

"1939—AND STILL THE SAME DIANA!"

Don't miss the fascinating New Year story featuring the Cliff House Chums in this issue.

THE SCHOOLGIRL

No. 493. Vol. 19.
Week Ending
JAN. 7th. 1939.

EVERY **2^d** SATURDAY

Incorporating
"SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN"



ENTER THE NEW YEAR—
in Babs & Co.'s Delightful
Novel Ice Show
See this week's superb **LONG**
COMPLETE holiday story.

A Grand Long Complete Christmas Holiday story, featuring Barbara Redfern & Co., that dynamic girl, Diana Royston-Clarke, and a very charming little newcomer.



1939—AND STILL the SAME DIANA!

An Objection Overruled!



"BUT surely," Barbara Redfern said, in a voice of anxious protest, "we can get round the difficulty in some way, Mabs?"

Mabel Lynn, Babs' golden-haired chum, shook her head.

"I tell you we can't!" she said.

"But supposing one of us played the part of Little Miss 1939?" Tomboy Clara Trevlyn questioned.

"No good!" persisted Mabs.

"But why not? Really," plump Bessie Bunter warmly put in, "I think that's a jolly good idea, you know! Tell you what, Mabs. Just to help you out, I'll play the part of Little Miss 1939. With my pretty face and my ripping figure, I'd make a wonderful Little Miss 1939!"

But Mabel Lynn did not smile as she might have done normally, for the idea of fat Bessie, as round as a dumpling, playing such a part, was certainly amusing. Nor did Barbara Redfern, Clara Trevlyn, Marjorie Hazeldene, Janet Jordan, Jemima Carstairs, Leila Carroll, or Gwen Cook, who formed the group of Cliff House School chums, which was anxiously gazing up at the ice-yacht that was moored to the bank of the River Pell.

The river was frozen over with a solid layer of ice, and the yacht, a little rickety, belonged to the near-by Pellabay Castle Hotel, at which the Cliff House chums were spending their Christmas vacation. A trim craft it was, with a certain grace in its lines; but thanks to its age, rather forlorn-looking now, and badly in need of a coat of paint.

But it was not of the yacht the chums were speaking, or even thinking, as they stood there. For their purpose, indeed, the yacht was ideal. When they

used that yacht in the forthcoming Pellabay New Year Ico Carnival, its graceful lines would be picked out with rows and rows of coloured fairy lights.

The idea of seeing the Old Year out and the New Year in as part of the carnival belonged to Mabel Lynn, and Mabs—as usual when anything in the nature of play-acting was concerned—was taking the lead. And Mabs, as usual, could not be satisfied unless all preparations aligned with the plans she had already made in her own mind.

"No, we can't do it," she decided. "It's just useless unless we have a young and pretty little Miss 1939. Just think of the scene for a moment. We start off with the dance of 1938, and Babs is Miss 1938. Then, in the middle of the dance, the 1939 crowd come dancing on, pelting the Old Year's crowd with snowballs—"

"Well, that's fine, I guess!" Leila Carroll said.

"Up to that point, yes." Mabs bit her lip. "Having snowballed Miss

By
HILDA RICHARDS

Illustrated by T. LAIDLER

1938 and her dancers out of the picture, the yacht is then towed into the floodlight. The trapdoor suddenly opens, and out of it jumps Little Miss New Year—that's all right. But this is my point—if one of us plays Miss New Year, what's the difference between her and the Old Year? She's just got to be smaller—to make the contrast. Apart from that," Mabs added, "it's the usual thing to have some sort of kiddie play New Year parts."

"And there's none," Gwen Cook voiced lugubriously, "at the hotel?"

"No."
Then silence. As if hoping for inspiration, they gazed at the yacht again. Certainly they had stumbled against a difficulty there. They all saw the force of Mabs' argument. They all admitted in their hearts that a tiny Little Miss New Year would make the show.

But this wasn't Cliff House, where they could have called upon the service of little Dolores Essendon, and what children might have played the part in the hotel had, along with the Whitechester School girls, and several others, left a day or two ago. Apart from that, the chums had established no village contacts.

"Looks," Jemima Carstairs murmured, polishing her monocle, "as if we're in the position of the merry old shipwrecked mariner—sunk!"

"Oh rats! The idea's too good to be scrapped!" Clara said impatiently, and then started. "Phew! I say, look at this!"

As one the chums twisted round, staring up the river. Hereabouts the frozen water made a wide sweep, and round the bend had skated a small, elfin figure, dressed in red gaiters, and a fur-trimmed, scarlet coat, with a little, close-fitting red hat upon her head.

"I say, who—who is she?" breathed Mabs. "Golly, can she skate?"

Skate she could, though she could not have been more than seven or eight years old. Apparently she had not seen them yet, and, suddenly lifting one foot, she skimmed on the ice in a perfect circle, and miraculously straightening herself at the exact moment, changed feet and reversed. She seemed a veritable little fairy of the ice.

"And there's our 1939!" Babs cried. Mabs had flushed now. Her face had lighted up. Excitedly she called out:

"I say—I say—"

The little girl stopped. Then she saw them. With a look back up-river she came skating towards them—so surely, so miraculously certain, with such a happy little laugh on her face, that it was apparent at once that she was a skater born. Rather breathlessly she reached them.

"Oh, hallo!" she said shyly. "Did you call me, please?"

"Rather!" beamed Mabs. "We were just admiring your skating."

"Oh, were you? I think that's very nice of you!" the small girl said. "Aunty Diana taught me, you know. And Aunty Diana says that she and I are going to do wonderful things together in the carnival."

"Good old Aunty Diana!" Clara chuckled. "She must be a pretty good skater herself?"

"She is!" the little girl answered seriously. "Aunty Diana's just marvellous. She's ever so nice, and ever so pretty, and I love her ever so, you know. My name's Pearl Bell," she added inconsequently. "I live at the Three Gables—over there"—and she pointed. "Now I must go, thank

you," she added politely, "because Aunty Diana will be worrying about me."

"But hold on!" Mabs cried. "I mean—wait a minute! I say, we—we wanted to ask you something! You say you're already in the ice carnival?"

"Oh, yes, I'm in with Aunty Diana! Aunty Diana is training me, you know. I think it's awful fun to be trained, don't you? But what do you want to ask me, please?"

"Oh, I sus-say, what a ripping little kiddie!" plump Bessie breathed, dimpling and blinking.

"It's about the ice carnival," Mabs went on. "We want a girl like you to be Miss 1939. You see this yacht here"—and eagerly Mabs explained, while the little girl looked up wonderingly as she took it in, and then, having taken it all in, glowed.

"And I pop out of the trapdoor in the ship?" she asked, big-eyed.

"Yes."

"Oh, I say, wouldn't that be 'citing! Oh, yes, thank you, I'd like ever so to be the little New Year girl. But first I must ask mamma and Aunty Diana. You don't mind if I ask them?" she added earnestly. "But look, here comes Aunty Diana now!"

her lips curled a little. "As a matter of fact," she said, "I was saving myself up as a surprise for you. I didn't intend you to know I was here really until the carnival came off."

"Meaning," Clara guessed, "you meant to bag all the prizes?"

"Well?" And Diana lifted her delicately arched eyebrows. "Have I any competition?" she added mockingly.

The chums glared, faintly resentful as they always were when Diana adopted this loftily superior attitude. They all knew that Diana was a very fine skater—but that was no cause for Diana to give herself such lofty airs.

"And you're little Pearl's aunty?" Mabs asked.

"Well, yes—and no." Diana looked down at the child. And easy to see, in the soft and tender affection which momentarily glowed in her lovely face, that she was more than ordinarily fond of little Pearl—as, indeed, who couldn't be? "Aunty," she added, "is a courtesy title. My father's a friend of her mother, and I've been staying with the family over Christmas, you see. Old Curmudge"—Diana's way of referring to her father—"has gone back now though, and I'm stopping on for the carnival."

"With me," beamed Pearl. "And we're going to have lovely times, aren't we, Aunty Diana? But, aunty, these nice girls want me to be the New Year, you know!"

"The what?" Diana asked sharply.

"Please, you tell her," Pearl beamed

No New Year Good Resolutions for Diana Royston-Clarke, the Firebrand of Cliff House's Fourth Form! Stormy, haughty, seeking the limelight as ever, she plots the downfall of Babs & Co.'s Ice Pageant—merely because it interferes with her own plans.

And she pointed gleefully towards the bend.

And the chums, looking, stood for a moment motionless. With one accord they stared. For skating with superb grace round that bend came a figure they all knew, a figure of grace, of beauty, of lithe and athletic shapeliness.

No mistaking that exquisitely beautiful face, with its framing masses of platinum blonde hair. No mistaking those curved red lips set in the cream-and-white peerlessness of that oval face. It was—

"Di—Diana Royston-Clarke!" stuttered Janet Jordan in amazement.

Diana! Their own stormy, reckless, self-willed, supercilious, and overbearing Firebrand of the Fourth Form at Cliff House it was!

"Aunty Diana!" shrieked little Pearl. "Aunty Diana, please do come!" And then, as Diana looked up and saw them, as she started, the little one skated forward. "Aunty Diana—"

"Yoicks!" Diana breathed; and then laughed. "Well, well! Fancy meeting you!" she called. "How goes it, girls?"

"But what," Babs demanded, "are you doing down here? And how, you ninny, is it that we haven't seen you before?"

Diana laughed. "Perhaps," she said, "I had better things to do than look up you washouts! Oh, yes, I knew you were at the Pellabay Hotel all right, but one does like to forget the old and tiring faces at times, doesn't one?"

"Just as polite as ever," Jemima murmured.

"No change!" Diana retorted, and

excitedly at Mabs. "Oh, Aunty Diana, I'd love to be the New Year."

But when Mabs had explained:

"Thanks!" Diana said curtly. "I think it's like your cheek! And please, you girls," she added, that flash of old temper flushing into her features, "keep off my preserves! Pearl is in two events with me, and I'm coaching her for them, and it's just like you, isn't it, to try to bag all the credit? The answer—if you want an answer—is no! Pearl is not going to skate in your rotten show!"

"Wait a minute—oh, just wait a minute!" And Babs, her eyes glittering a little, stepped forward. "I suppose, by any chance, you haven't adopted Pearl, Diana?"

"Don't talk rubbish! I—"

"Because," Babs went on, "it seems to me that the right person to give permission is Pearl's own mother. Pearl herself wants to be in the show, and I don't see what right, as a mere friend of the family, you've got to try to stop her. After all, it needn't interfere with anything you want to do."

"No?" Diana asked, with a curl of the lip. "Perhaps I think differently," she said. "Come on, Pearl."

"But, aunty—"

"Oh, come on!" Diana almost snapped, and grabbed Pearl's hand.

With Pearl, almost tearful then, looking back at the chums, she skated off.

"Dear, dear Diana!" Clara breathed, clenching her hands. "How like a little lady she always behaves! But that's your little Miss 1939, right enough, Mabs, and if you ask me, I don't see why we should knuckle under to Diana.

TWO TOPPING TREATS

for
1939

You can still obtain these gorgeous story-books, so if YOU have yet to sample them hurry up at once, won't you? On sale at all big newsagents and bookstalls.



This really is a "Golden" book, full of stories to suit all tastes, from humorous to thrillers, and from adventure to romance.

The return of Morocco! That is one of the chief appeals of this superb all-story book, which is most lavishly produced.



Look here, I'll tell you what. My Aunt Grace is bound to know the kiddie's mother. What about asking her to help?"

"Goodie, that's an idea!" Babs said quickly. "We can try, anyway. Come on."

They all had little Pearl Bell in mind for the part now. She seemed just fitted for it.

Quickly they hurried back to the hotel. Miss Grace Trevlyn, Clara's aunt, who owned the establishment, had been installed in Pellabay for quite a time, and could hardly fail to know her influential neighbours who owned Three Gables—a rather large house on the far side of the road, which skirted the bend of the river. As luck would have it, she was almost the first person they met when they reached the hotel. She laughed when they told her of their mission.

"Why, goodness gracious, I'm sure I can arrange that for you!" she said. "Iris Bell—Pearl's mother—is one of my greatest friends! Just wait a minute, will you, and I'll get on the phone to her!"

She hustled into her office. For five minutes the chums waited, anxiously watching Miss Trevlyn through the glass door as she phoned. She put down the receiver at last, and came out all smiles.

"I think," she said, "that you'll find everything all right. Apparently little Pearl herself has been talking to her mother of her meeting with you, and is full of excitement. Mrs. Bell would like to see you if you'd care to pop over. I'll order the Daimler for you."

"Whoops! We're in luck!" Babs cheered.

And excitedly, when the car arrived two minutes later, she, Mabs, Clara, and Leila Carroll clambered into it, leaving the rest of the party behind. And in a very short space they were rolling up the snow-covered drive of Three Gables, to be admitted almost immediately by the butler and to find Mrs. Bell, a sweet and gracious lady of very young years, awaiting them.

Quickly she took stock of the four, and it was evident that she liked them

at once. And when, once again, they explained—

"Well, I'm sure Pearl would just love it," she enthused. "In fact, she's done nothing else but talk about it ever since she came in with Diana. It's quite surprising, isn't it, to find you and Diana belong to the same school? And as far as I am concerned you have my permission willingly. Wait a moment; I will send for her."

She touched a bell. To the maid who appeared she gave the order, and presently, with a squeal of delight, Pearl entered, followed by Diana.

And Diana, seeing the chums, stood and scowled.

"My hat! What do you want here?" she cried.

Mrs. Bell stiffened a little. "Diana, these girls—your own school friends, I hear—have come from the Pellabay Castle Hotel. They have asked me—"

"I know." Diana's eyes smouldered. "And they asked me," she retorted, "not so long ago. I said 'no.'"

Mrs. Bell stared. "Really, Diana—"

"Well, dash it, haven't I taught Pearl to skate?" Diana asked.

"Diana—please!" Mrs. Bell gazed at her reprovingly. "It is not a question of what you have taught Pearl. I admit that Pearl has come on wonderfully since you have taken her in hand, but Pearl could skate very well before you professed an interest in her. In any case," she added, a little frigidly, "I cannot see what possible objection you can have."

"No?" Diana looked bitter. "But I can! And if you want my opinion," she added, blazing out, "I think it's a silly idea. How can you expect Pearl to do well in the skating events with me if her mind's going to be full of this New Year stunt at the same time? I've taken an interest in her. I've taught her what she knows, and I think I'm jolly well entitled to have the first say in what she does!"

Mrs. Bell rose to her feet. In indignation the chums gazed at the Firebrand. In some confusion, and not a little awe, Pearl regarded her.

"I really think, Diana," Mrs. Bell said stiffly, "that you are taking rather too much on yourself. Permit me, as Pearl's mother, to know what is good for her. I say that she shall take part in Miss Lynn's show. That is sufficient, and if, Diana, you do not like that—"

"I can lump it?" Diana said, between her teeth. "Well, go on; I'll lump it. But mind"—and as she tempestuously pulled the door open, she turned a face quivering with anger into the room—"just mind," she added violently, "you're not all sorry for it, that's all!"

And Diana, every firebrand instinct within her vibrantly alive once more, stormed out.

Diana Out of Luck!



"INTERFERING busy-bodies! Hateful! Just when I thought—oh rats!" And

Diana, back in her own room, savagely kicked over a pouffe. "Babs & Co.!" she said bitterly. "Babs & Co.!" Can I never do anything without that crowd poking its long nose in and spoiling things? Can't I ever—"

Words failed Diana. Of course, this was just the sort of thing she might have expected. This was just the sort of thing that would happen at the moment she was planning a new triumph for herself. They wanted Pearl, now, did they? And they, dash them, had got her!

It mattered nothing to Diana that she also had got Pearl. Diana, selfishly exploiting that skating genius which was the child's, had visualised glory for herself when it was revealed.

With the characteristic idea of grabbing all the credit for teaching her and training her, she had taken the kiddie in hand. To bring that triumph to a culminating point she had entered Pearl and herself in both the fancy skating events at the ice carnival, and for days now had dreamt of the wondering plaudits of the crowd. Who, those dreams had asked her, is that wonderful little skater? Who taught her to skate? Who trained her?

Visions, those; but visions, until these last few minutes, which had bid fair to become realities.

And now—now—
She turned. She lit a cigarette. Moodily she puffed at it, and then, with a gesture of disgust, flung it on the carpet and stamped it out. Now those upstarts had reared their interfering heads. Now little Pearl, instead of being excited about the things she was going to do with Diana, would be all afire with the more glamorous thing she was going to do for Babs & Co. Diana's schemes, in consequence, would be overshadowed.

"Hang them!" Diana fumed again. Furiously she scowled, as, looking out of the window, she saw Babs & Co. departing, laughing and talking among themselves. The beastly cheats! The robbers!

Oh, but they should pay for this! Pinch Pearl for their silly show, would they?

Back across the room she stormed. Into an easy-chair she flung herself. Moodily, blackly she stared into the fire, bitterness on her curling lips. Then suddenly there came a timid knock upon the door.

Diana glared at the door. She did not answer.

Then a rattle, and the door opened. Little Pearl, her blue eyes very large, stood on the threshold.

"Hal-hallo, Aunt Diana!" she said uncertainly.

Diana flung her a look, then turned back to the fire.

"Oh, Aunt Diana, you—you're not cross with me, are you?" Pearl faltered. Diana shifted restlessly. She did not look round.

"Cos, Aunt Diana, you know, I don't want you to be cross with me," Pearl said seriously; and, after a pause, timorously added: "Aunt Diana, please say you're not cross with me."

"Oh, don't talk rubbish!" Diana said gruffly.

The uncertainty vanished from Pearl's face.

"Aunt, don't look like that!" she said pleadingly. "I do want to be the New Year, you know, and we can all have such lots of fun, can't we?"

Diana set her teeth.

"And, aunt, you'll take me to the rehearsals, won't you? Aunt Barbara said you would."

"Aunt who?" Diana looked up.

"You mean Barbara Redfern?"

"Yes, aunt."

Diana heaved a deep sigh.

"So she's an aunt, too, is she? And Bessie Bunter and Clara, and all the rest of the rotten crowd—eh?"

Diana rose to her feet. Her face was furious now.

"Aunt Barbara, indeed! Me—take you to their trumpy rehearsals? No, I say! No!" she almost shouted. "And don't look at me like that, you little—Oh, yoicks! Here, I say, don't cry—"

She broke off in consternation as quick tears started to the child's eyes.

