

"BESSIE IN SEARCH OF A FORTUNE!" is one of the most delightful  
Cliff House stories ever written

# THE SCHOOLGIRL

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Incorporating  
"SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN"



**THE LOVABLE  
DUFFER'S GIFT TO  
SAVE A FRIEND!**

Bessie hoped to keep her  
identity a secret, but—  
See this week's superb story of  
Babs & Co.

A Long Complete Story, Humorous, Appealing, of Barbara Redfern & Co., Starring that Most Foolish and Lovable of all Schoolgirls—BESSIE BUNTER.



# BESSIE *in* SEARCH of a FORTUNE!

"Mabs is in Danger!"



**"FINISHED, Mabs?"** Barbara Redfern, looking across the table of Study No. 4 in the Fourth Form corridor at Cliff House School, smiled

sympathetically at the down-bent, golden-haired head of her chum. But Mabel Lynn, a rather worried look on her face, merely made a grimace.

"Yes, I've finished the first instalment, but I don't like it. It's the stuff that's supposed to be written by the heroine's father which seems wrong. It's frightfully difficult, Babs."

"Let me have a look," Babs said. With a sigh, Mabs passed over the sheets of paper, on which she had been energetically scribbling for the last hour. Hesitantly she gazed at the Junior School captain as that girl carefully scrutinised them.

Mabs looked worried. For the first time it was striking her that her brilliant idea for the new Cliff House magazine serial was not going to be such an easy job.

Briefly, the story was to be about an extremely rich and popular girl, whose father suddenly lost all his money, and how it affected her life at school.

Easy and straightforward the idea had appeared, but Mabs' snag was in the original method she had chosen of telling the story. Its title, already decided upon, was "From Pater to Pam," and the story itself took the form of a series of letters passing from Pam, the heroine, to Pater, the heroine's father. Mabs hadn't found it difficult to write Pam's letters, but

those from the father were causing her trouble.

And the first instalment was becoming urgent. Joan Charmant, indeed, who was the editress of the next number of the magazine, had demanded it by Friday.

"Well, Babs?" Mabs asked her anxiously.

"I don't think it's too bad," Babs said; but her tone was just a little dubious. "But I don't think, you know, old thing, that a man would use the word 'dreadfully' so often, and I'm certain he wouldn't say, jolly hard luck" when telling Pam he's lost his fortune. Look here, shall I see if I can do anything with it?"

But Mabs shook her head. "No," she decided; "it's my story, and I'll write it. Thanks ever so for the tip, though! Give it to me, Babs. I'll have another shot at it."

And Mabs, taking the letter back, read through it carefully again. She kept the first page, but, after perusal, immediately crumpled up the second, and tossed it towards the wastepaper-basket. The sheet, half unfolding as it fell, dropped near the fender.

"Hum!" muttered Mabs, taking the holder of her pen between her teeth.

And then, before she could start again, the door opened.

A fat, somewhat disconsolate form entered the study. A plump, shiny-pink, round face blinked at the two occupants. A pair of grey, short-sighted eyes, magnified by two enormously round and thick lenses, surveyed the two with gloom.

"I sus-say, you girls—" began Bessie Bunter.

"Oh, please, Bessie, don't worry!" Mabs said fretfully. "We're frightfully busy."

Bessie, the third occupant of Study No. 4, renowned for her appetite, her

blundering, and her good nature, blinked.

"But I do worry," she replied indignantly. "Really, you know, I don't know what things are coming to! For five days I've been expecting a postal order—and what do you think?"

"It's been delayed in the post," Babs sighed. "We know. Sit down, Bessie."

"I'm jolly well not going to sit down," Bessie said. "I think it's jolly shocking the way my postal order is being held up! It would serve the Government right if I wrote to the Prime Minister of the postal department, you know! How can we expect not to have crises and things when they don't do their job?"

"Bessie dear, I'm trying to write a letter," Mabs pointed out.

"Eh?" Bessie blinked. It struck her all at once how worried Mabs looked. "Well, I'm sorry. I—I didn't intend to interrupt; but when a girl's so jolly famished as I am, and is expecting a postal order, and doesn't get one, what do you expect? I say, Mabs, could you lend me five bob until my postal order arrives?"

"Sorry, Bessie; haven't got five bob," Mabs retorted.

"Well, four, then?"

"Nor four."

"Well, blow! Half-a-crown, then?"

"Not a half-crown, not a bob, not a sixpence, nor even a threepenny-bit! I'm broke—dead, dead broke!" Mabs said, and, thinking of her poor pet Pam's similar position, sighed. "Oh dear!"

Bessie stared at Mabs.

"I say, what's the matter? Aren't you well?"

"Oh, Bessie, please do let me get on with this letter!"

"Well, I'm not stopping you. Babs, can you lend me some money?"

"Only got a boblet," Babs said cheerfully, "and I owe that to the sports fund. Mabs, why not chuck that?" she asked. "Let it simmer for an hour or two. Let's go along and see Clara, and find out who's in the hockey team?"

Mabs nodded. She gathered the sheets of paper, and put them in her drawer.

While Bessie, somewhat disconsolately, threw herself into the armchair, she trotted out with Babs. Bessie sniffed.

"No postal order," she murmured bitterly. "For all the post office cared, a girl at this school could jolly well starve!"

Sulkily she stared at the fire. Then the crumpled sheet which Mabs had thrown away caught her eyes.

For a moment Bessie stared at it. Then, curiosity overmastering her, she picked it up, smoothed it out and blinked at it. Then she started.

"Oh kik-crums!" she breathed.

For the letter, or the part of it she held, was startling enough, in all conscience.

"And so," it read—this was only the last page of the letter—"I want you to bear up and be a brave girl. I am not mincing matters when I say that I am in danger of losing every penny of my money, and, unless I can raise a very large sum in the near future, I shall certainly do so. I know this will come as a dreadful blow to you, my dear, but there are certain reasons why I want you to keep the matter a dead secret—even from your closest friends. Please go on acting at school as if you had not a care in the world.

"It's jolly hard luck, I know, but I am hoping to weather the storm, though, goodness knows, the outlook is black enough at the moment. I am sorry, darling, I cannot send you your usual remittance to-day, but you will understand why now, won't you?"

"All my love, dearest daughter, and kind regards to your friends.

"Your loving,  
"FATHER."

"Mum-my hat!" Bessie stammered again. "Mabs is in danger!"

With round eyes she stared at the sheet.

So that was why poor old Mabs had been looking so cut up. That was why she was broke. Her father—ruined! Poor old Mabs a pauper!

Bessie was so shocked that she forgot all about her own hungry state and her grouse with the post office. Very, very fond indeed of Mabs was Bessie. And Mabs now—oh dear!

She looked at the sheet again, then, reflecting that she had surprised a secret, flushed guiltily. As though the paper had suddenly become red-hot, she crumpled it up and flung it into the fire.

It did not occur to the plump duffer in that moment that the letter was anything but genuine. She knew, in a vague way, that Mabs was writing a serial for the school magazine, but not for an instant did an association with this flash across her mind.

She did not question the handwriting, for Mabs' father, as is so often the case, wrote in a hand very much like his daughter's.

The door opened. Mabs herself came in.

"Hallo, Bessie. I left my fountain-pen behind. Oh, there it is! What are you staring at me like that for, you old chump?"

Bessie gulped. "Poor old Mabs!" she sighed feelingly.

"Eh?"

"I'm sus-so sorry, old thing."

"What?"

"I—I never meant to read—that is, of course, I didn't read it!" Bessie said. "Oh dud-dear, I'm so cut up I dud-don't know what I'm saying, you know! Kik-can I help, Mabs? If you'd like my postal order when it comes, you can have it, you know!"

Mabs stared.

"Bessie, what's the matter?"

Bessie shook her head. "Poor old Mabs! It's what is the matter with you!" she said. "But cheer up; you still have good and trusty and loyal friends, you know! I'll stand by you like—like anything."

"Well, thanks." But Mabs, in no little concern, stared. "Sure you feel well, old Bessie?" she asked anxiously.

"Eh? Of course! Fit as a— a fiddle, you know! But I'm not thinking of myself," Bessie said. "Friends must come first, and—and if the worst comes

to the worst, you can rely upon me!" Bessie said, her face shining. "Leave me now. I want to think things out."

"But, Bessie—" gasped Mabs.

"Please, Mabs!" Bessie pleaded. And Mabs, with a rather alarmed blink, withdrew. Returning to Study No. 7, where Babs was closeted with Clara Trevlyn, Marjorie Hazeldene, and Janet Jordan, she anxiously confided to Babs her opinion that there was something wrong with Bessie.

But when she and Babs returned to Study No. 4, it was to find Bessie gone.

Bessie, earnest, helpful, glowing with a sense of self-imposed virtue, had set to work to help restore Mabs' fallen fortunes before it was too late.

Mabs was in danger! Mabs was in need of help! Mabs, at this moment, wanted a friend as she had never wanted a friend in her life before. Right! Then Elizabeth Gertrude Bunter would not fail her.

So Bessie nobly and glowingly resolved. But having resolved, came a pause. How to carry out the resolves? Where could one raise a large sum of money in a very short space of time?

**"I'll jolly well save old Mabs and her father from ruin!"**  
**That is the noble resolve of plump Bessie Bunter, the lovable duffer of the Fourth Form. She will earn a fortune for Mabel Lynn with the aid of her skill as a mimic! So thinks the dear duffer, little dreaming of the amazing adventures and trouble before her—little dreaming that she has blundered again, and that Mabs is not in desperate need of money at all!**

Bessie thought of borrowing. Her rather unpleasant reception at the hands of several Fourth Formers whom she had asked recently to cash a postal order in advance made her hesitate, however. Next thing was to sell things—but what? Of course, there was that ripping purple evening frock with the emerald green sash she had had just before Christmas—a bit soup-splashed perhaps, but it was a jolly good dress, and that should be worth pounds of anybody's money. But who was likely to buy it?

Another pause. No, the purple dress was definitely out. Well, there was her stamp album—and for a second Bessie's heart knew a pang and Bessie found herself in mutiny. For Bessie loved that stamp album.

Still, it was for old Mabs' sake. After all, what was a stamp album compared with the ruin of Mabs' father?

With a deep sigh she fished it out. With a doleful good-bye-for-ever expression, she flicked through its pages. Then, tucking it under her arm, she heaved a heavy sigh, and going out, ambled off down the corridor, calling in first at Study No. 5. The Terraine Twins, with Sylvia Sirrett, were there, just commencing prep. They all looked up, however, as Bessie entered.

"Ahem!" said Bessie. "Dear Bessie, she's got a cold!" declared Ermyntrude Terraine sympathetically.

"Oh, I haven't," Bessie said indignantly. "But ahem! Would—would anybody like to buy my stamp album?"

Ermyntrude looked at her sister Priscilla.

"No, Ermyntrude; would you like to buy Bessie's stamp album?" Priscilla repeated.

"No, Priscilla. Sylvia, would you, dear?"

"No, thanks; not interested," Sylvia said briefly.

"Cat!" sniffed Bessie. She went out, peering into Study No. 6 next door. That study, occupied by Peggy Preston, Jane Mills, and Christine Wilmer, was also full. Bessie brightened as she repeated her invitation.

"Not interested in stamps, thanks," Peggy Preston said.

"I've got all I want," Jane Mills asserted.

"But why," Christine asked curiously, "are you trying to sell it, Bessie? I thought that album was the apple of your eye?"

"Well, so it is, but—but—oh, stuff!" Bessie said uncomfortably. "Do you want to buy it?"

"Sorry, Bessie; no."

"Then blow you!"

And off, with reddened ears, Bessie went. She gave Study No. 7 a miss, thinking that Mabs and Babs were still there. Study No. 8, usually shared by Jean Cartwright, Gwen Cook, and Miss Bullivant's niece, Lorna Millerchip,

proved only to contain the last named. Lorna grinned.

"How much?" she asked. "Well, make an offer," Bessie invited.

"Half-a-crown," Lorna replied. "Oh, really, Lorna—"

"Well, two and sixpence—ha'penny—payable in three instalments!"

Bessie snatched the album back.

In Study No. 9 Muriel Bond offered her four shillings. Bessie refused. In Study No. 10, Diana Royston-Clarke, doing lines, scowled furiously as she came in, and just as a polite hint to get out at once threw a cushion at her.

In Study No. 11 Joan Charmant offered her five shillings, which Bessie indignantly refused, and in Study No. 12 Faith Ashton offered to swap a new pair of scissors for Bessie's treasure.

Bessie, baffled, returned.

She went to Study No. 1, normally shared by Lydia Crossendale, Freda Ferriers, and Rosa Rodworth. There was nobody in that apartment, however, though a copy of the Courtfield Times, spread across the table and open at the page which advertised the local amusements, seemed to suggest that it had not long been untenanted. Feeling just a little crestfallen and distressed, Bessie decided to rest until one of the study members came in. She put her album on the table.

And it was then, as if by magic, that an advert in the small announcements caught her eye.

**"URGENTLY WANTED FOR STAGE PART—Girl mimic. Must be**

able to imitate well-known voices, animal sounds, etc. Excellent remuneration to right girl, with prospects of a valuable contract. Apply in person, Small's Rehearsal Rooms, Courtfield Square, between the hours of 6 p.m. and 8 p.m."

Bessie stood suddenly and perfectly still. And into Bessie's plump face came a flush, into Bessie's eyes a new gleam and sparkle. Excellent remuneration—that meant plenty of money. A contract—

She read the advert through again, licking her lips now as though sampling in advance the delights that announcement conjured up. Her heart bounded suddenly. Oh crumbs! Wasn't this just what she was looking for? She could mimic—and mimic jolly well! Apart from that, wasn't she just the very best girl ventriloquist who had ever been? Money—money! The advert seemed to promise tons of it!

What a chance to help Mabs!

If she could only get the job!

Bessie, trembling with eagerness, snatched up her stamp album again. In a perfect fever of excitement now, she bolted back to Study No. 4.

