you didn't touch it when it first came here, did you?" he asked quietly. "When I caught you running it around the quad?"

Richmond flushed.

"Well, that was just a lark!" he said. "In any case, I wasn't doing any harm. Running a car around an empty quad is pretty different from driving it about in public."

"All the same, you had no right to touch it," Lawrence said. "And now, apparently, you've been and smashed the thing up—to say nothing of ruining Marjorie's coat. The police found the car abandoned near the South Cope Road and rang up Dr. Barrymore. I think," he added, "you'd better come along and see Dr. Barrymore and explain things to him."

"But I tell you—" Richmond cried wildly. "Oh, my hat! You—you don't believe it, do you?"

He glanced round. But every face there except that of Babs showed plainly what their owners believed. Clara, apart from her anger, was looking frankly contemptuous now—Clara, open and honest herself, had no use at all for a boy who tried to hide his follies behind lies.

"Babs—"

"Come on!" Lawrence said grimly.

And without further argument he caught Jimmy by the shoulder and twirled him towards the door.

Barred from the Play!



"I DON'T believe it! I can't believe it!" Barbara Redfern said vehemently. "If Jimmy says he didn't—"

"But we saw him!" Clara bluntly retorted. "Really, Babs, I'm surprised at you."

Babs clenched her hands.

Argument in the prefects' room at Friardale School was waxing furious—and for once Babs found herself in the minority. Both boys and girls were talking about it, and feeling was running rather high.

With growing heat the argument had been progressing ever since, five minutes ago, the crushed and dazed Jimmy Richmond had been led from the room.

But Babs was sticking to her point, despite the hostility of the others. There was a mistake—must have been a mistake. It had required only Richmond's own word to dissolve her doubts.

"You mean to say," Gilbert Hillier asked, "that someone else took out Lawrence's car?"

"Well, what else?" flared Babs.

The boy shook his head.

"Pretty unlikely, isn't it?" he asked.

"I mean to say, that puts the blame on some other Friardale fellow. The car was taken from Lawrence's garage, which means that only a Friardale chap could have got hold of it."

Babs glared.

"You're a friend of his?" she challenged.

"Well, sort of."

"And you don't believe—"

"I don't see," Gilbert said, shaking his head, "how you can expect me to believe, Babs. Old Doug here is much more of a Richmond fan than I am, but you can see what he thinks. I'm sorry—dashed sorry! I don't hold it against Richmond for snaffling Lawrence's car; that's the sort of thing any fellow might do just for a bit of a lark. But I do think," Hillier went on seriously, "that when it comes to smashing it up, and then just abandoning it, it's not quite playing the game!"

Babs glared at him. If she had never reacted favourably to Gilbert Hillier before, she felt a sudden overpowering dislike spring up within her then. But Hillier had the majority with him. It was plain that, in expressing those sentiments, he was only giving voice to what all the others felt. Nobody believed in Jimmy Richmond—nobody except herself.

The door opened. Lawrence, a little disturbed, looked in.

"Oh, Babs, just a minute! Dr. Barrymore would like to see you."

Babs paused. Every eye was on her now. She guessed at once why the headmaster of Friardale wanted to see her—to give evidence against Jimmy, of course. For one moment she mutinously pouted, refusal quivering on her lips. Then she thought better of it.

No, she'd go. She was the only one, plainly, who believed in her boy chum. By refusing she could not help Jimmy. But by stating what she felt she might help—considerably.

"All right!" she agreed.

She went out, followed by the prefect, and flashed a cheering smile at the dazed-looking Jimmy Richmond as she entered the Head's study. Dr. Barrymore himself, his scholarly face rather stern, greeted her with a smile.

"Ah, Miss Redfern!" he said. "Thank you for coming! I suppose," he added, "you can guess why I have asked you here? According to Lawrence, you were one of the girls who saw Richmond in Lawrence's car?"

"I saw Lawrence's car—yes," Babs agreed. "But—"

"And that was about half an hour ago—on the South Cope Road?"

"Y-yes," Babs said uncertainly.

"I understand," the doctor added, "that you and your friends recognised the boy driving the car as Richmond?"

"Well—well"—Babs flushed—"it was a boy who was driving the car," she

said, "but—but I'm not sure it was Richmond. In any case, Jimmy wouldn't do a thing like that!" she added indignantly. "It just couldn't have been him."

Dr. Barrymore pursed his lips.

"Thank you, Miss Redfern! As you are a friend of Richmond, I appreciate your loyalty, but this is a serious matter. Would you state definitely that the boy you saw was Richmond?"

A moment's pause. Babs braced herself.

"No!" she said clearly. "I wouldn't state that, because I do not believe it was. Richmond says that he was not in the South Cope Road at that time, and I believe him. Oh, Jimmy," she burst out, "haven't you said where you were?"

"Richmond has told us a story of having been at the sale at Hollands'," the doctor said rather grimly. "It is impossible to verify it. I have already rung up the costumier's department which Richmond visited, and they state most expressly they do not remember having seen a Friardale boy. Richmond, I am sorry. Despite the attempt of Miss Redfern to shield you—"

Richmond stiffened.

"I must hold you responsible for this accident!" the doctor went on. "Not only have you severely damaged Lawrence's car, my boy; you have also broken the law in that, being under age, you took that car out without a driving licence! As regards the car, I shall send the bill for the repairs to your father!"

Richmond winced.

"But I tell you, sir, I had nothing to do with it!"

"Richmond, please do not persist in this foolish fabrication. Apart from being made responsible for the damage to the car, you are gated for a month for having taken the car out without a licence, the detention to start this afternoon with a special task! That is all."

Jimmy started.

"This afternoon, sir? But I'm rehearsing!"

"That," Dr. Barrymore said severely, "is none of my business, Richmond! You may go!"

But Jimmy did not go. His face, pale before, had drained utterly of colour now.

"Dr. Barrymore—" he cried.

"Richmond, do not waste my time! You have heard?"

"Yes, I've heard!" And suddenly anger stained the boy's cheeks; his eyes became shot with flames of mutiny. "I've heard!" he repeated bitterly. "I've done nothing but hear, but that doesn't alter the fact that I'm accused of a crime I know nothing at all about! If you must believe I smashed up Lawrence's car, believe it! Send the bill to my parents! But at least you might leave me the rehearsals. The girls are relying on me—"

"Richmond!" Dr. Barrymore rose toweringly to his feet. "The—the impertinence, sir!" he choked. "How dare you! Be careful, sir, or I will have you caned! And since," he added angrily, "you add such firebrand defiance to your folly, you may now consider yourself barred from rehearsing!"

"What?"

"You will not," Dr. Barrymore said, between his teeth, "take any further part in the play!"

Richmond drew a deep breath. Like a fellow coming out of a trance, he looked at Babs. He looked at Lawrence. He looked at the angry doctor, now reseating himself, and then hopelessly he shrugged. With a bitter smile curling his scornful lips, he allowed himself,

with Babs' hand on his arm, to be propelled towards the door

In the corridor, white-faced, he gazed at her.

"Thanks, Babs! Jolly decent of you!" he muttered. "But you see now how it is? I'm condemned! Not only that, but called a smasher and a liar into the bargain!"

"Jimmy, please listen to me!" Babs faced him. "Jimmy, don't—don't lose heart! I believe in you! Yes, I do! Somehow we'll get to the bottom of this together. There must be some explanation. Jimmy, if you could only prove an alibi! You're sure nobody in Hollands' recognised you?"

"Not a chance," Jimmy said. "The place was swarming; the poor assistants were being just rushed off their feet—so it's no wonder they don't remember seeing me."

"But didn't you speak to anyone else? Didn't you meet someone in Courtfield, for instance?" Babs pressed anxiously. "Jimmy, if we can only find somebody in Courtfield who saw you at the time of the accident."

Sombrely he gazed at her.

"Well, I did speak to one chap," he admitted, "but he's no good."

"Jimmy, who was he?" Babs asked.

"An ex-soldier Johnny wounded in the War. He was playing one of those organ things in the street. I gave him three-pence," Jimmy added, "being sorry for the poor blighter. And he just thanked me and skedaddled then. No, Babs, I'm afraid I've just got to take the medicine that doesn't belong to me. Still," he added softly, "you're a brick."

And with a warm handclasp he went off. While Babs, wretched, her heart torn, slowly strolled towards the prefects' room again.

One Explanation!



"HILLIER!" called Ralph Lawrence. "Yes, Lawrence?"

"I believe you were understudying Richmond's

part?"

"That's right," Hillier agreed.

"Well, then, it looks as if you'll jolly well have to take it," Lawrence frowned, "seeing that the play is barred to Richmond. Better run through the part with Babs first," he added, "so that you can get your cues off. Babs, are you ready?"

Babs was, though about the last thing in the world she felt like doing at that moment was play-acting. Babs' thoughts were with poor Jimmy, now eating his heart out in Friardale's detention-room—Jimmy, who should, at this moment, be here with her.

"Babs, this way," Mabel Lynn said anxiously.

She caught her chum's arm. Now that the excitement had died down, Mabs was very, very anxious to get on with the rehearsal. Though Mabs herself was taking no part in the cast, she was producing, and as it was partly her play, she was most keen to make it the biggest success that the school had ever tackled.

Without enthusiasm, Babs stepped on the platform. Gilbert Hillier, already there, his script in his hand, bent down to assist her.

"Cheer up, Babs," he said. "No need to look so dashed mooney, you know."

"Oh, come on, Babs!" Mabs cried apprehensively. "You start."

Babs gulped. She gazed at her script. Most of those lines she knew by heart—and how enthusiastically and happily

Jimmy and herself had rehearsed them on other occasions. She started.

"Oh, Babs, put some feeling into it!" Mabs protested.

"I'm sorry. Shall—shall I start again?" Babs asked.

"Yes, please; go back to the beginning."

Babs went back, doing her best this time. Gilbert was supposed to be her noble knight off to the wars, and the scene was one which called for quite a lot of deep emotionalism and tenderness. But she knew she was not doing well; she knew, strive as she would to infuse the right notes into her voice, that they were strained and false.

Somehow she stumbled through her lines. But she knew she was just making a mockery of the part. She knew, from that moment, that with Gilbert Hillier as her opposite, she would never be able to do justice to it. Knowledge of her own lack of enthusiasm, the railing sense of fury that she could not call upon herself to do better, the sense that she was behaving like an utter churl, threw her into a confused flutter which made good acting and good diction utterly impossible.

"Oh, Babs, for goodness' sake, do try!" Clara Trevlyn exclaimed.

Even Ralph Lawrence shook his head.

"No good, we're just wasting time," he said gruffly. "It's pretty obvious Babs is dead out of form. Best thing we can do is to chuck it and have another rehearsal later."

Hillier frowned.

"Well, that's all right; but what about me?" he wanted to know. "I've got the second biggest part in the play, and I've not rehearsed. I don't want to grouse, but you must admit it's a bit thick bunging a part at me like this and then expecting me to catch up without rehearsing."

"Yes, that's so," Clara agreed, and looked at Babs.

Babs flushed. She had a most dreadful feeling of letting her chums down, and desperately though she did not want

to let them down, she felt helpless in that moment to suggest anything. Hillier was right, of course.

It was Mabs, looking quite gloomy and apprehensive, who broke in.

"Well—" she said. "Oh, bother it, poor Babs can't help being off form. Perhaps," she added doubtfully, "if Babs has a bit of a rest she'll be all right again, eh, Babs?"

"Oh! Oh, yes, I—I'm sure I should," Babs said worriedly.

"Then," Mabs suggested, "what about a run through this evening? Gilbert, could you come over to Cliff House?"

"Name the hour," Hillier said gallantly.

"Six o'clock—is that all right? All right for you, Babs?"

Babs assented. Well, that at least would give her a breathing space. In the intervening time she could at least sort out her ideas.

And so that was agreed upon; just a run through for Gilbert Hillier's benefit between himself and Babs. And the chums, not very happily, packed up and went off. In silence they tramped down the road that led to Cliff House School.

"Mabs, I—I'm sorry—" Babs blurted at length.

"Oh, that's all right!" Mabs said a little distantly.

"I didn't intend to mess up the rehearsal."

"Then why," Clara glowered, "couldn't you jolly well go through with it?"

"I don't know. I—I suppose I was worried."

"About Richmond?" Clara asked with a sniff.

"Well, yes. After all, he—he is my friend. And—and it's pretty rotten being accused of something you haven't done. Apart from that, I missed him in the rehearsal."

Clara glanced at her impatiently. Marjorie, her stained coat over her arm, shook her head. Janet Jordan pursed her lips a little, and Bessie, who was



"JIMMY!" Babs cried, and hurried forward, for Jimmy Richmond should have been in detention. But to her amazement the Friardale boy swiftly made off. And yet—he must have seen her!

mumbling her lines as she went along, blinked. But the silence which followed Babs' announcement was eloquent of the chums' feelings. Liking Jimmy Richmond as they did, not one of them could forgive what he had done that day.

In the same rather gloomy silence Cliff House was reached. But during the journey Babs had been racking her brains. It was obvious the chums thought that Richmond deserved what he had got. But Jimmy was innocent—innocent! If only, she thought, she could find some way of proving that innocence! If only, for instance, she could prove an alibi!

She thought of the ex-soldier with the barrel-organ. Surely he was still in Courtfield!

A forlorn hope. But it was the only one now which presented itself as a possibility. Once Jimmy Richmond's innocence was proved, Jimmy would come back into the play. And once Jimmy came back into the play, she herself would gain new life, new inspiration.

Before she reached Study No. 4, which she shared with Mabs and Bessie, she had already made up her mind. Any hope, however faint, was worth exploring.

Mabs, with a sigh, peeled off her hat and coat and threw them on to the settee. Bessie, hanging up her clothes, seized the kettle and went off to fill it. Babs stood still, however.

"Why, Babs, aren't you going to take your clothes off?" Mabs asked, surprised.

"No. As—as a matter of fact, I—I'm going out," Babs blurted.

"But the rehearsal——" Mabs cried.

"I—I'll be back for that," Babs puffed. "Mabs, I've got to go—really got to!" she said. "Mabs, if I can prove Jimmy's innocence, Jimmy will come back into the play——"

"But we've got Gilbert," Mabs objected.

"Y-yes, but——"

"Babs, wait a minute!" Steadily Mabs faced her. "Babs, old thing, I don't quite understand you," she said; "but I do think this—I think you're potty to run after Jimmy Richmond after what he's done. And I don't really think," she added, with an unmeant hint of resentment, "you're being fair to me or the others. Babs, after all, it is my play, and you did promise to back me up."

"I know, Mabs; and—and I will. But—— Oh, I don't know!" And Babs shook her head distractedly. "I'm sure Jimmy's innocent, and I think I may get a clue in Courtfield. And that is why I must go now. You understand?"

Rather worriedly Mabs shook her golden head.

"Well, for goodness' sake, don't miss the rehearsal!" she said.

Babs nodded. To avoid further questions, she went off. It was a quarter-past four now; that gave her an hour and three-quarters in which to complete her mission and get back. Have to get a move on, though!

She caught the bus. Twenty minutes later she was put down at the Courtfield Market Cross. Anxiously her eyes skimmed the square, more crowded than usual as this was market day. There was no sign of an ex-soldier with a barrel-organ, however.

Through the market she walked, eagerly looking along the roads which ran off from it. She saw a beggar; a woman selling matches and pipe cleaners; but no man with a barrel-organ.

With a heavy heart she retraced her

steps, one eye on the town hall clock. And then suddenly, ten yards in front of her, she saw a boy staring into a shop-window, a handkerchief to his face.

"Jimmy!" she cried.

Jimmy Richmond it was—Jimmy, who was supposed to be confined to bounds in Friardale School!

"Jimmy!" she shouted.

But the boy at the same instant turned away, hurrying on along the market. Yet he must have heard her—must! And Babs, in some consternation, ran forward.

The crowd was thick hereabouts; people got in her way. Oh goodness! Where had they all come from? By the time she found herself in a clear space there was no sign of the boy who had been gazing into the shop-window; and, breathless and a little bruised by her buffeting, Babs reached the corner of the street; then she jumped.

For coming towards her, the handkerchief still in his hand, was Jimmy himself.

"Jimmy——" She hurried towards him; and Richmond, as surprised to see her, apparently, as she to see him, hurried, too. "Jimmy, why didn't you answer me just now in the market-place?" she cried.

"But," Richmond said, "I haven't been in the market-place."

"Jimmy, I saw you. You were looking in a jeweller's shop."