"Oh, Aunt Diana, you—you frightened me!"

"Did—did I?" Diana bit her lip. Quick to lose control, she had regained it as quickly, and now, in place of the white anger, a flush of shame stained her cheeks. The good streak in her nature came to the surface. Dash it, she was a brute! How could she expect the kiddie to understand? How could she blame Pearl? "I—I'm sorry!" she stammered. "I—I didn't mean that, Pearl. Here, dry your eyes," she added hastily, and fished out her own lace-embroidered handkerchief. "I—I'm not cross, really."

Pearl gulped a little.

"But you did look horrid, Aunt Diana," she said.

"I'm sorry!" Diana said sincerely, and bent and kissed the little one. "There, does that prove it? But, Pearl, you mustn't ask me to come with you to rehearsals."

Pearl looked disappointed.

"But, Aunt Diana, you know how better I skate when I'm with you."

"Yes, I know," Diana said, with a bitter smile. "But you must go alone. Now, trot along, Pearl. Your lunch will soon be ready."

"Aren't you going to have lunch, Aunt Diana?"

"Not to-day."

The kiddie, with a puzzled shake of her head, went out, leaving Diana standing in the middle of the room. Diana watched her close the door, and heaved a sigh. Really, the kiddie was so sweet, and she such a brute! Or was she? Wasn't she rather just a soft and sentimental fool?

She did not go down to lunch, and nobody came to ask her why—another fact which faintly nettled Diana. After lunch, however, happening to glance out of the window, she saw Babs and Mabs arrive at the house; saw with a pang of jealous anger in her heart, Pearl walk off, with her chubby little hands enclosed in those of her two new "aunties," happily kicking at the snow as she swung upon their arms. She scowled blackly. Then suddenly she rose.

"Well, dash it," she muttered, "I

might as well see what they are up to! And if"—she grinned maliciously—"there is a chance of messing up the show—"

Meantime, Babs & Co. had forgotten all about Diana. They had learned at Cliff House to ignore her tantrums. When Diana was in one of her Fire-brand moods—as she plainly was now—past experience had shown them that the best thing to do was to leave her severely alone.

With little Pearl happily chattering between them, Babs and Mabs reached the river. There they donned skates and skated to the spot where the old ice yacht was moored. All the chums were there, and there was a cheer as they came up.

"Everything ready?" beamed Mabs.

"Ay, ay, skipper!" Jemima said solemnly. "Top of the afternoon to you, Pearl!" she added genially.

"Good-afternoon, aunt!" Pearl said, staring at Jemima. "But, I say, why do you have that funny glass in your eye?"

"Because," Jemima answered seriously, "I have a pane in it!"

Pearl blinked, not appreciating the joke, but joining in the laughter which ensued just because these new aunties of hers all laughed.

"Well, and now to business!" Mabs said briskly. "Pearl, let's put you right first. I've told you the idea, haven't I?"

"Oh, yes! I'm to be the New Year in the big ship," Pearl added, gazing up at the old yacht in delight.

"That's it. You jump out of the trapdoor. The ship will be decorated with all sorts of fairy lights and—and other decorations," Mabs added.

"Oh, but why isn't it decorated now, you know?" Pearl asked seriously.

"Because," Mabs explained, "we haven't bought the decorations yet. We didn't want to spend the money, you see, until we were sure of a little Miss 1939. But there's a shop in Pellabay with heaps and heaps of the most lovely

decorations, and to-morrow we're going to buy them."

"Oh, I say!" Pearl cried. "And can I come with you?"

"Yes, of course." And Mabs smiled.

"Now, listen, Pearl, and we'll have a rehearsal. This is what you do. When you step out of the trapdoor you'll be dressed in white and red, and the flood-lights will turn on you, you know, and you'll have a jersey with '1939' on it," Mabs said breathlessly. "Then, when you reach the centre of the river, you step down and do a fairy dance on the ice, with all us big girls forming a sort of chorus. Is that clear?"

"Oh, yes! Oh, aunt, please let us start!" Pearl said, dancing now with eager excitement.

And they started, Pearl really breathless with excitement. Up in the tiny cabin amidships she and Gwen Cook were stationed. On the ice, the chums got hold of the ropes already attached to the runners of the yacht and lustily pulled it forward. At the given moment Babs pushed open the trapdoor, and, just as if she had rehearsed the part a dozen times, out jumped Pearl.

"Oh, splendid!" cheered Mabs.

Splendid it was. And how dainty the skating dance which followed! Mabs glowed.

"Oh, that's fine—fine!" she said.

"That's lovely, Pearl! Now, let's go through the whole thing from the beginning, shall we? But first we'll rehearse the opening. Clara! Where's Clara?"

"Adsum!" grinned that worthy.

"You're old Father Time. You start the ball rolling. You see, Pearl, Aunt Clara will be dressed as an old man with a long beard, and a scythe in one hand and a large hour-glass in the other. She comes on first, and says some words—sort of poetry—to introduce the scene. Then she dashes back and brings on the Old Year, which will be Babs. Now, everybody, string across the river in a line!" Mabs called anxiously.

"Clara, you stand here. Right?"



QUITE disregarding the fact that she had no right to say what the little skater should, or should not do, Diana flashed round on Babs & Co.

"The answer is no!" she snapped. "Pearl is NOT going to skate in your rotten show!"

"Right we are!" grinned Clara Trevlyn.

"Know your lines?"

"I think so."

"Well, then, let's go." And Mabs beamed. "Now, silence, everybody, here comes old Father Time."

But as Father Time moved forward there came, from up-river, a sudden excited commotion.

And that commotion was led by Diana Royston-Clarke.

New Followers for the Firebrand!



DIANA, trim, elegant, a pair of shining skates under her arm, had left Three Gables, mischief in her eye and a desire for vengeance in her heart. But, arriving at the river bank, she encountered a scene which momentarily diverted her mind from the problem pressing upon it.

A crowd of rather shabbily dressed boys, trailing a dilapidated, and very obviously home-made sled, were engaged in a fierce argument with a bigger boy of about fifteen, trailing a much superior-looking sled. Diana, always interested in small urchins, paused amusedly to watch.

"Seven-and-six!" stated the big boy. "But you know," protested one of the smaller lads, "that we haven't got seven-and-six! How can we have seven-and-six with our fathers out of work? Besides, we don't want to buy the sled. We only want to borrow it so's we can have a sled race. Come on, Jeff, lend it to us!" he urged wheedlingly.

"No lending—selling!" Jeff, the big lad, said firmly. "And seven-and-six is the price, so take it or leave it!"

There was a disgruntled murmur among half a dozen of the smaller boys. They held a hurried consultation together while Jeff, grinning, looked up, and then, seeing Diana, blushed and looked self-consciously back at his sled. The smaller boy, who had been spokesman for his party, came forward.

"Look here, Jeff; be a sport!" he urged. "I'll tell you what we'll do. We've had a collection and we've managed to rake up tuppence. Lend us the sled for half an hour, and we'll give you the tuppence!"

"Seven-and-six!" Jeff said firmly. Diana smiled. Poor kids, she thought. And then, suddenly struck with an idea, her eyes gleamed. Impulsively she strode forward.

"Excuse me," she said, "but can I be of any help? Jeff—your name's Jeff, isn't it?" she asked of the big boy.

Jeff turned an embarrassed scarlet.

"Yes, miss."

"And you want to sell this sled?"

"Y-yes, miss."

"And you—what's your name?"—

singing out the spokesman of the now tongue-tied and awe-stricken small boys.

"Mickey Lee, miss. We'd like to buy the sled, but how can we when we haven't any money?"

"Quite!" Diana smiled. "I think, Jeff," she said, turning to the bigger lad, "the price was seven-and-six?" and she fished in her handbag. "Well, here we are, Mickey; here's the seven-and-six. Now you can buy it."

Diana handed the money over very casually; her father made her a very large allowance.

"Corks! But, miss—"

"Go on!" Diana said impatiently.

Like a boy in a trance Mickey silently handed the money to Jeff. Jeff accepted it, blinking at the three half-crowns as they rested on the palm of his hand. Diana laughed musically.

"Well, there we are," she said. "Now you've got your sled and you can have your sled race. Thank you, Jeff," she added, "we shan't want you any more"—and there was such imperious dismissal in her voice that Jeff, turning redder than ever, just turned away and tramped off. "But first," Diana said, looking down the river, "I've got an idea."

"Yes, miss; but—but wait a minute, miss," Mickey said unsteadily. "You really mean this is our sled now?"

"Of course!"

"Crumbs! You're a sport, aren't you?"

"Thanks!" Diana said, and smiled bitterly. "I only wish, Mickey, that everybody thought so," she said. "Still"—and she laughed pleasedly then at the glowing, adoring looks which were turned upon her. "Now, if I may make a suggestion? What about letting me share the fun of the sled race, too?"

"Oh, corks! You, miss?" Mickey asked in awe.

"Why not?" Diana laughed. She was enjoying herself now and feeling really happy—happy in her knowledge of her good turn; happy because she was conscious of the admiration of the boys. "Just to christen your new sled, I'll ride on it," she said. "There are eleven of you. That makes five each team and one of you up as passenger on the other sled. Is that on?"

"Is it?" Mickey gleed, and looked round. "Well, who's in my team?"

The immediate chorus suggested they all were. It looked, indeed, in their earnest bid to tow Diana, that they would start a free fight on the spot.

But Diana again interrupted. "No, let me pick my team," she said. "Mickey, you, and you, you, you," she added. "Now the rest take up the other sled. We'll race to the brink on the other side of the bend, and the winning team gets tuppence a man. How's that?"

How was it? If gold had rained from the sky the boys could not have looked more excited.

With a chuckle, Diana stepped on to the new sled, seating herself. Red-faced and earnest, Mickey & Co. fastened the ropes. Diana nodded.

"Right! When I say go!" she said.

"Other team ready?"

"Yes, miss."

"Then—go! Oh, yoicks!"

And Diana laughed loud and long as the sled shot like an arrow away, her team shouting at the top of its lungs.

Down the river they went, running neck and neck. Such whoops, such shrieks! With the two earnest teams pulling neck and neck there was absolutely nothing in it for the first hundred yards. Round the bend at a spanking pace they clattered, and then Diana's eyes glittered as, coming in full view of the ice yacht, she saw what was happening there.

"Go on! Faster, faster!" she cried.

"Don't stop for anybody!"

For just ahead, seriously rehearsing, were Mabs & Co. They were stretched out in a line across the river, and Clara, as old Father Time, was in the act of hobbling forward. Rather warily was Clara hobbling, for Clara was on skates, and though Clara was good at most open-air pastimes and could skate fairly well, she was no expert.

Diana saw her, and yelling orders, made her team head straight for the Tomboy. Clara gave a yell of alarm.

"Hi—look out!" she called.

"Faster!" Diana roared. "Never mind those girls! Faster!"

"Kim on!" panted Mickey.

"Look here—" Clara roared. "Look—oh, my hat!"

For the racing sled was upon her. Perhaps Mickey & Co. sensed Diana's whim, and, in their earnest desire to please Diana, helped her to gratify it. Within a yard of Clara the sled whizzed, and as it whizzed Diana made a playful cut in the air with her arm as though aiming something at the Tomboy. Actually, of course, she had nothing, but Clara did not know that, and Clara, forgetting her skates, dodged too suddenly and came down with a thud. Diana laughed merrily.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Diana, you rotter!" hooted Clara.

"You did that on purpose!"

"Rats!" came Diana's disdainful voice. "If you can't skate, you shouldn't venture on the ice! Faster, team! Right through them!"

"Them" was Mabs & Co., strung across the river. Hastily and furiously they scattered. The two sleds came tearing into their ranks, to dash off down the river with a whoop.

"Di-Diana!" breathed Clara.

"The rotter!" hooted Clara, furiously picking herself up. "My hat! How I'd like to get my hands on her! But where on earth did she pick up that crowd?"

"Well, anyway, they've gone now," Mabs frowned. "Let's ring up the curtain again!"

Rather ruffled, rather angry, the chums lined up again. And again the scene was set. But hardly had they commenced when there came a ringing shout from behind them.

"Oh, my hat! Look out!" shrieked Babs.

"Diana again!"

For up the river, headed by the whooping lads, came the laughing Diana on a return race. Hastily the chums scattered, but Clara, diving for the bank, grabbed up a handful of snow and kneaded it into shape. Then she let fly—whiz!

She aimed it at Diana, but it hit Mickey Lee instead.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Diana, and then ducked as Clara threw a second time, the ball travelling on to hit the leader of the rival team. At once Diana sprang up.

"Stop!" she shouted. "Stop the race! Laddies, we are being attacked! Are we going to let these girls pelt us?"

"No!" cried her followers.

"Right! Then come on—quickly! Whoops!" Diana cried, as Clara's third snowball burst against her neck; and she really was furious for a moment. "Come on—at them!"

"Hurrah!"

Really, Diana was a most inspiring chum to have. So thought all these followers of hers now.

With a whoop they scattered to the bank, hastily making snowballs.

"Here, Diana, I say—wow!" yelled Babs, as their first snowball smote her in the chest.

"Go it!" roared Diana.

"Hurrah!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped gentle Marjorie Hazeldene, then rapidly retreated. "Pearl! Pearl!" she cried, and, seizing the little one's hand, rushed round to the leeward of the ice yacht as a perfect volley of snowballs came hurtling through the air.

"Come on!" yelled Diana.

Babs & Co. had gathered on the bank now. They, too, were scraping up snow. But there was no stopping the crowd of boys. Inspired by their leader—exhilarated by the eagerness of the game—they came on. There came

a howl from Bessie as three snowballs hit her simultaneously; a shriek from Gwen Cook as one, flung by Diana herself, broke in pieces down her chest.

It was no use. With such a valiant opposition the Cliff House chums, handicapped from the start by the fact that the boys had already made their snowballs, were simply smothered. Besides, it was only playing Diana's game to stand there returning missile for missile. They broke; they scattered.

"All right!" Diana laughed. "We've beaten them, I think. Good lads!" she said; and Babs & Co., taking little Pearl with them, went off. "You've done jolly well. Now, what about a sled race to the River Cafe, and I'll stand you all a feed?"

"Oh, Miss Diana!" Mickey Lee gulped.

And if they had admired Diana before, they regarded her as something of a goddess then. Truly, Diana had found a host of willing, if innocent, helpers in her campaign against Babs & Co.

Diana is Warned!



SEETHING and furious, the Cliff House chums tramped back to the Pellabay Castle Hotel.

"My hat! Just wait," Clara breathed—"just wait till I get hold of her!"

"Cat!" glowered Bessie. "But Aunt Diana was only playing a game, wasn't she?" Pearl asked innocently. "Aunt Diana wouldn't do anything wicked, you know! Aunt Barbara, don't you like Aunt Diana?"

Babs bit her lip. "Oh, we like Aunt Diana well enough!" she said.

"Then why," Pearl asked, big-eyed, "do you call her names like that? I think Aunt Diana's ever so nice. She—she was only having fun, you know. You see," she added wistfully, "I like you ever so much, and I like Aunt Diana ever so much. And we could have such lots of fun if we were all friends, couldn't we?"

Babs shook her head. "We could—and we would," she replied. "But it's not our fault, Pearl, that your Aunt Diana won't be friends. We're all willing like anything to be friends with her, you see, but she won't be friends with us."

Pearl sighed. They reached the hotel at last, and, entering the vestibule, found there Pearl's mother, who had come to take her little daughter back. She smiled at the chums.

"And how," she said, "did Pearl get on?"

"Oh, Pearl was splendid!" Mabs replied. "I popped out of the big ship!" Pearl cried excitedly. "Oh, mamma, it was ever so 'citing! And do you know, mamma, Aunt Diana was having sled races, and she had a lot of boys who pelted snowballs at us! Didn't she, Aunt Barbara?"

Babs flushed as Mrs. Bell glanced at her quickly.

"Well, yes." "You mean, during rehearsal?" Pearl's mother asked.

"Yes." "In other words," Mrs. Bell said steely. "Diana was trying to hinder you? Oh, you need not tell me—I know. Once or twice during the holiday I have seen that spirit flash out in Diana. She is a girl who hates to be thwarted, is

she not? She very much likes her own way. I am sorry," she added simply, "but as I am responsible for Diana I shall certainly speak to her when I get back."

"Oh well, I don't suppose she really meant any harm," Babs mumbled.

"But she is jealous because Pearl has been taken out of her charge," Mrs. Bell said shrewdly. "Pearl, my dear, come! We must be going."

They went outside to watch little Pearl climbing into the car, to wave hands as she and her mother drove off. But Mrs. Bell's answering smile swiftly faded. She was thinking of Diana.

Not yet had she completely forgiven the Firebrand for the stand she had taken up this morning. Diana, after all, was only a girl, whatever Diana might think of herself. Diana, plainly, must be taken in hand.

Diana looked extremely happy and pleased with herself when Mrs. Bell came into the morning-room at Three Gables, having sent Pearl up to the nursery. Diana felt that she could afford to be pleased with herself, and was remembering with many reminiscent chuckles, her triumph over the Cliff House chums that afternoon.

"Diana," Mrs. Bell said seriously, "I want a word with you."



*My dears,
Just a very tiny note to tell you how much I loved your Christmas cards. They made me so happy—and I want to thank you very, very much. My love to you all, my dears—and from dog Juno, too!*

The SCHOOLGIRL Office,
Fleetway House,
Farringdon Street,
London, E.C.4.

Hilda Richards

"Here's trouble!" Diana thought, and immediately stiffened. "Yes, well?" she asked, a little defiantly.

"I have just heard, Diana, at the hotel, what happened on the river this afternoon."

Diana's eyes glimmered. "Well, what of it?"

"It wasn't exactly a nice thing to do, was it—and especially considering those girls are your own friends?"

"Did they tell you that?" Diana asked, with a curl of the lip. "I've never counted them as friends as far as I know, and, of course," she added, a hint of anger creeping into her tones, "they would sneak to you!"

"Diana, they did not sneak to me," Mrs. Bell said severely. "And please do not jump at conclusions. What I heard I heard more by accident than anything else. In fact, Barbara was most reluctant to speak about it, Diana, I am not responsible for your likes and dislikes, but I have to remind you that while you are a guest at this house, your actions reflect upon the house. That is all."

Diana's eyes gleamed a little. "It was just a joke. Dash it, can't a girl have a bit of fun when she wants to? And in any case," she added, suddenly flaming out, "I'd like to know whose business it is, except mine and Babs & Co.'s?"