Mabs and Baba, listening with vast puzzlement in Study No. 6 to the story of Bessie's latest wheeze, which Christine Wilmer was relating, never saw her enter and never saw her come out. And they never saw, either, the fat form which, three minutes later, hurried down to the school gates.

Bessie Bunter, fired with her idea, aglow with happiness because at last she saw a way to help Mabs, had gone to embark upon her great adventure.

But it was a pity, perhaps, Bessie hadn't taken greater stock of the time. Whatever her future prospects might be as a result of her visit to Small's rehearsal rooms, the immediate prospects were sure. For it required then only half an hour to gates, which meant that well-meaning Bessie would return to Cliff House long after those gates were closed for the night.

### Bessie is Bluffed!



"VERY good, very, very good! What a mimic! Ah, wonderful, wonderful!"

And Mr. Ernest Small, of Small's Rehearsal Rooms, threw up his hands in ecstasy. "Young woman, there is a career for you," he predicted to the breathless, beaming, flushed Bessie Bunter. "A great career—a marvellous career! Like a rocket, shall you soar to fame! Like a star of the first magnitude shall you gleam in the sky!"

"Y-yes," said flustered Bessie. "But—but I don't want to gleam in the sky, you know. I want a contract."

"A contract?" Mr. Small frowned. Very ponderous was that frown—bringing the bushy brow which overlaid his small and rather crafty-looking eyes in a straight line across his face. He looked at his son, Charles Small—fair, but very like his father—and he looked at his wife, Mrs. Matilda Small, a heavy-faced woman who was nodding her head from side to side rather as if her neck had been a spring. "A contract, my dear? You shall have hundreds and thousands of contracts!" he said impressively. "You shall have contracts worth thousands and thousands a year. Splendid! Magnificent! Now," he added suddenly, "can you imitate girls' voices?"

"Well, of k-k-course I can!" Bessie said, rather astonished by the sudden change in his voice, and altogether

missing the significant look which passed between the three. "What shall I do—Shirley Temple?"

"Proceed," Mr. Small said, with a magnificent flourish of his hand.

And Bessie, beaming, proceeded. Bessie was enjoying this, utterly oblivious that time was passing.

At first Bessie had not liked the look of the Smalls, but their delighted admiration for the performance she had already given had completely obliterated her first faint dislike. And, really, Bessie was a very, very good mimic, though not so good, perhaps, as to merit Mr. Small's unqualified praise.

Bessie cleared her throat. She was just a little hoarse after imitating a braying ass, a sparrow, a pig, and Pekinese dog. But Shirley Temple came through perfectly.

Again the three Smalls exchanged glances.

"Ah! Excellent! Exquisite!" Mr. Small exclaimed. "What genius! What talent! Here, Matilda, we have a star of the first magnitude ready for the moulding! Miss Bunter," he beamed, "you have the job."

Bessie's heart thudded.

"Oh, thank-thanks!"

"But," Mr. Small ponderously frowned. "Wait one moment. What you have done is merely a test. Now I want you to rehearse the real part. I understand you to say, Miss Bunter, that you could imitate any girl's voice?"

"Oh, of course!" Bessie agreed. "But—but I've got to hear the girl first, you know."

"Naturally, oh, naturally!" And Mr. Small made a sweeping gesture with his hands. "Charlie, take Miss Bunter into the next room," he said grandly.

Bessie beamed. Charles, with a grin, caught her plump arm. Through a door he led her, and Bessie found herself standing in a small, sparsely furnished apartment, at the other side of which was another door. Across there Charlie led her.

"Now, listen," he said.

"But—" Bessie started.

"Shush!"

As Bessie listened, she heard a movement from the next room. Then suddenly the sound of a door being unlocked and opened. Then she blinked as the senior Small's voice fell upon her ears—this time sounding high-pitched and harsh.

"So, my little lily flower, you are still here! Have you come to your senses yet?"

"Now, listen," the young Small bade. "Let me go!" a girl's voice cried suddenly.

Bessie jumped.

"I sus-say—"

"Listen!" hissed Charles Small.

"All in good time, my little lily flower—all in good time!" Mr. Small's voice was purring. "You have merely to give us your word of honour—"

"I will not give you my word of honour! I will not! You are cheats—thieves—rogues! I know what your game is—"

The girl's voice was vibrant and passionate. "Oh, just wait till I get out of here!" she cried. "Just wait! When my aunt knows—"

"Ahem!" Charles said hastily, and for a moment looked anxious. "That's enough, I think. Got it, Miss Bunter?"

"Yes; but look here—" Bessie said. "Come into the other room."

Bessie, feeling rather uneasy, went into the other room.

"Look here, you know, who was that girl?"

"Oh, she?" Charles smiled. "Don't worry, Miss Bunter. That was only a rehearsal," he said. "That's part of a part we're doing in another play."

"Oh!" Bessie said, and her brow cleared. She laughed a little. "You know, I thuth-thought for a moment it was real!"

Charles Small laughed with her.

"Father will be pleased," he said. "If you thought that was real, other people will think it is real, won't they? Ah, here is father!" he added, as Mr. Small, delightedly rubbing his hands, appeared on the scene.

"Splendid—splendid!" Mr. Small said. "And you heard the girl's voice, Miss Bunter? Quite a turn, is it not? You can imitate that voice?"

"Oh, of course!" Bessie said loftily.

And she did imitate—with such complete perfection, indeed, that the Smalls beamed delightedly at each other.

"Superb!" Mr. Small stated. "Ah, Miss Bunter, what a career you have in front of you! I see the theatre lights dazzling with your name three feet high. Riches and fame—all these shall be showered into your lap like acorns in a pig's trough! But now to business!" he added seriously. "Let me explain what you must do."

And he went on to explain. Bessie blinked a little—it did seem so absurdly easy. Presently, Mr. Small said, they would rehearse the telephone scene, and as he said this he gave a rather significant look at his wife, who smiled. The "Aunt Mary" in the play would phone up, and he himself would dictate Bessie's reply which Bessie was to render in the voice of the unknown girl she had heard in the other room. And, having delivered himself most clearly of those instructions, Mr. Small looked thoughtfully at his watch.

"Five minutes," he said—"five minutes. Matilda, my dear, you will take the part of Aunt Mary and phone through from the other room. Miss Bunter, you will answer on this phone," and he pointed to the instrument on his desk, which was fitted with two receivers. "Matilda, will you go now?"

Mrs. Small nodded and went.

"Well, that's all right—that's fine," Bessie said. "But—but what about some money, you know. We—we haven't talked about the wages, you know!"

"Name your own sum!" Mr. Small said magnificently.

"Well, I—I want a lot of money," Bessie said impressively.

"Aha!" Mr. Small said again, and then jumped as the telephone bell rang.

"Excuse me," he said, and bent to the instrument. "What? Yes, yes, of course, Miss Lyell," he cried. "Your dear niece Lily is waiting now, quivering with eagerness to speak to you, Miss Lyell. Lily, my dear," he added, with a beam, and Bessie blinked as she understood that she was to take the call.

"This is the rehearsal," he whispered, as he handed her one receiver and picked up the other himself. "Say 'Hallo, aunt! This is Lily speaking.' Don't forget the voice."

Bessie smirked. Dead easy!

"Hallo, aunt! This is Lily speaking," she said in her assumed voice.

"You are happy, my dear?" a voice came—it was a very pleasant voice, and Bessie was mildly amazed to find how marvellously Mrs. Small, playing the part at the other end of the line, had changed it.

"Tell her yes; ask her if the twenty-five pounds you asked for is on its way," Mr. Small whispered.

Bessie did so. The reply came:

"I posted the money this morning, Lily, my dear, and, oh, I am so excited to think that you will be doing your first part next week. You do not feel nervous, my dear?"

"Say no. Thank her for the money," Mr. Small whispered, beaming.

Bessie did so.  
 "Well, that's all right. Do not hesitate, my dear, to ask me for anything you want. I am as eager as you are for your stage career to be a great success. To-morrow night, my dear, I have to go to the Wallace Gideon bridge party, so I will phone you in the afternoon instead of the usual time. Good-bye, my dear, good-bye!"

"Good-bye!" Bessie said, simpering. "Good-bye, aunt!" And she put the receiver down, blinking expectantly at Mr. Small, whose face was like a radiant full moon.

"Is—that all right?" she asked.  
 "Miss Bunter, you are a star—a star!" he cried. "Such a superb imitation! Miss Bunter, you are going to be worth hundreds of pounds to me—and, of course, to yourself," he added hastily. "But now, my dear girl, we must get to work—serious, earnest work. I am going to prepare you for stardom in our great new play. Miss Bunter, can you come here to-morrow afternoon?"

Bessie beamed.  
 "Why, yes; to-morrow is a half-holiday. But what about some money, you know?" Bessie asked anxiously, thinking of Mabs. "You—you said I could have some money—"

"And so," he said jovially, "you shall. Lots of money. How much, Miss Bunter, do you require?"

Bessie blinked. She hadn't thought of that. Bessie's idea of a practical lot of money ran vaguely into millions, but when it came to a real practical proposition pounds seemed to be equally desirous. She said, without for one moment expecting to get it:

"Well, sh-shall we sus-say ten pounds?"

"Ten?" Mr. Small pursed his lips. He gazed at Charles, who slyly nodded. "Ten—ahem! A mere trifle," he said grandly. "Modest Miss Bunter, ten pounds you shall have. Sign this receipt for it." And, to Bessie's trembling astonishment, he fished two five-pound notes from his pocket.

"There you are, Miss Bunter. Regard that as an advance of the many thousands you will be earning ere long. And—er—I think in the circumstances you had better not say anything about this at all yet. Understand?"

"Oh, yes, of course!" Bessie stammered.  
 "Very well, Miss Bunter, I shall regard that as a promise. Now sign this, please!"

And Bessie, not venturing to look at what she was signing in her trembling delight, signed, and, with the money in her hand, left the room. When she had gone the three looked at each other.

"A fool," Mr. Small announced thoughtfully. "An absolute fool. But easy to trick, and what untold wealth those conversations of hers with our dear unsuspecting client, Miss Mary Lyell, will realise. Ten pounds is a lot of money," he added, with a frown, "but I think, in the very exceptional circumstances, its expenditure is justified. Now, Charles, my son, will you visit our—er—prisoner, Miss Lily Lyell, and see that she has something to eat? We can't starve the girl, even though she is so defiant."

Clara Trevlyn, in the act of emerging from the gymnasium, where Lady Patricia Northanson had been putting them through their paces in preparation for the forthcoming drill display. It was a quarter to eight then, and gates for the night had been closed.

"Oh, yes, Sarah?" Babs said.  
 "Where's Bessie Bunter?"

"Bessie?" Babs started. In the excitement of the drill rehearsal she had forgotten all about the queer behaviour of her plump chum. "Why, hasn't she come in yet?"

"She has not come in," Sarah replied, her eyes gleaming. "In any case, she had no business to be out—without a pass. I have reported her as being out of gates to Miss Primrose. I have reported her for being out of gates without a pass. And I'm jolly well going to report her now," Sarah went on irritably, "for not turning in the fifty lines I gave her this morning for eating a banana at assembly. Where's she gone?"

But Babs, Mabs, and Clara shook their heads.

"We—we don't know," Babs stammered.

Sarah gazed at her—hard and irritably. Then she sniffed.

"All right," she said. "When you do see her, send her along to me. And buck up and get into school," she added, with a sour scowl. "Call-over bell goes in five minutes."

Off fumed Sarah. The three chums looked at each other.

"Well, what the dickens is the matter with the fat old idiot?" Clara asked. "She never said anything to you about going out, did she, Babs?"

"No, but—" Babs bit her lip. Remembering Bessie's strangeness, she felt vaguely alarmed all at once. It was so unlike Bessie openly to flaunt the rules of the school like this—Bessie normally one of the most timorous girls, despite the scrapes she often found herself in through telling romantic fibs and eating in class.

"The old chump's got some new bee in her bonnet," Mabs said worriedly. "Though goodness knows what sort of bee it is. I— Oh, Miss Charmant!" she added, as the pretty mistress of the

Fourth Form loomed up out of the darkness

"Hallo, girls!" Miss Charmant said. "Barbara, have you seen Bessie?"

"No, Miss Charmant."  
 "I am considerably vexed with Bessie," Miss Charmant went on. "She has not re-written the essay I gave her this morning. Tell her that I shall want to see her after call-over, Barbara."

"Oh crumbs!" Babs muttered. "I mum-mean, y-yes, Miss Charmant!"

"Looks," Clara opined, "as if old Bessie is laying up trouble for herself all the way round. Sarah wants to see her. Now the Charmer—and whoops! There goes call-over bell," she cried.

Rather worriedly the three chums went in to call-over, anxiously looking round. But of the plump figure of Bessie Bunter there was no sign.

And when call-over was finished Miss Primrose—only recently returned to the school to take over her duties as head-mistress once more—wanted to see Bessie. For Bessie still had failed to put in an appearance.

Uncasiness increased and deepened within Babs and Mabs. Where had Bessie got to?

Half the Fourth Form was asking that question now, however. The apparent defiance of Bessie Bunter was something to set tongues wagging. Restlessly Babs and Mabs drifted out into the darkened quadrangle, hoping to catch their fat chum on her return. But dormitory-bell rang. The chums, with the rest of the Form, went up to bed. Still no Bessie.

Babs frowned. She felt utterly disturbed now. All sorts of fears were beginning to grow up in her. Bessie, after all, was such an old chump. Bessie was short-sighted—an easy victim for an accident.

Sarah Harrigan came round to put out the lights, and the Fourth Form settled down to the usual chatter that was invariably preliminary to the night's repose. Then suddenly the door was thrown open and the lights went



A Strange Clue!

"BARBARA RED-FERN!"

Babs started as the rasping voice of Sarah Harrigan, the sour-faced duty prefect for the day, fell upon her ears.