Very decisively he shook his head. "I'm sorry, Babs; you were dreaming. I tell you I haven't been in the market-place. Whoever you saw wasn't me. No, siree! It——" And then quite startledly he looked at her. "Babs, were you—you sure it was me?"

Babs felt shaken. "Jimmy, it was! I could have sworn it! But if it wasn't——" Then she, too, became struck by the thought that was obviously in his mind. Quickly, agitatedly, she caught his hand. "Jimmy, if it wasn't you, it was someone exactly like you," she said.

"Just," Richmond suggested, "like that chap who drove Lawrence's car?"

"Jimmy, yes! You—you mean a double!"

"Something like that—yes." Richmond nodded, but his face reflected his puzzlement. "It's dashed—Oh golly! Excuse me, Babs." And he sneezed violently. "This blessed cold of mine has come on again—beastly thing! But I'm dashed," he said, "if I can understand who this chap could have been! It's the first time I knew I had a double."

But Babs was thinking then. A double—Jimmy had a double? And yet—and yet, was the boy she had just seen and the illegal driver of Lawrence's car one and the same?

But who could it have been? For the fellow who drove the car must have been a Friardale boy. How else to account for his possession of the car? And Richmond, as he said, had nobody even remotely like himself at Friardale School.

No wonder the boy she had seen in the market-place had never turned round when she had called! Naturally, he would not answer to Jimmy's name.

"But, Jimmy," she asked, "what are you doing—out of bounds?"

"I'm looking for Hillier," Jimmy said grimly. "If you want to know, I'm just on my way to his house—the blighter lives in Courtfield, you know—and when I get there——" His hands clenched. "But don't you worry, Babs——"

"But, Jimmy, I do worry!" Babs looked alarmed. "Supposing you're found out?"

"I shan't be found out." Jimmy smiled a little. "The Head sent me to work in the cellar, and I've bribed old Parsons, the gardener, to do the job for me. But I want—yes, I want very much to catch up with Hillier," he added, his eyes gleaming.

Babs looked at him queerly.

"What has he done, Jimmy?"

"Just telling whoppers, that's all. As if the case isn't bad enough against me, he pitched a yarn to Lawrence that he saw me messing about with his car this morning. Lawrence has found out that the silver watch he kept in the pocket of his car is missing since the accident—I suppose somebody pinched it when the car was abandoned on the road—but that awful snake-in-the-grass is trying to make out I pinched it. I——" He stiffened. "My hat! Talk of angels!" he breathed.

And as he stared along the road down which he had come, Babs, following his gaze, started.

For another boy in a Friardale cap was lounging towards them. It was Gilbert Hillier himself.

At the same moment as they saw him he saw them. Gaily he waved his hand, and, doffing his cap to Babs, hurried up.

"Well, well!" he said cheerily. "A gathering of the clans—what? Thought you were in detention, Richmond?"

"Your business?" Richmond asked curtly.

"No, rather not! All the same—— and Hillier shook his head—"pretty risky breaking detention, isn't it?" he asked. "Pretty tough on you if you were found out. You know, Richmond, I like you. I should hate to see you get into a row."

Richmond's lip curled.

"And I suppose that's why you told Lawrence you saw me messing about with his car this morning?" he asked bitterly.

"Here, Richmond, steady on!" Hillier cried. "I told Lawrence only what I supposed to be truth," he went on levelly. "You were near the car—just about half-past one. I remember, because the clock chimed at the same moment. I spoke to you, and when you saw me you just skeddaddled. If it wasn't you," he added—and both Richmond and Babs gave a simultaneous start—"it was somebody so dashed like you that you might have a twin!"

"Jimmy!" breathed Babs, her eyes gounding.

"Why, what's the matter?" Hillier asked, puzzled.

"Nun-nothing," Babs said. "Jimmy, come on; I want to talk to you."

Feverishly she caught his arm, while Hillier, with a stare, shook his head. As they trotted off together, Babs smiled and then shrugged.

"Jimmy," she gulped, "it's right—it must be right! There is—there is somebody like you. And that somebody, if he doesn't belong to your school, can get in and cut of it."

She noticed that her handbag had come open, and without thinking, in the stress of that moment, snapped it to again.

"Jimmy, don't you see?"

"I see—yes." His eyes gleamed a little. "But nobody else will see, Babs. Anyway, who is he? And how the dickens are we going to catch him out? Oh gosh!" He blew his troublesome nose. "Dash this cold! Babs, look here, can you spare a minute?" he added eagerly. "I'd like to chin-wag this out with you. Let's pop into this cafe for a spot of tea."

Babs, remembering that she had had nothing to eat since dinner-time, nodded, and so in they went.

At the precise moment that Babs and Jimmy were ordering tea, the telephone bell in Dr. Barrymore's study rang. With a resigned and rather irritated sigh, the headmaster picked up the receiver.

"Yes—yes?" he said, somewhat testily. "Dr. Barrymore speaking."

A voice, muffled and disguised, came over the wire

"I just want to tell you," it said, "that one of your boys—a fellow named James Richmond—"

"Who are you?" the doctor asked. "Never mind; that doesn't matter. But this boy Richmond is confined to bounds—"

"Well?" the doctor snapped. "I just thought you'd like to know," the voice went on muffledly, "that instead of being in bounds at this moment he's in Friardale—with a girl called Barbara Redfern, of Cliff House School. That's all. Good-bye!"

And while the doctor let out an angry gasp, the receiver at the other end clicked back on to the hook again.

Rift in the Lute!



"Oh, great golly me!" gasped Barbara Redfern, in alarm. In her absorbing conversation with Jimmy Richmond in the cafe she had forgotten all about the time.

But the time was vividly before her as, rather agitatedly, she stepped towards the bus terminus at the other side of the square. The great round, illuminated face of the town hall clock registered five minutes to six. And the rehearsal began at the hour.

What a chump she was! Why hadn't she thought about it before?

But that, at least, was understandable, and, in the present perturbed state of her mind, forgivable. She and Jimmy had had so much to talk about, so much to discuss, that time had been left out of their reckoning—not, indeed, that in the end they had been able to form any concrete plans. And now—

Babs' heart knew a pang as she thought of the rehearsal. What would Mabs say?

She hurried, but her luck was completely out. The bus service to Cliff House only ran every quarter of an hour, and she had just missed a bus. Fifteen minutes still to wait, and in fretful, white-faced anxiety, Babs had no alternative but to wait. Fifteen minutes! Nearly a quarter-past six when finally she climbed on to the bus, when, hoping against hope that something might have happened at Cliff House to postpone the rehearsal, she sank into her seat.

The conductor came round. "Fares, miss!" he said, rather grumpily.

"Yes. Single to Cliff House, please!" Babs opened her bag. Then suddenly she snatched it up, and feverishly fumbled within it. Too late, she remembered how, in talking to Jimmy Richmond, she had discovered her bag open. There wasn't a penny in it!

"I—I—I—" she stammered, looking up.

"Fares, please!" repeated the conductor inflexibly.

"Oh, I—I'm sorry! I've lost my purse."

"Then," the conductor said, and rang the bell for the bus to stop, "you'll just have to get off and walk, miss. I'm sorry." As Babs agitatedly rose to her feet as the bus stopped, he grimly caught her arm. "Good-night, miss!"

And Babs, with feelings too deep for

words, saw the bus roll off into the darkness. She had been robbed—robbed! But, worse than that, she now had a half-hour's walk to school. What would they be thinking of her there?

"TWENTY PAST SIX!" Mabel Lynn said anxiously. "Oh, great goodness! Where can she be?"

Clara Trevlyn glared; Janet Jordan, rather angrily, looked at the clock on the wall of the Cliff House music-room;

The chums looked at each other again, unaware of the distressed, agitated figure which at that moment was hurrying through the darkness nearly three miles away. Gloom fell upon them all—gloom tinged with just a little bitterness. Really, this was too much!

"Well," Clara exploded at last, "dash it, let's do something. We can't just sit here staring like a lot of silly ninnies! Mabs, you know Babs' part. It's not playing the game to drag

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Bessie Bunter, her script in her hand, muttered something, and Marjorie Hazeldene worriedly sighed. Gilbert Hillier, who had turned up at ten minutes to six, fidgeted.

"Well, Mabs, I'm sorry, but I shan't be able to hang on much longer," he said. "Our gates are shut at seven, you know, and the beaks are frightfully strict on fellows who miss gates. Funny, though. I should have thought even Richmond would have more sense than to keep her out till this time."

"You're sure," Clara asked grimly, "you left her with Richmond?"

"Oh, quite!"

Gilbert over here just for nothing. Can't you take it?"

"All right," Mabs agreed despairingly. "Bessie, we'll take it from your entrance."

"Yes, rather!" Bessie said, standing up. "Here, Janet, take the script, will you? I know my lines off by heart, you know."

"Come on from that end," Mabs told her. "Whoa, steady up!" she added, as Bessie, diving on to the stage, tripped on the carpet. "We don't want you to bring the scenery down! Now face me. That's right!

Gilbert, you face her. Now say your lines, Bessie."

"Oh, y-yes. Lul-lines!" Bessie stammered. "Ahem! I am the Abscess Elreda—"

"Abscess, Bessie!"

"Abscess, Bessie, I mum-mean!" stammered Bessie. And then, drawing a deep breath, she rushed out the words all in one string. "I-am-the-message-Elreda, and-I-kik-come-with-an-abscess, you-know—"

"Oh, boots!" breathed Janet Jordan. "Bessie, come off," Mabs said wearily. "Go and learn your lines properly. Gilbert, we'll take it from Bessie's exit. You kneel at my feet."

Hillier grinned. Using his walking-stick as a sword, he knelt. For the next ten minutes he and Mabs went through the part, and in the interest of watching him the chums almost forgot the absent Babs.

Hillier was good—no doubt about that—and Mabs, if she was a little less sure of her lines than Babs, was a magnificent foil.

Clara clapped. "I say, jolly good!" she enthused. "Jolly, jolly good! You two ought to do that in the play."

"Well, why not?" Hillier asked at once.

But Mabs shook her head. "Gilbert, I'm sorry—but no! It would break old Babs' heart to take the part away from her now that she's swotted it all up. And I've got all my work cut out on the production side."

"H'm! Yes. Sorry, I hadn't thought of that," he replied ruefully. "Poor old Babs! Of course, you can't let her down. Well, thanks most frightfully for the fun, but I really am afraid that I shall have to trot off now. Jolly nice, seeing you all, though. Like to have a spot of ginger-pop at the tuckshop with me before I go? I'm in funds, you know."

"Oh crumbs! I say, doesn't he think of the loveliest ideas?" Bessie beamed. "Yes, rather! Let's go."

And they went, though, to be sure, in a rather chastened mood. The rehearsal could not be said to have been a success without its principal character, and, really, Gilbert Hillier was so jolly nice and understanding that Babs' absence gave them all a sense of having let him down. The very good-natured cheeriness of his reaction to that set-back only made them feel all the more keenly humiliated.

They went to the tuckshop. There Hillier hurriedly stood the promised treat, including in it Leila Carroll and Lydia Crossendale, who happened to be in the tuckshop at the time. Very hastily he gulped his own ginger-beer down, with a breathless, cheery "Good-night!" waved his hand and went out.

"Nice boy!" Lydia beamed. "Jolly nice! But where's Barbara Redfern?" she added. "Thought she was in the rehearsal party?"

Nobody spoke.

"Where is she?" Lydia pressed. Lydia smelt a rat, and, being by no means fond of Babs & Co., meant to find out more about it.

"Oh, shut up!" Clara snapped. "My hat! We are in a nice temper, aren't we?" Lydia scoffed. "I must say you all look about as cheerful as a wet half-holiday. Hallo! Why, here's the giddy missing link herself!" she added, as a weary figure trailed past the lighted door. "Barbara! I say, Barbara—"

Babs paused. Then, as she saw her chums, she bit her lip.

"Oh!" she said, and came in, to be immediately fixed by half a dozen

stares. "I—I'm sorry. Is—is the rehearsal all over?"

"Why? Did you think we were going to keep it up till midnight?" Clara asked sarcastically.

She didn't mean to say it. Clara was very, very fond of Babs, and had a most unfortunate habit of blurring the first blunt words that came to her lips.

Painfully Babs coloured.

"He—has Gilbert gone?" she asked.

"Oh, only about half an hour ago," Lydia said airily. "Oh corks! Were you supposed to be rehearsing with him?"

Babs shot her a look. "I'm sorry!" she faltered. "I was stranded."

"Because of Jimmy Richmond?" Mabs asked, with quiet reproach.

"Well, no," Babs coloured again. "Not—not exactly. I left Jimmy at five to six."

"When," Clara put in, "you were supposed to be here at six. Cutting it fine, weren't you?"

"And—and then," Babs said, "I lost the bus."

Clara turned impatiently.

"And then—then I lost my purse, and—and—"

Babs stopped. Tired, weary, footsore herself, she hopelessly dropped her hands as she saw the others' stony stares. Oh, what was the good of explaining? What was the use, when it sounded like a string of excuses?

"I'm sorry," she added lamely.

"And that," Janet asked, "is all you've got to say about it?"

"Well, what else can I say?" Babs retorted.

"I think you might, at any rate, go and jolly well write a letter of apology to Gilbert Hillier!" Janet snapped. "He was a sport, waiting for you as he did."

"Hear, hear!" Lydia chirruped. "I say, this is fine! Go on! Have a row. I'm enjoying this!"

Babs looked at her. She looked at her chums. Even Bessie was blinking at her uncertainly, and Mabs, her cheeks flushed, had averted her face. All the elements of a first-class storm were gathering in the tuckshop then.

Babs did not give the storm a chance to break. No other word she said. With just a look, she turned on her heels and rather wearily stepped out.

"Babs—" cried Mabs, her voice breaking.

"Oh rats! Let her get over it—touchy chump!" Lydia sneered.

"You—"

Mabs glared at her. For one moment it looked as if she might strike Lydia. Then, in a rush, she was out of the shop. As Babs hurried on in the darkness she caught her up.

"Babs!" she cried.

Babs stopped.

"Babs, why—why did you do it?" Mabs asked tremblingly. "Babs, don't you want to be in the play?"

"Of course I do, silly!"

"Then—then why suddenly take up this attitude?" Mabs asked. "Babs, why run after Jimmy Richmond? I know what you think about him, but, Babs, we all saw him—saw him with our own eyes. Babs, please look at me. It's not worth putting your own chums out for the sake of a fellow who's afraid to own up to what he's done."

"You—you still think that?" Babs asked strangely.

"What else can I think?"

"What would you say if I told you I believe Jimmy had a double?"

"But, Babs, that's silly! If Richmond had a double he'd be known! Oh, Babs, you're just being a chump! You don't want to believe that Jimmy did what

he's accused of doing, and you're trying to convince yourself."

"You—you think that?" Babs asked unsteadily.

"Of course."

"Then," Babs said, and quickened her pace, "good-bye!"

And while Mabs, her eyes round, looked after her, she broke into a run and disappeared into the school.

Only Babs Believed!



EVEN as she ran, fighting back the smarting tears which rushed to her eyes, Babs was sorry for those words.

And yet, such was the condition of her tautened nerves that it did not occur to her to run back and make it up there and then. Though she hated herself for going for old Mabs, she still resented all the implications against her boy chum.

Gasping, almost sobbing, she hurled herself in Study No. 4, and there, with a great gasp, slumped into the armchair. Oh, what had she done? What had she done?

Ten—fifteen minutes went by before the door opened. Babs, not daring to look round, fiercely gripped the arm of the chair as she stared, damp-eyed, into the fire. A muttering voice fell upon her ears.

"I am the Messes Abbage, and I've come with Elreda— Oh crumbs! I sus-say, is thith—that you, Babs?" Bessie blinked. "Fuf-fancy you sitting there, you know! Oh dud-dear—"

And Bessie broke off in dismay. "Dud—don't cry, Babs!"

"I'm not crying," Babs said, with a catch in her voice.

Hastily she dabbed her eyes, and while she was in the process of doing that the door opened again, and Mabs came in. She paused awkwardly at the sight of her chum. Babs bit her lip as she half rose.

Bessie blinked a little. "Oh crumbs! I sus-say, why don't you two say something to each other?" she asked. "Dud—don't look at each other like that, you know! I tell you what," Bessie added hopefully. "Listen to my lines! I've got them off by heart now!"

But Mabs was not heeding Bessie. Neither was Babs. Mabs, seeing that wrong look on the face of her chum, that anxiety in her eyes, had impulsively stepped forward, forgetful of the moment of the tiff, forgetful of everything save that Babs was her staunchest, her greatest chum.