"Diana!" "Well, what right have you to lecture me?" Diana blazed, losing her temper.

"Diana, please!" Mrs. Bell's eyes glimmered. "That is enough! I see that it is not possible to reason with you in your present frame of mind. When one is guest at another house," she added a little tartly, "it is usual for one to defer, in some respects, to her hostess' wishes. I think, Diana—I am sorry to say this, but I mean it—unless you learn to behave yourself, I shall ask you to go."

Diana glared at her. Savage in that moment, she almost accepted the challenge. On her lips the furious words trembled. "Thanks! You needn't ask me to go! I'll go now!" But in time recollection came. In time she remembered that, in spite of Babs & Co.'s silly New Year stunt, she still had a hold on Pearl.

Pearl was still in those two fancy skating events with her, and she herself was in the biggest and the greatest event of all the events—the free skating championship, for which the prizewinner was to receive a glittering silver medal.

Diana wanted that. She wanted that almost as badly as she wanted the credit for teaching Pearl. Well, it was necessary, until that carnival came off, for her to stop. She would stop—and somehow she'd jolly well scotch that pageant of Babs & Co. if it was the last thing she did in Pellabay!

They, hang them, were responsible for all this!

Angrily she flounced off to her room. There she closed the door with a slam. Furiously she lit a cigarette, and puffing at it violently, strode up and down. Hang them—hang the whole lot of them!

The Firebrand was in her most vindictive mood now. Up and down she paced.

Then suddenly she sat down. No, this was no good. She'd just got to think up something, and breathing fury was no help to collected thought. She steadied herself. Now what could she do? All sorts of ideas ran through her mind. Suppose, for instance, she carted off Pearl on the day of the show? Then there would be no little Miss 1939 for Babs & Co.

And—"fool!" Diana sneered at herself as soon as that suggestion began to rove in her mind. And there'll be no fancy skating events with Pearl for you, either! Think up something else!

She was trying desperately to think up something else, when the door opened and Pearl brightly came into the room. Apparently Pearl had heard nothing of the wordy battle between Diana and her mother. Her pretty little face wore the expression of one who is sure of her welcome.

"Oh, Aunt Diana, isn't it dark in here?" she cried. "Shall I turn on the light?"

"Oh, if you like," Diana said.

"There! That's nice, isn't it?" Pearl beamed. "But, aunty, why do you look so unhappy? Don't be unhappy, please!" she added, and entreatingly came forward. "Aunty, I do love you," she said softly.

Diana made a strange noise in her throat.

"Pearl—I—I—"

"And, aunty, why won't you be friends with Aunty Barbara?" Pearl asked wistfully. "She says that she'd so like to be friends with you, you know. And, aunty, such 'citing things I've got to tell you about. You know the big ice ship?"

"Hang the ice ship!" was Diana's inmost thought; but she gulped and said—it was just too utterly impossible, somehow, not to humour this sweet kiddie. "Well, what about the big ship?"

"It's going to be dec'rated," Pearl said deliciously. "And, aunty, do you know, Aunty Barbara, and all the other aunts are going to let me go with them and buy the dec'ratings to-morrow morning. Now, isn't that 'citing'?"

"Is it?" Diana scowled a little. "And what about your practice with me?"

"Oh, we'll practise afterwards, you know," Pearl said seriously. "But it will be awful fun to buy the dec'ratings, won't it?"

Diana did not reply. Diana was staring, suddenly and fiercely, into the fire, and a little smile was twisting her lips. Only one shop in Pellabay was stocked with decorations. That was Gibbons'.

And if, when Babs & Co. went there to-morrow morning to buy those decorations—

Diana suddenly laughed.

"Aunty, why do you laugh?" Pearl asked interestedly.

"Oh, just thoughts," Diana returned vaguely. "Well, this is going to be fine!" she chuckled. "Now tell me some more, Pearl."

And Pearl, snuggling up against her, told. And Diana's smile grew.

She thought she saw an effective way of putting a spoke in the wheel of Babs & Co.

Setback for Babs & Co.!



"YOU know," Barbara Redfern said thoughtfully. "I think we ought to go over and see Diana!"

"What on earth for?" demanded Clara Trevlyn, staring.

The chums, seated at tea, all looked up as their leader made that remark.

"Well, I was thinking—" Babs shook her head. "We don't want to interfere with anything Diana's doing, of course."

"Well, who is?" objected Mabel Lynn.

"On the other hand," Babs said, "it's just possible Diana's running away with the wrong idea. I think," Babs said fairly, "that it's only right we give her a chance of coming into the show. Apart from that, there's Pearl. It would make the kiddie no end happy to feel that we were all working together."

There was a pause. On reflection, that did not seem to be such a bad idea.

"Well, we can try it," Mabel Lynn said. "It will be a relief if we can get Diana interested. Who's going?"

Four of them decided to go—Babs, Mabs, Clara, and Marjorie—and immediately tea was over, they set out across the crunching snow towards Three Gables, enjoying the brisk walk and the nip of frost which was in the air. Mrs.

Bell's butler opened the door to them, informing them that his mistress at the moment was upstairs in the nursery putting little Pearl to bed. As they stood waiting in the hall, however, a door opened.

And Diana herself, stopping with a start, scowled at them.

"Hallo, what do you want?" she asked.

Babs, as usual, was spokeswoman. "Diana, we came over to see you. We want to ask you something."

"Then," Diana sneered, "you might have saved yourself the trouble!"

"Why, you—" quick-tempered Clara began.

"Clara—please!" Babs looked at the Firebrand pleadingly. "Diana, why do you take up this silly attitude?" she asked quietly. "Why don't you be sensible? We're all willing to be friends, and you know little Pearl would love us to be friends."

"Oh, cut the sentiment!" Diana said roughly. "What do you want?"

"We were going to ask you if you'd like to take part in the pageant," Marjorie said gently.

Diana grinned.

"Oh, I see! Afraid if you don't make peace with me, I'll mess it up?" she sneered.

Clara clenched her hands.

"Look here—"

"I am—and what an awful sight it is!" Diana scoffed. "Well, well! And so you want me to take part in your show? What a break for me! Still, sit down—there may be something in it—one never knows, does one? Of course," she added loftily, "you'd want me to dance with Pearl?"

The chums looked at each other.

"Well, no—hardly that."

"Really?" Diana's lips curled.

"Well, what's your idea of what I should do?"

"Well, we—we really hadn't thought about it. But we'd be glad of your help."

"As one of the chorus?" Diana mocked.

"Well, yes. After all, we can't all have leading parts, can we?" Mabs asked.

"Thanks!" Diana stood up; her eyes scornfully flashed. "And you think," she bit out, "you can buy me off with that footing proposition? Well, you can get out of it, and get out quickly!"

"Thanks, we will!" Clara said angrily. "I told you it would be no use, girls! Come on!"

She turned disgustedly. Gentle Marjorie Hazeldene, biting her lip, looked pleadingly at the Firebrand.

"Diana, please won't you think it over—"

"Get out!" Diana cried.

And she herself stepped to the front door. She herself flung it open, pointing a quivering finger into the night. The chums glared. If they had not been on someone else's premises Diana might have regretted that outburst. As it was, they left without another word.

Diana, grimacing after them, smiled scornfully as she closed the door, and then turned, to meet a stern-faced Mrs. Bell.

Diana fell back a pace.

"Diana, I heard that!" Mrs. Bell's face was like flint. "I did not interfere because I did not want to upset your friends by creating another scene."

Diana scowled.

"Well, they only asked for what they got!" she growled.

"Did they? I think," Mrs. Bell said icily, "that they were exceedingly charitable, Diana—especially after the way you have treated them. Any other girl would have welcomed their offer

with joy—but not you. And since," she added, a glimmer in her eyes, "my daughter is the bone of contention, I really do think it would work out for the best, Diana, if you called off the two skating events for which you are entered with her."

Diana's eyes opened wide.

"But, Mrs. Bell, you—you can't mean that!" she cried.

"No?" Mrs. Bell smiled sternly.

"Listen, Diana! Unless you see fit to amend your attitude, until you apologise to Barbara and her friends for your spitefulness to them, I shall not allow Pearl to skate with you in your events!"

And Mrs. Bell rustled into the next room, leaving Diana white-faced and furious.

Think it over! Apologise to Babs & Co.! Be a silly chorus girl in Babs & Co.'s rotten show! Stiff and furious, the Royston-Clarke pride rose in arms! Not if she knew it!

She felt she would rather pack up and go home first!

A Bad Turn—and Good!



WHEN morning came it found no change in Diana's attitude.

Perhaps Diana realised now that in opposing Mrs. Bell she was up against as tough a material as she herself was made of. Mrs. Bell, for all her sweet and kindly ways, was obviously a woman with an iron will.

Diana's heart was bitter, vengefully bitter, when, after breakfast, she strolled off. Hardly a word had she and Mrs. Bell exchanged over breakfast, and little Pearl, all eager excitement, stared puzzled and strangely at her adored "aunty" when, asking questions, Diana answered shortly and coldly.

Babs & Co. had not yet arrived to call for little Pearl, and there was a gleam in the Firebrand's eyes as she walked down to the village. Straight into Gibbons' Stores she went, and the proprietor of the shop hurried forward.

"Morning miss! What can I do for you?"

"I want some decorations," Diana informed him. "How many have you?"

"Decorations, miss?" Mr. Gibbons beamed. Privately Mr. Gibbons, having over-stocked himself with decorations before Christmas, had been wondering how best to store his surplus until next year. "Plenty of decorations, miss," he announced cheerfully, "and, seeing that Christmas is over, going cheap, too. What would you be wanting?"

"Oh, I don't know—everything!" Diana said.

"I—I beg your pardon?"

"I said everything!" Diana snapped. "Dash it, man, haven't you got ears? What's the price for every decoration you've got in the shop?"

Mr. Gibbons looked overcome.

"Well, miss, I reckon it would come to about three pounds."

"Then," Diana said, and haughtily took three pound notes from her bag, "there's the money. Every decoration you've got in this shop is bought by me. Is that right?"

"Er—yes, miss—of course, thank you! Where shall I send them?"

"Send them?" Diana looked blank for a moment. "Oh, I don't know! Don't send them anywhere—yet. Just keep them aside, please. And don't forget," she added warningly, "if anybody else wants any, they're mine. The name is Miss Diana Royston-Clarke—with a hyphen and a final 'e.' Is that all clear?"

"Why, yes, Miss Cla—Royston-Clarke,

certainly! Of course! And thank you," Mr. Gibbons mumbled incoherently. "Just—just as you say, of course! Good-morning, Miss Royston-Clarke!"

Diana grinned. She walked out of the shop. Three pounds! A lot of money even for Diana—but, dash it, it was worth it! Those decorations were vitally necessary to Babs & Co. Gibbons' was the only shop in Pellabay which had them, and now she had cornered the lot! Yoicks! What wouldn't she give to see Babs & Co.'s faces when they came along to Gibbons and Gibbons told them that he had already sold his stock to her!

She chuckled as she walked along; then she paused, as there came a sudden shout behind her:

"Hi, Miss Diana!"

"What—" Diana said, and then dimpled as she saw Mickey Lee. "Why, hallo, Mickey!" she cried.

"Hal-hallo!" Mickey said shyly, and nervously fingered his cap.

"And where might you be going, Mickey?"

"I'm going to the village hall," Mickey said breathlessly. "You see, we—we can't afford to go to the carnival on New Year's Day, so we're going to have a sort of tea party. Mr. Briggs, the vicar, is getting it up, and—we're going to do turns and things and all—all that," he said. "Me and some of the other boys are scrubbing tables and so on."

"Sounds interesting," Diana mused. "Where is the village hall?"

"Just down this road, Miss Diana. Would you like to come?" Mickey asked eagerly. "The chaps will love to see you."

Diana smiled; but she was flattered by his earnestness and—well, thanks to her skating practice with Pearl being cancelled, she had nothing better to do. So off, with Mickey proudly strutting at her side, she went; and, entering the village hall—a wooden structure with a corrugated iron roof and battened walls—she was greeted by a whoop of glee.

"Miss Diana!"

And at once Mickey's friends were dancing round her. Diana laughed again, recognising in them her sled teams of yesterday. There were many other lads there, too, valiantly turning to make the village hall look spick-and-span. But as one they clustered round her, for the fame of this lady bountiful had spread.

"This is the hall," Mickey said earnestly.

"Nice!" Diana said and laughed, though privately she thought the place depressingly poverty stricken. A few rather tattered decorations, accentuating rather than hiding the poverty of the hall, bedraggledly hung from the rafters, and from the bare battens of the walls plain paper chains and such-like objects made by unskilled hands.

"And this," she asked, "is where you are going to have your New Year tea party?"

"Yes, Miss Diana. It—it's," Mickey said, as if conscious of the thoughts passing through Diana's mind, "the best we can do. You see, the tea party's for the children of the unemployed, and Mr. Briggs, the vicar, is paying all the expenses out of his own pocket."

"Jolly old Mr. Briggs!" Diana said, and a warm glow of gratitude for the unknown Mr. Briggs flooded her heart. "But wait a minute!" she said suddenly. "Oh, just wait a minute! You know, we ought to brighten this place up for the party—fairy lights and all that sort of thing. Supposing we decorate it?"

Mickey looked dubious.



"AUNTY BARBARA and all the other aunts are going to let me go with them and buy the decorations to-morrow morning," squealed little Pearl delightedly. "Now, isn't that 'citing'?" Diana's mind worked swiftly. Here, surely, was the chance she wanted to hit at Babs & Co.?

"Yes, miss. But the money?"

"Never mind the money!" Diana laughed deliciously. "Come on, Mickey! And you! And you! In two minutes," Diana promised, "you shall have all the decorations you want. And—yoicks!—won't we have just the loveliest time in hanging them up? Come on!"

"Oh, Miss Diana!"

"Come on!"

And, with a laugh, Diana led the way into the street again. With her earnest—and now excited—followers hurrying at her heels, she went back to Mr. Gibbons' shop.

There, to the lads' indescribable delight, parcels were plumped into their arms; and, staggering under the loads, they made their way back to the hall. Even so, there were more parcels to be fetched; for Mr. Gibbons had been right when he had told Diana that she was getting his surplus stock cheap. Diana was. If she had bought them before Christmas they would have cost her nearly twice as much money.

Diana gleed, Diana glowed; for in that moment both sides of her nature were satisfied. In doing Babs & Co. a bad turn she had also done a good one. Could anything have brought more contentment and happiness to her strange, stormy Firebrand heart?

Babs Saves the Day!



"HERE we are!" Barbara Redfern said cheerfully. "Now you shall help us to choose the decorations, Pearl."

And she smiled brightly at the little girl who—with herself, Mabs, Clara, and Janet Jordan—had just halted outside Gibbons' stores.

"And then shall we decorate the big ship?" Pearl asked breathlessly.

"That's it!" Clara laughed and beamed at her chums; for the "decrat-

ing" of the "big ship"—otherwise, the ice yacht—was a matter of pressing urgency now. "Got the cash, Babs?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Then in we go!"

And in they went, little Pearl dancing eagerly among them. Mr. Gibbons, sweeping up behind his counter, came forward with a beaming smile.

"Yes, missies, and what can I get for you?"

"We want some decorations," Babs said—"heaps of decorations! I think we can take practically all your stock, you know. You had quite a lot over, hadn't you—?"

"I had—yes," Mr. Gibbons smiled. "But I'm afraid, young ladies, you are too late—"

"Too late?"

"Miss Diana Royston-Clarke called on me about half an hour ago and bought up everything in the way of decorations I had in the shop."

The chums stared in utter consternation.

"Everything?" Clara cried.

"Every single thing."

"But Diana! What does she want with them?" Mabs cried.

"Miss Royston-Clarke didn't say."

The chums looked at each other a little sickly, a little angrily. Diana had been before them. Diana had taken all those decorations which they were so keen upon having. Without those decorations it was just utterly impossible to make the old ice yacht look anything but the shabby derelict it presented at the moment; and to use it in its present form was unthinkable.

"She's just jolly well bought them up to spite us!" Clara said angrily.

"Isn't that just like one of her tricks? But you can get some more?" she asked hopefully of Mr. Gibbons.

"That worthy, however, shook his head. "I am sorry, miss—no," he replied.

"Most stocks have been withdrawn. And I'm sure," he added, "I don't know where you could get them—unless, of

course, you ordered them from London, and—"

The chums gazed at him, feelings then too deep for words. That was impossible, of course, with the pageant only two days off. It would take one day at least for the order to get to London, another for it to be attended to, another in transit.

"Well, she's dished us!" Clara said savagely. "All the same, she's not going to get away with it! If she's got those decorations she's jolly well going to hand them over! Mr. Gibbons, I suppose you've no idea where she took them?"

"Well, yes." Mr. Gibbons blinked mildly. "She's taken them to the village hall."

"Then," Clara said, "off we go to the village hall! Sorry, Mr. Gibbons. Come on, kidlets!"

"Oh, has Aunt Diana bought all the decorations?" Pearl asked as they tramped out of the shop. "But why? Is it to give them to us? Because, you know, Aunt Diana said it was fine when I told her we were going to buy them this morning."

The chums gazed at each other—rather grimly. They had all been wondering, until that moment, how Diana had been forewarned of their plans. They had forgotten the great admiration of Pearl for Diana Royston-Clarke.

In rather angry silence they tramped on, little Pearl happily trotting beside them. They knew, of course, where the village hall was, and as it came in sight they strolled across the snow-covered field towards it. A great deal of excited noise was coming from the interior of the hall, a great deal of laughter. They reached the door and then peered in.

And they blinked at what they saw. For there was Diana standing on a table. On the table was the great pile of the decorations they had intended to purchase, and Diana was laughing. Round her, their faces earnest and eager, swarmed young boys, excitedly carrying off decorations as Diana handed them out. A dozen kiddies were perched on steps and ladders nailing them to the wall, and Diana seemed to be thoroughly enjoying herself.

"Mum-my hat! What is she doing?" Clara stuttered.

"It's aunty!" cried little Pearl. Diana heard that voice. For a moment she looked up. For a moment a scowl flitted across her face as she saw the stupefied faces of the chums, and then, magically, the scowl turned to a smile. Airily she waved her hand.

"Hallo, girls! Like to come and help?"

Clara's eyes glinted. She stepped into the room.

"Pretty clever, aren't you?" she challenged.