"CHEER up, Mabs!" cried Bessie. "You still have good and trusty and loyal friends, you know. I'll stand by you like—like anything!" Mabs looked dazed. "Sure you feel well, old Bessie?" she asked anxiously.



Babs was, with Mabs and Tomboy

up. Miss Primrose, her face very stern, appeared.

"Now, Bessie, get to bed!" she commanded.

Babs jumped.

"Bessie!" she breathed, as her plump chum appeared behind the Head.

"Barbara, please lie down!" Miss Primrose said severely. "Bessie, I will deal with you to-morrow morning. See me before breakfast."

"Oh, sus-certainly, Miss Primrose," Bessie said, and smiled. "Good-night!"

Babs blinked. Bessie did not even look scared.

"Good-night, Bessie," Miss Primrose said. "I will leave the light on two minutes while you get undressed. Meantime, I have to see Miss Bullivant. I shall return."

She hurried away. Bessie looked after her and chuckled. The Fourth stared.

"Bessie!" cried Babs.

"Bessie, you idiot!" said Clara.

"Bessie, you cuckoo!" cried Leila Carroll.

Bessie sniffed.

"Who are you calling names?" she demanded.

"But, Bessie—" Mabs cried.

"Hallo, Mabs!" Bessie beamed; then ponderously she winked. "Don't worry, old thuth-thing. Everything's going to be all right, you know!"

"All right?" Mabs repeated, mystified.

"Well, never mind now," Bessie said hastily. "I mum-mean, don't worry, you know! Trust old Bessie to put things right for you," Bessie said, with fat satisfaction. "And you know, you girls, you ought to be asleep," she added severely.

"Well, my only bonnet!" Clara breathed in amazement.

Babs blinked.

"And you," she added grimly, "had better jolly well get undressed. If Primmy comes back and finds you still out of bed—"

"Well, who cares about Primmy?" Bessie asked grandly. "That to Primmy—" and she snapped her fat fingers with such theatrical drama that Babs stared. "What right has Primmy to lay the law down to a star, you know!" Bessie went on indignantly.

"A whatter?" gasped Rosa Rodworth.

"Well, never mind!" Bessie said, realising she was saying too much. "Anyway, what I say is, blow Primmy! Poof to Primmy! Oh, kik-crumps!" she gasped, swishing round. "Thuth-ere you are, Miss Primrose!"

"Yes, Bessie," said Miss Primrose grimly. She had at that moment returned.

"Oh dud-dear! Fuff-fancy it being you!" Bessie stuttered. "I—I was just sus-saying to Babs what a nun-nice woman you are; far better than that beastly Miss Venn who was temporary headmistress, you know!"

"Bessie, you will go to bed," Miss Primrose said abruptly, "and to-morrow I shall add impertinence to the already big list of your offences. Now, no more of it. Get undressed this instant, girl!"

Bessie gulped. Under Miss Primrose's grim and watchful eye she undressed. Miss Primrose waited until she had got into bed, and then retired.

"Bessie—" said Babs then.

"Oh blow!" Bessie said disconsolately.

"But, Bessie—"

Bessie snorted.

Babs bit her lip. But she gave it up. Whatever had taken Bessie out of bounds and had brought her back with

such overflowing self-importance was apparently to remain a secret locked in Bessie's own plump being. But Babs was still worried—more so now, perhaps, than before. What new little game had Bessie found to play at?

She found it impossible to sleep. Half an hour, an hour went by. Then, from Bessie's bed, came a fat chuckle. "Oh, yes!" she said. "Of course I can do it. A jolly clever girl like me wouldn't be beaten by a silly thing like that, you know!"

Babs pricked up her ears. Bessie was talking in her sleep, and remembering suddenly that people who talked in their sleep often answered if they were spoken to, she leant forward.

"Bessie! What thing?" she breathed. "Well, that voice, you know!" Bessie said.

"Bessie, what voice?" "Well, Lily's voice." And Bessie mumbled something. Then she spoke again, and Babs started, for the voice in which she spoke was so utterly unlike Bessie's that for a moment she wondered if some stranger was speaking.

"Hallo, Aunt Mary, is that you? This is me speaking," Bessie said. "Oh, yes, Aunt Mary, of course I'm going to be a star—a star that gleams in a sky of the first magnitude, you know! You won't forget to send me that twenty-five pounds, will you?"

"Bessie!" breathed Babs.

But this time Bessie did not answer. Babs frowned again. Aunt Mary? Who was Aunt Mary? As far as Babs knew, Bessie had no Aunt Mary, and certainly no Aunt Mary who would send her twenty-five pounds at the mere asking over the telephone. And why, above all things, should Bessie speak in that strange voice?

Babs kept awake, hoping that perhaps Bessie might give some more clues in her sleep. Presently, however, she herself dozed off, and wondered vaguely why she felt so sleepy when rising-bell rang. Then she remembered Bessie, and looking towards Bessie's bed, started. For the plump duffer's bed was empty.

"Mabs!" she exclaimed.

Mabs, however, had also spotted Bessie's absence. She looked curiously at her chum.

"Where's she gone?"

But Babs shook her head. She felt baffled. Normally Bessie was the last awake in the Fourth Form dormitory. What terrific urge had forced the fat one to get up before the others this morning?

She washed and dressed. With Mabs she went down to Study No. 4. Bessie was not there, but on the table, propped up against the vase of artificial flowers which Marjorie Hazeldene had made, was an envelope. Curiously Babs approached that, and then blinked.

Inscribed on the envelope in scrawling black capitals were three words. The three words read:

"PRIVATE. MABEL LYNN."

"Who the dickens—" Mabs said, as Babs handed it to her.

"Open it," Babs advised.

Mabs ripped open the envelope, pulled out a sheet of impot paper from inside, and then, unwrapping it, jumped. For out of the folded sheet fell—two crisp notes.

"Oh, my hat!" Babs breathed. "Five-pound notes!"

"But what the dickens—" Mabs said, mystified, and just a little alarmed, now. "Babs, what do you make of that?"

She passed a sheet of impot paper to Babs. On it was a message in the same untidy block capitals as those on

the envelope. There was also a huge blot in one corner. The message read: "FROM AN ANNONYMIUS WELL-WISHING FRIEND. P.S.—ECSCUSE BLOT."

The two chums looked at each other. The same idea was in both their minds now. That blot and that spelling, despite the writer's pains to cover up her identity, simply shrieked one person:

"Bessie!" Babs muttered. "Mabs, it's Bessie! But why does she think you're in need of money? And—and where"—with a scared blink at the two five-pound notes on the table—"did she get those?"

## Bessie Keeps Her Secret!



**B**EFORE Mabs could answer there was a step in the corridor, and Bessie herself beamed in, her face as radiant and shiny as a rising sun.

"Ahem! Gig-good morning, girls!" she said, and blinked at the envelope in Mabs' hand. "Oh, I sus-say, fancy getting a letter so early!" she added artlessly. "I didn't know the post had come."

Grimly the two chums looked at her. Then Babs moved towards the door, placing her back against it. Bessie started a little.

"Oh, I sus-say! What's the matter?" Babs nodded to the two five-pound notes on the table.

"Bessie, where did you get those?"

"Those?" Bessie blinked; then, as if noticing the two five-pound notes for the first time, she gave a theatrical jump. "Oh, I sus-say, have you had a remittance?" she asked delightedly. "There are two of them, you know!"

Mabs gazed at Babs. Babs looked a little grimmer. Bessie was acting, of course—that was as plain as a pikestaff. But it was also plain that Bessie did not mean to commit herself.

And Bessie didn't. Bessie had a nice, warm, glowing, virtuous feeling inside her. Bessie liked to feel that she was benefiting Mabs by stealth. She knew that if she confessed to ownership of those two five-pound notes she would be asked all sorts of questions.

Babs, most assuredly, would insist upon seeing Mr. Small, and—well, she had promised Mr. Small that she would say nothing about what she was doing. Even apart from that promise, however, Bessie was going to keep her secret. Not until she had rescued Mabs and her father from ruin would the identity of Mabs' great benefactor be known.

"Bessie, you sent those!" Mabs accused.

"Me—I?" Bessie blinked. "Oh, really, Mabs, how could I send them? Where could I get two five-pound notes from?"

"That," Babs countered grimly, "is what we want to know! Bessie, be sensible. Where did you get them?"

Bessie looked obstinate.

"But I didn't get them, you know!"

"Well, where else should they have come from?"

"Well, how should I know?" Bessie countered.

"Now, look here, old chump!" Babs looked at her anxiously. "We've got to get this cleared up. Five-pound notes don't fall out of the air, and we want to know what the little game is. Last night you were talking in your sleep."

Bessie blinked a little concernedly. "You mentioned an Aunt Mary—who is Aunt Mary, Bessie?"

"Blessed if I know!" Bessie said truthfully.

"You mean, you haven't got an Aunt Mary?"

"Of kik-course not!"

"Then who," Babs flashed out, "is Lily?"

Bessie shook her head.

"I don't know anybody named Lily. But look here, you know, I don't see why you should jolly well question me like this! If a girl can't do a good turn without—I mum-mean, anybody would think I was a criminal!" she added indignantly. "I haven't done anything wrong."

Babs sighed. She knew that look of sulky obstinacy which came into Bessie's face then.

"Bessie, old thing, try to understand," she said gently. "We're not questioning you because we think you've done anything wrong. But you know what an old chump you are—and, after all, Bessie, ten pounds is a lot of money. Supposing you suddenly received ten pounds? You'd want to know where it came from, wouldn't you?"

bell. Apart from that, you went out without a pass. Where were you all that time?"

"I—I went to sus-see some friends in Courtfield, Miss Primrose."

"Indeed! What friends?"

"Oh, you wouldn't know them!" Bessie said uneasily.

"That does not enter into the question, Bessie! Who were they?"

Bessie stood silent. The last thing she wanted was Miss Primrose, to get into touch with the Smalls. It would be just like Primmy, after finding out what she was doing, to forbid her doing it; and where would poor old Mabs and her own chances of future fame be then?

"Well, they—they were just friends," she said. "Jolly nice people, too, you know!"

"What were their names?" Miss Primrose asked.

"Oh, dud-dear! I don't remember! Thuth—that is to sus-say—"

Miss Primrose sighed.

"I perceive, Bessie, that you intend

her career because she had to sit in a mouldy class-room with some rotten perfect grinding out an essay?"

"Bessie, what are you talking about?"

"Nun-nothing," Bessie said, and gulped. "I—I'm only asking you to let me off, you know! Naturally," Bessie added with dignity, "I'm not afraid to take my punishment. We Bunters are never afraid to face the music, you know! Couldn't you give me a thousand lines, or—or something, instead?" she asked hopefully.

"Bessie, how dare you!"

"But, Miss Primrose—"

"Bessie, leave this instant! And consider yourself," Miss Primrose rumbled, "extremely fortunate that your punishment is so light! Now go, girl!"

And Bessie jumped at the really alarming expression on Miss Primrose's face.

She went out, pouting. Blow Primmy! she thought bitterly. A detention,



"YOU'D better get undressed, Bessie," said Babs. "If Primmy comes back and finds you still out of bed—" "Well, who cares about Primmy?" Bessie asked grandly. "What right has Primmy to lay down the law to a star, you know!" There came a gasp of amazement. "A whatter?" gurgled Rosa Rodworth.

to make a mystery of your friends. I am strongly inclined to believe that your friends are non-existent. Were you a less foolish girl, I should punish you heavily for your offence; but as it is I am going to let you off with a detention for being late, and a strict warning that this must not occur again. If it does"—Miss Primrose pursed her lips—"then, Bessie, I shall send home a special report to your parents."

Bessie blinked at that. But she was not thinking of the headmistress' threat; she was thinking, with rather alarmed dismay, of the detention. A detention meant being confined to class-room, with a prefect in charge, all the afternoon—and she had promised the Smalls that she would appear for rehearsals that afternoon.

"You understand, Bessie?" Miss Primrose asked.

"Y-yes," Bessie stammered. "I—I'm sus-sorry. I—I'll try to be a good girl, Miss Primrose. But—ahem!—Miss Primrose, kik-could you let me off the detention?"

"Certainly not, Bessie!"

"But—but— Oh crumbs! Miss Primrose, please!" Bessie begged. "You wouldn't like to interfere with a girl's career, would you? I mum-mean, you wouldn't like to see a girl who might be a blazing star in a sky of the first magnitude, you know, being kept from

indeed! Fancy giving a coming star a detention!

Breakfast-bell rang. Bessie brightened a little. She hurried along towards the dining-room, pausing suddenly as she saw Mabs coming along the corridor. Mabs, thoughtful, looking just a little worried and anxious, was walking slowly, and Bessie stopped, her tender heart suddenly melting with compassion. Poor old Mabs! How wretched she looked!

Actually, Mabs didn't. True, Mabs was not her usual brisk self; but Mabs, in that moment, was rather anxiously thinking about the two five-pound notes, and wondering what she was to do with them. She had no doubt that Bessie was their owner. But as Bessie had indignantly denied that, what was she to do?

Obviously she could not take them to Primmy. Primmy would at once start up a whole series of embarrassing inquiries, and goodness knows what trouble those inquiries would land Bessie into! Apart from that, she was just a teeny bit concerned about her serial. She had become completely "stuck" on that.

"Mabs—" Bessie said sympathetically.

Mabs started.

"Oh, Bessie, here you are! Bessie, old thing—"

"Don't worry, old Mabs!" Bessie said comfortingly. "Don't worry! I know!

"Well, as long as it was honestly earned money, and it was given to me, why should I worry?" Bessie asked resentfully. "Really, you know—" And then she wheeled round as the door opened and Sarah Harrigan's unpleasant face peered into the room. "Oh, crumbs, it—it's Sus-Sarah!" she cried.

"And Sarah," that prefect scowled, "is looking for you. Miss Primrose wants to see you, Bessie Bunter! You'd better scoot at once!"