"Babs!" she said, and in that one utterance of her chum's name all differences seemed to melt. "Babs—oh, Babs!"

"Mabs!" Babs said. Bessie blinked. Then, with a beam, she left the room.

"Babs, don't—don't look like that." Mabs' voice was a little unsteady. "I—I'm sorry, old thing. Don't—don't let's mention his name again. Babs, we're still chums?"

"As if," Babs said, with a little choke, "we could ever be anything else!"

"And you're still keen on the play?"

"Mabs, you know I am!"

"Then," Mabs said, drawing a deep breath, "that's all right, isn't it? I—I don't want to interfere in your business, Babs, and—and I know you don't want to force me to think things I'm not willing to think. But—but I am keen, as you know, Babs, on making the play a big thing, and I can only make it a big thing, old girlie, if you will do your best. Babs, will you?"



"I'M sorry I missed rehearsal," Babs said tremulously. "I lost my bus, then I—I lost my purse, and—and then——" She broke off, seeing her chums' stony stares, knowing how feeble those excuses must seem. Then, wearily turning away, she left the tuck-shop.

"Yes, Mabs!"
 "And to-morrow"—Mabs paused—"we're having another rehearsal—at Friardale. Will you be all right for that?"
 "Positively all right, Mabs! And—and I'm sorry, too," Babs said stumbingly. "I—I didn't mean to let you down."
 "Then," Mabs laughed, "everything's all right, isn't it? Now, Babs, will you tell me what you think about your costume—I've got to order that to-night, you know. Where's the design you made of it?"

Happily Babs produced the design, and, with their differences completely forgotten then, the two chums enthusiastically sat down to work. Ah, this was better! This was more like the old times and the old comradeship. It seemed like a dream to Babs now—that brush with her chum. What sillies they both were!

And yet, though she worked enthusiastically on the play with Mabs, she could hardly repress a shudder every time she thought of the ordeal of facing Gilbert Hillier on the stage again. And, try as she might, her thoughts would wander to poor Jimmy Richmond.

To-morrow came. By tacit consent the name of Jimmy Richmond had not passed between Babs and her friends since last night.

At the same time that understanding just as strongly told Babs that her chums had not altered their views of Richmond's supposed conduct, and thought no better of him for having been the means of upsetting their chum.

In a cheery enough body they met the following day, and since Marjorie wanted to call in on Mrs. Hathaway, in Friardale, they went by way of Friardale village. While Marjorie went in to see her friend, Babs, Bessie, Clara, Janet, and Mabs remained grouped outside on the pavement. And then suddenly Janet gave vent to a low whistle.

"My hat! I say is that——"

She was looking towards the bottom of the street, round the corner of which a boy in a Friardale cap had just entered. The boy had a handkerchief to his face, but in manner and figure, even from that distance, he was unmistakable. It was Jimmy Richmond.

"Oh!" Clara said, rather stupidly, and glanced at Babs. "I thought he was confined to bounds? I——" She broke off. A sharp exclamation rose to her lips, and her eyes flamed. "The—the rotter!" she burst out.

For what they saw was calculated to arouse immediate ire. It was all so sudden, so utterly brutal, that they would have been incensed whoever had been involved. For, as the Friardale boy came round the corner, a small, grimy-faced urchin came up to him. He said something to the Friardale boy, who, without even a word in reply, suddenly raised his hand, and then—smack! went the palm on the side of the urchin's face. Up went a wail from the little chap, followed by a howl as he sat blinking in the gutter.

"Well!" gasped Clara. "Hi, Jimmy, you beastly bully!" she cried.

The Friardale boy looked up. He started. Babs gave a cry.

"Jimmy——"
 And then suddenly he turned on his heel, and, leaving the urchin in the gutter, still howling, disappeared round the corner.

"The caddish brute!" cried Janet Jordan.

Babs said nothing. But her face was white as she followed her indignant chums to the assistance of the small boy. Clara was the first to reach him, and the little chap, gouging grubby knuckles into his eye, whimpered as he tenderly caressed his cheek.

"And—and I only asked him if he'd got any cig'rette pic'hurs!" he protested. "I never meant no harm."

"Poor kid!" Clara said. "There, there, don't cry! Oh, my hat! Look, here's a penny. Go and blue it!"

"Ooo! For me?" the delighted one gasped.

"Yes, for you. And when." Clara

said, her face savage, "I see the rotter who hit you, I'll let him have a piece of my mind!"

"But, Clara," Babs cried, "it wasn't Jimmy!"

"No?" Clara's lips curled. "Then I'm blind!" she scoffed.

"But, Clara, it—it wasn't!" Babs cried wildly. "You know as well as I do that Jimmy would never do a trick like that!"

"You mean we thought we knew!" Janet Jordan said angrily. "You're not suggesting Jimmy Richmond's suddenly acquired a double in Friardale School?"

Babs fell hopelessly back. That, as a matter of fact, was just what she had been going to suggest. But the angry disbelief in her chums' faces told how that suggestion would be received now—better to save her breath and the argument which would ensue by not voicing it.

Friardale was reached at last, with Gilbert Hillier, all smiles, to meet them at the gate. As they went into the school, another fellow, with hands in pockets, gave him a bitter glance, and when Hillier turned to beam in his direction, deliberately averted his head. The boy was Jimmy Richmond.

Clara, reaching him, stopped dead.

"Rotter!" she said scathingly. "I didn't think, Jimmy, that you'd be adding the bullying of helpless children to your sins! Oh, don't deny it!" she sniffed, and, leaving Richmond utterly flabbergasted, marched on.

"Jimmy——" Babs said, coming up. "Babs!" He looked at her, then rather angrily glanced after Clara.

"What did she mean by that?"

"Jimmy, you weren't in Friardale ten minutes ago?" Babs asked.

"Friardale?" He laughed hollowly. "No, I wasn't!" he said. "I was doing special detention—out on the school allotments there. Thanks," he added bitterly, "to that beast Hillier!"

At least, I suppose it was Hillier!" Babs glanced at him quickly.

"Why, Jimmy, what's happened?"

"Just that some sneak went and

blabbed to Barrymore yesterday that I was out in Courtfield with you when I should have been doing detention. Only Hillier could have blabbed because only Hillier knew."

Babs fell silent, telling herself she must not argue with that. She did not like Hillier, but she had no cause to think evil of him, and she was desperately fighting not to allow her grievances to cancel out her sense of fair play. All the same, she was sorry in her heart for Richmond—poor old Jimmy, now having to bear this new blow!

"But what's this about Friardale?" Richmond wanted to know, seeing that she did not reply to his outburst. "What makes you ask if I was there, Babs? I— And then he broke off. 'I've not been seen again!'"

"Jimmy, yes!" And Babs explained the circumstances.

"I see." His lips curled a little. "And just as it happens, once again I can't prove I wasn't there. Babs, you don't believe it was me, do you?" he asked, in sudden agitation.

"Jimmy, no, no!" Babs vigorously shook her head. "But, Jimmy, don't you see?" she added. "We've got to do something. We've got to find out who it is. Jimmy, isn't there anybody you know like you—or even just a little like you?"

"No!" Richmond said finally; and then looked up as Clara came hurrying along—Clara, who had divested herself of her coat and her hat and now looked rather nettled.

"Babs!" Clara cried impatiently. "Why don't you come along? We're waiting for you."

"I—I'm sorry!" Babs flushed a little. She looked appealingly at her boy chum. "You coming, Jimmy?"

"Well, hang it, why not?" Jimmy said, with a trace of defiance. "If I can't act, I can watch. And I want to see you do well, Babs, for all that another fellow's got my part. I'll come," he added.

And as Babs went off, he fell into step beside her, while Clara, with her colour heightened a little, hurried ahead.

They entered the prefects' room, where Ralph Lawrence, comparing notes with Mabs, was waiting. His eyes fell rather grimly upon Richmond as that boy lounged in, but he said nothing.

The rehearsal began. Babs, casting aside all worries and cares, flung herself wholeheartedly into her part. Her first half dozen lines she delivered with an oratory so powerful, so vibrant that Mabs and Lawrence glanced at each other, exchanging smiles of delight. This was the real Babs. This was the Babs they knew.

And then—

Well, something happened. Those first few lines Babs had said without looking at Hillier. She felt, if only she could forget his nearness, that all would be well. But, of course, it was impossible to forget that—especially with the tender farewell scene which had to be staged between them. In the midst of her oratory, she saw Hillier, not looking at her indeed, but looking at Jimmy Richmond, with a sort of mocking contempt in his eyes.

Her voice faltered, broke.

"Oh, I say!" Lawrence said in dismay. "Bear up, Babs!"

"Babs!" Mabs adjured anxiously.

But from that moment the spell was broken for Babs. She felt rather than saw the mockery of Hillier's glances. She had a strange sensation as of a heavy hand pressing upon her head, compressing her thoughts, changing her utterances, throwing her into a panic.

Desperately she strove to right herself and in the straining, alas! made matters more confused. Mabs, at last, gave a cry.

"Babs, Babs! Oh, Babs, you can do better than that!"

"Oh dear! I—I'm sorry!" Babs stammered.

"What is the matter?" Lawrence cried peevishly.

"I—I don't know."

"Perhaps—" Hillier came forward, his face was shadowed and distressed. "Lawrence, may I make a suggestion?" he asked.

"Well, what is it?" Lawrence growled.

"Just this." Hillier shook his head. "It's pretty certain that Babs isn't at home with me—well, and no wonder," he added loyally, "considering she's never acted with me before. What about letting her have another shot with Richmond—just to get into the swing of the thing again?"

"Thanks!" Richmond said curtly.

But Lawrence paused; Mabs looked hopeful. Babs felt herself flushing—with joy—at the prospect, and with shame for ever having dared to entertain an unjust thought against this boy Hillier who was now shining in such a real sporting light.

"Oh, Jimmy—yes, please!" she cried.

Richmond, in the act of turning away, paused and looked at Lawrence.

"Do you mind?" he asked.

"Please yourself," Lawrence said rather curtly.

"O.K.!"

Hillier heaved a sigh. There was a smile on his face which Babs could not quite understand but which, if she had probed her memory, might have caused her there and then to beg Jimmy Richmond not to stop on the stage.

For in the excitement, the desperate anxiety of getting something done, they had all forgotten one very vital thing—that Jimmy Richmond had been forbidden to have anything further to do with the play. Richmond himself was thinking of that, however, though, bowing to Babs' wish, he did not voice it.

He stepped on to the stage. Hillier, with a grin, stepped off it. Jimmy nodded.

"Right-ho, Babs! Fire ahead!"

And Babs fired ahead, eagerly, enthusiastically. Those words which before had seemed to stick in her throat now came out with all Babs' power of expression behind them. And Jimmy Richmond, too, seemed once more to come alive. Mabs gurgled.

"Oh, lovely, lovely!" she sighed, and smiled at Lawrence, forgetful that Richmond was only a sort of stand-in for Hillier. "Isn't it?" she breathed.

"Top-hole!" Lawrence heartily agreed. "If only—"

And there he stopped. There, suddenly, he jumped, as behind him the door came open with a furious swish and into the room, wielding his cane, came Dr. Barrymore.

"Richmond!" he thundered.

Jimmy, turning, stood still.

"Richmond, how—how dare you, sir!" The doctor's voice was thick with rage. "Step down from that platform at once—at once, I say! Have you forgotten, boy, that yesterday I ordered you to have nothing at all to do with this play?"

Richmond bit his lip.

"No, sir."

"Then why did I find you acting here?"

"I was just trying to help things out, sir."

"Indeed! Including, I suppose, the

discipline of the school?" the doctor rasped.

"But—" Babs gasped. "Dr. Barrymore—"

"Miss Redfern, I request you to be silent!" the doctor rasped. "Richmond, hold out your hand."

Richmond shrugged. For a moment he heaved a deep, deep breath; then, fearlessly, unflinchingly, he extended his palm and Dr. Barrymore, seeming to gather himself, flung up the asphalt above his head. And in that fraction of a second Babs became an electric bundle of nerves.

Blindly, impulsively, she had hurled herself forward. Amid a deathlike silence she threw herself at the headmaster of Friardale, and even while the cane was in the act of starting downwards at Richmond's palm she caught his arm in midair. The cane fell. The doctor, jumping back, glared

"You—you, miss—how dare you!" he spluttered.

"You can't punish Jimmy!" Babs said wildly. "Dr. Barrymore, I asked—"

"Silence, please! You, you—you dare—in my school—" The doctor's face was livid now. "Miss Redfern, put your clothes on!" he thundered, quivering. "Leave this school at once—at once! If this is how you are going to behave yourself during these rehearsals, then I think—yes, I think," he added, glaring round angrily on all the Cliff House girls, "that you had better keep away. Richmond, you will go to my study! You—Miss Redfern—you will go—now. And I think—until I have had time to think over this matter—that you had better take your friends with you!"

Apology—and Discovery!



"NICE!" Oh, jolly nice!" Clara Trevlyn said sarcastically. "Can

you imagine a happier state of affairs? Just because Babs won't believe the evidence of her own eyes, all this fuss and bother—"

"But, Clara," Marjorie objected, "I'm sure Barbara—"

"Oh, stuff!" Clara said irritably.

"The matter, as I see it, is this. Babs promised to back up Mabs in her play—and is she backing Mabs up? No! Instead of backing Mabs up, she's backing up a fellow who's not worthy to breathe the same air!"

The atmosphere in Study No. 4 at Cliff House, to which the chums had retired on their return from Friardale, was not gloomy; it was thunderous. And there was no doubt for once that Clara was voicing the sentiments of them all. Even Mabs had nothing to say this time.

For it did seem, on the surface, that Babs was putting a worthless boy before the thing which mattered so much to all of them—and, much more to anyone else, to Mabs, who was Babs' best chum. That scene at Friardale this afternoon meant the end of Babs' rehearsing activities at Friardale and might very well mean the end of their own activities. Already, they had discovered, Dr. Barrymore had phoned through to Miss Primrose reporting the scene at Friardale. And Babs, immediately upon her return, had been summoned to the headmistress' study. She was still there.

As they all gazed rather glumly at each other the door slowly opened. Babs herself, her cheeks a trifle pale but her head upheld defiantly, came into the room.

"Babs!" Mabs cried, and there was

a break in her voice. "Babs—what—what did Primmy say?"

Babs looked at them with lack-lustre eyes.

"As far as rehearsing at Friardale is concerned, I'm out," she said.

"Oh my hat! Then—then—" Mabs stuttered.

"Then," Clara said, "that means we're all out. We can't jolly well rehearse without a leading lady, and so the play's just kyboshed! We haven't got anyone else to take Babs' place, and it's jolly well my opinion," she added resentfully, "that you might have kept your silly head when the caning stuff started. After all, it wasn't your business."

Babs rose to her feet.

"Well, what did you expect me to do—stand there and see him punished? It was me who pleaded with him to come on to the stage, remember!"

"But why," Clara bit back, unable to keep a rein on that dangerous tongue

really do think that as I'm such a fly in the ointment you'd better make other arrangements. If you can act with Gilbert, why, then, you take the part."

Mabs looked near to tears.

"Babs, you—you really mean that?"

"Yes," Babs said almost fiercely.

"Then," Mabs said, "I'll do the part."

Clara grunted. Marjorie sighed. Janet shook her head, and Bessie, still mumbling her lines even while taking a lively interest in the proceedings, looked reproachfully at Babs. But the die was cast then. And though it was cast, Babs felt her heart near to breaking point. She was out of the play—Mabs' play—the play she had hoped, for the sake of her chum, to make such a success!

And Mabs—

Mabs, that night, quietly cried herself to sleep.

But it was a long, long time before

with such an unscrupulous ruffian as Alfred Spaggles?

But it wasn't Jimmy—of course not.

For almost the first person she saw on entering the drive at Friardale was Jimmy himself—Jimmy, who had a broom in his hand and was sweeping dead leaves from the concrete path outside Little Side Pavilion. He looked rather grimly angry when Babs told him what she had seen.

"Well, this time I can prove it," he said. "Because I've been on this beastly punishment job for the last half an hour. Half the school has seen me and can bear witness to it."

"But, Jimmy, who—who can it be?" Babs cried. "It's a boy—your own age, with your hair, wearing a Friardale cap and everything. You say there's nobody in the school like you?"

"And there isn't," Richmond said.

"Then—then—" And Babs looked at him with sudden new inspiration.



CLARA strode up to Jimmy Richmond and stopped short. "Rotter!" she said scathingly. "Bullying helpless children!"

of hers, "why couldn't you act with Gilbert?"

Babs was silent.