"Oh, quite!" Diana mischievously smiled. "Like our decorations?" she asked innocently. "I was awfully lucky to get them, wasn't I? Do you know, they're the only decorations for miles around!"

Clara breathed hard. "You knew, you cat, that we wanted them?"

"Did you?" Diana looked astonished. "Well, well, well! Who ever would have thought that? Still, you must admit they are being put to a very good cause. I do so hope that I haven't interfered with any plans you have made."

Clara glared. The others, who had come into the room now, glared, too.

Diana had them—she knew it just as they, most bitterly, knew it. Plainly, they could not quarrel with Diana because she was playing Lady Bountiful to the village kiddies.

"Of course," Diana urged, "if I can help you in any way—like taking the leading part in your pageant, for instance—Or will there," she asked, with mock interest, "be a pageant now?"

"Oh, come on, girls!" Babs said. "But look here—" Clara cried.

"Clara, please!" Babs protested, and tugged at her sleeve, for Babs could see that if Diana's baiting went too far the Tomboy was in danger of losing her temper. Bitter though she herself was, they could hardly give the appearance of quarrelling with Diana because Diana was doing the village lads a good turn.

Clara glared. But she allowed herself to be persuaded. Followed by Diana's laugh, she went out again, just as Mr. Briggs, the vicar, stepped into the room. In somewhat lugubrious silence they made their way back to the hotel, little Pearl puzzledly shaking her head and wondering what had so suddenly come over her new chums.

Diana, it seemed, had beaten them after all.

But she hadn't. If Babs was angry, her brain was busy.

And before the hotel was reached Babs had the glimmering of an idea. By the time they were all seated in the lounge drinking morning coffee, the idea had burst into full bloom. To her chums' surprise she gave a sudden laugh.

"Funny, isn't it?" Clara growled. "Blessed if I see—"

"No; but you're not thinking of what I'm thinking," Babs said. "I've got it! We can't have the ice yacht, but we can—and will—have something else. Clara, you know the old globe up in the lumber-room?"

Clara blinked. The knew the old globe all right—a simply enormous, but very out-of-date globe of the world which her aunt, Miss Grace Trevlyn, having no further use for, had stored away.

"Well?" she said.

"Well?" Babs chuckled. "My hat, I think this is an even better wheeze than the first. Supposing we get hold of that globe. Suppose," Babs added, "we decorate it as a snowball—with cottonwool and all that. Instead of the yacht, we tow the snowball in—balanced on a sled, of course—and instead of popping out of the yacht, Pearl pops out of the snowball."

"Phew!" whistled Leila Carroll. "Gee, that's O.K., I guess!"

"We tow it in just the same," Babs went on. "No need, as far as anything else is concerned, to do different rehearsing. The only thing—" And then swiftly she looked at little Pearl. "Pearl, you'd rather pop out of a big snowball than the big ship?" she asked. "Oo, yes! That's lovely!" Pearl said excitedly.

"And, Pearl, will you promise us one thing—just one thing?" Babs asked. "Don't say anything to Aunt Diana about it."

"But why not?" Pearl asked, her face falling.

"Because we don't want her to know. You see," Babs said, with perfect truth, "we want to give Aunt Diana a big surprise. And if you told her now you'd only spoil that surprise, wouldn't you?"

Pearl beamed. "Oh, no! But I can tell mamma about it, can't I?"

"Of course!"

And the chums glowed. Little Pearl, now that she had had it impressed on her, would keep her promise.

Excitedly they set about preparations, when, having asked Miss Trevlyn, they had permission to use the globe. Miss Trevlyn, indeed, was more than helpful.

"I think," she said, "that it would be a good thing, as you are so intent on keeping the new setting a secret from Diana, to rehearse it in private. Instead of using the river, why not use the private lake in the grounds? Diana cannot very well trespass there without permission, and I should hate," Miss Trevlyn said sincerely, "for her to do anything to mess things up again."

And so what seemed to have been disaster seemed to have turned out to the chums' advantage. It was novel. It would be new. It would be the sort of surprise that would delight the villagers—most of whom, at any rate, were very familiar with the old ice yacht moored out on the river.

Enthusiastically from that moment they set to work to rig up the globe and fix it to the sled, little Pearl doing her best to help. And so willingly, so eagerly did they set to, that the task was finished before lunch, and after lunch they held their first rehearsal—a smashing success—on the lake.

Meanwhile, Diana, in a very good humour, continued at the village hall to superintend the village kiddies' preparation with Mr. Briggs. Lunch-time came there, but, seeing that the decorations were still far from finished, Diana tramped the whole of her party across to the Roman Cafe on the main road, and there treated them to whatever they wanted. In her most generous, her most expansive mood was Diana then.

With every reason. For Diana loved the admiration of the village lads. And there was a warm, if somewhat vindictive, sense of satisfaction at having dished Babs & Co.

Dusk came, with the hall finished at last. Shaking hands with the very grateful vicar, Diana, with her admirers crowding round her, went back to Three Gables. She was grinning as she went up the drive. Well, the day had been a success after all. And even if she was not skating with Pearl, she still had her own big event in the Free Skating to look forward to.

With a glow in her heart she entered the drawing-room.

Then she stood still. By the fireside was Mrs. Bell, and sitting on Mrs. Bell's knee was little Pearl. And Pearl was talking—excitedly.

"Mamma, Aunt Barbara says it's going to be ever so much better than the big ship, and won't need any decorations at all, you know. And I'm to be—Oh, Aunt Diana!" she cried, as she saw Diana, and, with a shriek of glee, rushed across the room.

Diana caught her. "Hallo, Pearl! Been enjoying yourself?"

"Oh, ever so, Aunt Diana! We've been rehearsing such lots of lovely surprises, you know!"

Diana gazed at her, her self-assurance and pleasure receiving a sudden chill. So Babs & Co. had abandoned the idea of the ice yacht, had they? Babs & Co. had something else up their sleeves—something that was going to be even better, was it?

But Diana was artful, if she was not cunning. Mrs. Bell was coming towards them then, and she realised that this was no time to pump Pearl.

"Well, Diana, will you have tea?" asked Mrs. Bell.

"Thanks!" Diana said.
 "You have seen Barbara and her friends to-day?"

Diana nodded calmly.
 "Oh, yes, I've seen them! But I was too busy to talk to them," she added.

Mrs. Bell compressed her lips, reading rightly in that that Diana had not apologised. But she had no wish then to re-open hostilities with Diana, and whisked away. As soon as she had gone Diana settled herself in front of the fire.

Confidingly Pearl swung up on to the arm of her chair.

"Oh, aunty, what were you doing in the village hall?" she said. "Aunty Barbara and the others were cross, you know, because they couldn't get their decorations. Didn't you buy them for Aunty Barbara?"

"No, I didn't. I didn't know that Aunty Barbara wanted—" And then

Jering and dismayed distress at the anger gathering in the Firebrand's cheeks. "I like Aunty Barbara ever so much; but I like you, too, you know."

"Sounds like it!"
 Pearl slipped off the arm of the chair. With eyes wide with distress she looked at her.

"Please, aunty, don't ask me!"
 "But I am asking you!" Diana glared, completely nettled now. "Oh, all right!" she blazed out. "Keep your silly little secret! I thought," she added bitterly, "that you liked me better than Aunty Barbara!"

"But, aunty—"
 "Well, tell me!"
 "Aunty, I—I can't!" Pearl said, her lips quivering. Then she paled as Diana, with a glare, strode across the room. "Aunty, don't go—"

But Diana, with a furious slam of the door, had vanished.

morning. But she watched from her window; she saw Babs, Mabs, and Clara arrive. She saw them leaving, taking a still somewhat sad-faced little Pearl with them. And this time, Diana noticed, they did not make for the river.

Where, then, were they rehearsing?
 Diana rose. Well, that, at least, shouldn't be a secret for very long. Once she knew what was happening, she—

Sofly she left the house.

"WE'LL DO it first without the snowball," Barbara Redfern said.
 "Pearl, dear, you take your place here, will you?"

Pearl nodded, but without enthusiasm. She looked a little sad, Babs thought.

Pearl was. But she was too loyal to Diana to tell the chums the real reason of her upset.

The scene was the frozen lake in the grounds of Pellabay Castle Hotel—an excellent spot, quiet and secluded, for Babs & Co.'s rehearsal.

"Well, stand here, Pearl, will you?" Mabs said. "Babs, will you stand here? Clara, as Father Time, you keep just a little in the rear—get back by that bush there. Bessie—"

And then, all at once, Mabs broke off.



"LIKE our decorations?" Diana asked mischievously. "I was awfully lucky to get them, wasn't I? Do you know, they're the only decorations for miles around!" Babs & Co. glared. "You knew that we wanted them!" accused Clara angrily.

Diana stopped herself. No, she simply could not tell a fib to Pearl. "But tell me, Pearl, what have you been doing?"

"Oh, lots of things!" said Pearl.
 "What's this new thing Aunty Barbara's going to do instead of the big ship?" Diana coaxed.

"It's a surprise," Pearl chuckled.
 "What sort of surprise?"

"Well, you know, I can't tell you that, aunty, 'cos Aunty Barbara told me not to," Pearl said innocently.

Diana's eyes narrowed. So that was the way of it, was it? Babs & Co. had bound Pearl to secrecy.

"But Aunty Barbara didn't mean you to keep secrets from me, Pearl."

"But she did, you know! She said it ever so plainly. Oh, aunty, please don't ask me!"

"But I want to know," Diana said.
 "Aunty, I—I'm sorry—"

"You," Diana said, and there was a glint in her eyes now—"you like Aunty Barbara better than me?"

"Oh, aunty, no! But—but— Oh dear!" And Pearl looked up with won-

"Diana, You—You Bully!"



SHE was a cat, of course! She was a brute! She had no right to upset Pearl only because she was being loyal to Babs & Co.

She knew she had done wrong, but the very knowledge of her wrong-doing only added fire to her fury. She thought she had dished Babs & Co. Babs & Co., apparently, so far from accepting defeat, had only risen to greater things.

A bitter pill that to swallow. She did not see Pearl for the rest of that evening, and for the first time since she had been at Three Gables Pearl failed to come and kiss her good-night when she went to bed.

But could Diana have seen the tear-stained little face which cried itself to sleep that night, even she might have flung that stiff, revengeful pride of hers on one side.

She did not see Pearl either in the

For suddenly something twenty yards away had caught her eye.

The something was the moving tip of a crimson feather.

The feather was moving above the bank on the opposite side of the lake, just before a tall fir-tree.

Mabs started. She knew that feather. It belonged to the hat of Diana Royston-Clarke. Stealthily she indicated it to Babs, and Babs, staring, looked at Clara, who, at the same time, noticed it. The Tomboy's eyes glimmered suddenly.

"Then wait a ticklet!" she cried.
 "We've forgotten the opening scene! Make snowballs, everybody!"

"But what—" gasped Gwen Cook, only to be silenced by a swift grimace from the Tomboy, and Clara motioned towards the feather tip. And then Gwen understood. They all understood.

Grimacing, they made the snowballs.
 "Now," Clara said, "don't fire until I give the word! Remember, girls, the tree's the target! One, two, three! Fire!"

Diana, behind the bank, pricked up her ears. Hallo! What was this? Then, crash! A snowball smashed

(Continued on page 14)

OUT OF SCHOOL HOURS



PATRICIA is your very own friend, who writes to you each week on this page in just that chummy way schoolgirls love. She tells you about herself—about things to do and things to talk about. In fact, about everything to interest schoolgirls.

SO Christmas is over! I hope you all had a most glorious time, my pets, and that you aren't feeling too tired now after your late nights and active days.

But even if Christmas is over, the memory of it is still with us, isn't it? I expect you've noticed during the past days that one of the first questions everyone asks is: "What did you have for Christmas?"

At any rate, that's what everyone has been asking your Patricia.

Perhaps you'd like me to tell you about my presents, would you? (I know I love to know all about other people's!)

● Lovely Presents

Well, my biggest present was from mother and father—an evening dress.

It's a perfect dream in ice-blue taffeta, which "whispers" most thrillingly as I walk.

The neck is fairly low, and comes right off the shoulders—in the fashionable Victorian style. Oh, I just love it.

Brother Brian was rather a lamb. He gave me a pair of felt boots, lined with fluffy sheepskin. They fasten with zippers and will be ideal for my little cold toes on very freezing days when I'm doing anything in the garden, for I'm a chilly mortal, you know.

Another exciting present I had was from Aunt Monica—who isn't my aunt, you know, but young Heath's godmother. She gave me a wondrous Beauty Box, fitted up with the most lovely beauty preparations, made by one of the most exclusive "beauty experts" in the world. (I'm almost frightened to use it!)

My rather-rich friend, Esmee, gave me a bottle of perfume, bless her! It was only small, but very special—and, of course, I adore it.

A pair of hand-knitted angora gloves was the present from my not-so-well-off friend, Joan. They're in bright yellow, and so fluffy and adorable. I'm thrilled with them.

So altogether, you see, your Patricia has been very, very lucky this Christmas—for even now I've not mentioned hankies, stockings, jumper, cigarettes (with gold tips), and chocolates, which I received from sundry grandparents, aunts, uncles, and youthful cousins.

And I have told you, haven't I, that the Christmas cards from all you dear young people are among my most treasured possessions.

● Resolutions

Now what about some Good Resolutions for the New Year?

Have you made any? Heath's are rather comic. They seem to consist of resolving to like all the things he hates at the moment!

"I'm going to like hot milk, medicine, Bobby Jones, and Mrs. Meredith's dog who's always chasing my Minkie," he said, all in one breath, when I asked him about the subject.

I just had to laugh, and did try to explain that good resolutions didn't necessarily mean he must try to change himself round entirely—but are an attempt to remedy failings.

As I said, it didn't really matter two hoots whether he liked hot milk or not—for I hate it, too. No one likes "med'cine," Bobby Jones, who lives down the road, certainly can be a very objectionable young man of ten years when he likes, and Mrs. Meredith's dog should NOT chase our beloved puss-cat.

But, of course, I didn't tell Heath all this!

● Rather Dull

My own resolutions are rather uninteresting, I'm afraid. I'm going to wash my hair-brush every single week; I'm going to do more cooking than I did last year. And I'm going to concentrate on breathing exercises.

I've been reading a lot about breathing just lately, and it seems that it is one of the secrets of good health—not to mention good looks.

I may have told you that I am rather subject to colds in the winter-time, and throat-y complaints.

Correct, deep breathing exercises in front of an open window are said to be magic for keeping such ailments at bay. So I've promised myself to have a good try.

● Something To Make

I've got a horrible idea that you won't be feeling at all in a domesticated mood this week, so perhaps you'll not be impressed by the sight of this useful little "emergency mending outfit" here.

All the same, I'm going to be firm, and just tell you how to make it, for you're sure to have plenty of odd moments

when you wonder just what you can do. And this little outfit would be very handy for taking back to school, where buttons have a habit of "busting" unexpectedly,

and holes will appear in stockings just when you want to look your trimmest.

You'll want a piece of cardboard measuring 5 inches by 2½ inches. Cover this with pretty cretonne back and front, then fold in half, so that you have two squares.

Sew a piece of flannel on to one side, and a piece of tape across the other.

Fix needles and pins to the flannel, and slip a card of mending wool or silk into the other. Paint or embroider your initial on the front cover—and it is complete.

● For Party Wear

With parties and pantos in the air, I wonder how you like this very simple idea of pretty-ing up a last year's party frock.

You will need a straight silk scarf to effect the transformation.

Fold this as shown in the little diagram, and then gather slightly at the two shoulder edges, and sew two or three pretty buttons there.

Then drape this over your shoulders, as shown in the picture, and fasten in the front with another button, or with a ribbon bow.

You can see from the picture how pretty this will look—and it is a style which would certainly appeal to you who get rather chilly on the shoulders.

There, I quite forgot to mention the present that small brother Heath (or Heatherington in full) gave me.

It wasn't a tablet of pink soap, after all—perhaps mother had restrained him!

He gave me a blue-handled tooth-brush—which was just what I wanted. And thrown in for luck was a typewriting rubber. I think the young urchin must have noticed how many typing mistakes I make, for I certainly do quite a lot of rubbing out!

Before I say bye-bye I simply must tell you about a very ingenious Christmas Card which I received from a reader in Montreal, Canada.

Attached to the outside was a small stocking—actually made of net, like those you buy—and apparently full of toys. When you opened the card there was a clever drawing facing you of Father Christmas emptying gifts out of his sack, and it was these which showed behind the stocking. Now wasn't that clever!

Happy New Year to you all, my pets.
Your friend, PATRICIA.



FESTIVE FANCY DRESSES

Three easy-to-make and delightful-to-wear fancy dresses that any schoolgirl would love.

If you are going to a fancy dress party this year you'll most certainly be wondering "what to go as," for attractive fancy costumes can be very expensive to buy.

So this is to help you who'd rather make your outfit, spending as little as possible.

JAPANESE GIRL.—This costume would suit a girl with dark hair and creamy skin. Silky pyjama legs can have elastic threaded through the ends so that they catch the ankles firmly.

A short summer dress will make the tunic part. This should have dark blue or black silk ribbon sewn around the neck, sleeves, hem and up each side. (You need not slit the sides unless you like—for the ribbon can be removed afterwards.)

Wear a wide sash of this ribbon around your waist and flat-heeled black slippers. Carry a sunshade and tuck an artificial flower into your hair over each ear.

SPELLING BEE.—Here's a very simple dress for the up-to-the-minute young miss.

Wear your simplest summer frock, and over it embroider in chain-stitch as many letters of the alphabet as you can. Make yourself a dunce's cap from a cone of stiff paper glued at the sides. Tie it under your chin with ribbon and paint more letters on the front of the cap.

Carry a piece of card with you on which are written some long words spelled wrongly. This should certainly be very intriguing and make an opening for conversation.

NELL GWYNN.—This would particularly suit the girl with long hair. The dress must be borrowed from mother or a big sister.



Then you make a long white organdie or muslin apron, as full as you like. Tie this around your waist, the bow at the front, and it will stand out stiffly at the back.

Drape a chiffon scarf around your shoulders and pin the ends with a cameo brooch. Wear a wide-brimmed hat, decorated with a feather over the brim, and carry a basket of oranges.

BABS & CO.'S WINTER DRESSES

In response to many requests, Miss Hilda Richards and Patricia have put their heads together to give you these peeps into Babs & Co.'s winter wardrobes. Next week Diana will be featured, bringing this little series to an end.