Bessie pulled a face. She knew what that summons meant. At the same time, she was not altogether sorry; she felt that she was approaching rather deep waters with Babs and Mabs. Rather breathlessly she rushed off.

Miss Primrose regarded her curiously as she entered her study.

"Bessie, you know why I have sent for you?"

"Oh dear! I—yes, Miss Primrose!"

"Last night, Bessie, you did not return to the school until after dormitory

And I've told you, haven't I, that everything is coming right, you know? Trust old Bessie to see you through! Does a Bunter ever forget her pals?" Bessie asked valiantly.

Mabs frowned.  
"But, Bessie, I don't understand—"  
Bessie gave a fat chuckle.

"You will—some day," she said. "I sus-say, there's second breakfast bell. Come on, Mabs! The porridge will be cold."

"But, Bessie, about those five-pound notes—"

"Come on!" Bessie said hastily.  
And she tugged Mabs into the dining-room.

Mabs sighed. Babs, already seated, looked curiously at her, and from her to Bessie. Bessie beamed again. The sight and the smell of food always restored Bessie's buoyant good humour and— Well, blow it! Hadn't she everything to look forward to? She was saving Mabs like anything; fame and fortune would soon be hers for the mere picking up of a telephone receiver, and the detention—well, blow the detention! She'd get out of that somehow, though, of course, she mustn't let Babs or Mabs know that she was going to dodge it.

Babs, watching her, wondered again. Certainly, if one could judge by the size of the Bunter appetite, it did not seem as if Bessie had anything on her mind. The way she finished off her porridge, her sausages, and bacon seemed to imply that everything was normal with Bessie Bunter.

After breakfast, however, Bessie realised from the look in Babs' eyes that her chum had not finished with her questioning, made herself scarce, and it was not until after lessons that Babs had a chance of a talk with her. Then she caught her arm.

"Bessie, what did Primmy give you?"

"Oh, a detention!"

Babs shook her head.

"Poor old Bessie! But you did ask for it, you know! Bessie, where were you last night?"

"Oh, look! I sus-say, there's Jemima Carstairs!" Bessie cried hastily, and tore herself away—though, to be sure, she had no earthly reason for wanting to see Jemima at that moment.

And that was the last Babs saw of Bessie until dinner. After dinner Sarah Harrigan took her in tow, and, with Sarah, Bessie was somewhat reluctantly marched off to the Fourth Form classroom. Sarah scowled.

"You can get out your book and write an essay on spring," she ordered.

"Y-yes, Sarah," Bessie said meekly.

She got out her books. Sarah, with a grunt, seated herself at Miss Charmant's desk and produced a copy of "Macbeth"—a part in which she was learning for the forthcoming Shakespeare festival. Bessie looked at the clock.

Two o'clock now. At three she was due in Courtfield.

She smirked a little.

During morning classes Bessie had been doing some rather deep thinking, and Bessie had already solved her problem.

Apart from her excellent gift of mimicry, Bessie was an accomplished ventriloquist. It was her ventriloquism, she resolved, which should open the gate to freedom for her this afternoon.

But Bessie, on these occasions, could be rather deeply artful. Not at once did she put her scheme into action. While Sarah, with knitted brows, frowned over her "Macbeth," Bessie kept one watchful eye upon the door, and presently was rewarded by seeing the angular figure of Miss Bullivant

pass. Sarah, looking up at the same moment, also saw her, only to become re-engrossed in her book the moment the figure had passed. But suddenly the voice of Miss Bullivant, outside the door, spoke.

"Oh, Sarah!"  
Sarah started.

"Yes, Miss Bullivant?"  
"Will you please go up to the attic and see what Madge Stevens and Fay Chandler are doing? I think they are up to some mischief."

"Oh, yes, Miss Bullivant!" Sarah said.

She blinked at the door, expecting Miss Bullivant to come in. But Miss Bullivant, unconscious that her voice had been imitated, was at that moment descending the stairs. Sarah breathed hard through her nose as carefully she put her book down; then, with a glare at Bessie, she left the room.

And Bessie chuckled as she rose. Ten minutes later Mabs, Babs, and Clara, sauntering out of the school, intent upon hockey practice before tea, were met by furious-faced Sarah.

"And where," Sarah ground out, "has she got to now?"

"She? Who?" Babs asked.

"Bessie Bunter!"

Babs jumped.

"Oh, great gollywogs! You don't mean to say—"

"I mean to say," choleric Sarah hooted, "that that fat idiot tricked me out of detention-room! She's bolted! And if you three have been helping her in any way—"

But the three shook their heads, and then looked at each other with faces which expressed their uneasy consternation. Bessie, it seemed, was asking for it—with a vengeance!

### An Odd Coincidence!



"I WON'T—I won't, I tell you! Let me go! Let me go!"  
Bessie Bunter

jumped.

Bessie, elated by the clever dodge with which she had got rid of Sarah Harrigan, had arrived a quarter of an hour early for her appointment at Small's Rehearsal Rooms.

The large room which had been the scene of her interview with the Small family yesterday was empty when she reached it, and Bessie, blown a little after her climb up the stairs, had sunk into an easy chair. Now, however, she sat up, electrified as that angry voice floated from behind the door of the adjoining room. It was the voice of the mysterious girl Lily.

Now came Mr. Small's voice, threatening, menacing.

"You will do as you are told, Lily my girl! You will do as you are told!"

"I won't!" Lily's voice was frantic, distressed. "I won't, I tell you! I'll never be party to your crooked plans! Sooner or later I'll get out of this place! Sooner or later—"

The utterance was followed by the sound of a blow, a sharp cry, and then silence. Bessie blinked.

What was going on in there?

Bessie had a twinge of alarm. She felt she must find out what was going on beyond that door. Three hesitant steps she took towards it, and then stopped dead. For the door had opened and Mr. Small himself appeared, accompanied by his wife. Of Charles, his son, however, there was no sign.

He almost jumped as he saw Bessie. The expression which crossed his features was peculiar in the extreme.

"You!" he said sharply.

"I—I— Oh crumbs! I—I gig-got here early, you know!" Bessie somewhat uneasily exclaimed. "But—but— Oh dud-dear! Mr. Small, who was the girl I heard crying in that room?"

An anxious look passed between Mr. Small and his wife.

"Oh, that!" Mr. Small smiled. "That was Lily." He laughed heartily. "Lily Lyell—you remember, the girl you are impersonating in the play."

Bessie still looked uneasy.

"But why should I impersonate her if she's here?" she asked.

"Aha!" He laughed again. "That is all part of the play," he said. "Did I not explain? Lily, Miss Bunter, is being held prisoner by villains. The villains, you see, have to pretend to Lily's wealthy aunt that Lily is still happy and contented—thus the reason for another girl to imitate Lily's voice. Meantime, as you may guess, Lily is trying to escape. What you heard, Miss Bunter, was merely the escape scene which we were rehearsing as you came in. In the end, of course, everything ends happily by Lily and the impersonator discovering they are twin sisters. But wait a moment! If you like I will introduce Lily to you."

Bessie beamed then. She was relieved. The explanation satisfied her. It sounded convincing—and actually it was convincing, because three-parts of it was true. Bessie had yet to learn that she was imitating a real prisoner—the purpose of the imitation to extract money from an innocent and unsuspecting aunt.

She waited while Mr. Small disappeared through the doorway. In two minutes he was back, ruefully shaking his head.

"Alas! I am sorry, Miss Bunter. Lily has just this moment left. Still, another time perhaps? I trust," he added, with a frown, "no unworthy suspicion passed through your mind?"

"Oh, nun-no, of kink-course not!" Bessie stammered. "I—I was only curious, you know! But she did it well, didn't she?"

"Very well, very well!" Mr. Small smiled. "But not as well as you, my little star! Now, now—hum! We have ten minutes to go. Matilda," he added to his wife, "once more you will take the part of the aunt, and once more, my little star, you will answer the telephone. This time Aunt Mary will ring up asking if you've received the twenty-five pounds she sent yesterday."

"Oh, yes!" Bessie said. "But I sus-say, you know—"

"And you will answer," Mr. Small said gravely, "that you have. Thank her for it, of course. You will also tell her, Miss Bunter, that you have received the costume from the costumiers and will require another forty pounds, for this fictitious Aunt Mary is supposed to be financing a show in which her niece is to act the leading lady. Is that clear?"

"Yes, rather! But when do we do some real acting, you know?" Bessie asked.

"That," Mr. Small assured her, "will come later. Now— Ah, there is the telephone!" And he ran eagerly forward as the bell rang, and, with an oily smile answered: "Yes, Miss Lyell. One moment, Miss Lyell, she is here. Miss Bunter!" he added magnificently.

And Bessie, all suspicion lulled, unconscious of the plot of which she was being made such a pawn, answered according to her instructions.

"WELL, GIVE it up!" grunted Clara Trevlyn.

"Where the dickens can the old



chump have got to?" Mabel Lynn asked worriedly. "Babs, can you suggest anywhere else we can look?"

But Babs, as worried as her two chums, just shook her head.

The three, of course, were looking for Bessie. They were looking for Bessie in Courtfield. Little Dolores Essendon of the Second Form had set them off on that track, for Dolores had seen Bessie mount the Courtfield bus in Friardale Lane, and further inquiries at the Courtfield terminus had revealed the conductor who had punched the fat one's ticket. Yes, he had told them, Bessie had certainly alighted from the bus in Courtfield, so Courtfield, obviously, had been her destination. But whereabouts in Courtfield?

They had visited all Bessie's favourite haunts—most of them teashops and restaurants. They had visited Bessie's friends, the Snaiths; they had visited Mrs. Bennett and her son Roddy. They had even looked in at the local picture house; but for all they had seen of Bessie, Bessie might have been a thousand miles away. Now, a rather disconsolate and worried trio, they stood at the corner of Courtfield Square.

A rather drab and cheerless thoroughfare, this Courtfield Square. Not a soul was about.

"Well," Clara grunted, "it's obvious she isn't here. Bet you what you like she hooked it back to Cliff House! I vote we have a snack at the Anglo-American and return. We—Hallo!" the Tomboy added suddenly. "What's the giddy game?"

And suddenly the chums' interest switched.

For from a few doors up the road had come the bang of a window. Now, as they watched, they saw a slender girl climbing over the sill. One hunted look she gave up and down the street, and then dropped into the road. Immediately after, from the room behind the window, came a shout.

"Hi! Come back! Come back!" But like a hare she was running—away from the chums. While Babs & Co. watched they saw her look round again. Then suddenly, kicking her foot against the jutting edge of a badly laid paving stone, she measured her length with a cry. And from the window which, a moment before, she had so suddenly jumped, another figure came springing. It was Mr. Ernest Small himself.

"Ha!" they heard him cry. And before the prostrate girl could raise herself, he had pounced on her, was hauling her to her feet.

"You would, would you?" Clearly they heard his words. "Ungrateful wretch! But this time is your last, my girl—your very, very last!"

"Let me go!" cried the girl. "Let me go! You shan't take me back! You shan't take me back—"

Babs jumped. "My hat! That voice—"

"What voice?" Mabs asked.

"The girl's voice? It—it's the same—"

And then Babs paused. It was the same—but the same as what? Strikingly familiar that voice—and yet she knew she had never seen this girl before. Where had she heard it?

"I say, come on!" Clara said, with sudden grimness, for the man, beside himself, was shaking the girl violently. "Both it, he's got no right to treat her like that!"

"But it's no business of ours—"

Mabs unhesitatingly. "And it's no business of his to ill-treat a girl like that!" Clara said. "Come on!"

She herself took the lead. Her busi-



"AND now, dear Miss Bunter," Mr. Small sneered, "you can think that over!" Bessie stared at the document in horror. If the police ever saw that!

ness or not, bullying always aroused the quick-tempered Tomboy's indignation. Now the girl, gasping, crying and struggling, was being towed towards the door near the window through which she had escaped. As the chums rushed up the man hastily pushed her in and then slammed the door upon her.

"You rotter!" Clara cried.

"Young woman, I beg your pardon?"

"What were you doing with that girl?"

"Is it any business of yours, young woman?" Mr. Small magnificently asked. "Has a father not a right to chastise his undutiful child? Concern yourself with your own affairs," he added frowningly, "and leave myself to manage the affairs of my family!"

"But look here—"

Babs started. "Be gone! Otherwise"—and Mr. Small's eyes glittered—"I will phone up your headmistress and report you! How dare you!"

And with another fierce frown he suddenly turned on his heel, opened the door, and walked into the house, slamming it in their faces. The chums looked at each other.

"But—but—" Babs said, and racked her brain. That girl—that voice—that—and then suddenly she jumped, a look of wild excitement flaming into her eyes. "Gosh!" she breathed.

"Gosh what?" Clara asked.

"That voice"—and Babs stared at her chums. "I—I've just remembered where I heard it before. It was the voice which Bessie was imitating the other night in her sleep! The very same! I wonder," Babs breathed, while Clara and Mabs looked at her in surprise, "I wonder—if there's any connection between that girl and Bess?"

**A Last Warning from the Head!**



BUT, of course, there could be no connection—the resemblance of the voices was just an accident. After all, one girl's voice was very much like another,

as Clara pointed out. Mabs was in-

clined to agree with her. So, on the surface, was Babs. It was so unlikely that Bessie could know that girl.

And yet Babs was still wondering when, in the gathering dusk, they left the bus and marched up the drive to the school. Almost the first person they saw on entering Big Hall was Joan Sheldon Charmant. Joan was looking just a little worried.

"Mabs—"

"Hallo!" Mabs said. "Has Bessie come back?"

"No," said Joan. "But there's going to be a hot reception for her when she does! Sarah reported her to Primmy, and Primmy's waiting for Bessie with her chopper sharpened! But, Mabs, what about that serial?" she added anxiously. "It's the only thing I haven't got in now, and I've just got to send the stuff off to the printer to-morrow. Can't you let me have it to-night?"

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Mabs. "I—I suppose we can't hold it out?"

"Mabs—no! You know we can't. It was announced in the last issue of the magazine. Old thing, do your best!" Joan urged.