"Because," Clara went on, "you've just allowed your silly sympathies to run away with you. Oh, Jimmy Richmond is a friend of yours, I know! He was a friend of all of us. But the Jimmy we know to-day isn't the Jimmy we were pally with, and I for one want to have nothing to do with such a rotter! Babs, you're just being a fool about Jimmy Richmond, and because you're being a fool about him you're just letting all of us in the soup without even worrying about our end of the stick."

The chums fell uncomfortably silent. But again there was no discordant voice. That sentiment, if expressed roughly, underlay all their own feelings at the moment.

"I—I'm sorry," was all Babs could think of to say.

"But that," Janet Jordan chipped in, "doesn't help matters, Babs. Why can't you act with Gilbert? He seems a jolly nice chap to me."

"I've got nothing against Gilbert," Babs said. "And yet—well, if you must have the truth—yes, I don't like acting with him! Oh, it sounds silly, I know, but—but—well, there it is," she added not very lucidly. "Mabs, I

Babs got to sleep. More than anything at this moment Babs was anxious that Mabs' play should be a success. Though it broke her heart to drop out it was for the best, she told herself—for how could she go on acting with Gilbert Hillier when she felt as she did about Gilbert Hillier? To-morrow, she vowed, she would go to see Dr. Barrymore at Friardale, make an apology and clear the air for the peacefulness of future rehearsals. And early next morning—a whole day's holiday at Cliff House—she was up. Immediately breakfast was over, without telling anyone where she was going, she boarded the bus for Friardale.

But, nearing the point where she would alight to walk on to Friardale School, she received another shock.

On the right of the road was a little clearing among the trees, and in that clearing, imperfectly screened, were two people. One was the villainous-looking bookmaker whom Babs knew for Alfred Spaggles; the other, Friardale cap on head and handkerchief to his face—

Jimmy Richmond!

As Babs saw them she sat perfectly still. Jimmy—or was that Jimmy? What could Jimmy possibly be doing

"Jimmy, could—could it be someone impersonating you?"

He started.

"But who would?"

"Jimmy, somebody must—must." Babs was jumping now as the new idea got hold of her. "Perhaps," she said, "somebody's acting out of revenge. Somebody, Jimmy, who wants to cook up trouble for you. Jimmy, is there anybody who would be glad to see you disgraced?"

Queerly he regarded her.

"I don't know. No. Well, yes, perhaps there is one chap—Gilbert Hillier."

Babs frowned.

"No, Jimmy, don't—don't let your own prejudices run away with you," she begged. "I know you don't like him, but everybody else does."

"Wait a minute, Babs, I've got a reason! A fellow who would pinch a fag's stamp collection and try to sell it to get himself out of a jam isn't quite the little angel that Gilbert makes himself out to be—"

"He—he did that?" Babs breathed.

"Weeks ago—yes. I caught him at it and jolly well punched his nose. The rotter's never liked me since, and I've

OUT OF SCHOOL HOURS



Week by week Patricia writes for 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

FROM now onwards—until December 25th—this Patricia of yours is going to write quite a bit about Christmas.

I'm sure you won't mind that, for we all love looking forward and making plans, don't we?

Also, Christmas itself has a way of sneaking up on us—so busy are we with other things—that quite often it catches us unprepared!

● Christmas Lists

This week, I want to remind all you who haven't yet done so, to prepare a list of the Christmas presents you must give.

As I know I have told you before, I simply adore "lists," for it does so help the old memory along.

So write out first the names of people to whom you simply must give presents, starting with your family and relatives and working through to finish up with your school chums.

Against each name it is a good idea to write the type of present that person would like, and then to look for it in the shops, or to set to work to make it—according to your mood. Then, as each present is bought, the name should be struck off.

Very systematic! But, of course, you mustn't leave this very private list lying around. Tuck it away somewhere secret so that all your gifts will come as real surprises.

"Oh, but I haven't a single idea in my head about presents!" I can hear some of you say. "I'd love to write a list, but what's the good when your mind just goes blank?"

So here is your Patricia to your rescue with some suggestions—some luxurious and costly, some really cheap, but charming for all that.

MOTHER.—An early-morning tea-set (particularly good if you've a sister to share the cost). A coffee-set. A tablecloth with serviettes to match. A tray cloth. A tea-trolley cloth. A pair of cutting-out scissors (for which she must give you a farthing for luck). Knife rests for the table. Some airtight jars for the kitchen. A bed jacket. Some house slippers. A telephone and address book. One of the new wooden cheese boards with knife to match. Fruit bowl. Shopping basket. Shopping list. Cork table mats. Dish mop. Dusters. Ironing-board cover. Pack of cards for Bridge. Ashtrays.

FATHER AND BIG BROTHER.—Tie. Silk hanky (for show or use). Gloves. Scarf. Cigarettes (always popular). Pipe (to be chosen with care and mother's help). Tobacco pouch. Stick-on ashtray for car. Box for collar studs. Propelling pencil. Note-case or wallet. Socks. Braces and suspender set. Armbands. Penknife (farthing payments to you for this, also). Corkscrew. Razor blades. Hammer. Oil-can. Calendar for office desk. Torch.

AUNTY OR BIG SISTER.—Back puff (a powder puff on a long handle, this is). Box of bath salts. Mirror and comb in case for handbag. Hankies with lots of lace on them. Writing case. Fancy belt in bright colour. Collar and cuff set. Silk-covered coat hangers. Covered shoe trees. Stocking-mending outfit. Umbrella. Fancy combs for hair. Chiffon scarf for draping round hair when going somewhere gay in the evenings. Buttonhole of artificial flowers.

GRANNY.—Thermos flask for her hot milk. Hot-water bottle with cosy cover. Bed socks. Bed jacket. Bedside lamp. Case for spectacles. Cushion. Set of pencils. Blotting pad. Waste-paper basket (you can't have too many). Shopping bag. Brooch. Bunch of safety pins. Bundle of mending wool and silk. Calendar. Letter rack for the wall.

CHUMS.—Box of sweets. Diary. Gloves (the gayer the smarter). Party bag. Book. Hair ornament. Coloured scarf. Address book. Bottle of coloured ink. Set of paint brushes. Necklace. Bangle. Brooch. Over-sock. Shoe-cleaning outfit in case. Tube or packet of shampoo. Bottle of setting lotion. Bottle of eau-de-cologne. Packet of orange sticks (for nails). Nail file. Autograph album. Snapshot album. Notepaper and envelopes with her initial in one corner.

There, now, I think that long list will probably give you some ideas about what to give. It consists only of bought presents, of course—though, naturally, you'll want to make some of them, not only because they cost less that way, but because people love to receive a present that is made by the giver.

So next week I shall be giving you some ideas about presents to make, so that you can start on them right away, for this making business certainly does take time.

● In Bright

Tartan

If the neck part of your winter coat is not very interesting, and you feel you'd like a change, it is quite the smart thing to wear your scarf cravat-wise outside the coat.



Supposing you haven't a scarf and intend to make one, then do choose some tartan material, for as I told you before, it's all the rage this year.

And if you have any material left over from the scarf you could tack some round the cuffs of your coat to match, removing it when you feel like it.

● From An Old Blazer

A cosy jacket to pull over a dress on chilly evenings, or to wear under your coat when going out, sounds a bright idea, doesn't it?

You could easily make one from your old school blazer that has grown too short in the sleeves and altogether too small for you.

Cut out the sleeves and cut off the collar part. Then, in brightly coloured wool, buttonhole-stitch all round the edge—and along the tops of the pockets as well.

A simple initial worked in running-stitch on one of the pockets would give a smart finishing-touch.

You'll be almost longing for snow when you're wearing this!



All we who live in London were horrified to find one of the best—or, rather, worst—"pea-soupers" arriving in October this year.

You who live in the country will remember the fog, too, of course, though you're lucky in that your fogs are at least white.

Ours was black and yellow—and perfectly beastly.

I know, when I had to go out in it, I thought it would be quite a good idea to wear my gas mask!

The fog made my eyes sting so horribly, and also I was absolutely shocked at the colour of my nice clean hanky after a "blow" of the old nose.

A special eyewash after coming indoors again out of the fog is the best treatment for you who value your eyes. Either bathe them with clear water, or with a special-eyebath and a solution of boracic powder and warm water.

And do take two clean hankies to school with you on foggy days if you want to preserve your reputation for being a perfectly groomed and immaculate young person under all conditions.

Your friend,

PATRICIA.

BABS & CO.'s WINTER DRESSES

Miss Hilda Richards and Patricia have again put their heads together, and to-day and during the next few weeks will describe the winter dresses of popular Fourth Formers at Cliff House School for you.



MABS is actually slimmer than Babs—though you might not notice this when she is wearing her school tunic.

She is also rather a shivery person, so she does love long sleeves. ("After all," she says, "you can always chop them off and make them short when they wear out at the elbows"—and hers do, for Mabs loves to prop her elbows on the table when poring over a book.)

Reading that pleats were fashionable this year, Mabs, who has quite a good fashion-sense, insisted that they were the very thing for her.

So she chose a new frock this autumn with as many pleats as she could find—and it really does suit her.

As she's so slim around the hips, it actually makes her look a spot plumper—which she doesn't mind at all. But if she were already plump, she would still have chosen pleats, but from the knees only—not from the waist.

This dress is made of stockinette in a rust shade. It has a square neck into which Mabs can tuck a scarf or not, as she pleases. A silk scarf in olive green was provided with the frock when new, but Mabs isn't keen on sombre colours.

So she made herself a new one of royal blue velvet—and a belt to match.

For going-out-to-tea occasions, Mabs' dress is really quite suitable, but sometimes—just for a change, she takes the scarf out of the neck and wears a royal blue velvet sash around the middle instead.

This, by the way, is the dress she usually wears on the ice-rink at Courtfield when a party of the Fourth Formers go skating.



BABS "Just a typical schoolgirl's dress" is how you would describe Babs' favourite winter frock if you saw it.

It is made of navy blue woollen material, with short sleeves and a white collar. (This is tacked in and is exchanged for a similar one every other day.)

The only trimmings to the dress are the imitation pockets on the bodice.

Three buttons, covered in the same material as the dress itself, fasten the frock at the front of the neck.

At the side there is the latest zip fastener—which Babs loves to zip up and down. In fact, it will become a habit, if she doesn't watch out.

Zips are lovely—much neater than the old hook-and-eye fastening, but you do have to be careful not to catch them on your petti or panties as you zip them closed. If you do catch them, they just stick—and refuse to budge.

Babs has several belts that she can wear with this dress—one of matching material, one of pale blue suede, one of red, and one of mauve.

Mostly she wears the matching one.

Nice as this dress is—and so useful!—Babs did feel that it was a spot ordinary, especially when she was going out to tea with Mrs. Venner or other people in Courtfield. So she consulted Marjorie Hazeldene about it.

The result was that Marjorie made her the ripping little "bolero" jacket you see Babs holding. It is of multi-coloured silk, with a squiggly pattern in pale blue, royal blue, mauve, and a dash of red.

With this slipped over the dress, and a pale blue or mauve belt around the waist, Babs' very simple dress becomes one that could "go anywhere."

And that's why she's so fond of it—even though 'tisn't new.

FINGER TIPS

Your nails will be a perfect joy to behold if you give them a regular manicure. And here Patricia tells you how to do it, step by step.

WELL-KEPT finger-nails are just the finishing touch to a schoolgirl's appearance. I always think.

Uneven tips, and skin growing where the pretty half-moons should be, destroy the charm of even the nicest young person.

So now that the long evenings are here, I want you all to devote part of just one evening a week to your "manicure"—so that by Christmas you will have real party hands that look as if they've just stepped—or floated—out of a beauty parlour.

For this manicure I'm going to assume that you haven't any fancy bottles of lotions, and so on, so we'll make it a real "homey" treatment.

A PRETTY SHAPE

First, give those hands a good washing, then we can see where we are to begin.

Dry them well and now examine them.

Now what shape shall we file the nails to? Well, they should follow the shape of your fingers, roughly, but if you have square-tipped fingers, as quite a number of people have, I certainly won't let you file the nails dead straight.

So we'll decide on a nice oval—an oval that leaves more white of the nails in the centre than at the sides.

Bend your fingers and hold your nails towards you, so that your finger-tips point downwards, then file from the sides to the

tip. Then, very gently, round off the pointed part left.

Now we'll look at the cuticles, which is the skin in which the nails are embedded. Perhaps this is rough and uneven, and trying to grow over the nail itself.

Well, it's simply got to go back.

TIDY CUTICLES

So I want you to smear Vaseline or olive oil all over and around each nail. Leave this on for several minutes, while you read your book or listen to "Music Hall" on the wireless.

Then give it a good rub-in. Much of it will be absorbed, but the remainder must be washed off in warm soapy water.

Dry the hands thoroughly, push all the fingers into half a lemon, if you have one, and then come back to the fireside again.

I want you to borrow an orange stick from mother or big sister if you haven't one yourself. (They cost threepence for a bundle of twelve, you know.) Wrap a tiny wisp of cottonwool around this, dip it into the lemon, and then press it around each nail—very gently—pushing the skin back so that the full beauty of the nail is revealed.

Go underneath each nail-tip with it as well, and the nails will be whiter than you had hoped for.

Rinse the hands again—in clear water



this time, remembering to push back the cuticle round each nail with the towel as you dry them—and they will look a perfect picture.

THE FINISHING TOUCH

To give them an extra gleam, you can buff the nails of one hand on the fat part of the palm of the other hand.

If you give yourself this "treatment" once a week, by Christmas your nails will be really lovely—and then perhaps you can use a special powder polish on them to give a pearly-pink gleam for such an extra-special occasion.

(Continued from page 11)

never liked him. But I don't think it could have been him. He might be the same build as I am, but you could hardly say that his chivvy was the same."

"Then who——" she began, only to be cut short.

"Cave, Babs! Don't talk any more! Here's Barrymore."

And as a tall, athletic figure in a black gown came rustling out of the school house, he turned to his broom again.

Babs understood. She remembered then that it was to see Dr. Barrymore that she had made this visit. Rather confusedly she hurried to meet him, and he, seeing her, slowed a little and frowned.

"Well, Miss Redfern?"

"I—I came over to—tell you, Doctor, how sorry I am for what I did yesterday."

His eyes twinkled a little.

"This is an apology, is it?"

"Yes, Dr. Barrymore. You see," Babs said earnestly, "I—I wouldn't like you to blame my chums for something I did. The—the play means a lot to them, and it is, of course, as necessary for them to rehearse here as it is for the boys to come over and rehearse at Cliff House. I—I do hope," she added, "that you will forgive me this time, especially now that I shan't be taking part in the play myself."

Friendlily he smiled and patted her shoulder.

"Very well, Miss Redfern—very well," he said. "We all do things at times which we regret afterwards. I accept your apology. You may go."

And Babs, gulping, went, casting a sympathetic look at the toiling Jimmy as she trotted past him again. She reached the gates. Beaming in the sudden glare of wintry sun that streamed out, she looked up the road. Then she paused.

A figure was approaching from the main Courtfield cross-roads. A figure walking slowly. He did not see Babs for a moment, but Babs, seeing him, received a faint shock to notice the scowl which marred his features, and the almost haggard expression which accompanied that scowl. In his hand was a piece of paper, and even as she watched she saw him crunch the paper in his hand and throw it into the grass which verged the roadside. It was Gilbert Hillier.

More slowly still he came on. Then he saw Babs and started, snatching off his cap to reveal his close crop of dark hair. In a moment a miraculous change came over his face. He beamed.

"Lo! 'Morning, Babs!" he said jovially. "Coming in?"

"No," Babs said rather shortly.

"Going out. But excuse me now, I've the bus to catch." And she darted away, while Hillier, with a shrug, went into the school. Up the road Babs hurried, and, more out of curiosity than anything else, glanced at the spot where Gilbert had cast aside that slip of paper.

Then, acting on impulse, she stooped, picked up the paper and smoothed it out. And then she stiffened. Suddenly the hot colour surged up in her face.

For what she held was a bookmaker's slip—and printed in typewritten capitals on the top of the slip was—Dr. to Alfred Spaggles. Less than half an hour ago she had seen the false Jimmy Richmond talking to Alfred Spaggles near this very spot.

Oh, goodness! Was Gilbert Hillier Jimmy's impersonator?

Caught in the Act!



BUT not till Babs arrived at Cliff House did the natural outcome of her discovery occur to her, though, to be sure, it was the most obvious thing.