BESSIE BUNTER

"Bub-Babs," said Bessie excitedly, "I'm going to have a new dress! So what colour do you think would suit me?"

"Well, what colour would you like, you old silly one?" said Babs, laughing.

Bessie hung her head. "Pup - purple," she mumbled and kicked the carpet. "But you always tell me not to choose purple, and I do wish—"

"Bessie!" Babs jumped up and placed her hands on Bessie's shoulders. "You may now do three swift somersaults with excitement, for at last your wish shall come true. For purple is THE colour this autumn."

That was just before Christmas—and now Bessie has that dress and it is the light of her life.

A deep, rich purple it is—the material a plain wool cloth. For several days Bessie and Babs pored over "Bestway" fashion books to find a suitable style that could be made up in the village—for, naturally, Bessie is almost impossible to fit "off the peg."

Bessie obviously yearned for frills and furbelows—but Babs was firm. As the material itself was such a brilliant colour, she insisted that the style would have to be extremely simple.

The neck can be worn high, or in a tiny V, as you can see, and it fastens with a short, purple zipper.

The belt is narrow suede, matching the dress exactly. The pleats which come from the shoulder-yoke are stitched half-way down and are then free over the knees.

This downward line provided by the pleats is very slimming, you'll notice, and so is the narrow belt.

Altogether, quite the most charming day dress Bessie has had for ages—and the joy of it is, it looks equally well under a navy, a green, or a brown coat.

JEMIMA CARSTAIRS

Jemima is definitely thin, and she knows it.

She also knows [that well-tailored] clothes give her that trim look which she—and the old gov'nor—admire.

But Jemima by no means sticks to one fashion all the time. For her new winter outfit she decided on CONTRASTS, knowing these to be the newest idea.

A check-jacket and a plain skirt was her choice. The skirt is in hunting-green, and the jacket the same colour, with brown over-check.

The wide lapels and padded shoulders give Jemima width across the chest, and make her hips look extra-slim. (For hips, you know, want to be very neat if a well-cut skirt is to be worn with distinction.)

You will notice the "fob" that Jemima wears on the left lapel. This was a Christmas present from her father, and it is actually a silver watch, with her initial on the back. It fastens to her coat with a leather band, which can be removed in a twinkling.

Jemima was so pleased with this outfit, that she is considering having a jacket made of the plain material, and a skirt of the check. Then she can change and change around so that two complete outfits will do duty for four.

But good tailoring—even for young people—is a costly business, so Jemima has not made up her mind yet.

On one thing, though, Jemima was firm.

She insisted on having a straight panel of artificial silk sewn across the back of the skirt on the inside—to prevent the skirt stretching.



(Continued from page 11)

against the tree, shooting a shower of snow over her. Another—another! And in a moment the air was thick with flying snowballs, and Diana, amid a flurry of snow, was crouching on the ground. From the chums came a yell of laughter.

"Go it!"

"Fire!"

"Keep it up!"

Diana sat up. She guessed what had happened then. Hang them, they had spotted her! Quickly she sprang up, only to fall back as a well-aimed snowball took her beneath the chin.

"Look here—!" she shrieked. "Wow—both—er you—ooch!" Diana gurgled, and, turning, ran—

A whizzing volley of snowballs followed her.

Diana, out of range, stopped and glared back furiously. The cats! And then she became aware of Miss Trevlyn striding towards her.

"Diana! What are you doing here?"

"I—I—" gasped Diana.

"You know these grounds are private property. You have no right to be here without permission!"

Diana glared.

"So I should be obliged," Miss Trevlyn added coldly, "if you would remember that! Please do not come here again, Diana!"

And Miss Trevlyn, with a decidedly frigid glance, but with a suspicion of a smile lurking on her lips, passed on.

Diana gritted her teeth. Hang her! Hang them!

She flung back on her way, and not even when she met Mickey Lee & Co., who whooped towards her with an eager rush, were her chastened spirits buoyed up. All the same, even if they had scored over Diana, things were not going too well for the Cliff House chums. For the dance, which should have been such a success, was in danger of becoming a complete wash-out.

The cause was little Pearl.

For it was obvious from the first that she was not herself. Caring for Diana as she did, it was a cause of real distress to Pearl to feel that she was in the Firebrand's bad books.

Small wonder that she could not put her heart and soul into her part. But, loyal to Diana with Babs & Co. as she had been to Babs & Co. with Diana, she pluckily resisted any entreaty of the chums to find out what was the matter with her.

Mabs gave it up at last.

"It's no good," she said despairingly. "Pearl can do it, but Pearl's just not doing it! We'd better scrap the rehearsal for the time being."

The chums nodded. Pearl looked—and felt—very sad and sorry; but for once there was no eagerness on her part to carry on. In rather a disheartened group the chums gathered in the hotel again, and Babs and Mabs, having promised Mrs. Bell, took Pearl home, saying good-bye to her at the gates of the Three Gables.

Rather disconsolately Pearl drifted up the drive and knocked at the door.

The door opened. But it was neither the butler nor her mother who opened that door to her. It was Diana.

Diana had arrived home fifteen minutes before, and although she had spent some time with Mickey Lee & Co., advising them about their New Year tea-party, her feelings were still bitter.

"Oh, Aunty Diana—" started Pearl.

The Firebrand scowled as she remembered that if Pearl had only told her what was happening, she would have been spared the humiliation of the morning.

"Come in!" she snapped.

Pearl sighed. With her lips quivering a little, she went in. Diana closed the door.

"Well, jolly funny, wasn't it?" she growled, "to see your hateful friends pelting me with snowballs? I suppose you laughed like anything!"

Pearl's eyes filled with tears.

"Oh, aunty, I didn't!"

"No; but it was your fault!" Diana said, and inwardly reviled herself, even as the words left her lips, for her unfairness. "If you'd told me what was happening at the hotel there'd have been no need for me to hide there, would there? And if I hadn't hidden there I shouldn't have got caught."

"Oh, aunty, I—I'm ever so sorry!" Pearl said.

"Well, then, tell me what they're doing," Diana said.

"But I can't, aunty. I promised."

"You mean," Diana snarled, "you won't! All right!" And then, as Pearl, with a little cry, started towards her, she thrust out an arm. "No; don't come— Oh, yoicks!"

For, in thrusting out that arm, she had pushed. That ungovernable temper of hers made her push just a little harder than she intended. Pearl, rushing on, rebounded from Diana's palm, slipped, and fell.

"Pearl—" Diana cried, and suddenly, feeling a cat and a brute, rushed forward.

But before she reached Pearl an agitated figure swept on to the scene, and Mrs. Bell, her eyes blazing, helped little Pearl up and furiously turned to face the Firebrand.

"Diana, you bully!" she cried in a quivering voice. "How dare you! Diana, you will go to your room! You will pack your bags at once—at once, do you hear? I will not tolerate you a moment longer in this house!"

Defeat—and Triumph!



"PEARL!"

"Pearl dear!"

"Pearl, please— please do cheer up!" Mabel Lynn begged, almost in tears herself.

But little Pearl's best reply to them all was only a wistful and rather sad smile.

"I—I want Aunty Diana!" she said, with a half-sob in her voice.

It was the following day—the day of the great ice carnival. On the river outside the carnival was in full swing, and the chums' big event was due to begin in a quarter of an hour's time. With Pearl in this state, it looked like being an utter flop.

"Oh, my hat! What can we do?"

Mabs whispered. "Pearl—"

"Oh, please," Pearl begged tearfully.

"I want Aunty Diana!"

She did. From the moment, twenty-four hours ago now, that Diana had disappeared from Three Gables, Pearl had done nothing but want Diana. Diana was her friend. She loved Diana so much. Diana, on the ice, had taught her so many things—had given her that buoyant confidence which was so necessary to her good performances. The fact that Diana had left without a word—with, in fact, just one bitter scowl in her direction—had tortured little Pearl's memory to distraction. She felt she could never, never be happy again until she had made it up with Aunty Diana.

"If only Diana were here!" groaned Babs.

But Diana wasn't—at least, as far as Babs knew.

Actually, however, Diana was not far

away. Diana, contrary to expectation, had not gone back to London. If she had left Three Gables, she had not left Pellabay. And Diana, robbed of everything else, intended at the last moment to make a spectacular appearance in order to carry off the biggest event of the whole programme—the New Year Carnival Free Skating Championship.

That, Diana had vowed, should be her reward. She'd show the rest of the competitors—among whom were Janet Jordan and Leila Carroll—how a skating championship should be won! Robbed of Pearl, foiled in her intention to smash the show which Babs & Co. had originated, she would at least snatch that great triumph from the wreck of her plans!

Diana, at that moment leaving the village hotel where she was now staying, told herself that she was glad that she hadn't got Pearl to worry about. And yet that strangely changing heart of hers had known more than one pang since she had left the kiddie. Perhaps to allay the pangs of her own conscience, she had sent all the tickets she had bought for the carnival—twenty of them—along to Mr. Briggs, the vicar, advising him to get rid of them in the best way he thought.

Babs & Co. thought she had left, did they? Babs & Co., doubtless, were now hoping that Leila Carroll, the best free skater in the event, would win the prize. But let them wait! Oh, let them wait! Twice she had beaten Leila Carroll in Cliff House championships. It should be nothing to the beating she would inflict upon her now!

And Pearl? Oh, bother Pearl! Why should she think of her now?

It was early evening—a starry night—as Diana, attired from head to foot in fur-trimmed snowy-white, her glistening skates under her arm, strode off to the carnival. There, on the river, was congregated a great crowd, all blinking in the glow of the floodlights which shone upon the scene, where at the moment a skating dance on the ice was in progress. And then suddenly there came a shout:

"Miss Diana!"

Diana stared; turned round. Mickey Lee, his face glowing and looking unusually tidy, was in front of her.

"Why, Mickey, what are you doing here?" she asked.

"It's thanks to you, Miss Diana!" he said, and his eyes glowed his admiration. "Those tickets you sent to the vicar, you know. He gave them to us."

Diana laughed.

"And you've got a front seat, I hope?"

"Yes, Miss Diana. But, I say, you're in the championship, aren't you? It starts in five minutes, you know. I do hope you win, Miss Diana. We're all waiting to clap you like anything!"

"Thanks!" Diana said. "See you later, Mickey—with the first prize!"

Airily she waved her hand, and strutted off to find the master of ceremonies. But hardly had she taken half a dozen steps than a startled voice reached her.

"Diana!"

Diana turned, and scowled as she saw Babs hurrying up.

"Diana—you!" Babs gulped. "Diana, I thought you had gone home?"

"Bit of a blow it is for you, eh?" sneered Diana. "I suppose you think Leila is going to win the championship?"

"I was thinking of Pearl," Babs said quietly.

"Bother Pearl!" Diana said irritably.

"Diana, listen! No, don't walk away!" And Babs caught her by the shoulder. "Diana, doesn't Pearl mean

anything to you?" she asked. "Don't you like the kiddie any more?"

"Oh, rats! Of course I like her!" "And you wouldn't," Babs said, "like to think you were the cause of her being ill?"

"My hat! What are you talking about?"

"Diana, listen! I am not asking you for my own sake—it's for the kiddie this time. But since you went away Pearl hasn't been herself. She's just breaking her heart because she thinks you've got a down on her!"

Diana flushed. "Well?" "Well?" Babs faced her squarely. "Diana, a word from you will make all the difference in the world. She's there, in that tent. Won't you just come to say that word?"

Diana paused. Oh, yooks! And suddenly, in her mind's eye, she saw that pretty little face again; she heard that whispering cry.

Well, after all, what harm had Pearl done to her? And, hang it, she couldn't go into her championship with this on her mind!

"Well, where is she?" she asked roughly, even though she knew.

For answer Babs crossed to the tent and pulled back the flap. The other Cliff House chums were standing just inside.

Diana, then, with a shrug, went in. And little Pearl, at sight of her, uttered a cry.

"Aunty!" So pitiful that face, so utterly radiant and delighted as soon as she spotted her, that Diana's heart knew a most terrific pang.

"Pearl!" she cried. "Aunty!" And there was Pearl running forward; there she was with arms outstretched, the tears streaming down her chubby face, blindly groping.

"Oh, aunty," she sobbed, "I—I knew you would come! I—I've been so—so unhappy without you!"

Diana felt something rise and stick in her throat.

"Kid!" she said hoarsely. "Kid!" And stooped and gathered her. "Well, hang you!" she snarled savagely at Babs & Co. "Can't you get out of this? Can't you leave us alone?"

"Come on!" Babs said. She turned her head towards the door. Quietly the chums filed out. Pearl, with a sobbing little cry, clung to Diana.

"Aunty, you—you don't think I'm a bad girl?"

"Silly kid, no!" Diana said, trying to forget the tears she felt welling to her own eyes.

"And—and you do forgive me, aunty? 'Cos, you know, I never meant to make you not like me! Aunty, say you like me!"

Unheard by Diana in the emotional stress of that moment, the bell outside was clanging for the competitors in the free skating championship.

"Oh, aunty, I—I'm so happy!" Pearl sighed.

Diana sighed, too, and then furiously dashed the tears from her eyes. She was just being a sentimental fool, of course, but how could one just help loving a kiddie like this?

"There!" she said. "Now, Pearl, are you happy?"

"Happy, aunty, yes!" Pearl beamed mistily. "I feel ever so brave now you are here! Aunty, you don't mind me popping out of the snowball with Aunty Barbara and her other friends?"

"Oh, of course not!" Diana said. And then, remembering, jumped to her feet. "But, Pearl, I've got my skating event!" she cried in sudden apprehension. "I've got to rush. I've got to

fly. Pearl, wait here till I've finished. See you later."

And Diana flew. Outside she paused, looking at the skaters on the ice. Could that be her event? She caught hold of a steward.

"Steward, quickly! Where's the M.C.'s offices? I'm in the championship!"

"Are you?" He turned to look at her. "Then," he said, "I'm sorry; the championship has already started! Those are they—on the ice now. You're too late!"

Diana gasped. "But can't I go on?"

"Sorry, miss, orders are that all competitors start together. I'm afraid you're out!"

miracle?" She gazed at Babs. "Is this the same kiddie I saw before the championship race?" she asked.

"It is—and it isn't!" Babs laughed. "You see, we got hold of Diana! Diana worked the miracle, as you call it! Now, Pearl, what about this 1939 jersey?"

"Oo, yes!" Pearl cried. "Aunty Barbara, will Aunty Diana be watching me?"

"You bet she will!" Babs laughed.

And her heart in that moment glowed towards "Aunty" Diana who had achieved this striking transformation in their little star.

"There!" she laughed; and Pearl, ecstatically happy now, danced her



Diana stared, blankly uncomprehending. Out? She had missed her triumph! She was too late! Too late all because she had been a sympathetic softie!

Choking, almost quivering with rage, with sickness at her own sentimentality, she stamped towards the ring of spectators.

This competition—it should have been hers. This—and she had lost it!

And Leila—that Babs & Co. cat!—Leila, obviously, was winning! Leila, whom she had beaten twice at Cliff House.

Bitter, black, Diana's stormy heart then. How she hated herself! What a weak, silly fool she was! She, who had missed this most glorious of opportunities! But look, it was coming to an end! The heads were conferring; the crowd was clapping. Now the M.C. was stepping into the floodlight. He raised his hand.

"The champion," he announced, "is Miss Leila Carroll!"

What a cheer! But Diana did not cheer. Diana did not clap. She gritted her teeth. She looked more furious than before.

Leila, her face alight, was running off now—for the American junior had to get ready to take her place in the New Year Tableau. She entered the tent to find Babs, Mabs, Clara, Jemima, and all the rest already dressed, and Pearl, a radiant little fairy, among them, laughing with excited happiness.

"Aunty Leila, look at me!" she shrilled.

"Snakes!" Leila laughed, and stared. "I am! Say, who's performed the

"LOOK here—" shrieked Diana furiously. "Bother you—ooch!" And still the snowballs came! The Firebrand's efforts to spy on Babs & Co. had failed dismally.

glee as the trim jersey, boldly marked "1939," was slipped on her. "Everything ready? Good egg! This way, Pearl; you come with me. Now you're going in—"

"In the snowball!" Pearl gleed. "Oh, isn't it all 'citing, Aunty Barbara? I do hope I see Aunty Diana!"

Babs smiled. But off then to take up positions. Clara Trevlyn, unrecognizable in a long grey beard and her scythe and hour-glass, was already there. Pearl went off into a shriek of laughter as she saw her.

"Oh, Aunty Clara, don't you look funny!" she pealed.

"And don't I feel it!" Clara gurgled.

For Clara, despite her pluck, always suffered from stage fright. "But hurry, you chumps! I'm getting my cue!"

The cue was the end of the M.C.'s announcement—the M.C. now on the ice addressing the silent and wondering crowd. Now the floodlights were circling, concentrating their light full on the scene, and while the crowd watched, Clara, in her Father Time disguise, hobbled forward on her skates. There was a laugh and a cheer.

Diana, watching, scowled.

Now Clara was saying her lines. Now, as she waved her scythe, in skated Babs as 1938, circling around her. Then suddenly, from the dark background, a trumpet blew. There came a chorus of laughing voices, followed by a flying shower of snowballs against which Clara and Babs gave way. Then—what a gasp of admiration went up!

Laughing, singing, the rest of the chums swept into the light, dragging behind them the huge snowball on the sled. Once—twice—they skated in a circle, and then—hey presto! A circle in the snowball flew back.

And there, in the full glare, rising like a fairy out of the huge ball, appeared little Pearl!

Pearl, on tiptoes, her face suffused with happiness!

Diana watched, for a moment sharing the wondering admiration of the others. What a fool she was not to have been in this! And then Pearl saw her—like a ray of sunshine that beaming happiness which overspread her face—and with what wild delight she waved her hand! Then, as a round burst of cheering came from the crowd, she leapt lightly down. While the band played and the Cliff House chums formed up behind her, she commenced her dance of the New Year!

The crowd was entranced. By Jove, but this kiddie was a champion in the making! This kiddie was just marvellous! An involuntary roar went up. "Bravo, bravo, bravo!"

Pearl skated on. But always her eyes were directed at the spot at which Diana stood, and Diana, gazing, felt herself torn—one moment with admiration, with glowing pride; the next, with fury that she had no part in this—with angry self-reproach because she had made Pearl's success possible, and in making that possible, had also assured the unqualified success of the show she had done her best to ruin!