"Yes, come on!" Babs said. "I'll give you a hand."

Mabs sighed. If there was one thing she regretted now, it was taking the serial on. Still, printers, like time, would not wait. The one thing to do was to make a really determined effort. Obviously now they couldn't do anything for Bessie until the truant returned.

Bessie, had they known it, was at that moment on her way back to school.

Bessie was walking because Bessie, at the last moment, had found she had no money for her return fare. A pretty pitiful state of affairs that, for a girl who would soon be a star and pulling down thousands and thousands of pounds' worth of contracts! At least, that is what Mr. Small had told her this afternoon, and Bessie, because she liked news that flattered her, truly and earnestly believed him.

Three miles is a long way to walk at the best of times. The time now was far from the best, for with the coming

of night had also come fine, drizzling rain. Bessie was no walker, and she was tired and fed-up when, after tea, she reached the gates of Cliff House School.

She walked wearily up the drive, to be met at the entrance to Big Hall by a furious Sarah Harrigan.

Too late then, Bessie remembered her little trick in detention. She blinked rather alarmedly.

"Oh crumbs! I sus-say, Sarah, dud-don't look at me like that!" she said feebly.

"Come on!" Sarah said grimly.

"Oh dear! Where?"

"Miss Primrose. She's asking for you—and, my word, aren't you just going to catch it!"

Bessie was towed to Miss Primrose's study. With dismay on her fat features, she faced the strict-looking Miss Primrose. The headmistress nodded.

"Thank you, Sarah, you may go," she said, and Sarah went. "Now, Bessie?"

"Oh dear!" Bessie sighed.

"Bessie, sit down. I am going," Miss Primrose said severely, "to talk very strictly to you! I suppose you realise that continual behaviour of this sort merits expulsion?"

Bessie blinked.

"This morning," Miss Primrose went on, "I was very lenient with you, Bessie. I realise you are somewhat more obtuse than most girls, and I made allowances. But this afternoon you deliberately tricked Sarah into leaving you alone in detention so that you could escape. That is serious."

"Y-yes," stammered Bessie.

"And it is more serious, having escaped, deliberately to break bounds again! Bessie, why did you do it?"

"I—I had to go somewhere!" Bessie mumbled.

"To Courtfield?"

"Y-yes—no—that is to say, I—I don't know!" Bessie said wildly. "I never went to see the Smalls, you know! In fact, I don't know who they are!"

"Bessie, what or who are the Smalls?" Miss Primrose asked keenly.

"Nun-nothing," Bessie said.

"Bessie, please tell me where you went and what you did!"

Bessie, realising that in her present frame of mind she might blurt out something, shut her lips.

"Bessie!" Miss Primrose said sharply.

Bessie remained obstinately silent.

"I see!" Miss Primrose's eyes glimmered a little. "You still persist in being foolish? Very well, Bessie, I am not going to be lenient this time! I am going to send your parents a special report, and if, Bessie, you do not profit by your experience this time, the next time will be the last. For then," Miss Primrose added, "I shall, in all probability, write to your parents asking them to take you away from the school altogether. You still refuse to say where you have spent the afternoon?"

Bessie's lips quivered. Rather forlornly she blinked at Miss Primrose. To be taken away from Cliff House—no, no, not that! But she couldn't tell Primmy—no! For Mabs' sake she must keep her secret.

"Very well, you may go," Miss Primrose said tartly. "Please send Barbara to me."

And Bessie, very glad to go, hurried off into the corridor. She trailed off towards Study No. 4. Rather a martyr Bessie felt then—she, noble, forbearing, drawing all the barbs of cruel fate in order to help her friend. It was pretty thick—but then hadn't all people who went about the world doing jolly good turns for other people been misunderstood and persecuted?

That reflection helped Bessie. It

gave her a glowing sense of a sacrifice. Well, she nobly thought, it was all for old Mabs' sake—and wouldn't Primmy and those others be sorry when they knew how heroic she had been in spite of their persecutions! And she'd have her reward, too, when she became a star of the first magnitude! Poof! Stuff to Primmy—and everybody else! She knew her duty. She was going through with that duty.

"To the bitter end!" Bessie said aloud.

"Eh? What end have you been biting?" June Merrett asked.

"Eh? Oh, really, June, I didn't see you!" Bessie said, realising she had reached the Fourth Form corridor. "Anyway, I don't know what you mean," she added offendedly, and with nose in the air walked on, leaving the prankster of the Fourth chuckling.

She rolled on to the study. The door of that room was ajar when she reached it, and she hesitated a moment, trying to remember for what reason Miss Primrose wished to see Babs, unheeding of the fact that Miss Primrose had given no reason. As she did so, Mabs' voice struck upon her ears.

And Bessie jumped. For Mabs, putting a dramatic expression into her serial as she read it out for Babs' approval, sounded really alarming.

"And I must—I simply must—have one hundred pounds by Friday," she said. "Where I'm going to get it, goodness only knows! If I can't get hold of that sum, there's nothing for it—"

"Oh, mum-my hat!" Bessie stuttered.

She blinked again, unconscious that Mabs had stopped because Babs, listening, had shook her head. For a moment the fat one stared in the deepest consternation at the door. A hundred pounds—a whole hundred pounds! Oh dear! Oh goodness!

She rolled away. No, she couldn't face poor old Mabs in this moment of her utter distress. But—a hundred pounds—by Friday—and Friday was the day after to-morrow!

Bessie's head reeled as she thought of the money—ten times more than she had given Mabs already! Then she paused. Well, if she had already got it, she could get a hundred, couldn't she? And, after all, what was a hundred to a star who would soon be signing contracts for thousands—millions, perhaps? Mr. Small hadn't been very surprised when she had asked for ten—how could he fail to refuse her a hundred? All she had to do was to ask for an advance on her contract.

She'd go—now!

Bessie braced herself. Then she thought again. She remembered Primmy's words, and shuddered a little. To go out again now meant the risk of discovery, and if she was discovered it was expulsion as sure as fate. But it was for old Mabs' sake, wasn't it? And even if she were expelled, she still had a brilliant future on the stage. Poor old Mabs—she'd have nothing.

Jemima Carstairs, monocle in eye, came strolling up the corridor. She stopped and beamed.

"What cheer, Bessie? Fat Spartan, why the ponderous frown upon the noble brow? Methinks thou looketh thoughtful."

"Eh? Oh, really, Jimmy!" Then Bessie remembered. "I sus-say, Jimmy, do me a favour," she asked.

"Ask!" commanded Jemima.

"Tut—tell Babs that Primmy wants her, will you? And—ahem!" Bessie blinked. "If—if I'm wanted, Jimmy, cover me up, will you—it's not that I'm going to Courtfield, of course, but somebody might be sneaking around

trying to find me! You know what suspicious cats they are at this school!"

Jemima frowned.

"But, old Spartan—" she murmured.

"Gig-good-bye, Jimmy!"

And Bessie, with a fat blink and a fleeting smile, had ambled away.

## Not a Star After All!



"AND you can give me no clues whatever as to Bessie's mysterious activities, Barbara?"

Miss Primrose asked the question ten minutes later. Babs, informed of the headmistress' summons by Jemima Carstairs and in a panic in case the Head should ask for Bessie now, shook her head.

"I—I wish I could," she answered. "I am worried—very." Miss Primrose frowned. "I am speaking to you now, Barbara, as her friend. Do please keep an eye on her. I should hate to have to send her away."

"Yes, Miss Primrose," Babs said. "Thank you, my dear! You may go."

And Babs, frowning herself, went, more and more deeply uneasy. Primmy was trying her utmost to be kind, trying her utmost to save Bessie from going further; but Primmy, after all, must see that school discipline was maintained.

Where was Bessie now?

Bessie at that moment was in the bus bound for Courtfield again, having borrowed a shilling on her way to the gates from Marcelle Biquet, the little French member of the Fourth Form. She was content now, was actually smiling, though, to be sure, in the background of her mind was a rather apprehensive dread of what might happen if her absence was discovered. Of course, she would have no difficulty in getting a hundred pounds. Mr. Small would only be too delighted to let her have such a trifling sum.

The bus stopped. Bessie got out, heading for the dingy Courtfield Square. She reached Small's Rehearsal Rooms, and, pushing the door open, climbed the draughty, unlighted stairs. About to knock on the door of Mr. Small's office, she paused.

Some commotion was going on in there. Mr. Small, his voice full of tense anxiety, could be heard.

"Wretched girl!" he was crying bitterly. "Charles, you have searched the small room?"

"Yes, father. She isn't there."

"Matilda, you have looked in the lobby?"

"I tell you," Mrs. Small answered, "I've looked everywhere. There's no doubt about it; the girl's escaped, and a fine pickle we're in now! Her Aunt Mary phoned up an hour ago, and her Aunt Mary says that she's coming to see her to-morrow afternoon. If we can't produce her—"

Bessie blinked. What was this? "We've got to produce her!" Mr. Small's voice was savage. "We've got to! She can't be far away. We've got to be after her! We've got to track her down! Thank goodness," he added fervently, "she's got no money! That means she can't get far. Charles, my coat! Matilda, get on your clothes! We must investigate—quickly! And once we catch her—"

"Well, once!" Charles said sulkily. "And what do we do then?"

"Then," Mr. Small said, and Bessie was surprised at the sudden spite in his voice, "she's just got to do as she's told

—just got to! Too long have I been patient! No longer will I be defied! There are ways and means—ways and means! If this time she does not do as we ask, I will frighten her into doing it! Hallo!" he added, as the door opened.

And the three of them started as the fat, perspiring face of Bessie Bunter intruded.

"Oh crumbs! I sus-say, are you rehearsing?" Bessie asked.

But she knew, even as the question left her lips, that they were not. The whole three of them looked so guilty, so utterly strange somehow, that a pang of dread struck at her heart. For a moment Mr. Small did not answer. Then, with a look at his family which plainly said "Leave this to me," he moved towards her.

"And what," he said, "do you want here?"

"Well—" Bessie said, and more weasily blinked. "Oh, I sus-say, dud-don't look at me like that?" she stammered nervously. "I—I came to ask for a—a hundred pounds!"

"What?"

"Well, a hundred pounds, you know—an advance on my contract!" Bessie said. "You said—"

"I said—what?" he snarled at her. "Girl, you are a fool!"

"Eh? Look here, you know—" Bessie began indignantly.

"Get out!"

"Eh?"

"Get out, I said—get out! Can't you see we're busy? A hundred pounds!" He laughed scornfully. "What an optimist you are!"

"But you promised—" Bessie said. "Will you get out?" Mr. Small roared.

"No, I jolly well won't!" And Bessie, anger overmastering her nerves, stared up at him. "If this is rehearsing I dud-don't think much of it—so there! You said I could have any money I wanted, and I want a hundred pounds! And if," she threatened, red-checked, "I don't get a hundred pounds, I won't jolly well come and rehearse again!"

"And do I tremble at that threat?" Mr. Small sneered. "Miss Bunter, sorry as I am to tell you, I shall not want you for more rehearsals! Your purpose is served! Charles, don't gape at me! Get on, my lad, and get busy! Now, Miss Bunter, vanish!"

Bessie blinked.

"I jolly well refuse to vanish!" she said indignantly. "Look here, am I going to have the money, or aren't I?"

"You aren't!" Mr. Small said. "Now get out! You're finished!"

Bessie stared as the man turned away. Then she saw Mrs. Small hastily putting on her hat. And for the first time it dawned upon her that something was wrong. A swift tremor of alarm shook her plump frame as she remembered the scene upon which she burst. Some girl had escaped. What girl?

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bessie.

For she remembered again those rehearsals; the girl whose voice she had imitated; the girl who she had heard crying that she was being kept a prisoner here. Lily Lyell! Was that the girl who had escaped? Was that the girl who had been held a prisoner? A wave of faintness seemed to sweep over her.

"You—you crooks!" she gasped out. "Oh, mum-my hat! I see it now!"

Mr. Small wheeled round.

"Yes?" he asked unpleasantly. "And what, Miss Bunter, do you see?"

"That girl, Lily Lyell—you were keeping her prisoner here all the time! She wasn't rehearsing when you said she was

rehearsing! That was real! I shu-shall go to the police!"

Mr. Small's eyes glittered.

"And what," he asked smoothly, "would you do if you went to the police, Miss Bunter?"

"Well, I'd jolly well tell them what I know!"

"So!" He smiled. So suave, so tigerish, that smile that Bessie quivered a little. "And when you tell the police that, will you please tell them that you helped to keep that girl a prisoner? Will you tell them that, if we are crooks, you are also a crook—and an even bigger one than us? Because, you see," he added, while Bessie gazed at him, suddenly weak with horror, "you were the girl who deliberately imitated the prisoner's voice in order to deceive her aunt, Miss Mary Lyell!"

Bessie gulped.

"But—but I dud-didn't know—"

"But you did!" Mr. Small laughed. "If you didn't know, how was it you signed this?"

And he thrust under her nose the document which Bessie had innocently signed when she had received the two five-pound notes. It was no receipt she saw now. It was a typewritten statement, and that statement read:

"I, Bessie Bunter, do hereby undertake to imitate the voice of the girl, Lily Lyell, knowing full well all that is implied by this agreement, and sharing all responsibility for what I do with Mr. Ernest Small."

"And now, dear Miss Bunter," Mr. Small sneered, "you can think that over. Meantime, Matilda, get busy!"

And while Bessie, shaking now, weakly tottered away, he briskly turned.

### Babs Explains!



SHE was a crook! She was a criminal! Not only that, but she had confessed to the fact on the document she had signed!

And Mabs—Mabs! Poor old Mabs! She wouldn't be able to help her, after all!

Poor old Bessie! Her mind was whirling round as she made her way back to Cliff House. Even the sight of the portly constable in the middle of Friardale Square, glimpsed through the window of the bus, sent her recoiling with a shiver.

What could she do? Oh, what could she do?