It did not occur to her all at once that Richmond was the one who should immediately be informed of her discovery. That realisation came to her as she was in the very act of stepping off the bus. Then——

Not a moment did Babs hesitate. Instead of going into the school she wheeled swiftly and disappeared into the cycle sheds, out of which she wheeled her own machine. In such a desperate hurry was she all at once that she never even saw the three girls Mabs, Marjorie, and Janet—who were strolling down to the cycle shed at the same time, and most certainly never heard Mabs' cry of "Babs!"

"Oh, Babs!" called Mabs again; and then, as Babs disappeared through the gates, looked hopelessly at her chums. "She—she's gone!" she stammered.

Clara sniffed a little. Janet shook her head. They all looked worried, for it was Babs they had been seeking at that moment. Early that morning they had run through the play with Mabs taking Babs' part, but it was obvious all through it that Mabs would never, never have time to be word perfect for the show. The one thing—the only thing—was to prevail upon Babs to reconsider her resignation of yesterday.

And now Babs had gone.

"Gone towards Friardale," Clara said. "Better get our bikes and follow her up. My hat, what a chump that girl is!"

Janet nodded. Mabs was hurrying forward. They reached the cycle sheds, and, rather anxiously aware that Babs had a decided start, mounted their machines. Down the road they sped, until, nearing the lane which led to the boys' school, they met Leila Carroll leisurely cycling from the direction of Friardale. Mabs hailed.

"Leila! Cooe! I say, seen Babs?"

"Babs? I guess so. Passed her five minutes ago, going at a lick through Friardale village," Leila said.

"What? Not in the direction of Friardale School?" Janet cried.

"I guess not!"

"Oh gosh! Then come on!" Clara cried.

And swiftly, leaving Leila frowning, they pushed on. Friardale village was reached. No sign of Babs. At the crossroads, however, they saw P.-c. Tozer.

"Wait a minute; ask him," suggested Mabs.

"Miss Redfern? Why, yes," Tozer said. "I saw her five minutes ago, cutting that way towards Hillier House." And he pointed to the narrow lane on the right. "I s'pect she was following Mr. Richmond from Friardale School," he added. "He went along there before her."

The chums looked at each other. So that was what Babs was doing! The bounds-breaking Jimmy was once again abroad. Babs, like the stupidly loyal chump she was, was doubtless pedalling after him to persuade him to return. Clara's face grew a little exasperated. Mabs, worried, shook her head. She thanked Tozer. They set off.

The lane was narrow, but they had all traversed it before. Hillier House, which stood half a mile farther on, was, as they knew, the home of Gilbert Hillier's father.

Without talking they pedalled on.

The road, bumpy and pit-holed, did not make for comfort. Nearer, nearer they approached the house, Clara in the lead. Then suddenly she waved an arm.

"Whoa! I say, look!" she cried. They drew up and blinked at the cycle which stood in the ditch.

"Babs!" cried Mabel Lynn. "What the——" And then she jumped. "Babs!" she shrieked in a startled voice.

For there, crouching behind the bank of the ditch, was Babs herself.

"My stars! What do you think you're doing?" Clara asked.

For answer Babs shook an agitated head.

"Please," she begged, "come here! Don't let anybody see you." And she cast a half-scared glance towards the house. "Please!"

Puzzled, they went to the ditch. Mabs blinked.

"Babs, what is it? Nothing to do with Jimmy——"

"It is—yes," Babs bit her lips. "Oh, I know you can't believe in his innocence, but please—please listen to me! It's not Jimmy, I tell you. Jimmy is being impersonated!"

"My hat! Is this another yarn?" Clara cried.

"Please!" Babs gasped. "I tell you it's true—must be true—and in a few minutes I'll prove it! Jimmy—or the boy you think is Jimmy—is in that house at the moment. I've followed him."

"Well, how does that prove it?" Clara asked.

"Because Jimmy, as you know, is confined to bounds. I saw this boy at the end of the lane. He doesn't know I was watching him, but all the time he was behaving in a most funny manner, dodging and hiding as though he knew he was being watched. He——" And then Babs jumped, as from the house came a sudden commotion, followed by a strident shout in a man's voice of "Stop him! Stop him!"

"Look—look!" cried Babs. "Here he is! Grab him, girls!"

For down the drive came a running figure—a figure each of them recognised at once—the well-known figure of Jimmy Richmond!

"Put your bikes across the road!" cried Clara. "Whoops! What a leap!"

This as the boy, without troubling to open the gate, placed one hand on it and vaulted over.

But the chums were ready now. They had grabbed their machines, and, placing them broadside on across the road, formed an effective barrier to check the fugitive's plunging rush. From the house went up another shout, and now a man in shirt-sleeves came rushing excitedly from round the corner of the building, shouting at the top of his voice.

The Friardale boy, spurting on, came to a halt.

"Babs!" he cried. "Oh, my hat! Take those bikes away! Let me go!" He cast a hunted glance behind him. "Quick!"

But Babs was not to be deceived this time. Her lips closed.

"In just—one minute!" she cried, and with those words thrust out her arm. Off went the Friardale cap, and the boy's curly fair hair was revealed. Babs took a firm and fierce grip and tugged. The boy yelled.

"Babs, you chump! Ow, wow, wow! My hair!"

Babs jumped.

"Jimmy! It's you!" she stammered.

"Of course it's me!" Richmond angrily rubbed his head. "What the——oh, my hat!"

Too late he turned, as the man in

shirtsleeves rushed through the gate, fairly hurling himself at Jimmy. Babs could only look on in utter amazement. "Got you!" the man panted. "Got you at last! Thanks for the help, young ladies! We've been on the lookout for this young man for quite a while. Trapped you nicely this time, didn't we?" he added, as he gripped the beaten Richmond's arm.

"But what—what has he been doing?" Babs gasped.

"Doing enough!" the man answered grimly. "Three times in four days this young man has been here saying he was a friend of Master Gilbert. Always he called when Mester Gilbert's father was out, and always afterwards we missed something—first a silver watch, then a small case of coins, and yesterday a gold chain. To-day he didn't get away with anything. We pounced on him as soon as he entered the house."

"Jimmy—a thief!" Clara cried. "My hat!"

"But it's not true—it's not true!" Richmond cried wildly. "I know nothing about the thefts! I came here because I saw the fellow who is impersonating me on the road outside Friardale. I followed him here."

"Then," the man said, "it's funny we've seen no other boy. Come on!"

And while Jimmy, protesting, was led away, Mabs put her arm on Babs' shoulder. For Babs, dazed, her face working, really did look in that moment as if she were going to faint.

Later that night, when Gilbert Hillier visited Cliff House with the awful news from Friardale, she almost did faint. For Jimmy Richmond, accused of theft at Hillier House, was sentenced to be expelled!

It All Depended on Babs!



ONCE Babs had become reconciled to Jimmy Richmond's fate, she sat down to do some clear, hard-headed, and very rapid thinking.

Shaken she had been, but calmer reflection left her belief in her boy chum's innocence unshattered. Jimmy Richmond was no thief. And anyway, what reason was there for him to steal? She remembered the bookmaker and the boy. That, fully established, had not been Jimmy Richmond; but it most certainly was the boy who impersonated him, and his dealings with a man like Spaggles suggested that he was in need of money—most people who dealt with Spaggles were. Strange, afterwards, that she should have discovered Gilbert Hillier to be also in league with Spaggles! Stranger still that the thefts should have occurred at Hillier House, in intervals during which Hillier must have known his father would be absent!

And then Babs remembered the purse which had been taken from her bag. Hillier had been there on that occasion! Here was further proof!

But no use Babs telling those suspicions—and, after all, they were only suspicions—to her chums. Their minds were made up. Deplore as they did the change in the Jimmy Richmond they had all known and liked, the facts, as they saw them, spoke for themselves.

Early next morning Babs went to Friardale. There she learned that Jimmy Richmond was to be expelled that afternoon. Heavy-hearted, she cycled back to Cliff House, to find Mabs seated in Study No. 4.

"Oh!" Mabs said, in a somewhat strained voice.

Babs paused.

"Mabs, what's the matter? You look worried!"

"I am," Mabs replied. "It—it's about the play. Babs, I've got to tell you. We—we've had a run through while you've been away, and it's just hopeless—without you. Babs, couldn't you come in again now this Richmond business is over? Wouldn't you take the part again?"

Babs looked at her queerly.

"Mabs, if I agree, will you do something for me—first?"

"Well, will you—"

"If you'll do this thing for me—yes," Babs said. "No, Mabs, please don't ask me what it is. But I want to get hold of Clara and Janet and Marjorie—never mind old Bess. I want you, if you will, to take them to the music-room for a rehearsal. But please keep them behind the curtain

Out of the school she hurried, to the phone booth some way down the lane. Here she picked up the receiver, inserted her two pennies, and in a moment was through to Friardale School. A maid's voice answered her.

"Will you please ask Mr. Hillier to come to the phone?" she said.

A longish pause. Then Hillier's voice.

"Hallo! Who is that?"

"Oh, hallo, Jimmy!" Babs brightly replied.

"Jimmy! Who do you think you're talking to? This is Hillier speaking."

"Oh!" Babs said, in a voice of faint disappointment. "Gilbert, this is Barbara. I'm sorry if you were called by mistake, but I can't wait. Gilbert, will you give Jimmy a message for me?"

"Why, of course!" Hillier said.



"I say, look!" Clara cried, pointing towards the ditch. She and the others gasped, for a girl was crouching there, spying on the house—a girl they recognised at once as their own chum, Babs!

there. You can tell them, if you like, I've got some stunt on. Later on I shall be coming in with Jimmy Richmond—"

"Richmond?" Mabs cried.

"Mabs, please! Please, please do it!" Babs cried. "Mabs, the play depends on it. Please! Will you?"

"Well, go on," Mabs said.

"In the meantime will you get hold of Lawrence? Ask him to come along, too. Keep him with you behind the curtain until I come in—and then please just watch until I give the word. Mabs, you'll do it—for the play's sake, Mabs?"

"Well," Mabs said, "I don't see how it's going to help the play, but—but—all right!" She nodded. "I don't expect it will be easy, but I will do it. How long will you be, Babs?"

"About half an hour," Babs said. "But get hold of Lawrence at once."

She quitted the room then. But her pulses were racing. Nobody but herself knew the desperate nature of this last gamble. If it failed, then she would be called a fool and a traitor. It must not fail—must not—must not!

"Will you ask him," Babs said, "to try to get to Cliff House within the next half an hour? Yes, I know he's going to be expelled and it might be difficult, but this—but, Gilbert, he's just got to make it somehow because—well, just guess! I know, as a friend of Richmond's, you'll be thrilled to death. I've got proof of his innocence—absolute proof, Gilbert!"

She heard an exclamation from the other end of the wire.

"Gosh! Have you?" Gilbert cried. "What sort of proof?"

"I can't tell you now. That's the secret. But it's not unconnected with a bookmaker man—a fellow named Spaggles. You will tell him, Gilbert?" "I will!" Gilbert's voice was firm. "I'll tell him now, Babs—and, if necessary, I'll help him get away! He'll be bucked to death, I've no doubt!"

Outside the phone booth, Babs waited. Presently a little green two-seater came racing along the road and tipped into Cliff House's gates. That was Lawrence in his car—fortunately, by that time, repaired.

She gave him time to get away, then slipped towards the gates herself.

Five minutes later there was a whirl of bicycle wheels in the road and the well-known figure of Jimmy Richmond, holding a handkerchief to his face, raced up. Anxiously he looked at her.

"Babs, what is it? Excuse the hanky, but you know how beastly this blessed cold of mine can be. Babs, what have you to tell me?"

Babs gazed at him. Was she talking to Jimmy—or the impostor?

Certainly the boy was exactly like Jimmy Richmond—or that part of him which appeared over the hanky. The same blue eyes—the same curly mop of fair hair. Just for a moment her heart failed her. Then:

"Come with me," she said. "We can't talk here!"

"Where?"

"In the music-room," Babs answered softly. "That's deserted at this time of day. But buck up!"

The boy nodded. Placing his machine against the wall of the tuckshop, he followed her.

Babs' heart was thumping violently. Supposing she was wrong? Supposing Mabs had failed to induce Ralph Lawrence and the others to be party to this plan? Supposing, after all, this lad was Jimmy Richmond?

The music-room was reached. Babs took a swift look round. Not a sound—not a movement. Oh, goodness! Were Mabs & Co. here after all?

"Well, here we are!" the boy said, and breathed a sigh. "This is all right," he said. "We can talk here. Now, Babs, where is the proof of my innocence?"

Babs drew a deep, deep breath. Now—the moment had arrived. Were her chums here?

"The proof," she said, "is here."

And she pointed across the room. Then, as the boy twisted round, she made one swift grab for his hair. As her fingers fastened in its thick curls, she gave a cry of exultation. For a wig had come away in her fingers and the handkerchief, dropping at last from the boy's face, betrayed the features of—

Gilbert Hillier!

He spun round, glaring. And then, with a cry, he hurled himself at her, catching her arm.

"You—you beastly, sneaking spy!" he gritted. "So it was a trick, was it—a trick, you little cat! A trick on me! Well, I'll show you now what I think of girls who play tricks! I'll twist your arm—"

"Help!" cried Babs. "Help!"

Oh, goodness! Were her chums here?

Yes, they were! There came a sound like the snapping of a twig, and away from her reeled Gilbert Hillier, smiting the floor with a mighty thud. As Babs, with half-swimming eyes, looked, Ralph Lawrence caught her round the waist.

"Babs!" he cried.

"You—you know?" Babs muttered.

"We know—we heard." Lawrence gazed with loathing at the fellow on the floor. "Hillier, get up!" he cried.

Hillier sulkily rose to his feet.

"It was you, and not Jimmy Richmond, who busted my car?" demanded Lawrence.

Hillier shrugged.

"And it was you," Clara cried, in a tone of stinging contempt, "who hit the kid in the village yesterday?"

Hillier shrugged again.

"And you," Babs flashed, "who I saw talking to Spaggles this morning!"

He looked alarmed at that.

"Here, I say, you didn't!"

"I did." Babs faced him, her chums crowding round her now. "And, what's more, I'll tell you who the thief at Hillier House was—you! You pilfered your father's things to raise money to pay Spaggles your gambling debts, but so that the servants shouldn't suspect you, you disguised yourself as Jimmy Richmond!"

All the colour drained from Hillier's face.

"You—you know that?" he asked faintly. "Oh, my hat! Don't—don't give me away!" he begged. "Don't! I never meant Richmond harm. I never thought he'd get it in the neck because I took those trifles! And I had to adopt the disguise when I met Spaggles. You see, Spaggles knew my father—my father was one of the magistrates who sent him to gaol not long ago. I never meant any real harm to Richmond."

Lawrence glared at him.

"And, of course, as Richmond had a cold, you could conceal the lower part of your face with a handkerchief without arousing suspicion!" His lip curled. "But why did you bag my ear, you young rogue?"

"Because," faltered the boy, "I had to see Spaggles in a hurry. He vowed that if I didn't get money to him by a certain time he'd have the police on me."

Lawrence's eyes showed his contempt.

"And all the time, you let Richmond take the blame for your sins!" he said scathingly. "You beastly little snake-in-the-grass!"

"Please, don't give me away!" the boy wailed. "If my father knew—"

"Your father," Lawrence said, "shall not know. But you're coming with me now, my lad, and you're going to tell Dr. Barrymore about your imposture. Tell him what you like, but Richmond's not going to suffer another moment. And after that," he added, "you can make your peace with Richmond him-

self. Babs—all of you—I think you'd better come along to Friardale."

"YOU THINK?" Clara scoffed. "We are! And I," she added, "am going to be the first to beg old Jimmy's pardon! I only hope," she added, with a withering glance at the white-faced Hillier, "he knocks you into the middle of next week!"

"Hear, hear!" chimed in Janet, Marjorie, and Mabs.

Which, however, Jimmy Richmond did not do. For Jimmy, in spite of his anger, could be merciful, and the knowledge that his girl chums' faith in him was restored, and he was pardoned, and able, henceforth, to keep his part in Mabs' play, was too delicious to allow of any desire for revenge.

Besides, Hillier had his punishment. That night, after the reunion of the girls with their boy chum, and a rehearsal which justified even Mabs' wildest hopes for the success of her play, a white-faced Hillier was publicly caned on the platform in Friardale School Assembly Hall.

Afterwards, while Hillier, trembling, almost swooning, tottered into his place, Dr. Barrymore called Richmond on to the platform.

"I want, Richmond, to apologise to you in public for my own mistake," he said gallantly. "But, more than that, my boy, I want to congratulate you and—"

"Congratulate me, sir?"