Now, amid a thunder of applause, the turn came to an end. The Cliff House chums, hugging Pearl between them, were going off and the M.C., stepping forward, was making a fresh announcement. Diana caught part of it:

"And for her most delightful and clever exhibition, Miss Pearl Bell will be awarded a special prize—"

"And those cats," Diana said, between her teeth, "will get all the credit for having coached her! Oh rats! Why am I stopping here?"

She bit her lips. Hang it, she'd get out! She'd lost everything—everything! No cheers, no limelight for her—just empty black bitter disappointment! Roughly she turned away, pushing herself through the crowd. Then she stopped as she felt a touch upon her shoulder.

It was Babs.

"Diana, thanks!" she said softly.

"Thanks for what?" Diana scowled.

"For—backing up Pearl! It was only because of you, Di, that she played up so splendidly! But won't you please come and see her now? They're

just going to award the prizes, and Pearl's dying for you to see her get hers!"

Diana paused. Rough refusal was on her lips. Prizes—when the principal ones were going to her rivals! And yet—Pearl! Pearl wanted her—Pearl was asking for her! It would complete the little one's happiness to have Diana by her side when she received her prize. For a moment the Fire-brand struggled fiercely with the generous and noble-hearted Diana. Then she shrugged.

"Oh, well, I'm a fool!" she growled.

"But come on!"

"Diana, you brick!" Babs glowed.

Diana allowed herself to be led forward. Now, smiling and scowling by turns, she had reached the chums. Then suddenly a fiery-faced little figure hurled itself at her.

"Aunty—aunty! Oh, Aunty Diana, I'm going to have a prize—a special one, you know. Aunty, you come and watch me get it!"

And into Diana's glove went that chubby, confiding little palm, and Diana, with a gulp, allowed herself to be led forward to the president's platform, where the prize-giving was now being held. Pearl danced.

"Aunty, soon be me!" she said.

"Oh, aunty, look! There's Aunty Leila going to get her prize, you know."

Diana sourly smiled.

"And now," the M.C. called, "Miss Pearl Bell!"

A cheer, a burst of handclapping. Diana joined in that then. And with a beam, little Pearl went forward to receive a perfectly enormous doll from the president's hand, and cheered and clapped, came back to Diana, her earnest little face aglow, her eyes like stars.

"Oh, aunty, isn't it won'ful?" she breathed. "Look, now Aunty Barbara's going to have a prize!"

Diana gulped. She couldn't stand this—she couldn't! Prizes for everybody, except her!

She turned away.

Then there was a rustle. Diana blinked. For on to the platform was stepping the Reverend Joshua Briggs,

the vicar of Pellabay, and with Mr. Briggs, holding a pair of shining skates, was Mickey Lee. Mr. Briggs blinked mildly.

"Is Miss Royston-Clarke here? If so, will she step forward?"

Diana started.

"Me?" she asked ungrammatically.

"Ah, Miss Diana!" Mr. Briggs smiled. "This way, please! Ladies and gentlemen, I have an announcement! An extra prize is to be awarded," he said "Not, in truth, for any skating championship, but a prize for loyalty and unselfishness. The poor people of this village have requested me to give some mark of their gratitude and esteem to Miss Royston-Clarke, who has helped them so much; who has spent so much money on them, who decorated the village hall at her own expense, and really brought happiness into the drab lives of our village boys. These skates have been bought by the village boys themselves. Miss Royston-Clarke, will you accept them?"

And Diana, stumbling forward, found the roaring cheers of the crowd-ringing in her ears. Breathless, in a daze, she collected her prize—a prize for her, after all. Cheers again, led this time by Babs & Co., and joined in heartily by Mickey Lee & Co. Breathlessly she turned, to find Babs smiling at her, and Babs' hand held forward.

"Diana, congratulations!" she said. "Friends now?"

"Yes!" little Pearl cried, and took Diana's hand and shyly put it into Babs'. And while the chums all cheered, and Mr. Briggs beamed, they shook.

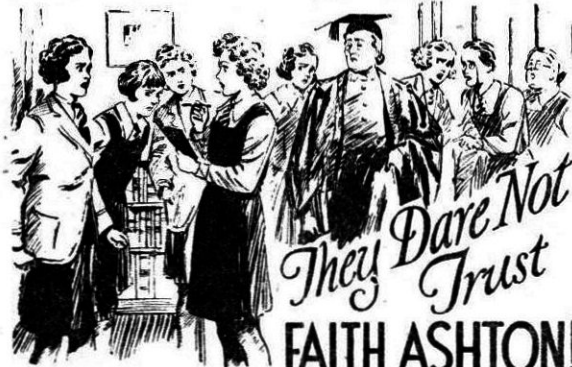
"And," Babs added, "a very happy New Year to all of us!"

"And better understanding in the future, I hope," Diana said, in a sudden, generous burst of expansiveness.

"To which," said Pearl's mother, now coming forward for the first time, "hear, hear, Diana! And now, if all of you have finished making friends, and Diana would like to come back to Three Gables, we'll drink the toast in home-made ginger-wine."

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

Christmas Holidays Over, Babs & Co. Return to Cliff House To Find Several Staggering Shocks Awaiting Them!



By Hilda Richards

First, there is a temporary new Headmistress, with dismayingly ideas of her own about school discipline; second, Faith Ashton, Barbara Redfern's cry-baby, deceitful cousin, is back in the Fourth Form; and, finally—Faith, having wheeled her way into the mistress' affections, is determined to back her up for her own selfish, vindictive ends. Everyone suffers, but it is Babs, who suffers most. This is the first of a magnificent series featuring your Cliff House favourites, and it appears next week. Don't miss it whatever you do.

Romance, Glamour, Breathless Excitement—all came to Pamela Courtney when she became—

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. She learns from a young Leiconian, **PAUL NALDI**, a secret helper of Princess Sonia, that the duke is plotting to disgrace her in the eyes of the people and then seize the throne. The grand duke has Paul outlawed, and suddenly suspects that Pamela is an impostor. On the night of a state ball he arranges with his niece, Juanita, to try to unmask Pamela. They must be very careful, for the grand duke is not certain his suspicions are correct. (Now read on.)

Who Saved Pamela?

HORRIFIED, incredulous, Pamela stared into her dressing-table mirror.

Standing behind her, hands actually beginning to caress her wig of shiny, black hair, was Juanita—Juanita, her friend, the girl she liked and trusted.

And on Juanita's face was an expression that told the staggering truth as clearly and startlingly as though she had confessed it with her own lips.

Juanita was an enemy; Juanita was a helper of the treacherous grand duke, who, in the background, looked on with folded arms, a smile of expectant exultation curving his lips. In other words, Juanita had deceived her.

And now—now—
Only too clearly Juanita meant to test whether Pamela's hair was false. One gentle tug, and the wig would be dislodged.

Pamela would be exposed as an impostor!

In another second—

And then something happened; something so startling and unexpected that Juanita, with a little scream of fright, leaped back, a hand to her cheek; the grand duke spun round, and Pamela, heart thumping, slowly turned towards the french windows.

There had been the most appalling crash of glass! A stone, amid splinters of glass, lay upon the rich, red carpet.

A gaping hole in one window told its own tale.

"What's this?" came a cry from the duke. "Who dares—"

Traitor he might be, but he was no physical coward. He wrenched open the windows and strode on to the balcony.

Juanita stood, white-faced and trembling, almost overcome with reaction at the tenseness of her stealthy, frustrated attempt to test Pamela's wig. Pamela herself, no longer spellbound, sprang to her feet and darted to the door on the far side of the room.

The grand duke returned, from the balcony.

"Must have been an intruder in the

PAMELA LEARNS THE TRUTH AT LAST!

The girl who has posed as her dearest friend is actually one of her deadliest enemies.

grounds!" he began. Then, spotting Pamela, he hastened forward. "Sonia, where are you going?"

"To summon the guards," was Pamela's swift reply, as she wrenched open the door.

"There is no need, my dear," protested the grand duke. "Whoever the miscreant was, he is nowhere near the balcony. Doubtless he is scuttling off through the grounds."

But Pamela, herself puzzled by the incident, though by no means as startled as she pretended to be, had a double reason for wishing to call the guards. If the grand duke, sensational though it was, had his doubts about her identity, he would be less likely to risk making a fool of himself—and Juanita—by trying to expose her before their own soldiers, when his suspicions might prove to be false.

"All the same, uncle," she said, "I am going to fetch one guard at least. He can stay here during the ball. It might be as well."

There was no need for her to call one of the soldiers. The sound of the breaking window had already roused everyone within earshot.

Pamela was greeted by a startled, excited crowd in the corridor outside her room; civic guards, in their gorgeous white and crimson uniforms, jostled maidservants and elaborately-dressed flunkies in their anxiety to discover if anything had happened to the princess.

For even among the palace staff it was known that certain sections of the populace were hostile to the princess, though only Pamela, Paul, and the grand duke and his associates knew the truth. That it was, entirely due to the duke's plotting that the good name of the princess was in disrepute, and the people were simmering on the borderline of open rebellion. For the duke coveted the throne himself.

Very strained about the cheeks, Pamela tried not to appear ill-at-ease. With a smile, she beckoned the foremost civic guard.

"There is nothing to be alarmed about," she said quietly. "Someone with a better control over a stone than over his temper saw fit to break one of my windows. No one was hurt. But I should like you, Luigi," she added, looking at a young soldier, "to remain here on guard. It would be just as well."

The grand duke and Juanita hastily stepped apart as Pamela re-entered her boudoir, followed by the soldier. Plainly they had been conversing together. Pamela had guessed that they would. Fellow-conspirators!

But not yet had she quite recovered from the astounding shock. That Juanita was an enemy—a spy. That the grand duke should have suspicions that she was not the real Sonia!

Pamela had to fight to control her fears, or she might have shown her guilt by bolting precipitately from the room. But that would be foolish, disastrous! It would be treacherous to her young friend, Paul, himself a fugitive, thanks to the grand duke's cunning, and now alone and wounded in a mountain cave.

With all the calmness she could muster, Pamela indicated a chair.

"Sit down, Luigi," she invited.

"There is no need to stand. And there

By
DORIS LESLIE

will be less chance of your being seen from the grounds should anyone attempt to climb over the balcony."

"Very well, your Highness."

And the soldier, surprised as well as grateful for such unexpected licence, perched himself awkwardly on the edge of the chair.

The grand duke coughed, screwed his monocle more firmly into place.

"Ahem! Really, my dear, I hardly think this precaution is necessary."

"I do, uncle," Pamela returned quietly. "Now, I've finished dressing, and there's no need for us to stay any further. We can leave everything to Luigi. I'm sure you wouldn't want anything to happen through us not being prepared."

It was then that Juanita, blissfully unaware that her own expression had betrayed her to the girl she had deceived for so long, played up in her usual false fashion.

"Don't you think Sonia may be right, your Excellency?" she said, with the most simpering of smiles and just the suggestion of a curtsy. "After all, whoever threw that stone may still be

hiding in the grounds; waiting for a chance to—"

She closed one eye. It was the eye turned away from Pamela, but Pamela, from bitter experience to-night, had learned that mirrors often revealed what would otherwise be undetected. She was glancing in one now, pretending to adjust the back of her long, white evening gown.

And, seeing that wink, catching the nod which the grand duke gave in return, and the word "later" he silently mouthed, she understood.

For the moment she was safe. But after the ball—then these two enemies would make another attempt to unmask her; to test their doubts or suspicions—Pamela could not be sure which they were at the moment.

"Very well," said the grand duke. "Remain here, my man!" He curtly nodded to the soldier, who sprang to attention and saluted. "Come, Sonia—Juanita! Your arms—"

On one side of the grand duke, while Juanita clung to his other arm, Pamela was escorted to the door. As they separated a moment to pass through, she glanced round.

Why she did so, she hardly knew herself. But some instinct made her do it. And she was glad she did—glad, yet filled with sudden alarm.

A face peeped through the french windows, a face wearing an expression of urgent warning, with a finger to its lips.

Paul Naldi!

Paul, her lone ally, the fugitive from justice, with a price on his head; Paul, whom she had believed to be miles away in the mountains, safe and sound and unaware of the terrible danger she was in.

He was here after all! And in just as grave a peril as herself!

Fresh Hope!

"SONIA! Come, my dear. What are you waiting for?"

With a violent start, Pamela turned from her horrified gazing at the window. Paul had bobbed out of sight again now. There was nothing to tell he was there; nothing at all. But the slightest sound, and Luigi would discover him. And how was it the grand duke hadn't seen him when he had gone on to the balcony?

"Oh, I—I'm sorry, uncle. I thought I'd forgotten something, that's all," she managed to say shakily.

"It can scarcely be important, my dear," he said, and, reaching out, took her arm and tucked it under his. "I must say you two girls look charming," he went on, in benevolent tones that did not deceive Pamela. "Perfectly charming! Two of the prettiest pictures I have ever seen. The guests will feel doubly honoured, I am sure. You, Sonia, my dear, are completely bewitching. But haven't you used just a little too much powder?"

"Have—have I, uncle?" Pamela said. But she knew that it wasn't powder that made her cheeks look white. Oh, why had she left Luigi on guard? Why hadn't she taken the duke's advice? It might have brought disaster to herself, but at least Paul would not have been in such awful danger. She'd got to save him. She must—she must! Not only for his own sake, or her sake, but for the sake of everyone in this tiny, lovable country, from the genuine princess, far away in America, to the humblest of its inhabitants.

If Paul were caught, nothing could save her from exposure—and Leiconia from rebellion. He had saved her to-night. Of course, it must have been he. That explained his presence on the balcony. But if he were captured he could not do so again, and after the ball she would be at the mercy of her enemies.

Yet what could she do?

Then suddenly her heart fluttered. Her handkerchief. Here was an excuse to leave the grand duke for a few moments; to return to her boudoir; to dismiss Luigi.

"There, I knew I'd forgotten something!" she exclaimed. "My hanky. You go on, uncle—and you, Juanita. I won't be a minute."

And away Pamela sped. It took her less than thirty seconds to get to her boudoir, and even less to dismiss Luigi.

Pamela waited until his footsteps had died away, locked the door, and then spun round, heart thumping.

"Paul!" she cried.

The french windows opened and he stepped through. At sight of him Pamela ran forward in concern. His injured arm tucked into the open collar of his shirt, his clothes dusty and dishevelled, he looked hunted, exhausted, hungry.

Your Editor's address is:—
The SCHOOLGIRL Office, Fleetway House,
Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

BETWEEN OURSELVES



MY DEAR READERS,—A lovely New Year treat for you all! Something you will be able to enjoy week after week for a long time to come; something you are certain to want to recommend to all your friends. In other words—

Oh, but first please let me wish each one of you

A VERY HAPPY AND PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR!

There! And now I can begin to satisfy your curiosity. As a matter of fact this treat which is in store for you isn't exactly a surprise, because I referred to it in last week's issue. I mean, of course, the series of stories featuring the Young Lady Fayre and that romantic, gallant young outlaw, Robin Hood, which I told you would be commencing next week.

I simply couldn't give you a complete idea of the novelty, appeal, and romantic fascination of these stories.

Merrie England in the days of Richard Lionheart is a thrilling enough background for any series. But when, added to that, you have a delightful heroine, indulging in all sorts of daring escapades on other people's behalf, and no less a person than the renowned Robin Hood as her friend, there are endless opportunities for the most thrilling and unusual situations.

Miss Ida Melbourne, author of these grand stories, has never written anything better in her life. And I am sure you will soon be declaring that you, in your lives, have never read anything quite like them. There are other details on page 24. Remember, the Young Lady Fayre,

"SECRET HELPER TO ROBIN HOOD,"

will make her bow next Saturday—and will

be reappearing for many, many Saturdays to come.

Before I pass on to next week's extra-special Babs & Co. story, a few words about the current issues of the

SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN LIBRARY.

These wonderful little fourpenny volumes, which can be obtained at all newsagents and bookstalls, always include one story of the early adventures of your Cliff House School favourites. This month's—No. 660—is both enthralling and seasonable, "Babs & Co.'s London Xmas," and you would simply revel in it. The other three fine numbers are: No. 661, "Morecove's Christmas Problem," by Marjorie Stanton; No. 662, "The Schoolgirls Who Staged a Pantomime," by Helen Gibbons; and No. 663, "Molly of Mystery Ferry," by Sylvia Macrae. Why not ask your newsagent if you can glance at them? And now—

"THEY DARE NOT TRUST FAITH ASHTON!"

That is the intriguing title of next Saturday's magnificent LONG COMPLETE story of Barbara Redfern & Co., and as old readers will realise, it features Babs' treacherous, hypocritical cousin, who once managed to rob her of the Fourth Form captaincy.

Back to school for the new term, Babs & Co. receive many shocks: first, there is a temporary new headmistress; second, Faith Ashton, arriving there ahead of the other girls, has already wheedled her way into this unsuspecting woman's affections; thirdly, the new Head has very strong and often unpleasant ideas about how Cliff House should be run; and finally, it is Faith who, for cunning reasons of her own, supports the headmistress tooth and nail.

This is the first of a really powerful series, bringing Faith in conflict with practically the whole of the Fourth Form, but Babs in particular. You simply mustn't miss a single incident in these superb stories.

Your next issue will also contain further exciting chapters of "Princess to Save Leiconia," and more of Patricia's Bright and Useful Pages, so do order your copy well in advance, won't you?

With best wishes for every moment of the New Year.

Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.

"Oh, Paul, you're not well," she said tremulously. "Sit down. Have a rest. Look. Come in here. You'll be safe then if anyone comes—"

"I'm O.K., Pam," he said weakly. "Just a—just a little fagged, that's all. Thanks."

But despite his assurance, he allowed her to help him into the large wardrobe-room, and then sank wearily on to a trunk. Pamela darted out and unlocked the boudoir door, just in case the grand duke or Juanita returned. Then, closing the door of the wardrobe-room, and drawing rows of clothes across to screen them from view, she dropped to her knees beside Paul.

"You—you saw what nearly happened?" she breathed.

"Not a second too soon," was Paul's grim reply. "That's why I'm here, Pam. One of the peasants, a friend of mine, happened to come through the mountains on his way to the border. I saw him—had a chat. And he told me he'd overheard the grand duke talking—about you—that he couldn't be sure, but he suspected you were an impostor, and that to-night, when you were dressing for the ball—well, you know as much as I do now, old thing. Except," he finished, "after I broke the window, I swung over the balcony and hung by my hands—as I did once before, you remember. That's why the grand duke didn't see me."

Pamela, thinking of the strain that must have been on his injured arm, laid her hand on his.