Nothing—except, Bessie thought, keep her mouth shut. Who was Lily Lyell? Why had those people held her prisoner? And why had they tricked her into replying to Lily's Aunt Mary? Bessie did not know, and was in no mood to probe deeply that aspect of the matter. The uppermost, most dreadful thing was that she was a self-confessed crook—the accomplice of crooks.

She reached the school—fortunately, this time, without being spotted. With her fat cheeks burning, she stole into Study No. 4. Quickly she shut the door behind her, and then, with a gasp, plumped into the armchair. Mabs, busy finishing her serial—she had struck a vein of inspiration at last—looked up in amazement.

"Bessie, what's the matter?"

"Nun-nothing!" Bessie said feverishly.

"But, Bessie, you look quite white!"

"Wuw-well, I've been running," Bessie said, with a gulp. "Oh, dud-don't ask questions, Mabs! It—it isn't my fault, you know, and—and I only dud-did it for you!" she added, and her lips quivered. "Mum-Mabs, you

musn't think too badly of me when—when they come for me, will you?" she added. "They—" And then she jumped as there was a rattle at the door. "Oh crumbs! Hide me!" she gasped. "They're here!"

But it was not "they." It was only Babs. Bessie almost collapsed with relief when the captain of the Form entered.

Mabs frowned at Babs. Bessie, then, was quivering like a leaf. She looked utterly frightened.

"Bessie!" cried Babs. "Where have you been?"

"Nun-nowhere!" mumbled Bessie.

"My hat!" Babs stared. "What's the matter? Are you ill?"

"Nun-no!"

There was silence; then Babs, with a look at Mabs, approached the plump one.

"Bessie, take your clothes off," she said gently. "Let me help you. Now, what about some tea?"

"Nun-no thanks!" Bessie stammered.

"Oh, Babs, I dud-didn't know, you know. They told me they wanted me to act, and they said they'd give me heaps and heaps of money, so that I could save you from being ruined, Mabs—"

"Me?" Mabs cried.

"Yes. And—and—oh dud-dear! I've done my best, and you're going to be ruined now, after all!" Bessie said, and shook her head.

"But, Bessie, of course I'm not going to be ruined!" Mabs cried. "What put that idea into your head?"

Bessie blinked.

"Well, that letter your father wrote to you—I saw it," she confessed.

"You threw one sheet of it in the fireplace, you know, and your father said that he wasn't making mincemeat of matters, but that he was in danger of losing every penny of his money—"

Babs gave a violent start.

"Oh, my hat! Bessie, you duffer!"

"Eh?"

"You duffer! You silly chump!" Babs laughed. "Is that what is worrying you? Oh! Ha, ha, ha! Mabs, don't you see? Bessie was reading your serial!"

"Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!" cried Mabs.

Bessie blinked up offendedly.

"Blessed if I see anything to laugh at!" she said indignantly.

"But, Bessie, don't you see, you goosy?"

"No, I jolly well don't!"

"Mabs," Babs started, and laughed again. "Mabs isn't in danger of losing her money. What you read was a letter supposed to be written by one of Mabs' characters in her story. You silly goose! So that's what has been on your mind all the time!"

Bessie stared at them. Her face had gone very white. So that was it, was it? And in that moment of crisis she did not listen to reason. Mabs, all the time, had just been pulling her leg! She, all the time, had been acting the noble heroine, thinking all the time that Mabs was in urgent need. Mabs wasn't going to be ruined, but she—because she thought Mabs was going to be ruined—had jolly well got herself hitched up with a lot of crooks, and might at any moment be arrested. And all Mabs could do about it now was to grin!

Bitterness in an overwhelming flood welled up within Bessie.

"You—you dud-dare to laugh!" she cried. And suddenly the tears came, and while Mabs and Babs stared in consternation, she rushed for the door. "I—I nun-never want to speak to you again!" she gulped.

(Continued on page 14)

# OUT OF SCHOOL HOURS

*Week by week your friend PATRICIA writes to you, keeping you up to the minute with all those things schoolgirls like so know. She tells you about herself, and about good-dressing and good looks—all in that chummy and helpful way so typical of her.*



**T**HERE'S no doubt about it, Darts is a most fascinating game!

I expect quite a lot of you have a dartboard at home now, haven't you? With a neat piece of plywood behind it to keep the darts from piercing the walls.

What a pity it is that we can't make a suit of armour, or something, to cover up the family pets when we're playing this game!

Our puss-cat, Minkie, loves to investigate the darts when they rebound off the board—as they are bound to do sometimes. Several times your Patricia has rescued him—just when he looked like being stabbed.

But now he has to be pushed out of the room while darts is in progress—unless he will deign to sleep on the armchair by the fire.

My small brother with the long name, Heatherington—or Heath for short—used to be very fed up at not being allowed to play the grown ups' game of darts.

But mother was insistent about it, and said quite flatly HE MUST NOT.

And when mother really puts her foot down—which is seldom—then Heath knows it's not a bit of use for him to bawl, howl, sulk, or even plead.

But Heath now has his own dartboard and plays grand "matches" with his friend from next door, young Johnnie Lane.

The fact that their dartboard is really a game called "rings"—a numbered board with hooks, on to which you throw rings—doesn't seem to depress them in the least.

Also, it means that Minkie is allowed to watch in safety and even join in, chasing the rings. For Heath, who is absurdly fond of animals, adores his puss-cat and likes to have him around all the time.

## ● Darts Fun

Have you tried playing "One-to-Nine" at darts?

It's a very simple game, but surprisingly popular. Also, the scoring isn't at all complicated—which is an advantage. (At least, I think so, for I just hate counting.)

Any number can play, which makes it even more friendly.

Each player throws three darts. The object in the first round is to get as many of these three into the Ones, making as big a score as possible in that "bed," so, of course, if you can get "doubles" or "trebles," so much the better.

The second turn round, the players aim for the Twos—with the three darts again—scoring as many as possible with Twos.

And so it goes on—three, four, five, six—It doesn't matter if you don't score anything in a particular bed. You just sigh and go on to the next number at the next round.

Until—you come to the Sevens. And then you must get at least one of your three darts into a seven. If you don't, you're jolly well out.

If you do, then you score and next round go on to Eights, and after that to the Nines, which ends the game.

The winner—quite simply—is the player with the biggest score.

## ● Wigwam and Canoe

Who said Red Indians—or Red Injuns, as my small brother calls them!

What about making yourself a present of a little comb-case shaped like a canoe, and a purse shaped like a wigwam?

The canoe looks best when made of two strips of felt or imitation leather. (Yellow would be particularly suitable.) The strips should measure about six inches by two, but I should use your pocket comb as a pattern, just to make sure of the size, if I were you.

Keep one eye on the picture here and cut out the canoe, with rounded ends as shown. Then buttonhole-stitch around—and it's complete. (The joy of felt is that raw edges do not have to be hemmed. So felt would be even better than leatherette for this, after all!)



The wigwam purse is made of two triangles of any bright material. Join up two sides and sew a zippy fastener along the other. You do know by now that you can buy zip fastening in any lengths at a penny an inch, don't you?

Make a gay tassel and sew this to the end of the zipper. Now the purse is complete, ready to take your cash.

And "Where did you get that cute purse?" your chums will say to you. (Unless, of course, they also read this page! In which case, we must leave the remark to the grown-ups.)

I expect you're all looking forward to seeing Deanna Durbin's new film, "That Certain Age."

I warn you, you won't find her quite so young as she was in her other films, even though she is only represented as being school age. But she's still very, very charming.

It's in this film, you know, that she wears one of her mother's "stay-up-by-magic" dresses and does her hair on the top of her head. You'll love seeing this part of the film, I know, so I want you to notice how much older Deanna looks all dressed up like this. I think it's the hair-style even more than the dress which gives this impression, for, after all, we have all been wearing low-cut bathing

suits and sun-tops for ages now, haven't we?

Anyhow, I know you'll adore the film, especially the part where all the youngsters are getting up a play.

Jackie Cooper is particularly attractive in his part, I think. He's certainly not a handsome lad, by any means, but he has a boyishly rugged sort of charm that you're bound to like.

For in these days we don't look only for prettiness in girls or handsomeness in men, do we?

Do you know when the Boat Race is this year?

Well, I'll tell you—on April 1st!

So now you can save up to make someone an "April Fool" on that day by announcing, say, that Oxford has won. (I happen to be Oxford, you see!)

"Really?" they'll gasp. (I hope!)

And if they do—in a forgetful moment—you say "April Fool—the race hasn't started yet, silly!"

After which you'd better scoot, or you'll get your hair pulled, at the very least!

## ● Simple Trimming

What effective trimmings buttons do make to a woolly dress!

If you happen to have a frock like the one in the picture—except perhaps that the pockets on yours would be square instead of three-cornered—you could so easily trim it in the same way, with buttons.

Six are sewn down the front. But not all in one row—in groups of three instead. Three buttons can also be sewn on each cuff.

Five more are sewn at the edges of each of the pockets.

For square pockets you'd require six on each, two down each side and two along the bottom.

If mother uses those pretty little jars of face creams, do ask her to save them for you when they are empty.

After washing them they make excellent little containers for work-basket treasures—particularly if you keep the screw-on caps as well.

You can keep pins, hooks and eyes, and buttons in them, labelling each in painted letters. Enamel paint is the best for this. It costs two pence a tin from our favourite shop and a brush can be bought for a penny.

Bye-bye now until next week, my pets.

Your friend,

PATRICIA.



# SUCH A LOVELY SMILE

*Some very wise advice from Patricia about the care of those very precious things—your teeth.*



**T**HIS Patricia of yours has just returned from her visit to the dentist-man, so naturally is feeling rather teeth-conscious!

I have told you before, I think, that I visit him every six months. Sometimes there are "fillings" required, sometimes not.

On this visit I did require a "filling" to be renewed, and that was followed by a good clean-up.

The dentist brushed my teeth, back and front, with a revolving brush, on which was some special cleaning stuff, which made them feel very gritty and "on edge."

But after a good rinse-out of my mouth, I felt fresh and sparkling, and I am now very pleased with myself, aware that my teeth are in good condition for another six months.

All this talk about myself isn't meant to be selfish, you know. It's meant as a reminder to you that it really is important to visit your family dentist regularly—unless, of course, your teeth are examined frequently by a school dentist.

Just imagine if I hadn't gone to my dentist to-day, but had left it, say, for another year. I might have been too late to have the filling renewed! Supposing I had had to have that tooth extracted.

No, it isn't the thought of the pain that would worry me—but losing a tooth. A front one at that!

## REGULAR VISITS

So, please, you who already have lovely teeth, and you whose teeth are not so strong, pay *regular* visits to your dentist. There will probably be nothing to be done to your teeth—but, just supposing there is, you'll be so glad later on that you have been so careful of them.

Quite apart from visiting a dentist, there are other ways of guarding your precious teeth yourself.

I know I need hardly mention regular twice-a-day cleaning, for you all know how important it is to give your teeth a brisk scrubbing in the morning and evening. You need only use tooth-paste—or powder—once a day, and I think morning time is the best for this.

## TWO BRUSHES

But did you also know that it is important to use a dry, stiff brush all the time?

The best way to make sure of your brush being fresh is to keep two in use—then one is always dry and firm.

And remember, too, that brushes should not be used for ever, just because the bristles are not worn out. They should be changed fairly frequently—which isn't such a terrible expense in these days when quite good brushes can be bought for threepence.

You should always brush your teeth with an up-and-down movement when cleaning them. This removes any particles of food that may have become lodged between them.

## FIRM GUMS

Brush the backs as well as the fronts, and give the gums a rub over, too.

If your gums should be tender and inclined to bleed easily, it's a good plan to dip your finger in some ordinary coarse salt—such as mother uses for cooking—and rub this briskly over the gums, top and bottom.

On the Continent it is considered quite correct for people to "pick their teeth" after a meal, and specially hygienic tooth-picks are provided on most restaurant tables for this purpose.

We in England do not think this a very elegant practice, I know—good as it is for the teeth. So if you should find that pieces of food tend to lodge between your

teeth after a meal, you must just dash to the bath-room and give them a brush over.

## AN APPLE A DAY

It isn't possible to do this at school after a meal, I know, unless you have a toothbrush hidden away in your satchel. But an apple will do the trick just as well.

For to eat an apple is teeth-cleaning in itself, as well as being so good for you in other ways.

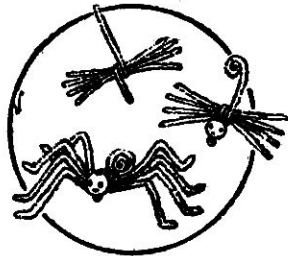
So do try to make a point of always including an apple in your lunch if you take it to school with you. Eat this last of all, after your sandwiches and cake, or whatever you have.

Remember always that your teeth really are as precious as jewels, and should be guarded well.

You must have realized that there is nothing which can spoil a girl's charm more quickly than uncared-for teeth. They make her nervous, and afraid to smile for fear of showing them.

But if you really take care of your teeth, and allow your dentist to do his share, this should never happen to you.

You should be able to smile happily all the time, knowing that nice teeth make a radiant smile, and a radiant smile makes a happy and lovely face.



## A FEARSOME PET

*That is really the very newest mascot!*

**D**ON'T ask me why, but spiders have suddenly become fashionable. Yes, spiders.

They are being worn on hats, handbags, dresses and furs, by all the wealthy people. Mind you, theirs are probably made of gold or platinum, with diamonds or emeralds for eyes. But they're still—spiders.

So if you like being up-to-the-minute with your mascots it must be a spider.

The creepy-crawly one here is made from pipe-cleaners, which will look very smart, and, you'll admit, cost less than gold or platinum.

I think coloured pipe-cleaners would be best, if you can spare twopence to buy a packet. (You can give those you don't need to father—who might hand over the twopence to you, in spite of receiving such short measure.)

Get four pieces of pipe-cleaner all about four inches long. Bind them together in the centre with another piece—as shown in the top diagram.