"On having found a friend who, for steadfast loyalty, can surely teach every boy in this school a noble lesson," Dr. Barrymore went on. "I refer to Barbara Redfern."

To which Richmond retorted with a fervent and red-eared:

"Thank you, sir!"

And Friardale, who knew the main details of the story by this time, cheered with a vociferous "Hear, hear!"

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

Spoiled and pampered, a niece of stern Miss Bullivant, at the moment acting headmistress of Cliff House, Lorna Millerchip was determined to have her own way when she came to the school. And whenever Barbara Redfern & Co., or their popular Form-mistress, Miss Charmant, rightly resisted her tantrums, Lorna just burst into tears. It didn't deceive the chums—nor Miss Charmant—but it deceived Miss Bullivant, with the most serious results for the chums and their beloved mistress.



CRY-BABY LORNA *Headmistress Favourite!*

Don't miss this dramatic LONG COMPLETE story by HILDA RICHARDS featuring all your Cliff House favourites. It appears next Saturday.

A story that is simply packed with Romance and Excitement.

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 turn the peasants against her and then seize the throne. Pamela in disguise goes to a peasant festival with Paul. After adventures there they learn that a band of angry peasants is marching down on the palace. Paul rides after them to try to hold them up, while Pamela dashes off to take a short cut back to the palace and thus be in time to face the peasants when they arrive.

(Now read on.)

Through the Secret Passage!

"FASTER, old boy—faster!" Pamela Courtney bent low over her racing horse's head. "We've got to race the peasants!"

By "we" Pamela meant herself—the Princess of Leiconia.

At the moment no one could have looked less like a princess. No one, in fact, could have looked less like a girl, for Pamela was wearing one of Paul's suits of picturesque peasant costume—shorts, shirt and jacket, thick stockings and shoes, and a little Tyrolean hat.

As the moonlit ground skimmed by below her, and she swayed slightly to the horse's steady striding, her mind went over the events of the past twenty-four hours.

She felt breathless at thought of them. What a sensational series of happenings!

And all because she had taken from the grand duke's desk papers relieving the peasants of various taxes, papers which should have been given her to sign weeks ago.

If she hadn't returned them to the peasants, disguised as one of them, she would never have been at the festival when it was broken up in her name—thanks to the grand duke's treachery—she would never have been made a prisoner there, because the papers were

unsigned, and she would never have been in this strange dual role.

A fugitive from the peasant encampment, disguised as a boy, and at the same time a princess frantically trying to get back to the palace, and become herself again.

But here she was at the fringe of Tolari Forest.

A swift dash through the trees, and at last she reached the hollow oak.

Pamela swung from the saddle. With an affectionate word and a pat on the muzzle, she sent the horse trotting back.

Snatching a torch from the pocket of her coat, she climbed the thick trunk of the tree, slipped into the opening

AN ANGRY CROWD MARCHING DOWN ON THE PALACE!

And Princess Pam riding
desperately to get there
before them!

where the branches forked, and clambered down the half a dozen crude steps that descended to the secret tunnel.

The torch beam cleaved the darkness. Pamela ran. She often stumbled in the tunnel, but on and on she sped, knowing that each yard she covered was a yard nearer the secret panel in the art gallery of Tolari Palace—a yard nearer the averting of disaster.

And Paul—how was he faring? He had gone to intercept the angry peasants on the march to the palace—gone to delay them, so that when they finally did arrive and demand to see the princess, she would be there ready for them, able to sign the papers they carried, and thus pacify them.

On she went. Twenty minutes after entering the tunnel she was standing in the aperture behind one of the paintings in the magnificent art gallery.

She slid back the canvas and peered cautiously through. The coast was clear. Then began a nightmare journey

to her boudoir, expecting every second to encounter a servant, or one of the uniformed Civic Guards, or worse still, the Grand Duke Bernard himself.

But, save for a glimpse of Juanita, her new friend, at the end of a corridor, she saw nobody. But passing an open window distant sounds reached her ears. They become louder.

Voices—voices shouting. And she could see in the distance tiny pin-points of light.

"The peasants! They'll soon be here," breathed Pamela.

She whirled and rushed on, slipped into her boudoir, and turned the key in the lock. She must be quick—oh, she must be quick!

Across to the large ante-room that did service as a most commodious wardrobe she darted.

That roomy apartment was lavishly stocked with every conceivable item of wearing apparel.

Pamela just snatched up the first things that came to hand, and, arms full, returned to her boudoir. All but one of the array of mirrors was ignored as she stripped off her boy's clothes, and hastily put on those luxurious creations from the ante-room.

Last of all, her wig! And it was the most important item of all, for its dark, sleek hair, completely concealing her own golden waves, was the one thing necessary to turn her into the living counterpart of the girl she was impersonating.

"Ready!" she muttered at last, stepping back.

She gave herself a final scrutiny in the mirror, turned towards the door, and then stopped as a voice sounded outside the room.

"Pamela! I say, is that you, Pamela? It's me—Juanita!"

Triumph for the Grand Duke!

PAMELA stood perfectly still. Juanita's unexpected return meant another delay; another threat to her desperate efforts to meet the peasants at the palace gates, but it wasn't such a very serious one.

By

DORIS LESLIE

"I think I can deal with her easily enough," Pamela decided.

Of course, Pamela was judging Juanita at surface value; regarding her as a most charming, likeable girl, whose only faults were an inclination to be a little too talkative, and an almost embarrassing desire to be friendly.

If she'd realised who Juanita really was; that she was the grand duke's niece, and that she had come to the palace to spy upon her, and to discover, if possible, who Pamela's mystery friend was, Pamela would never have acted as she did.

But, all the same, it succeeded in its object.

With a smile she opened the door, with a smile she quickly invented an explanation for her extraordinary disappearance from the opera, and her absence all last night.

She, too, had received a note, like Juanita, she said; true in substance, for she'd had one from Paul while a prisoner at the peasant encampment. And she'd gone to the mountains as a result of it, and then been unable to find her way back. Also true—up to a point.

"But—look here, dear," she finished hastily, "I can't stay now. I've got to do something—something frightfully important. I wonder if you'd wait for me? You'll be quite comfy. You'll find books and chocolates, and—and a radio—everything you want in here. I shan't be long, dear. Bye-bye!"

And gently pushing Juanita into the room before that secretly suspicious girl could utter a word of protest, Pamela shut the door, and simply flew down the passage for the art gallery.

"Poor old Juanita!" she mused, as she stepped through the secret doorway once more, this time taking the tunnel that led to the palace grounds. "She must think princesses are crazy."

But Juanita, bursting out of the boudoir, and finding no trace of the girl she was supposed to shadow, was furious.

"The—little cat!" she hissed. "What on earth's she up to?"

Pamela, stepping out of the wall into the moonlit palace grounds, closed the sliding portion, and then went flitting away to the gates.

Tumultuously her heart was beating now. The din of the peasants rang in her ears. She could glimpse their brandished torches every time a gap in the trees or thickly clustered flowers brought the gates into view.

How near were they? And what of the other inmates of the palace—what of Prince Alphonse, the grand duke?

They'd be bound to hear the commotion soon, if they hadn't done so already, and they would come to investigate. In all probability the grand duke, putting the blame on to her, would order the Civic Guards to charge the peasants and arrest their leaders.

Pamela tore on. At all costs, she must prevent that. If only she could sign those papers and turn the peasants back before the grand duke arrived on the scene, all would be well. Her own popularity with the peasants would have been revived.

She plunged out of the flower garden, through a rustic archway, and on to the main path. And then she came to a panting stop.

The elaborate iron gates were before her; the peasants were on the other side, not fifty yards away. But they were not coming nearer; they had their backs towards her, and were marching

away from the palace, still shouting, but on a note of jubilation.

Immeasurable relief surged over Pam. The peasants were going off, as though they had abandoned their angry intentions!

"Paul—he must have worked this!" Pamela breathed. "Oh, I wonder what ever he did? Perhaps he said he'd get the papers signed; perhaps they've given them to him. If so I'll be able to sign them, after all, and—and—oh!"

Her voice, trailing away, ended on a little cry.

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Someone had stepped into view from the bushes beside the path. It was a tall, thin figure in the uniform of a field-marshal, and as it approached Pamela she caught the glint of a monocle.

The Grand Duke Bernard! "Why, Sonia!" he exclaimed, hurrying forward. "My dear girl, where ever have you been? You've given us a dreadful shock! What happened to you?"

"Oh, I—I—" Pamela, recovering a little of her composure, made the same excuse that she had given Juanita. "Somebody—somebody played me rather a mean trick!" she ended.

It sounded terribly lame to her, but the grand duke was apparently impressed.

"A trick, eh?" he remarked lightly. "Well, you were rather stupid to be taken in by it, my dear. And it might have been extremely serious, too, as things turned out."

"How—how do you mean, uncle?" "Did you see a crowd of peasants outside the gates just now? You must have heard them, anyway—"

"Why, yes, uncle. But—but—" "Well, my dear," said the grand duke, folding his arms, "they came here to see you. They'd got some papers they wanted you to sign; papers connected with some of their taxes, apparently. Did you know anything about them?"

Pamela fought down a tremor that ran through her body. Unflinchingly she returned the grand duke's almost nonchalant glance, but it meant a tremendous effort, for there seemed to be a hint of mockery in his eyes.

"Papers?" she repeated, frowning. "Why, no. I haven't been shown any."

"I thought not. It's a mystery to me how that rabble got hold of them. But they were rather annoyed when they knew you weren't here. Of course, I made some excuse. I said you were not well. But they seemed to imagine that you were deliberately refraining from signing the things, and so—"

The grand duke shrugged, pausing. Pamela bit her lip. Obviously the grand duke guessed how the peasants had obtained the papers; guessed that she had taken them from his desk. Possibly he even guessed that she had been at the festival last night. And he was toying with her; deliberately trying to lull her into a false sense of security.

As though quite composed, she nodded calmly.

"Yes?" she prompted, conscious that he seemed to be inwardly gloating at some further secret of his own.

But at that moment there came a sudden burst of shouting from the peasants, whose voices had died down some time ago. Pamela, turning, saw them gathered before one of the other gates; saw their torches waved aloft and sticks and hats flung into the air.

A roar of cheering reached her ears. To a sudden uncontrollable thrill, she stepped forward, waving her hand. Then, incredulously she drew back. The cheering had changed to boos and hisses, and the brandishing of clenched fists. White-faced, she stood there.

Next moment the cheering broke out afresh. Pamela, glancing round, saw that the grand duke was saluting. Faintly, but clearly understandable, she picked out the cries.

"The duke—the duke!" "Evivva! Evivva!" "Long live the Grand Duke Bernard! Long live the duke—"

And then the crowd moved off again, still chanting acclamations to the grand duke.

Terribly wounded though she was, Pamela did not mean to let the grand duke suspect her feelings. Somehow she managed to keep her voice tremorless as she turned to him again and, as though nothing had happened, repeated in the same questioning tone:

"Yes, uncle? You were saying—"

"Ah, yes!" Quite jauntily the grand duke swung round. "I was saying, my dear, that the peasants were so annoyed to find you were not available that I did the only thing possible to keep them quiet. I signed the papers myself!"

Pamela looked at him; looked at him with eyes that must have betrayed the consternation she felt.

She'd failed—and he, her enemy, Leiconia's enemy, had succeeded. True, the papers had been signed and the peasants' rebellious mood curbed, but

so far as she was concerned those things might never have happened.

The peasants' recent attitude was explained. They hated her more than ever, while the grand duke had made himself the idol of their little community. He had achieved the first stage of his plot—the plot to turn the whole of Leiconia against her so that when he made his bid to seize the throne and banish her, the entire populace would rally to his support!

"Of course," he went on unctuously. "It would have been much better if you'd signed the things. I don't think the peasants were too pleased that I'd deputed for you. But at any rate, it averted a very nasty situation. Well, my dear." He adjusted his monocle and crooked an arm towards her. "Are you coming inside?"

Pamela, hands clenched, shook her head.

"Not—not yet, uncle," she said. "I think I'd like a walk. Good-night."

"Good-night, my dear."

He gave her an unmistakably exultant glance and strutted off.

Sick at heart, Pamela watched him.

How he must be gloating now! No wonder he so lightly dismissed the rifling of his desk and her visit to the festival. It had played her right into his hands.

Frowning, Pamela began to walk along the path. She had not gone far before—

"Coo-eee!" came a low hail from behind a bush.

Quite startled at first, she halted, and then her face lit up.

"Paul!" she cried, recognising the crouching figure who beckoned her. "Oh, Paul!"

In an instant she was beside him, and as she looked at his handsome face, now so grim and haggard, she felt just a wee bit less despondent. Paul was her dearest friend. Paul was always at hand whenever she needed him. And she needed him now more than she had ever done before.

"Paul," she began, her voice breaking. "the grand duke—"

But that was as much as she could say. Paul laid a gentle hand on her arm.

"I know, Pam," he said quietly. "I was here all the time. I heard everything. And I was in the crowd when that rotten schemer was talking to them!" he added fiercely. "Oh, he made out a darned good case for himself all right—and as bad a case for you as he could! He didn't say you were ill. He said you'd refused to sign the papers, and that he'd come to do so instead."

Pamela, though by no means surprised at this news, bit her lip.

"And they believed him, Paul?"

Paul shrugged.

"Of course! What else were they to think?"

"Then I've got to disillusion them," Pamela said, tight-lipped. "It—it was awful when they booed me just now, Paul. Not because it's so serious for me as princess and for Sonia if things aren't better when she gets back, but because I—well, I want them to like and respect me, just as I like and respect them. But what ever can we do?" she asked helplessly. "I've been racking my brains, and—"

"Did you know you'd a birthday the day after to-morrow," was Paul's apparently inexplicable question—"or, at least, Sonia has?"

"A birthday?" said Pamela, staring at him. "Why, no, I didn't know that! But what's that got to do with it?"

"A whole heap," Paul went on, a gleam of hope in his eyes. "Now, old thing, I've an idea. You want to show the peasants you're not half as bad as you're painted. Well, then, here's how you can do it. Invite them to a garden-party in these grounds!"

Pamela held her breath, hands clasped.

"Paul, what a gorgeous idea!"

"Naturally, in view of its inventor!" smiled Paul, with a brief return of his customary gayness. "You'll have to get the council to agree, of course. And they may try to dissuade you. But you've only got to insist, make out a good case for yourself, and I don't think you'll have much trouble about that. Oh, and by the way—"

"Yes?" said Pamela, who was beginning to feel quite excited.

"One important point—Prince Alphonse. I happen to know he won't be at the palace on your birthday. There's some matter of State he's

What Juanita Overheard!

"AND now, my friend, you know exactly how grave things are!" Elbows resting upon his shining walnut desk, the grand duke looked up at his accomplice.

Ricardo, having listened without interruption to the duke's account of the events of the past twenty-four hours—so far as he could deduce them—seemed rather dazed.

"But—but it's fantastic, Bernard!" he burst out at last. "That the princess, of all people, should give those papers to the peasants! I can't— But, Bernard—"

He looked sharply at his chief. "How did she get hold of them?" "Stole them!" said the grand duke, through his teeth.

"Stole them? But—but where from?"

"From here, my friend."

And the grand duke tapped one of the drawers at his side.



PAMELA shrank back as the angry peasants at the gates hissed. But the next moment cheers rang out for the treacherous grand duke. He smiled and saluted, knowing full well he had completely defeated Pamela this time.

got to attend to near the eastern frontier."

Pamela was quick to understand what Paul meant.

"Oh," she said, "then I shan't have anyone to show me the ropes—tell me what to do—how to receive the peasants and all that?"

"You'll have someone all right!" was Paul's smiling reply. "None other than myself!"

"But how?" Pamela stared. "You can't come as yourself. It would never do for the grand duke to recognise you."

"I shall be disguised," said Paul. "I shall be in peasant costume, of course; but you'll recognise me by a blue hat with a white band and three red feathers in it. And I'll stick to you like a shadow the whole time."

Further discussion was prevented then by the appearance of one of the Civic Guards some distance away. Paul, with a whispered "So-long!" crept off through the bushes, and she, waiting until she knew he had got safely away, headed for the palace.

There was a smile on her face now.

The grand duke had been cunning and clever, but he hadn't quite beaten her yet.

Ricardo, ever highly strung, looked horrified.

"Then she must suspect—"

"That I am her enemy—planning to turn her off the throne and seize it myself?" interposed the grand duke, as Ricardo gulped over the words. "Of course she does." His eyes narrowed. "And that's what makes it so grave from our point of view."