"Thank you, Paul," she said simply. "And, Paul—I'm sorry about Juanita. You never did trust her. I—I wish I hadn't." And then, in sudden apprehension: "Oh, Paul, what are we going to do? They're going to try to unmask me after the ball. I know they are. And—and how can we stop them? How—how?"

Distractedly, she looked at him. To her amazement, he gave a faint smile, tapping his head.

"By putting this right, Pam—the wig," he said. "That's part of the reason I came here. Not only to warn you, but to make you, well—exposure-proof. You see—"

Swiftly he explained, and Pamela's fears vanished, a little flush of excitement drove away the pallor of her cheeks.

Paul's idea was a masterpiece! Pamela must dye her own hair the same shade as Sonia's. Paul knew where to obtain the necessary dye, and her own hair was long enough to pass muster. To-night, immediately the ball was over, she must meet him at their favourite rendezvous in Tolari Forest—the hollow oak at the end of the secret passage to the palace—and he would give her some.

"And it'll make me so like Sonia that the grand duke—and Juanita—can try to rumble me as much as they like!" she cried. "Oh, Paul, how—how wonderful! I never even thought of it before—"

Paul grinned.

"You never do think of the best wheezes until you have to," he said sagely. "Well, so much for that. Now, Pam."

His expression became grim.

"There's something else. The peasants!"

"You mean, they've started to revolt already?" Pamela said, catching in her breath.

Paul nodded.

"In places. The grand duke's lying story about my being wanted as a traitor has worked only too well—"

Pamela bit her lip. It was she who was held responsible by the peasants for



IN another second, Pamela would have been unmasked—exposed as an impostor. And then came an unexpected respite as a stone crashed through the window.

Paul's plight. The grand duke had caused it to be stated that she had ordered his arrest. That, on top of other cunning moves by the grand duke, was why the peasants were against her. Once, she had tried to deliver a message from Paul, in which he himself told the truth, but she had been unable to get through with it to the peasant chief.

"You told your friend the truth, of course, Paul?" she asked keenly.

"Naturally. And he'll spread it all he can. But it'll take time. He's got to reach the border first to transact some business. It may take two days—perhaps more—before it does any good. I'd have seen the chief on my way here, only there wasn't time. I'll try to see him while waiting for you."

"If only we can hold out a little while longer!" Pamela breathed.

She stared before her, her mind in a whirl; there were so many things that came crowding into it—the peasants, herself, Paul. Sharply she looked up.

"But you," she said anxiously—"you daren't stay here any longer; you must get away. Can you get over the balcony without being seen?"

"I got over it coming here, and I'll get over it going," Paul replied steadily.

He rose, stood looking at her for a moment, and then playfully patted her head.

"Cheer up, old thing! Soon get that hair fixed, you know. And the darkest hour's always just before the dawn, they say. Bye-bye!"

Pamela's heart seemed to be racing as she watched him step on to the balcony; as she waited after he had vanished over the balustrade, counting the seconds, strung up with suspense.

But minutes passed and all was still. Her hopes, rising, became steady. Paul had made it safely. By now he should be on his way along the underground tunnel to Tolari Forest.

"Come on, now—smile!" she ordered herself, glancing into a mirror. "That's better! A little broader, please. Topping! And now keep it there, put your head back, walk as though you were treading on air. You're Princess Sonia Alexandria, you know, for the next few hours, at any rate."

Whereupon, Pamela, summoning up all her courage, hurried from the room.

THE GRAND DUKE BERNARD and Juanita turned as one person as Pamela left them on the excuse of obtaining a handkerchief. He was frowning, rubbing his toothbrush moustache; Juanita scowled craftily.

"Shall I follow her, uncle?" she hissed.

The grand duke shook his head. "No need to do that. She's not up to anything. At least, she doesn't suspect"—he shrugged—"well, that we suspect her, but— Oh, confound it, Juanita! Why did that fool—whoever he was—have to break a window just at that moment?"

"I'd almost done it," Juanita said fiercely. "I couldn't be certain, but I'd swear it is a wig, uncle."

"We've got to be absolutely certain, Juanita. Even now the whole thing's so fantastic I can scarcely credit it. That someone should be posing as Sonia—masquerading as the princess under our very noses—"

"Here, in the palace—"

"Without anyone having the faintest inkling of the truth until now."

And so the treacherous duke and Juanita went on, reviving all over again the host of amazing features about their suspicion which still made them wonder—could it really be so, after all?

If someone was impersonating Sonia, then where was Sonia now? Was she a prisoner somewhere? Or a willing absentee, in league with her impersonator? And what of Prince Alphonse, her uncle, now engaged on matters of State in another part of the country? Did he know of the masquerade? Was it possible that he, too, was a party to it?

And, finally, how long had this extraordinary state of affairs existed? What was the motive behind it?

"We'll try again after the ball, uncle," Juanita presently said with unmistakable eagerness.

"We must!" The grand duke's eyes glittered. "Now is the time to strike, Juanita. The peasants are already in the mood to rally to my cause. If this girl should prove to be an impostor"—he laughed—"the game's as good as won! The whole country can be swayed behind us in a few hours. Think of it, Juanita! The princess missing—away from her post—a deserter of her people

at the most critical moment of their history since the civil war. There's scarcely a man would remain loyal to her. I doubt if even—"

"Sssh! Here she comes now!" Juanita nudged her uncle warningly. And so it was that when Pamela, herself playing a part, hurried up to them with a beaming smile and the most charming words of thanks for their having awaited her return, she was greeted in a similar gracious fashion.

Arm-in-arm they descended the broad, red-carpeted staircase to the main hall and the principal dining hall, where a banquet was first of all to be held.

Two of them awaited a chance to prove their amazing suspicions; the other determined at all costs to see that the opportunity was never theirs.

The Worst Blow of All!

"YOU are enjoying it, Sonia?" "Very much indeed, uncle, thank you."

And Pamela smiled at the grand duke, seated next to her in the glittering dining-room. She spoke the truth; she was enjoying herself tremendously, for this was her very first state banquet. Probably her very last, too—which was one reason why she intended to have just the loveliest time she possibly could.

"I am glad, my dear." The grand duke looked at her over the top of his glass. "Very glad! A toast, Sonia." He extended the glass towards her. "A toast to the happiness of our beloved country."

Their glasses chinked. "To Leiconia!" said Pamela from the depths of her heart.

"To Leiconia," said the grand duke—and mentally substituted "Myself!"

Pamela guessed it. Pamela knew he was half-mocking her, and yet somehow she did not feel so troubled as she'd done earlier this evening. So much had happened to take her mind off tragic things. The banquet—fascinating, enchanting, spellbinding; it had bound a spell around her—a spell she did not mean to break until she had to.

She meant to make it last just as long as she could.

Now, with bright eyes and flushed, radiant face, she gazed about her. She'd done so a dozen times already. She wanted to do it yet again.

It was a scene of unforgettable brilliance, of lavishness, pomp, and magnificence.

Ranged on either side of the enormously long table were the diners—the men in immaculate evening dress and a variety of colourful uniforms; the women exquisitely gowned, some with tiaras, some without, but all a-glitter with jewels. There were flowers on the table in shining silver vases; Venetian glasses worth a fortune in themselves; silver plate; great silver bowls containing every kind of fruit; a bewildering array of cutlery; flowers, fruit; more glasses, more silver plate, from one end of the table to the other. And discreetly in the background, but ever ready to anticipate the requirements of each person there, hovered a host of scarlet-coated flunkies with white knee-breeches and powdered wigs.

Pamela could scarcely drag her eyes away from the scene. It did not seem to matter that almost every other eye was upon her. For was she not the guest of honour? And was she not smiling all about her, as though anxious to ensure herself that each individual guest was completely at ease?

The meal came to an end. That in itself had been an experience—one long

succession of the most delectable dishes, each seemingly more tasty than the last. Then the voice of the toastmaster, clear and bell-like, stilled the hum of conversation.

"Your Highness, your Excellency, my lords, ladies, and gentlemen, pray silence for his Excellency the Duke of Aosta—"

And up rose the dapper, bearded foreign ambassador. He began to speak. He began to speak about the princess, and Leiconia, and his own country, and of the centuries-old friendship between the two countries, and how they had gone to each other's aid in times of distress and conflict.

Pamela, at first mildly interested, found herself becoming enthralled. She began to glow with a peculiar sense of pride; pride to be serving this little country. And, glancing at the grand duke, beside her, her lips set firmly.

He was sneering behind his hand. A surge of anger against the treacherous plotter rose in Pamela. He shouldn't succeed in dethroning Sonia! He shouldn't be allowed to unmask her. She'd outwit him. She'd slip away to Paul before the ball was over—as soon after it had commenced as she reasonably could.

Once her hair had been altered there was no way in which the grand duke could establish her identity. And with Paul's help she could hang out until the truth about his outlawing became known to the peasants; perhaps until Sonia herself returned, with arrangements completed for the exploitation of the newly discovered oil wells in Leiconia; in other words, prosperity!

Put in that way, the position seemed very much brighter. Pamela's happiness returned. She actually enjoyed all the speeches. And afterwards, in the sumptuous ball-room—

Such gaiety and fun, music and laughter, that Pamela was swept off her feet for a while.

"Your Highness, will you?" said one of her partners, when they reached an alcove, at the end of a dance.

A rugged young man, in the early twenties, he proffered a gold cigarette-case.

"No, thank you," Pamela returned, also smiling. "I never smoke."

"Never smoke!" exclaimed her partner, in astonishment. "But—but, your Highness, I've seen you smoking many times."

It was a little slip, of course, for the real Sonia did smoke, but Pamela was quite able to remedy it.

"I never smoke with a sore throat," she said.

"Oh, I'm sorry." The young man looked sympathetic as he replaced the case. "Is there anything I can get you?"

Pamela smiled at him gratefully, but shook her head. She was thinking of Paul at that moment and realising that here was an excellent chance to slip away.

He would not be expecting her yet, of course, for the festivities would go on for several hours. But she had done her duty, had had the guests presented to her, and had more than her share of the fun. She'd got to leave—at once.

"Thanks, but I have an excellent remedy myself," she replied. "I can get it now."

And excusing herself to the young man, she slipped away. Passing across one end of the ball-room, she gazed about her.

Now Juanita and the duke—where were they? Ah! There was Juanita, just discernible behind a bower of ferns and palms in one of the alcoves. But

the grand duke—try though Pamela did she could not spot him.

"Good," she said, and, smiling, hurried on.

With both her enemies out of the way it was going to be quite simple for her to reach the secret doorway in the art gallery, and so gain access to the underground passage leading to Tolari Forest.

But that was where Pamela was unfortunately mistaken. Reaching the gallery, she drew back, her lips compressing.

"Oh, bother it!" she muttered. "This would happen when I'm in such a hurry!"

For a party of guests, being shown round the various treasures of art, were actually admiring the very painting which concealed the hidden door.

Pamela, retreating, thought swiftly. It was obviously impossible to use this entrance to the tunnel. There was only one thing to do. Use the other secret door in the wall of the castle in the palace grounds.

Tiptoeing away until she was a safe distance from the gallery, she simply flew. On the way to her boudoir she passed several servants and guards, but the sight of the princess going to her own room, even at the height of a state ball, did not occasion any surprise. A princess could do as she chose!

So, perfectly safely, having seen nothing of the grand duke, Pamela reached the room, locked herself in, and then, pausing only to don a heavy coat to conceal her conspicuous gown, she stepped out on to the balcony.

It was a brilliant moonlight night. The grounds were bathed in shimmering silver radiance, and she could see right across them. For a moment, as she hoisted herself on to the stone bulustrade, she peered about her keenly.

No. None of the guards in sight. Everything was fine. She could reach the secret door. There was nothing to worry about; nothing—

Suddenly she tensed, dodged back, pressing herself into the shadows beside the french windows.

Hark! What was that? Voices—and footsteps, too. A great many footsteps, coming this way.

Heart pounding, Pamela waited, listening. The sounds, drawing nearer and nearer, eventually passed right beneath the balcony. There must be a dozen men at least. And—that voice she could hear. Taunting, mocking, exultant.

"And you thought you could get away with it, Master Naldi! You are as big a fool as your father was, but not quite such a capable plotter!"

Pamela, white-faced, went cold with terrible alarm.

Those were the grand duke's tones. And Master Naldi—why—why—that must be—

"Paul—oh, Paul—they've got you—caught you!" Pamela choked, and forgetting that she would be exposing herself, she rushed to the bulustrade.

The spectacle she witnessed below her made her weak and sick. She gripped the stone ledge to steady herself. With wide, horror-filled eyes she watched the little procession that was going past.

Paul was held in the grip of two civic guards! Before and behind him marched other soldiers, and level with Paul, gloating and triumphant, strode the Grand Duke Bernard!

AN unexpected disaster indeed. Paul, who was to bring the vital hair dye to Pamela, now a prisoner! You'll be enthralled by the exciting developments in next Saturday's chapters

The most Thrilling and Intriguing Story you've ever read.

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, but Hilda & Co. believe she is a traitor. The chums are sure the mystery is connected with the 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. Lavender is kidnapped by a hooded woman and kept in a secret room. The chums rescue her, but she has lost her memory. Later, Hilda & Co. are forced to leave, accused of trying to steal the hidden treasure. They hide in the old mill. Hilda, dressed as one of the two hooded figures who have prowled the manor house, deceives the other into taking her for her accomplice.
(Now read on.)



By
ELIZABETH CHESTER

The three girls exchanged looks.

"Doesn't make much sense," frowned Beryl. "Are you sure this is a clue to the treasure?"

"It must be," nodded Hilda. "It's a riddle, and it can be solved. The other woman—the mystery woman, whose name is Judith, I learned—has solved it, anyway. So we've got to."

They were silent, save for the sounds made as they carved the chicken and ate it with bread-and-butter. Then presently Judy spoke.

"What on earth is like unto a trooper?" she worried. "Troopers ride horses. What else do they do?"

"And lie," murmured Beryl. "Lie like a trooper, y'know."

Hilda gave a start.

"Lies—the opposite of truth—like a trooper. My golly! The treasure lies somewhere. That's it!"

But they got no further, although they racked their brains and puzzled until their heads ached. Even though they

back to that other panel which gave access to the tunnel leading to the mill. She was soon tearing along it, and when she reached the exit she found her chums awaiting her.

"Oh, what a time you've been!" sighed Beryl. "I was getting so scared. Oh, cold chicken! How lovely!"

"Sausages, too!" murmured Judy. Marcus, the retriever, gave a woof of delight.

They went up the ladder to their upper room in the old Stuart mill, and there, by the light of the torch, Judy and Beryl examined the food Hilda had brought.

Meanwhile, Hilda casually put down the plan.

Waiting for the Ghost!

"**S**-SH!" said Hilda Farrel, as she faced the hooded woman who sat at the table, the parchment plan in her hand.

It was all that Hilda dared say, for fear her voice betrayed her true identity.

As it was, she knew that the woman at the table thought she was Thelma Harkness. So completely did the hooded cloak she wore conceal her that Hilda had no qualms at all about being recognized, so long as she did not speak.

"Come inside," whispered the woman. "I've solved the riddle."

Hilda nodded, but held up her finger warningly and beckoned. Then, as the woman rose, plan in hand, Hilda led the way into the corridor, finger to lips.

Quite easily, she took the plan from the other's unresisting grasp, led the way along the corridor, and halted before the secret panel.

Hilda rapped it, and, with dumb show, made the other understand that she must go through, answering all soft questioning with an anxious "Ssush!"

The woman, clearly puzzled, and not a little alarmed, opened the panel and crept through.

What she thought, Hilda did not know, but the impression she had tried to create was that there were enemies about, and hiding was safest.

As soon as the woman had closed the panel upon herself, Hilda hurried away,

Triumph for the plotters! The treasure found—and only Hilda & Co., banned from the Manor House, can outwit them.

Judy, seeing it, jumped nearly out of her skin.

"Wh-what's that?" she gasped. "That? Oh, only the plan!" said Hilda lightly. "I say, can we manage with this knife?"

"The plan! You've got the plan?" cried Judy. "Oh, hurrah! How ever did you do it?"

Hilda couldn't go on pretending any longer. Eagerly she explained just how she had done it, while Judy and Beryl listened with deep admiration.

"And now let's look at it," Hilda finished.

The writing was faint, but someone had inked it over recently so that it could be read.

"Let the Diligente Seeker," recited Judy. "Who findeth shall deserve. Truth is hard to find. The truth is not the truth; it is the opposite. Like unto a trooper. Yes, it is deep hidden."

had the plan, it was not helping them much.

"Poor Lavender!" sighed Beryl. "Perhaps it's just as well that she has lost her memory. If she knew what was going on—that we've been turned out of the house, and that Thelma Harkness means to frighten the rest away, too—"

"If we find the treasure, though, all's well," Hilda observed. "It's because of the treasure Thelma Harkness wants to ruin this place, so that she can search in secret. Once it's found, she'll go. There'll be no more ghosts then."

"And poor Lavender! Oh, I do hope she'll recover her memory!" sighed Beryl. "I know people often do. Sometimes by shock."

Lavender had been so bright and cheerful always; they missed her now. It was for Lavender's sake that they had been anxious to make the manor house successful as a guest house, know-

ing that upon it depended the prosperity of her and her father.

But the greatest help they could give Lavender now was to locate the treasure, for it might be worth enough to banish the Mortimers' troubles for ever.

"At the moment," said Hilda, with a yawn, "we'd better sleep if we can, huddled together wrapped up in our coats. We'll need to be awake and lively at midnight, because, if possible, we're going to catch that ghost, or prove it a fraud."

Helping Marcus to climb the ladder, they appointed him as watch-dog, and Hilda tried to make him understand that he was not to growl, whatever happened; only to wake them up.

Then, huddled together for warmth, their coats wrapped round them and their spare clothes used as pillows, they soon dozed off.

They were fast asleep when the lights of the house went out at half-past ten—fast asleep still when Thelma Harkness came creeping along the tunnel from the manor house to the mill!

Turmoil!

A UNTY—Aunt Judith!" Lavender Mortimer struggled up in bed. She was asleep, yet she spoke, and her father, who sat pale and worried at her bedside, shook his head sadly.

Mr. Mortimer was deeply concerned about his daughter; for the doctor had given no hope that she would soon recover her memory. Unable to remember events previous to her fall in the secret corridor, Lavender did not even know her own name, or realise that she was in her own home.