Slip a bead on one end, twisting the end so that the bead won't slip off—as in the second diagram. The other end is curled round, as shown, to form the body.

You then carefully bend the legs to the right shape, and paint comic eyes and nose on the spider's head.

Sew a pin to the underside of this friendly insect, and wear it proudly on a dark dress, on the lapel of your coat, or on a hat.

## A USEFUL LETTER-RACK

*Made from cork table-mats.*

**I**F someone gave mother a set of nice new table mats for Christmas, perhaps she'll be parting with her old ones. And it wouldn't surprise me in the least if these weren't made of cork.

If she is able to spare two for you, then do bag them to make this very novel and useful letter-rack to stand on the mantelpiece or on the bureau in the sitting-room.

You cut one of the mats in half, so that you have two perfect semicircles. Then you cut a strip about 2½ inches wide from another.

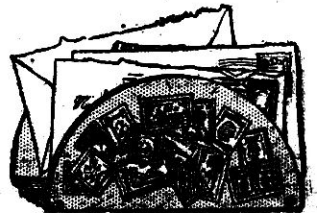
In order to get this cutting quite straight, by the way, you should rule a line in pencil across the mats first, and then cut away with a very sharp knife, or razor blade.

Now you have the three pieces, they must be fastened together. Stand the two semicircles up, with the rounded part upwards, and place the strip flat between them. Fix them together with drawing-pins, or a little glue.

The rack will then stand up perfectly, you'll find, and will hold all letters that require answering.

You may like to decorate it in the way shown, with stamps. These stamps can be English ones, torn from letters, or foreign ones, if you have them.

Just glue them to the front of the rack, all higgledy-piggledy, and you will be delighted with the effect.



(Continued from page 11)

Before either Babs or Mabs could stop her, the door had opened, the door had shut, and Bessie had vanished.

"Bessie!" cried Babs.

She dashed to the door and jerked it open. Wildly she peered along the passage. But Bessie had fled out of sight.

"Bessie!" she cried again, and then she looked back at Mabs. Her own face was white now. Inwardly she was kicking herself for a careless fool. Now, partially, she understood. Now she knew why Bessie had sent those five-pound notes to Mabs. But she still did not know where they had come from. "Come on; let's get after her!" she cried.

Mabs, with an anxious gulp, nodded. They flew towards the stairs; but Bessie, for once, had not gone that way. Bessie had bolted back towards the servants' quarters, and a moment later a quivering, sobbing Bessie was letting herself out of the school.

The stinging shock of Mabs' heartless trick, as she thought, coming on top of all her other worries, had completely unnerfed the duffer of the Fourth. Haunted now by those dreams of prison, burdened with the knowledge of her guilt, adrift from her friends, there was only one thing Bessie could do.

And Bessie was going to do it. She was going to run away from school.

Where she was going, what she was going to do after she had run away, Bessie did not stop to think. She only knew that she must get away.

In the cloisters she made for Lane's Field, squeezed her way through the gap in the hedge, and finally reaching the now darkened road, blinked as the headlights of a car flashed in her eyes, and then, stepping aside, waited for the car to go by. But it didn't. It came abreast of Bessie. Bessie heard a sharp exclamation, and then started.

"Bessie!" cried Miss Primrose, peering out from the window.

"Oh, mum-my hat!" Bessie cried.

In a moment Miss Primrose was out of the car.

"Bessie, I am absolutely disgusted with you!" she cried. "What are you doing here—out of bounds, at this time of night? You will come back! And this time," Miss Primrose added, with a flinty note in her voice, "I shall send for your parents!"

### Bessie Bolts!



"Oh, my hat, Mabs!" Barbara Redfern cried, with a startled

jump.

It was the following morning in the Fourth Form dormitory, and Babs had just awakened, to gaze at Bessie Bunter's bed. And that bed—

It was empty!

A rather disturbed and restless night both Babs and Mabs had spent. Rather a remorseful one, too. They knew all about Bessie being caught by Miss Primrose, of course. They knew all about her disgrace. But Bessie, strangely dignified and aloof, had said nothing to them, and even, in fact, refused to speak to them. Bessie was wounded—deeply—and when Bessie was wounded, Bessie could be the most obstinate of girls.

Babs, in the night, had heard Bessie restlessly tossing and sighing, and once had caught a little sob from her bed. Now, again Bessie was missing.

"Come on!" Babs said.

In a flash she was out of bed, Mabs with her. A hurried wash and a swift dressing, and they flew downstairs to Study No. 4. Bessie was not there, but propped up against the vase was another letter—this time in Bessie's own handwriting. Babs opened it. And then she bit her lip.

"I have gone away," the letter read, "and it is no use your trying to find me, because none will ever here of me again. Though you have treated me so shabbily, I do not bear you any illwill. Do not try to find me.

"Your heart-broken,

"BESSIE."

"P.S.—If you want to know what to do with the two 5-pound notes, give them to the police."

"Oh, what a silly, silly old chump!" Babs said; but there was a suspicion of a quiver on her lips, and a moisture in her eyes. "She's run away from school!"

"Poor old Bessie!" Mabs breathed. "Babs, what are we going to do?"

"We're going," Babs said firmly, "to see Miss Primrose. We're going to ask for permission to try to find the silly old duffer. Bring the letter, Mabs, and the two five-pound notes. We're going to tell Primmy all about this—now! Come on!"

They found Miss Primrose in her study when, breathlessly, they had raced there. The headmistress looked grave in the extreme as she heard the story.

"I wish, Barbara, I had been aware of this before," she said. "I have had a feeling all along that something most dreadful was wrong. The only information I was ever able to get from Bessie was the fact that she was paying visits to some people called Small, in Courtfield. You have never heard of them?"

"Never," said Babs. "But, Miss

Primrose, can we go and look for her? If she hasn't got away by train—and I don't see how she could do that, because she had no money yesterday—she can't have got very far."

"Most certainly you can go," Miss Primrose said.

And off, without further ado, Babs and Mabs went. As Babs said, the first thing to do was to make inquiries at the railway station. By road, Friardale Station was a good three to four miles, but by a short cut through the woods, they could cut off at least a mile of that distance. Into the woods they plunged, hurrying along the path, and then suddenly Babs halted.

"Mabs, what was that?" she cried. "Listen!"

Mabs stopped. She, too, had heard the voice—a rather familiar voice. It came from beyond a clump of trees on their right. Now, as they listened, they heard it again.

"I won't, I tell you—I won't!" It was a girl's voice, breathless with desperation. "I won't, I tell you—I won't!"

Babs felt a thrill; for it was the voice of the girl they had seen in Courtfield Square yesterday—the voice which Bessie Bunter had imitated in her sleep.

Now came another voice—the voice of the man who had been her pursuer in Courtfield Square.

"Lily, be sensible! We are asking you to do such a little thing. Tell your aunt, when she comes, that all is well. Promise us that on your word of honour—we know you will not break it—and I swear that all shall go well with you!"

"I won't!" Lily's voice was defiant. "I am going to tell my aunt all! I am going to let her know how you have swindled her—how you have treated me! Now let me go!"

"Little fool!" The man's voice was a snarl. "Well, if you will not respond to kindness, perhaps you will to other methods! A day or two's imprisonment in the dungeons or the old priory may induce you to change your mind. Charles, help me with her."

"Babs," muttered Mabs.

But Babs was stealing forward now, peering over the bushes. And her lips tightened at what she saw.

In the clearing before the ruins of the old priory, struggling in the grip of the tall man and his son Charles, was the girl, Lily. Near them—actually Mrs. Small—was a woman.

Lily was screaming.

"Help!" she cried. "Help!"

"Babs," muttered Mabs.

"Wait a minute!" Babs breathed.

"Let them take her. We can't do anything against those three, but as soon as the coast is clear, we can nip in and rescue her."

Mabs nodded. For the moment they had forgotten the plight of Bessie in the more desperate position of this girl. Apart from that, it was pretty plain now that both the men and the girl were linked up with Bessie. They waited till the girl, dragged off by the two men, had disappeared. Then Babs nodded.

"Come on!" she said. "But go carefully!"

They set their faces towards the priory. In the bushes near it they waited, eyes fixed upon the heavy iron door. In the priory they heard vague sounds of movement.

Then silence.

Until— Suddenly a twig snapped behind Babs. With a jump she turned. And then she gave back.

## IS PROGRESS WORTH WHILE?

### FASCINATING NEW WORK

Today we are inclined—not without reason, perhaps—to question the worth of mankind's amazing achievements; to doubt whether progress is really worth while. Has progress brought greater happiness and well-being than our forefathers knew? These are some of the questions which the new weekly part work, **OUTLINE OF PROGRESS**, attempts to answer. It is a work of outstanding interest. Edited by Charles Ray, editor of "The World of Wonder," it is published each Tuesday, price 9d. Part I is now on sale.

**OUTLINE OF PROGRESS** deals with every side of life. Beginning with conditions today, it traces back man and his works to their sources. It outlines his strivings for a better order of things, for freedom and happiness and justice. It tells how tribes became great nations.

On the material side it pictures the strides of science. It shows how the little bark canoe grew into the "Queen Mary," how the modern banking system evolved from barter, how the huge steelworks came from primitive iron smelting, and how the "Puffing Billy" was the grandfather of the streamlined express.

The complete work, of about 40 parts, will contain roughly a million words and 4,000 pictures, including 500 full-page explanatory drawings. There will also be a superb series of Full Colour Plates.

Every intelligent person will find inspiration and food for thought in this popular work, which, when completed, may be bound into a handsome set of volumes you will be proud to own.

"Mabs, look out!" she screamed. But it was too late then. For in the act of bearing down upon them were Ernest Small and his son Charles. And Ernest Small's face was savage. "Spying, eh?" he ground out. "You saw, eh? Well, maybe, it is not harder to keep three prisoners than one. Charles, seize them!" And next instant the two girls were in the grip of the two men.

**In the Old Ruins!**



**A** PLUMP, forlorn-looking figure alighted from the bus in the Courtfield Market Place, gave one scared glance at the policeman on duty, and then hurriedly bolted across the road.

The figure was that of Bessie Bunter. Bessie, scared of the police, dreading the visit of her parents to the school, heartbroken because of her break with Babs and Mabs, had no further use for Cliff House—or so Bessie told herself. So Bessie, somewhat vaguely, had made up her mind to seek fame and fortune somewhere else.

And since the Smalls had been the cause of her present plight, Bessie was on her way to see Mr. Small for the very last time.

Resolutely Bessie marched up the street, coming at last to the dingy, dull-looking Courtfield Square. She found the rehearsal rooms, marched up the stairs, and pushed open the door. Then she blinked.

For of Mr. Ernest Small, or Mr. Charles Small, or of Mrs. Matilda Small, there was no sign. Only a very small lady, with a very pink little face and mild blue eyes was in the room, seated on a chair beside Mr. Small's desk. Bessie blinked at her.

"Oh!" she said. "Oh!" the lady said, in return, and smiled. "I presume you are one of Mr. Small's staff?" she asked. "I fear I am somewhat early. Neither Mr. Small nor my niece Lily, whom I have come to see, was expecting me till later. My name," she added, with a delightful dimple, "is Miss Mary Lyell."

Bessie jumped. "Oh kik-crums!" she stuttered, and broke into a perspiration. For this was the woman she had deceived. This was the lady whose niece had been held prisoner by the Smalls while she imitated that niece's voice! This was the woman before whom she had cause to quail and fear. A sort of trembling panic took hold of Bessie.

Hastily she walked towards the door. "I—I—I—" she stuttered. "Oh, dud-dear! Ex-cuse me, please; I—I've forgotten something!" And with a smile meant to be reassuring, but which was merely a sickly smirk, she backed towards the door. While Miss Mary Lyell blinked in mild surprise, she hurriedly closed it, and hurried towards the stairs. Then she jumped again.

For, coming up those stairs were Mr. Small, his son Charles, and Mrs. Small!

One scared blink Bessie threw towards them. Her heart was jumping now—and so, for once, was her brain. She couldn't descend those stairs without betraying herself to the Smalls, and they, seeing her now, were bound to drag her back into that room to face the little woman who, all unwittingly, she had wronged. Like a flash that realisation hit Bessie, and like a flash Bessie acted. She seized the handle of the Smalls' door to her right.

While the Smalls, talking between themselves came on, she disappeared through it.

"**B**UT WE'VE got to get out—we've got to!" Lily Lyell almost sobbed. "I tell you my aunt will be at the rehearsal rooms any moment now, and those scoundrels are going to tell her I've been a bad girl and run away! Auntie will believe them. It will break her heart to think I've been so ungrateful! Oh, Barbara, what can we do?"

It did not seem likely, in the dark cellar beneath Friardale Priory, that the chums could do much at all.

For in that dungeon Mabs and Babs had been thrown to keep Lily Lyell company, and in that dungeon they had heard her story—a simple enough story, but one which, now they knew the details, revolted them.

Lily, living up in Scotland with her aunt, had been anxious to get on the stage. Her aunt had encouraged that ambition, and they had fallen in with the Smalls. Mr. Small had magnifi-

For Babs know these cellars. Many a time and oft she had explored them on a half-holiday. Mr. Small & Co., before they left, had taken good care to secure the stout door against all possible assault. Sooner or later, at Cliff House, of course, there would be a hue and cry. Eventually they were bound to be discovered. But by that time it would be too late.

Then Mabs, groping round, gave a sudden exclamation.

"Babs—" "Yes, old thing?" "The—the brickwork—it's loose here!" Mabs said. "I—I've been able to take a whole brick out, and the plaster's crumbling, too! Babs, if we could make a hole—"

In a moment Babs had sprung to her side.

"Here!" Mabs panted. Babs ran her hands over the wall. It felt rotten. Mortar was coming away;



**BABS and Mabs watched tensely as the girl was hustled towards the old ruins. This girl had some connection with the mystery surrounding their chum Bessie. Of that they felt certain. But how were they to rescue her?**

cently offered to take Lily to his academy and train her for a stage part.