"Has—has she said anything?" Ricardo asked, licking his lips.

"If you mean of her thoughts—no. But, then, Sonia is not a fool, Ricardo."

"And so it's to be a game of—of wits between you?"

"Exactly! But"—the grand duke glared at his watch—"where's that confounded niece of mine got to? I sent word that— Ah, here she is!"

For at that moment the doors were flung open by a couple of flunkeys, and Juanita appeared. Flushed and breathless, she did not wait for the doors to be closed before rushing across the room. Obviously, she was beside herself with excitement.

"Uncle, I—I've just heard them—in the—in the grounds!"

Both men stared at her. Ricardo looked blank, but the grand duke's eyes suddenly lit up.

"You mean—Sonia and—"

"Her accomplice—yes!" Eagerly

Juanita nodded. "A young fellow! I heard them talking near the gates!"

The grand duke sprang to his feet. "What luck!" he cried. "Ricardo! Juanita! Don't stand there gaping! Quick! Summon the guards! We'll catch them together—"

But Juanita gave a swift gesture of futility.

"No good, uncle!" she snapped. "He's gone now. He went before I could do anything. And Sonia's gone to bed, I think."

Like a volume of escaping air, the grand duke's eagerness oozed out of him. Quite limply he sank back into his chair.

"Gone!" he muttered. "And to think he was under our noses, and we didn't know it!" Then, leaning forward, he looked intently at Juanita. "But what did they say?"

"Oh, nothing much!" said Juanita, scowling. "The fellow said something about she'd know him by a blue-and-white hat with three red feathers in it, and that he'd stick to her like a shadow. That was all I heard."

"H'm!" muttered the grand duke. "That might mean anything—it might even be some sort of code."

He pondered a while, and finally, as if finding the thing beyond him, looked up.

"At any rate, this proves Sonia has an accomplice. From now onwards we must be absolutely relentless. Unless Sonia is driven out of Leiconia at the earliest possible moment we may find that she is the one to do the driving, and we the ones to flee. Juanita!"

Quite startled by the bark in his voice, Juanita backed away.

"Oh! Y-yes, uncle?"

"You've bungled things once. See that you don't bungle them again, or there will be a dungeon for each of us. Your job is to wheedle yourself into Sonia's favour."

"I've already done that," said Juanita, with a scowl.

"And," continued the grand duke, "discover how we can lay our hands on this precious friend of hers. You might also," he added, as if on an afterthought, "try to find out what this 'red feather' business is. Meanwhile—"

Rising, he folded his arms, a crafty confident smile on his face.

"Meanwhile, I will take care of Sonia—my way!"

BUT THE grand duke discovered as early as the following morning that it was not going to be as simple as all that to "take care of" the princess.

She rose later than usual, refreshed by the deepest and most untroubled of slumbers. She had a bath in foamy, perfumed water, and dressed, while Rowena, her personal maid, flitted in devoted attendance about her, always seeming to anticipate her wishes even before she had expressed them.

Pamela's eyes glowed as she studied the girl in a mirror.

Darling Rowena! So devoted and adoring that she was still trembling with relief at the safe return of her mistress. Pam was touched by such affection.

"Rowena dear," she said gently, "it's a lovely day, and I've not much to do, so I want you to do something instead."

"Why, anything you wish, your Highness," said Rowena at once.

"Then take this," Pamela replied, pressing several currency notes into the maid's hand, "put on your best clothes, and go out and enjoy yourself."

And, with a smile, she left her suite, leaving wide-eyed Rowena stammering her delight and thanks.

In the passage, Pamela saw Juanita

standing by her bed-room door, and Juanita, having heard Pamela's approach, was wearing the most friendly expression.

"Pamela!" she cried, and hugged Pam's arm. "Oh, you look lovely this morning. Did you sleep well?"

"Like a lumber camp—full of logs!" Pam chuckled.

They began to walk, arm-in-arm, towards the main staircase.

"I'm so glad!" Juanita chattered on.

"You must have been tired after what happened to you in the mountains. That's why I didn't wait for you after all, last night. I knew you'd want to go to bed. And besides, I did, too. We—we were all rather worried about you, you know."

"That was awfully sweet of you all!" Pamela said.

Garrulous Juanita might be, but she did seem an awfully charming girl.

The long journey to the breakfast-room was a greater thrill than ever for Pamela to-day, for it seemed that as many servants and Civic Guards as could contrive it had taken up positions along the route, merely in order to show their delight at her safe return.

It was one never-ending succession of curtsies, bows, and salutes.

"It must be lovely to be a princess—sometimes!" Juanita sighed.

"After breakfast I'll show you when being a princess has its difficult side," Pamela replied, chuckling.

And she would say no more until, with the leech-like Juanita still clinging to her arm, she entered the beautifully appointed council-room, where certain ministers had gathered at her request.

There was a rustle on Pamela's entry—a general bowing. The grand duke was there, pompous and yet very complacent. Prince Alphonse was also there, as handsome as ever, with his trim imperial beard and faultlessly cut clothes. And it was he who, taking Pamela's hand, led her to the desk.

"Be seated, gentlemen," Pamela invited. "My reason for calling this unexpected meeting can be explained in a few words. To-morrow is my birthday. I wish to celebrate it by throwing open

the palace grounds to a garden-party—for the peasants."

Of course, that was in the nature of a bombshell. The grand duke started violently, instantly realising something of the motives behind Pamela's suggestion.

"An excellent idea!" exclaimed Prince Alphonse. "But, really, Sonia, at such short notice an affair of this nature is impossible."

"It must be made possible, uncle," said Pamela quietly, and tried to convey her inner thoughts with a glance.

"Your Highness, I'm afraid I must agree with his Highness," said one of the ministers. "A magnificent suggestion, but the time—"

"Quite out of the question," said the grand duke suavely. "Another year, perhaps; but this year—I'm afraid not."

"I wish it to be held this year," said Pamela, quietly but firmly.

"Ridiculous!" snapped the grand duke.

"It is not ridiculous, uncle."

"But, your Highness, we could never complete the arrangements in time," came a tentative objection from another minister. "We have not the staff."

Pamela, nonplussed for a second, suddenly spread out her arms.

"Then get the staff," she said. "Employ men who are out of work. Do two good turns at once."

"Really," began the grand duke, scowling, "this is absurd!"

But the only thing which the rest of the council appeared to consider absurd was his own objection. Pamela's little inspiration about making use of some of the unemployed had done the trick.

"A master-stroke, my dear!" exclaimed Prince Alphonse delightedly.

"Bravo!" the council echoed.

"Then the garden-party is to be held, gentlemen," said Pamela, more as a statement than a question. She smiled, gloriously happy-hearted. "Thank you. That is all, gentlemen. I will leave everything in your hands."

And, amid a general bowing of figures, she left them, pausing on the threshold of the room, while two liveried flunkeys held open the double doors, to beckon Juanita.

Curtsying to the council, Juanita hurried after Pamela; but, thanks to the distance of the door from the desk, she had already held a brief but intense conversation with the grand duke.

"You little fool!" he hissed, seizing her arm. "Why didn't you warn me about this?"

"I didn't know until just now."

"Well, you've got to find out all you can. It's too late to stop this scheme of Sonia's—a clever scheme, I'll admit, getting herself back into the peasants' good books like that. But there may be more in it than there seems. And"—he lowered his voice even more—"we can take no chances. Go after her—stick to her like a limpet; keep your eyes and ears open. She's only got to make one little slip, or say one indiscreet word, and if she is up to anything on the quiet we've got her where we want her. Now!" He gave Juanita a push. "After her—quick!"

And Juanita, like the dutiful little plotter she was, hurried to join the unsuspecting Pamela.

IN next Saturday's instalment you will read how the garden party for the peasants is held, and how it provides great fun—and excitingly dangerous incidents—for Pamela and Paul.

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How would you like to knit a lovely present for daddy, mummy or your school-chum? Well, even a very little girl can make a "pixie" hood for herself, a scarf or shawl, a "Dusky Sue" tea-cosy, and "Bunny" bedroom slippers, and there are such hosts of other jolly knitted things. It tells you all about them and exactly how to do it, in this BESTWAY book, which costs only sixpence. You'll like the "pixie" pictures in it, too. Buy one and start knitting today. Ask for

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Thrills and Adventure 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 Hawsley 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, and soon has Hilda & Co. under suspicion. The chums are sure the mystery is connected with an old mill near by, which can be reached from the manor by a secret passage. There is also a tunnel to the mill from outside. A guest, MIRANDA BATES, learning of the treasure, accidentally sets fire to the mill, but the chums save the building. Later, they find a wax model of a pair of hands used by the mystery woman.

(Now read on.)

By

ELIZABETH
CHESTER

"Come in!" she cried. It was Beryl who looked in, her face red and shiny.

"I say, do come and help," she begged. "Lavender hasn't shown up, and there are the breakfasts to get. Goodness knows what the Bates family will say if they don't get breakfast on time—and I know they are getting up!"

Hilda saw the need for haste, and as she could put her plan into execution as well after breakfast as before, she very carefully hid the wax-modelled hands in the bottom of the chest of drawers under some of her things.

Beryl had not seen it, and with common consent she and Judy decided not to mention anything about their discovery to her—yet. Later, of course, since there were no secrets between them, they would tell her.

Mr. and Mrs. Bates and Miranda were already on their way down to breakfast, so Hilda and Judy hustled down to the kitchen with Beryl.

Where Lavender could be, and why there was no news from her, was a com-

"My word, but it was clever!" said Judy. "Anyone seeing these hands would believe the woman was old. She must have been simply livid when Marcus took them from her."

She patted Marcus for that, and he wagged his tail proudly—for, so far as finding clues was concerned, he had done really well, right from the start.

"Yes, she must have been," said Hilda slowly, a gleam in her eyes. "But she'll be still more mad if he gives them back."

Judy did not quite see what Hilda was driving at.

"Mad if he gives them back?" she echoed. "Oh, no. Why? That'd be what she wants."

"Come With Me—"

"WHAT we have to do now," said Hilda Farrel, as she returned to her bed-room from the secret passage with the wax model where Thelma Harkness can find it, and then keep watch to see if she tries to sneak it back."

Hilda put the wax model of a pair of clasped hands on to the bed, and she and Judy stood there silent for a moment, still rather startled by their suspicion that Thelma Harkness, supposedly a detective trailing the mystery woman who was "haunting" the old manor house, was really that woman herself.

"It's hard to believe," said Hilda slowly. "And yet, you know, thinking things over, it does hang together. As the detective, she can roam this house how she likes—she's free to hunt for the treasure, too."

"Then let's trap her," said Judy eagerly. "When you think how hateful she's been it'd be just grand to bowl her out, wouldn't it? And no wonder she's been up against us!"

But Hilda put a warning finger to her lips.

"Shush!" she said, looking round warily. "These walls have ears, and once she knows we're on her trail she can be artful, and fool us."

Hilda picked up the cleverly modelled hands. From a distance they really did look natural—the hands of an old woman—and she tried to hold them by the wrists in front of her, her own hands concealed in the sleeves of her dressing-gown.

AT LAST A CLUE TO THE WHEREABOUTS OF THE MANOR HOUSE'S VANISHED HOSTESS!

"Not if I told him to give them back to whoever he got them from," pointed out Hilda.

As her friend's purpose suddenly dawned on her Judy brightened, and then clapped her hands in glee.

Marcus, clever dog that he was, had one very special trick. When he chose, he could sort through a number of things piled before him on the floor and return each object to its owner, guided only by his power of scent—and whatever sixth sense he possessed, not given to human beings.

"All I need say," mused Hilda, "is 'give it back.' If I say it when Thelma Harkness is in the room we'll soon know whether he got them from her or not."

She turned then, for there was a step in the corridor, followed by a tap at her bed-room door.

plete mystery, but one that would have to wait until after breakfast.

None of them supposed that she had met with a serious accident, and they were not yet gravely concerned about her, mysterious though her disappearance was.

In the kitchen the daily help was flustering around, used to having Lavender's organising mind to guide her.

There was toast to be made, bacon and eggs to be fried, ham to be cut, tea and coffee to be made—and, so far, she had started everything, but finished nothing.

Beryl was very little use in a kitchen, and she had already broken two eggs on the table instead of into a cup. Fortunately, Hilda was more expert, and she wasted no time.

Judy got busy with a loaf of bread, cutting slices for toast, and Lavender's father hovered around, getting into everyone's way.

"I just can't think where Lavender is, unless at the Old Mill!" he muttered.

Hilda was just dishing up bacon and eggs when the bell rang from the dining-room.

"That's the Bates family!" said Hilda. "Trust them to make a fuss. Buzz and tell them breakfast won't be long, Beryl."

"I will go!" said Lavender's father. "They can start with cereals, or porridge."

He took a tray, and hurried out. The coffee was ready now, and Hilda poured it into a large pot, put hot milk into a jug, and then gave a loaded tray to Judy.

"I put some eggs on to boil some time ago," said Beryl. "They ought to be done now."

"Some minutes ago?" gasped Hilda in alarm. "My golly, they'll be done all right, you duffer—completely done!"

The eggs, needless to say, were hard-boiled.

"All the eggs there are!" sighed Hilda. "And I suppose the Bates will want boiled eggs, and nothing else, this morning. You are a duffer, Beryl, really!"

"Um!" admitted Beryl, with a faint sigh. "But one can do things with boiled eggs, you know—egg with

sardines and chicken, and crab, and things—"

"Well, you do it. Catch a crab or two, and get busy," advised Hilda humorously. "And if you see an anchovy lurking around you can have anchovy eggs, or whatever they call them—if the Bates stay on long enough."

Then Hilda hustled up herself with the tray of bacon and eggs, leaving the woman to see to the kippers. There was plenty of variety, and the guests of Hawsley Manor could not complain that they were starved or neglected as regards food.

Entering the dining-room, Hilda heard Mr. Bates making protest.

"Really preposterous!" he exclaimed. "I had intended going to play golf early this morning. And here I am, awaiting breakfast at this hour."

"I am sorry, sir," said Lavender's father, playing his part as butler. "Miss Lavender has been unavoidably prevented from giving assistance this morning—"

"Miss Lavender—ah!" said Mr. Bates, recollecting. "There was a telephone message from her. She is on her way to London, and will telephone later. Urgent business called her away."

Mr. Mortimer stared blankly, completely at a loss to know why his daughter should have gone so mysteriously to London.

"To London—but—but why?" he murmured.

"I cannot say why," said Mr. Bates sharply. "It is not my business. Doubtless your master will understand. Please take him the message."

Hilda heard that message, too, and was just as puzzled as Lavender's father.

"How odd!" she could not help exclaiming.

"Where are the boiled eggs this morning?" asked Mr. Bates irritably. "I particularly want a boiled egg."

Hilda had guessed it!

"There's some nice bacon—and fried eggs, Mr. Bates," she said.

"If I wanted fried eggs I should say so," he retorted, never at his best at breakfast time. "I want a boiled egg—two, in fact!"

He pressed the bell.

"Why are you helping with the service?" asked Mrs. Bates, frowning at Hilda. "I thought you were a paying guest."

"I am," admitted Hilda. "But I'm rallying round. They're short-handed here. The servant problem, you know."

She did not explain that the reason for the problem was that the servants had been scared out of the house by the ghost, and that as the story was known in the village none of the other available maids would take a job.

For the Bates would have behaved in the same way as the servants once they had known there was a ghost—they would have fled.

"I'll see what we can do about a boiled egg, Mr. Bates," promised Hilda, and, hurrying from the room with the tray, collided with Thelma Harkness, detective.

"Oh—sorry!" said Hilda, taken aback.

Miss Harkness, her eyes gleaming, caught Hilda's arm.

"Just the very girl I want to see," she said grimly. "You had better come with me to Mr. Mortimer now. I have convincing proof that the Old Mill was deliberately set fire to."

Hilda stiffened, guessing what was coming.

"By whom?" she asked.

"By you!" was the snapped retort.

Accusations!

HILDA had guessed that she would be blamed for setting fire to the Old Mill, so she was not completely taken aback. Nevertheless, she foresaw a lot of trouble and unpleasantness proving her innocence.

"Hadden't we better go into it after breakfast?" she asked.

"No! We can discuss it now," said Thelma Harkness.

She took Hilda by the arm, and Hilda allowed herself to be marched along the corridor, thinking hard as she went, wondering when it would be best to put her plan with Marcus into operation.

Thelma Harkness—if indeed she was the artful schemer Hilda supposed her to be—was working fast, bringing events to a head. But this move of hers fitted in admirably with the judgment Hilda had formed of her.