To Mr. Mortimer it seemed that Fate was against him. Everything was going wrong. The girls he had liked—Hilda, Judy, and Beryl—had been proved enemies by the detective, Thelma Harkness; his other guests were thoroughly unnerved and terrified, at the idea of the house being haunted. On the morrow, most likely, they would leave.

Then what could be done? Unless he could utilise the large rambling house to entertain guests—letting out the rooms and running it at some kind of

profit—he would be compelled to sell it.

Yet now it was only of Lavender he thought, of her health, her future, as he sat by the bed, fondling her limp hand. Her sleep was restless, and she called out in her dreams.

But suddenly she woke up and stared about her, pressing a hand to her forehead.

"Aunt Judith!" she muttered, and looked at her father, frowning.

"I'm your father—not your Aunt Judith, my dear," he said. "Poor Lavender! Of all people to mention—your Aunt Judith. Why, you haven't seen her since you were a child; and I hope we may never see that deceitful, dishonest woman ever again!"

Lavender's expression was vague, strained. For now that she was awake she did not remember calling out her Aunt Judith's name. Nor did she remember her aunt at all.

"Did I call out—'Aunt Judith'?" she asked. "Then—then I must have an Aunt Judith. That's all I know about myself!"

He pressed her hand.

"Lavender, my dear, compose yourself. You must sleep," he said gently. "It's nearly midnight, and I must leave you."

And tears shone in his eyes as he looked down at her, then tenderly kissed her forehead. Lavender, brows knit in bewilderment, watched him go to the door.

"Hot milk for you—in the cup," he said, pausing in the doorway. "I should drink it."

Lavender reached for the milk, which was on a table beside her, drank it, and then, hands pressed to her temples, turned over restlessly, searching in the darkness of her mind for memory.

For ten minutes she turned, and then, worn out, dropped off to sleep. Five minutes later she pushed back the bed-clothes, groped for her dressing-gown, and put it on. Then, tucking her feet into slippers, she went to the door.

But she was sleeping still. Asleep, she opened the door and wandered out down the passage.

Mr. and Mrs. Bates, in their room, heard the shuffling steps and looked at each other.

"The ghost!" Mrs. Bates faltered.

"The ghost!" her husband echoed.

In other rooms the steps were heard, and the same words were muttered: "The ghost!"

Bertram, the young member of the Robinson family, was wide awake, and although he shook a little, a fever of excitement burned within him. For Bertram intended making an experiment with the ghost.

On his bed was an assortment of fireworks—a jumping cracker, a big cannon, and smaller crackers. They might not be able to harm a real ghost, but a fake one would certainly be scared! If a firework exploded without the ghostly apparition moving, then clearly it was indeed a ghost, and Bertram would write to the scientific papers and his school magazine about it.

He might become famous, in fact—or so he thought.

Assuring himself that the ghost was moving away, Bertram took the big cannon, a firework capable of making a deafening report accompanied by a vivid flash.

Pocket torch in one hand, the firework in the other, and matches in his pocket, Bertram stepped into the corridor.

The dragging, shuffling steps came from the left, and he crept after them on tiptoe.

He reached the bend of the corridor that led to the gallery surrounding the hall, but there he paused, the torch and firework clattering from his nerveless hands.

For in the hall was a filmy quivering shape—a Cavalier, transparent and glowing; and as he watched, he saw it walk through a chair.

Bertram's limbs came to life at last, and, yelling hoarsely, he turned and ran back to his room.

"The ghost—the ghost! I've seen it! I've seen it!"

But Lavender did not hear him; she was descending the stairs, asleep still, unaware of the ghostly apparition; and in the darkness she crossed the hall, opened the door, and went out into the night.

Meanwhile, confusion reigned in the manor house. The lights suddenly fused and went out. With matches and pocket torches the guests ran to and fro, colliding and struggling; while Bertram, in shaky tones, described the ghost.

Lavender, still asleep, walked across the grounds towards the Old Mill!

IN THE Old Mill, Marcus put his paw on Hilda.

She woke up with a start, shivered a little, and then, shining her torch on her watch, nudged Judy and Beryl.

"Three minutes past midnight!" she muttered.

Hilda groped for the hooded cloak, and slipped it on; then, urging her friends to follow, she crept to the trap-door. No sounds came from below, and shining her torch down, Hilda saw that the room was empty.

"Judy—the ladder!" she urged.

Judy having helped her to rest the ladder against the edge of the trap, Hilda climbed down. Marcus followed with their aid, but Beryl was left behind looking for her shoes.

Marcus, in excited mood, knowing that something was happening below, led Hilda at once to the tunnel entrance, where he stood whining.

Listening there, Hilda almost at once heard faint noises that told of someone's approach.

"Judy—the idea of a lifetime," she breathed. "If we bar this door, there's no way out of this tunnel, except the manor house. Quick—those boards! We can jam it up."

They found boards that had been prised from the floor, and rested them against the door, jamming it. Then together, they dragged a large fragment of a broken mill-stone.

"Marcus—keep guard," said Hilda. "Judy—to the manor house. If we bar that secret panel entrance, whoever is in the tunnel is trapped. We'll have caught the mystery woman, or Thelma, or both!"

Calling to Beryl to follow, Hilda and Judy ran out of the Old Mill, to go as quickly as possible to the manor house. It was two minutes later that Beryl descended the ladder.

"Which way did they go, Marcus?" she asked.

Woof! was his best answer, and Beryl went out to find out for herself. She looked right and left in the moonlight, and then saw the glow of a torch amid some trees. It shone for but a moment, yet long enough to reveal the cloaked and hooded figure that held it.

"Hilda—oh good," murmured Beryl, and went forward, buttoning her coat about her. Then, puzzled by the fact that Hilda was searching, Beryl pulled up. "What are you looking for?" she asked.

The cloaked figure turned sharply,

... Jolly things every School-girl can Knit

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" bed-room 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

BESTWAY (Knitting Book No. 51)
KNITTING BY YOUNG FOLK

6d at all Newsagents and Bookstalls, or 7d post free (Home or Abroad) from BESTWAY, Bear Alley, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4

and the torch rays flashed upon Beryl. Instantly the torch went out, and the cloaked figure dodged aside.

A cold shiver ran down Beryl's spine as the truth dawned upon her. It was not Hilda. It was either Thelma Harkness—or the mystery woman!

Beryl, using her own torch, flashed it amongst the trees but saw no one, so she stared at what had held the cloaked woman's attention.

On the ground near the bushes was what appeared to be a rubbish dump; and the woman had been clearing it. A chopper and branches showed how a bush had been hacked away, and Beryl saw old pieces of iron stretched out.

Dropping to her knees she tugged at the irons, to reveal boards that had rotted with the years; and between the boards was a gap. Then, finding that she was kneeling on something hard, Beryl tugged at the grass. At once she gave a soft murmur.

"Bricks—why, it's—it's—"

She stiffened and sat up, for suddenly into her mind flashed the truth of the riddle.

"I've got it!" she cried.

And at that very instant something descended upon her head, thick as a blanket, bringing utter darkness. She cried out, but her voice was muffled. Struggling to free herself, clawing at the blanket, Beryl's hands were seized. Round one wrist a cord was tied. With the other hand she hit out, but her silent adversary, paying no heed, gripped her wrist and bound it to the other.

Half-carried, half-dragged, Beryl was taken some distance away and there left, helpless.

Meanwhile, Marcus, using his own initiative, hurried out to follow Hilda and Judy.

Yet all at once he hesitated, hearing a soft step in the grass. Moving forward, sniffing, he saw a figure approach with slow, steady tread. He leaped forward eagerly, then, for he had recognised who it was—Lavender.

As Marcus's paws touched her, Lavender woke with a sharp cry. Startled to find herself in the open air, she stared about her, then looked down at Marcus wonderingly.

Marcus did not know that her memory had gone, that she did not recognise him. She was a friend, so he wanted advice. Should he desert his post or not?

Tugging at her dressing-gown hem, he led her to the mill, and Lavender, bewildered though she was, could not mistake his intention, that he wanted her to follow him.

But inside the mill she frowned.

"What is it? How did I get here?" she quavered.

Marcus went to the barred door and clawed at it, looking up at her, trying to ask if it was safe to leave it, or if she would take over as a guard.

But Lavender only understood that someone must be shut in, and she tugged at the planks. With Marcus helping, the door was soon open.

Was it right or wrong? Marcus did not know; he galloped off, leaving Lavender to worry it out for herself. And there Lavender remained, wondering what to do, whether to explore that tunnel or to go back to the house. More than ever her life seemed a dream. How had she got here at all?

But Marcus outside paused, for he heard his name very faintly.

Guided by the source of the sound, he brushed through bushes and between trees, and then stopped as he came upon a human bundle on the grass.

Beryl still helpless with hands tied and the blanket over her head!

"Truth!"

"WAIT," said Hilda softly, to Judy. "Now's our chance."

They had found the door of the manor house open and just walked in. Upstairs there was commotion, but Hilda and Judy had gone at once to the secret panel that barred the entrance to the tunnel.

Now, one at either side, they dragged a heavy chest of drawers from a bedroom and thrust it close to the panel.

Naturally, the noise it made did not pass unnoticed, and Mr. Mortimer came down, followed by Mr. Bates, Bertram's father, and Bertram himself, carrying his firework in the rear.

"What! You girls! You have not gone," Mr. Mortimer cried in amazement and anger. "Playing ghost again!"

"No, no—we've caught the ghost," said Hilda excitedly. "In a tunnel

Knowing that argument was useless, Hilda turned to Judy.

"The mill—quick as we can," she said. "Get to the other entrance, just in case it can be forced."

They reached the mill, panting and gasping, meeting Marcus on the way, and he ran with them.

"Marcus, you deserted your post!" said Hilda, shocked. "Oh, you bad dog!"

And, hurrying inside, they halted, staring in dismay at the open door. But dismay was not long-lived; for the sound of hurried steps came, and Hilda, signalling to Judy to do the same, stood at the side of the door, ready to pounce.

The steps came nearer, someone hurried through, and Hilda and Judy grappled with the excited, panic-stricken—Lavender!

"Let go! Let go!" Lavender cried. "There was an explosion down there! I— Oh!"



"DON'T let her go," Hilda pleaded, clinging to Thelma Harkness' arm. "She knows the hiding-place of the treasure—" "And so do I," another voice cut in, and Beryl appeared on the scene, with broken ropes hanging from her wrist and ankle, but her face alight with triumph.

behind this panel, Mr. Mortimer. It leads to the Old Mill. We've barred the other entrance, and this is the only other way out. The ghost is in the tunnel—"

Mr. Mortimer dragged away the chest of drawers and, opening the panel, stared into the darkness down the short flight of steps that led to the tunnel. Then he took a torch and shone it along.

Shuffling steps could be heard.

"Yes—somebody there all right!" he said, and switching off the torch, drew back.

"This time we must make no mistake. We must catch the culprit," he said softly.

But Bertram could not resist the temptation to work on his own. He struck a match, lit the fuse of the firework, and then tossed the sizzling object into the tunnel.

A second later there came a roar that made them all jump clear of the ground. In the confines of the tunnel that firework sounded like a mighty aerial bomb.

But something else sounded, too—a scream!

Hilda stooped to climb into the tunnel, but was pulled back.

"I'll go," said Mr. Mortimer. "This is not a job for girls."

And she shuddered, covering her face with her hands.

Hilda and Judy fell back, staring at her in bewilderment, for she was the last person they had expected to find. But Lavender, suddenly looking up, gave a cry.

"Hilda! Judy!" "Lavender, you know us?" cried Hilda, startled, but joyful.

Lavender passed a hand across her forehead, and her eyes widened.

"Why, yes, I— It all comes back. How strange! I—I can remember all from the moment I heard that terrible bang. Oh, the shock of it—"

"The shock did the trick," said Hilda excitedly. "My goodness! Lavender, this is grand! How happy your father will be! Oh, it's wonderful! You must come back indoors at once—at once! You're as cold as ice—and only in your nightie and dressing-gown, too!"

"Wait!" said Judy. "Here comes a crowd from the house."

With torches flashing, a party approached—Mr. Mortimer, Mr. Bates, and Bertram and his father, all having abandoned the search of the tunnel half-way and barred the exit with the chest of drawers.

"Lavender!" cried her father, and

ran forward, alarmed at sight of her so lightly clad in the cold.

"Daddy, it's all right; my memory has come back!" she said.

Prominent in the crowd was Thelma Harkness, and she strode forward now.

"Mr. Mortimer, first of all," she said, "these two girls should be taken into the house and locked up. It is an offence to play ghost, and they should be charged with it."

But Lavender put a hand on her father's arm.

"No, daddy; take no notice of her," she said. "I know who has been playing ghost."

"Who?" asked half a dozen voices.

"Aunt Judith," said Lavender quietly. "I saw her when I tore off her cloak just before I fell through that gap in the floor—"

Thelma Harkness spoke sharply in scorn.

"The poor girl is rambling. Her Aunt Judith went to Australia years ago—"

"How do you know that?" demanded Lavender.

"I am paid to know things—"

"And, besides," said Hilda quietly, "she's been friends with your aunt, you know, Lavender. She and your Aunt Judith are the cloaked and hooded women!"

Thelma Harkness trembled with anger.

"Mr. Mortimer, I have endured enough!" she said. "I am packing my things at once! I will not stand this!"

She turned to go, but Hilda jumped forward and caught her arm.

"No, you shan't go until it's all cleared up," she said. "Mr. Bates—Mr. Mortimer, don't let her go! She knows the secret hiding-place of the treasure—"

A voice cut in then—a drawling, pleasant, girlish voice.

"And so do I."

It was Beryl. In the excitement Judy and Hilda had not realised that she was missing; but now every eye was upon Beryl, as—a piece of cord dangling from one wrist, and another piece trailing from an ankle—she walked forward into the beams of their flash-lamps.

This was Beryl's moment of triumph. "Beryl, you—you know the secret?" gasped Hilda.

"I solved the riddle. It's easy!" said Beryl, delighted with herself. "The opposite of truth is—what?"

"Lies," said Judy. "But—"

"Well, where does truth lie?"

"At the bottom of the well," said Bertram smartly.

"Of course," said Beryl. "And deep down."

"But there's no well here—except at the back of the house," said Lavender.

"Oh, yes, there is!" smiled Beryl. "A buried one—at least, it was buried until the mystery woman hacked it clear. And she tied me up. I'd still be tied up, except for dear old Marcus; he bit through the cords."

Shaking the blanket in his teeth, Marcus came into view, looking very proud—as well he might. It was more than enough for Thelma Harkness; turning suddenly, she bolted.

"Marcus, after her!" cried Hilda.

Marcus obeyed like a shot. For days he had wanted a good snap at Thelma Harkness—and he had it. With considerable skill he ran beneath her legs, bringing the woman detective down in a heap, to rise limping, tightly held by Bertram, his father, and Mr. Bates.

"Well, my goodness!" breathed Lavender. "The treasure is found, then. But Aunt Judith—where is she? Oh, I might have guessed it was someone who knew the house well—knew the history—"

"Aunt Judith is down the well," said Beryl, "on the end of a rope, and I think—Hark!"

Came a cry for help; and Hilda, Judy, Beryl, and Lavender rushed to the spot—the old buried well. By their combined efforts, hauling on a rope, they brought up the cloaked woman who clung to it; and when she was on level ground—exhausted, trembling, knowing that in another moment she would have lost her grip and dropped thirty feet to the bottom of the well—she made no effort to escape.

The mystery woman had been caught at last; and the treasure, as investigation in the well with proper tackle proved on the morrow, had been located.

The ghost was found in the tunnel—a mere painting in phosphorescent paint on silk threads that could sway and flex, and through which a solid object such as a chair could easily pass.

"Oh, I knew it was something like that!" said Bertram. "I—I just called out for a joke, you know."

And, as everyone laughed merrily, it was clearly a good joke.

"You gained me my memory back," smiled Lavender; "and, even if by accident, I'm grateful. But it wasn't by accident you found the treasure," she said to Hilda, Beryl, and Judy. "And you were right all the time about Thelma Harkness."

"Yes; fortunately, I had not paid her a penny," said her father—whom everyone now knew was their host, not the butler.

But no one worried about Thelma Harkness now, or Aunt Judith. They

had gone, having been given half an hour to clear out.

The greatest excitement had yet to come—the unearthing of the treasure. Special equipment was purchased, and the aid of experts invoked. From a cavity in the well wall fifteen feet down a large chest was hauled up, then another; and, finally, several smaller boxes.

When the chest and the boxes were opened everyone stood spellbound; for it was a treasure indeed—gold and jewels worth a king's ransom—and there could be no disputing Mr. Mortimer's ownership of it.

"Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah!" cheered the girls happily.

Hilda and Judy and Beryl felt almost as though it were their own treasure, since they had had the fun of tracking it down and wresting it from two schemers.

It was a grand, care-free time that followed when the other paying guests had gone—and there was no need for others. Hilda, Judy, and Beryl had a splendid holiday with Lavender. The chums and the Mortimers had a belated Christmas party—and a great success it was, with the house well staffed with servants.

When at last they went home, the three friends took with them precious gifts—gold and jewels that they had not been allowed to refuse—gifts worth enough to provide a small fortune for them all when they grew up.

There was even something for Marcus, an enormous gold bracelet, diamond studded—to be used on special occasions—his birthday, Hilda's birthday, and just to annoy other dogs. For Marcus had played his part just as cleverly and nobly as any of them.

THE END



Merrie England in the days of Richard Lionheart! Colour, pageantry, and romance: Noble knights and wealthy lords; simple peasants, humble servants; gay scenes on village greens; dancers, jesters, processions, wandering minstrels, and—outlaws! Such was the life that teemed about the young Lady Fayre, niece of a rich but bullying baron. Fayre longed to help the poor. A certain daring young outlaw, Robin Hood, already did help the poor. And so—Fayre, whose home was a castle, joined forces in secret with the gallant outlaw of the woods.

IDA MELBOURNE has written a fascinating series about the adventures that come to Fayre. The first story appears **NEXT WEEK**—quite the most unusual story you've ever read.

S.C.L. 16

Printed in England and published every Saturday by the Proprietors, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Advertisement Offices: The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Registered for transmission by Canadian Magazine Post. Subscription rates: Inland and abroad, 11s. per annum; 5s. 6d. for six months. Sole Agents for Australia and New Zealand: Messrs. Gordon & Gotch, Ltd.; and for South Africa: Central News Agency, Ltd.—Saturday, January 7th, 1939.