Hilda, Judy, and Beryl—because they knew about the mystery woman, and about the treasure—were a nuisance to her. There was a chance that they might solve the riddle of the ghostly manifestations that were driving servants away, and would soon ruin the chances of running the manor as a guest house. Further, they might find the treasure.

And what easier way of getting rid of them than fixing them with some crime such as firing the mill, and so

YOUR Editor's address is:—
The SCHOOLGIRL Office, Fleetway House,
Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

BETWEEN OURSELVES



Fourth—a mean, deceitful, hypocritical girl who, spoiled and pampered all her life, is determined to have her own way at Cliff House, even if it means trading upon her relationship with the acting headmistress or breaking into crocodile tears.

This girl leads everyone, particularly popular Miss Charmant, mistress of the Fourth, a terrible dance. Indeed, at one time, it seems as though Miss Charmant must suffer a most disastrous blow because of "Cry-Baby Lorna."

As usual, our next issue will also contain enthralling instalments of our two grand serials, as well as more of Patricia's Bright and Useful Pages, so do make sure of your copy well in advance, won't you? And now to end with those

LITTLE LETTERS.

Lily O'Connor (Kerry, Eire).—Delighted to know that you are enjoying "Princess to Save Leiconia" so much. I am afraid there are customs difficulties in the way of the other thing you mention, Lily. I only wish it was possible for Irish and Overseas readers to share the same privileges as home readers. Write again soon, won't you?

Muriel Hallop (Kingston, Jamaica).—Lucky girl, Muriel, to live in such a sunny clime. Or have you got accustomed to it now, just as we in London have—almost!—become accustomed to those famous fogs of ours. I shall be pleased to hear from you again whenever you care to write.

Delia Copson (Margate).—Yes, Boker has been at Cliff House a good many years now, Delia, and a more popular member of the staff it would be difficult to find. Did you enjoy the recent story featuring him?

Helen Sparks (Malta).—Look out for another story starring your favourite character very shortly, Helen. Miss Richards is actually preparing one at this moment. Best wishes!

And best wishes to you all until next week!

Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.

MY DEAR READERS.—Once again I have to thank you—and apologise to you—at one and the same time. Can you guess why? Well, it's the same old thing, your really delightful letters, which have come along in such a perfect shoal that they have, for once, caught me napping.

I've had the busiest, and most enjoyable, time answering all those with full addresses through the post. And now, in mingled relief and disappointment—but eagerly looking forward to to-morrow's posts—I am free to tackle the final batch in the form of Brief Replies.

So I thank those of you who have written to me, and crave your indulgence that, once more, a large portion of these weekly notes is devoted to answering some of my correspondence.

But first, I must tell you all about next Saturday's really magnificent complete story of Babs & Co. Here is the title:

"CRY-BABY' LORNA—HEADMISTRESS' FAVOURITE!"

And here, in the briefest form, is the story. Miss Bullivant is appointed temporary headmistress of Cliff House School in the absence of kindly Miss Primrose. That alone causes Babs & Co. many a concerned frown, for "the Bull," as you know, is inclined to be harsh.

But judge of the chums' consternation when a niece of Miss Bullivant joins the

causing Mr. Mortimer to ask them to go?

But Hilda did not intend to be disposed of so easily.

"There is Mr. Mortimer," she said, as they reached the hall.

Lavender's father was approaching, bearing a tray on which were boiled eggs—unaware that they had been cooked by Beryl.

"Mr. Mortimer," said Thelma Harkness, detaining him. "I have discovered how the Old Mill caught fire—"

"Indeed? I am glad. But please leave it till later. I must see to breakfast," he said agitatedly. "My daughter has gone to London."

"Gone to London?" asked Thelma Harkness in surprise. "What ever for?"

"Unfortunately I cannot say, but breakfast is served, Miss Harkness, and there will be time afterwards for discussion. The Bates family is getting restless, I fear."

And Mr. Mortimer hurried on.

Thelma Harkness released Hilda's arm and shrugged.

"It's very little use taking all the trouble—I do to solve mysteries when he takes so little interest in my efforts," she said surlily.

"Yes, I should chuck it," said Hilda coolly. "That mystery woman is too smart for you, Miss Harkness."

Thelma Harkness gave her a bitter look.

"Maybe, but I am too smart for you, my girl," she said. "You have not covered your tracks as well as you think. When I have explained matters to Mr. Mortimer, I don't think you will remain much longer in his house."

It was on the tip of Hilda's tongue to say, "You mean, you hope not," but she realised that it would be a bad move to let the detective know that she was under suspicion.

"We'll see," was Hilda's non-committal answer. "Anyway, I'm going to have breakfast. But one thing, Miss Harkness—you are very observant, I know—"

"Well?" said the detective, wondering what was coming.

"Have you seen any chickens about here—laying hens?" asked Hilda.

"Certainly. To the left of the tennis courts—why?"

Hilda did not answer, but gave a whoop of joy and rushed out of the house, returning five minutes later with four eggs which the hens had not concealed cunningly enough.

Six minutes later Hilda walked into the dining-room. Mr. Bates, angry and indignant, was displaying what he had found in his egg—a solid yolk!

"And this is how we are treated! We are charged high prices," he woofed, "and we expected reasonable food. Could anyone eat an egg like this?"

Hilda, taking her place, looked up with assumed eagerness.

"Why, is it hard-boiled, Mr. Bates?" she asked.

"Hard? A road drill would be needed to pierce it—"

"Oh goody!" said Hilda, almost dancing up and down on her chair. "May I have it? There are some lightly boiled ones here."

Hilda swapped his egg for a lightly boiled one; and he looked like a newly landed fish, for he liked his morning grievance.

"Mmm!" he mumbled, unable to complain any longer.

Hilda, eating that hard-boiled egg with distaste, nevertheless gave expressions of enjoyment, and Judy, playing up, had one, too.

Then Miranda rose to get herself a



"I WANT a word with you," exclaimed the woman detective, grasping Hilda's arm. "I know who set fire to the Old Mill!" Hilda drew up. It was plain the detective meant to accuse her!

kipper, lifted the cover, and uttered a gasp.

"My goodness! Wh-what's this?"

Hilda turned sharply and jumped up. Mr. Mortimer, entering with some China tea ordered by Mrs. Bates, stepped across and also stared.

For under the cover, where there should have been kippers, was just an empty dish—empty, save for a slip of paper.

Miranda took up the paper, and Hilda read the message over her shoulder.

"This house is haunted. The ghost appears when the moon is full. Beware!"

Meanwhile, Miranda read it aloud, bringing a sudden silence, which was broken by Mrs. Bates giving a sharp cry and putting her hand in theatrical dismay to her chest.

"Haunted! And—and at the full moon! Why—"

"It's full moon to-night," said Miss Harkness sharply. "This must be some foolish prank."

And she looked sternly at Hilda.

Mr. Mortimer, frowning, took the slip of paper from Miranda and studied it.

"A joke—a foolish joke," he said, without carrying conviction.

"Haunted—haunted?" gasped Mrs. Bates in horror. "I won't stay here another night if it is! Good gracious! Why did you not warn us about this?" she asked Mr. Mortimer.

He bowed gravely.

"Madam, I have never seen the ghost. I can only think this paper was slipped in here as a joke—"

Hilda took the paper from Mr. Bates and stared at it. What interested her most about it was the familiarity of the writing.

It was thin and spidery, written in block letters, with the obvious intention of concealing the identity of the writer; but, although it succeeded in that, it proved to Hilda that whoever had written it had also been responsible for that other warning—the message they had been given at the station the day they arrived. That, too, had been a warning that the house was haunted—an attempt to drive them away.

"Here, Marcus," said Hilda suddenly, "whose is it? Give it back."

It was quickly done, and Marcus knew at once what was expected of him. Taking the note between his teeth, he turned, walked a few steps, and sat up beside Thelma Harkness!

Judy looked at Hilda, and Beryl uttered a gasp, but the significance of it all was lost upon the others completely. Pawing at the detective, Marcus offered her the slip of paper.

Plainly puzzled, Thelma Harkness shot a look at Hilda, and then, taking the slip of paper from Marcus, put it on the cloth.

"The first intelligent thing you have done," she said. "Bring me every clue you can find, good dog, and we shall soon discover who it is up to pranks in this house, trying to frighten people—although perhaps you know already."

There was a queer gleam in Marcus' eyes as he lifted his head back and answered.

"Woof!" he said.

Thelma Harkness smiled grimly. "And I know, too," she said. "I know more than people think. In the night I learned how the Old Mill had been fired—and by whom!"

There was a new silence, and Mr. and Mrs. Bates looked instantly shocked—but not nearly so shocked as Miranda, whose carelessness with a candle had actually started the fire.

Miranda went chalk-white and quaked, but all eyes were on the detective, and her alarm passed unnoticed.

"You mean that the fire was started deliberately?" demanded Mr. Bates.

"Not necessarily deliberately," said the detective; "but by someone who had no right to be there."

"Scandalous!" snorted Mr. Bates. "Whoever it is should be made to pay for the damage—"

"Hear, hear!" agreed Hilda.

Miranda bit her lip fretfully, wondering if Hilda had guessed the truth, and yet thinking not, because Hilda did not even glance in her direction.

"We all might have been burned—the house might have been set alight," said her mother. "Disgraceful! Who was responsible, Miss Harkness?"

The detective pointed at Hilda, Judy, and Beryl in turn.

"Those three girls," she said grimly. "They were in the mill last night—searching there with a candle."

Mr. Mortimer made a quick intake of breath; and Hilda, glancing at him, saw that he looked stern and reproachful.

But as he was supposed to be the butler, and did not want to confess his true identity to the Bates family, he could say nothing at the moment.

Mr. Bates it was who took charge of matters.

"This must be gone into immediately after breakfast," he said grimly. "With such girls in the house we are none of us safe. I should like to know what you were searching for in the mill at dead of night. Most likely you intended to play ghost and terrify us all."

"Ah! Either that, or searching for treasure. They have some foolish notion that there must be treasure hidden here because it is an old house," said Thelma Harkness boldly and with great cunning.

Mr. Bates gave a grim laugh, and Miranda, who had overheard about the treasure by listening at doors, giggled to turn away suspicion from herself.

But Hilda, Judy, and Beryl were not abashed, being fully prepared for this unjust charge.

"Miss Harkness is making a great mistake," said Hilda quietly. "And if Mr. Mortimer wants to hear my version, I shall be glad to give it to him after breakfast," she added; then, turning to the butler, she said: "Perhaps you will ask if Mr. Mortimer can see me then."

"And I will see him, too!" cut in Thelma Harkness. "You will not be able to wriggle out of this as you did out of the charge of playing ghost at night."

By saying that she would report to Mr. Mortimer, Hilda virtually ended the discussion of the Old Mill; for it was his affair, rather than his guests'—and as the Bates family did not know that Thelma Harkness was a detective they did not pursue the conversation.

Hilda was silent because she had plenty to think about—that strange message, and the fact that Marcus had so unhesitatingly given it to Thelma Harkness.

To Hilda that proved up to the hilt that the detective had written it.

But the message was not intended as a joke, she decided. In due course the ghost would appear, and if Hilda's suspicions were correct, Miss Harkness herself would make it appear.

How the detective had moved the kippers and replaced them with the message, Hilda could not guess—nor where the kippers were now. They had completely vanished!

But in actual fact they had not been wasted at all.

Lavender Mortimer, still a prisoner in the secret room built nearly three hundred years ago, was eating breakfast at that moment—and her breakfast consisted of the missing kippers.

A block of bricks high up in one wall had moved, and a small tray had been pushed through. Behind it Lavender had caught another glimpse of the hooded woman—yet able to see no more than the shine of her eyes through the peep-holes cut in the hood material!

"Until the treasure is found, you will remain a prisoner," said the hooded woman; and closed the block brick before Lavender could reply.

Lavender, frightened and worried, put down the tray. During her absence the whole organisation of the house was

going astray. The Bates family would protest, probably leave.

Without paying guests, she and her father could not hope to live in the old manor house, that had been the family home for so long. Already there was a pile of bills waiting to be paid.

If only the Bates stayed and the new guests who were arriving to-day were happy and pleased, then in a short while all would be well. But Lavender knew that she had to reckon with the hooded woman, that unknown enemy who was planning to rob them of the treasure—even to ruin them and drive them from the manor!

All that Lavender knew about the hooded woman was that she was old—and that only because she had seen her hands clasped before her!

Everything possible for her to do to make her presence in this room known, Lavender had done, but the walls were so thick that not even her wildest yell had been heard.

The hooded woman had made her plans well!

On Another Trail!

"WE did not set fire to the mill, Mr. Mortimer."

Hilda Farrell faced Lavender's father, her chin in the air, her eyes flashing in indignation, while he, by no means convinced that they were to blame, readily listened.

He had no wish to believe them guilty; he liked Hilda, and he was grateful for what she and her friends had done to make the guests feel at home. Yet he could not ignore the woman detective.

"Miss Harkness must be mistaken," he said worriedly. "But she seems convinced that you girls are really plotting against us. I hope it isn't true—I should hate to think that you could be capable of such treachery!"

"We went to the Old Mill yesterday at her request, to search for the treasure which she said was hidden under the floor," explained Hilda. "What motive could we have for setting fire to the place, Mr. Mortimer?"

He shook his head gravely. "None, unless you are enemies of ours. And if you are—"

The three girls were hushed, for he had drawn himself up, unusually stern. "Yes?" said Hilda quietly.

"If you are enemies, then I must ask you to leave this house," he said. "Even though you have seemed helpful, even though it means the loss of three guests. Miss Harkness has promised me definite proof to-night."

"Proof of our guilt?" gasped Judy. "Proof indeed! Faked—"

Mr. Mortimer shook his head. "I do not see why she should want to fake evidence against you," he protested. "You all seem to hate the woman, and I cannot think why."

"Because she unjustly accuses us—and because—" said Hilda, and then broke off. "But never mind why, Mr. Mortimer. We're going to find out the culprit ourselves, and perhaps by to-night we shall have proof!"

And then, even though they were suspected of such base treachery, the chums went to the kitchen to help.

"It isn't Mr. Mortimer's fault," said Hilda to her friends. "And we've got to rally round for his sake and

Lavender's, or else this awful woman will win even yet. She'll empty the house, drive everybody away, and find the treasure!"

In the kitchen the daily woman was starting the washing-up, none too pleased to be without Lavender's assistance, but she brightened when she heard that the girls were helping.

"And the dog's helping, too," she added. "Licking up the kipper plate." Hilda wheeled to where a plate was being trundled.

Marcus was having a grand time lapping up the fat, and demolishing the skin that had been left.

But Hilda, staring at the plate, gave a start of surprise.

"Who had kippers for breakfast?" she exclaimed.

"No one," said Judy in surprise. "Not in the breakfast-room."

"Mr. Mortimer, or you?" Hilda asked the daily woman.

"No, miss. That tray—well, I don't quite rightly know how it got here," the woman admitted, frowning.

Hilda urged Marcus back, and took up the plate.

"Someone left most of one of the kippers," she said. "And—hallo!" she ended.

Marcus had dropped the kipper skin, and was looking down at it. Suddenly he pawed at Hilda, attracting her attention.

What he had noticed was that as the kipper skin dropped it unrolled, revealing a scrap of paper, and Marcus knew that paper of that kind was important.

It was. Hilda snatching it up, almost jumped into the air. Then with a glance at her friends—a jerk of the head indicating that she wanted them to follow—she hurried from the kitchen.

"What is it, Hilda?" asked Beryl eagerly.

Hilda took a cautious look up and down the corridor, lest Thelma Harkness should be near.

"A message written with the end of a burned matchstick," she said excitedly. "And—from Lavender!"

She held the greasy slip of paper open and, with their heads together, the three friends read the message.

Little did they realise that near by, behind the panelling, the hooded woman listened intently.

"Am hidden in secret room, Lavender."

Hilda crumpled the paper, her eyes shining with excitement, but spoke in a whisper.

"Hidden here—prisoner," she breathed. "My golly, we're on to something now!"

"But where is the secret room?" asked Judy.

Hilda shook her head.

"I don't know—but there's a way of finding out," she said. "And this time, instead of Thelma Harkness giving us a fool's errand, we'll give her one. She's going to lead us to this secret room, for if we're right about her, then she's the one who captured Lavender."

Without detailing her plan, Hilda hurried back to the kitchen and called Marcus. For much depended upon him.

WHAT can be Hilda's plan for deciding if Thelma Harkness is the mystery woman or not? There are exciting surprises in store for you next week.