But all the time Mr. Small, through Lily, had been swindling Miss Lyell for sums of money, and Miss Lyell, unexperienced in the way of the stage, unsuspecting dear old thing that she was, had been sending it—until finally Lily had discovered that all the sums which Mr. Small had asked her to pay for additional expenses, had been going into his own pocket. Then she had realised; had tried to run away, and so been made a prisoner.

Which meant, of course, that Mr. Small, sadly in need of funds, had, in order to encourage the goose to keep on laying the golden eggs, been forced to find a voice exactly like that of Lily's, never dreaming that unsuspecting Aunt Mary would suddenly take it into her head to pay a flying visit to her niece.

And now here she was, at the moment when those rascals should be exposed, a prisoner with Babs and Mabs.

"We've got to get out—we've got to!" she panted. "Oh, isn't there any way?"

In the darkness, Babs frowned.

the bricks held loosely together. Feverishly she groped in the hole Mabs had made; feverishly she hauled. And then she gave a cry.

"There's a chance—a chance!" she cried. "Lily, quickly—help here! If we can tear enough of these bricks away, we may be in time yet! Hurry! And work," Babs panted, tearing and heaving now for all she was possessed, "as if her life depended on it!"

And with desperate will they worked,

**For the Last Time!**



"**A** HA, ahem!" said Mr. Small, and blinked back the consternation he felt at discovering Miss Mary Lyell in his office. "So you have arrived, Miss Lyell?"

"I have arrived," Miss Lyell said. "Good-morning, Mr. Small. Good-morning, all of you." She smiled at Mrs. Small and Charles. "Where's Lily?"

"Ah, Lily!" And Mr. Small

rowned ponderously at his family. "Ah, Lily!" he repeated, and shook his head, preparing Lily's aunt for the worst. "The—the fact is, Miss Lyell—"

Bessie, in the next room, separated only from the main office by a thin partition, pricked up her ears.

Bessie was quivering; Bessie was palpitating. But Bessie was also glowering angry. It was the Smalls who had reduced her to her present plight—these Smalls who had deceived her, who had bluffed her into acting the decoy to the sweet-faced Aunt Mary. Because of her an innocent girl had been persecuted; because of her Miss Lyell had been swindled—

Bessie breathed wrath. "The fact is," Mr. Small said sadly. "Oh, I hate to tell you, Miss Lyell—but prepare yourself for a shock. Your niece, Lily—"

"Lul-Lily—" Miss Lyell faltered. "She has gone—run away!" Mr. Small announced gravely. "And not only has she run away, Miss Lyell, but she has taken fifty pounds of my money with her. That, I am sure, you will replace; but for Lily's shocking conduct I am afraid there can be no pardon."

Bessie clenched her plump hands. "But—but I do not understand!" Miss Lyell's voice sounded weak and faint. "Lily—" she faltered.

"She said," Mr. Small's voice was like a rasp, "that she was happy, she was content. She was—or so we thought, dear Miss Lyell. But in the end—ah, it is a long, long story, and I feel you are not equal to the strain of listening to it. Lily was a rebel. Lily cheated us right and left—"

Bessie heaved a deep breath. She could stand this no longer. And suddenly she pursed her lips. In Lily's own voice she spoke.

"Aunt Mary, it's a lie—a big, whopping lie!" she cried indignantly. "Don't believe him! Don't believe any of them! What they've been doing is to swindle you! I haven't taken any money and I haven't run away, because I'm here and now I'm jolly well going to show them up!"

"Lily!" shrieked Miss Lyell. "Lily!" Mr. Small sounded electrified. "She has escaped!"

"Escaped!" cried Miss Lyell. "I—I mean—" mumbled Ernest Small.

"He means," Bessie said, "that he has been keeping me prisoner!"

In the next room Mr. Small's face was white. Miss Lyell had straightened, darting a sudden suspicious look at him. Charles, his hands shaking, was edging towards the door. Mrs. Small was looking hopelessly at her husband. Then suddenly Miss Lyell gave an exclamation.

"There is some mystery here!" she cried, with consternation. "I do not understand! Lily!" she cried. "Come here! Come here at once!"

Bessie never moved. But Mr. Small & Co. did. They, scared, fancied that in reality Lily had escaped. Not for a moment did they associate Bessie Bunter with that voice.

"No!" Mr. Small cried. "No!" And back went his arm, sweeping astounded Miss Lyell into the chair. "Away, away!" he cried wildly. "Get down the stairs! Lock the door!" And he himself, while Miss Lyell gasped, wrenched the door open, only to shut it and lock it on the outside as the others hurried after him. Then, higgledy-piggledy, the three of them rushed downwards.

But they never reached the bottom. Half-way down Mr. Small started back. For through the outer door

rushed three girls—Babs, Mabs, and Lily herself! They were followed by two stalwart police-constables whose services the three girls, having escaped from the Priory, had enlisted en route.

As Lily saw them, she gave a vibrant cry.

"Officers, there they are! Arrest them! They are the people who have been swindling my aunt and who kidnapped me!"

The Smalls halted, beaten, baffled, just as Bessie Bunter, with an inquiring look, peeped out of her door.

"AND THAT," Miss Lyell asked, twenty minutes later, in Mr. Small's office, "is the story? What wicked, what awful rogues they were! And you, my dear—" she looked at Bessie, who shivered.

"I—I didn't know anything about it!" Bessie said. "I didn't, Miss Lyell! I thought it was all honest—really! I only wanted to save Mabs' father from ruin, you see, and I never even saw Lily!"

"That is right," Lily said.

Miss Lyell smiled.

"Poor Bessie!" she said softly. "I understand. Perhaps, after all, I have been the greatest fool for allowing myself to be so easily deceived. At least I have to thank you for exposing them," she said. "I confess I was completely deceived. I think you are a dear girl, Bessie; and I do admire your loyalty to your friends—oh, so much! And as for the ten pounds they gave you—that, of course, being my money—"

"We've still got that, Miss Lyell," Babs said.

"Then," Miss Lyell smiled, "will you keep it, please, and stand yourselves a spread, or whatever you call it? I can never, never tell you how deeply indebted I am to all of you for the part you have played in this affair. And now," she said, "since you were

apparently sent to find your chum by your headmistress, what about going along to your school and telling her the story? Bessie, why do you look afraid?"

For Bessie shivered. "Nun-nothing," Bessie said.

"But—Oh dear! Mum—my parents, you know! Miss Primrose has sent for them to take me away!"

"Well, anyway, come!" Babs urged.

And Bessie went. And half an hour later the amazing story was being poured into Miss Primrose's ears. She nodded her head as she listened, and smiled.

"Barbara, Mabel, I am proud of you," she said. "Bessie"—she frowned—"in another way I am proud of you—not for your foolishness, but for the very fine motive which made you act as you did. In the circumstances, my dear, you are excused all punishments." "Thank—thank you," Bessie gulped.

"But—but my parents, Miss Primrose?"

Miss Primrose smiled.

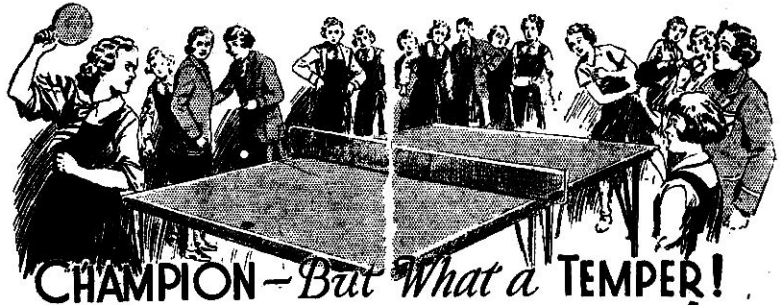
"I don't think," she added softly, "you need worry about your parents, Bessie. I intended to write to them as I said, but the discovery that you had run away this morning made me decide to wait until you had been found until I took any further step in the matter. In the circumstances," Miss Primrose added kindly, and Bessie beamed, "I think we will not trouble them. All that I ask, Bessie, is that in future you will consult Barbara or myself before making new friends of whom you know nothing."

To which Bessie fervently answered: "I will!"

And then, with a hopeful blink at the smiling Miss Lyell:

"I sus-say, dud-do you thuth-think we might spend some of that ten pounds now? I'm fuf-famished, you know!"

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.



CHAMPION—But What a TEMPER!

Next week's superb COMPLETE Cliff House story is packed with popular "features"—starring Christine Wilmer, that wonder of the tennis courts; dealing with an important table tennis championship; giving an important role to popular Lady Pat, of the Sixth Form; bringing the Hon. Beatrice Beverley into the limelight again; and, of course, providing Babs & Co. with plenty of activity. In fact, it is Babs who, more than anyone else, can help Christine to win the championship. For Christine's ungovernable temper threatens to ruin all her chances, thanks to someone who is deliberately goading her, and Babs sets out to help Christine overcome that falling. Don't miss Hilda Richards' latest magnificent story.



Another absorbing COMPLETE story of Merrie England in the Middle Ages. 1



"SSSSH," whispered the young Lady Fayre, to captive Robin Hood, in the dungeons of her uncle's castle. "I will rescue you." But the problem was—how, when the cell was guarded?

### The Witch's Cottage!

"**A**HO, there! Whither goest?" The young Lady Fayre's heart jumped to her mouth as the guard at the barbican of Longsley Castle stepped in her path.

The castle was by rights Fayre's own, even though she was only a girl, but her uncle, the Baron le Feuvre, had taken possession of it, and adopted her. Normally, there was no reason why Fayre should have been alarmed by the guard, but to-day it was different.

For Fayre was dressed in a shabby green frock, covered by a ragged, brown-hooded cloak.

"I—I but go to the village for the Lady Fayre," said Fayre timidly.

The guard did not move. He was armed in chain-mail, and carried a javelin in his right hand, and at his side a sword; moreover, he was burly and aggressive.

"So-ho? For the Lady Fayre? What have you in the basket?" he asked.

"Shoes," said Fayre.

The guard took the basket, and lifted the cloth that covered it. Taking out the two, worn shoes, he gave a nod, and a grunt of disappointment; for he had been prepared to find some delicacy pilfered from the larder being smuggled out by this ragged girl.

"Uh! Move on!" he said.

Fayre, heaving a sigh of relief, moved on along the drawbridge that crossed the castle's deep moat.

The baron was hunting in the forest near by, while her aunt, under armed escort of a hundred soldiers, had gone to pay a call upon a neighbouring lady.

Consequently, being free for a while, Fayre had assumed her disguise. Her tutor, the ancient, bearded Venerable Brie, was busy writing up the baron's accounts of his adventures at the Crusades, so there would be no one to note her absence.

Free of the castle, Fayre hurried along, singing to herself, for it was a lovely sunny afternoon, and the ominous

black clouds in the sky to the east did not daunt her.

"Now for the fun of the village," she chanted to herself. "And little will the shoemaker guess that it is the Lady Fayre herself bringing the shoes. I'll buy lollipops; I'll buy cakes—tra-la! And mayhap I'll see Robin Hood."

Robin Hood, the friend of the poor, was the friend of Fayre, too—except that, like all others, he thought she was a village maid. Mystery Maid Marian he called her, since he did not know her real name, nor where she lived.

Robin Hood, outlawed, daring, and gay, had his lair some distance into the wood, so that Fayre would not have time to seek him out, and get the shoes to the shop as well.

Nevertheless, as she skirted the wood she walked slowly, wondering if, by

## By IDA MELBOURNE

chance, she could get a glimpse of him. She was just past the wood when there came a sound that halted her. It was the clear note of a hunting horn with a musical pitch of its own.

Round she swung, eyes dancing.

"Robin Hood!" she called.

And into the roadway sprang Robin Hood, young and handsome, dressed in green, a short cape at his shoulders. Sweeping a small, pointed cap from his head, he bowed to Fayre.

"Good-afternoon, Robin!" said Fayre, and noticed the sack in his left hand.

"Good-day to you, Mystery Marian!" he smiled. "And if you are still the friend of the poor, I must ask a service of you."

"I have asked many of you," smiled Fayre.

He held out the sack.

"A goodly load—a feast!" he said. "If you are going the way of the little red-painted cottage, 'twould be a kindness to give the old lady this. There

# Secret Helper to Robin Hood

is a birthday merry-making there, but little enough good food."

The sack was heavy, but Fayre took it, swinging it on to her back.

"Why, yes, Robin Hood! Of course I'll take it!" she said.

"If anyone should ask how you came by it," he said, closing one eye, "say that a man dressed in green made you a gift of it."

Then, bowing again, he hurried back into the wood, leaving Fayre to wonder what the sack contained, and what urgent business he had that prevented his running the errand himself. But, having had so many kindnesses from Robin Hood, it would have been churlish indeed to have refused this, when the little red cottage lay but two hundred yards from the road.

The sack was heavy, though, and by the time she reached the cottage, Fayre's arms and back ached, and she knew she would be glad to see the last of it.

She thumped on the door, which was presently opened by an old, white-haired woman, whose back was bent with toil, but whose face wore a kindly smile.

"A gift from a man in green," said Fayre.

"Why, 'twas Robin Hood, Jass!" cried the old woman. "Come inside, please!"

Fayre stepped into the clean, simple cottage, and put down the sack. A mighty fire was roaring in the open grate, and the smoke curled up through the roof that served as a chimney.

On the spit before the fire meat was being roasted, and the savoury smell filled the room.

"Meat from Robin Hood!" she cried, opening the sack. "The rascal has hunted in the baron's forest! Ah, but the kind heart of him!"

"The friend of the poor," nodded Fayre.

"A friend indeed! All day I have been fearing my menfolk might be hunting to get meat for the birthday!" said the old woman. "If the baron should catch them—"

She sighed, but did not end the sentence. For there could be punishment with death in those days for men caught hunting in a baron's forest. Yet somehow food had to be found.

"I hope you will have a merry feast," said Fayre, opening the door.

But she jumped back into the room again as, with terrific force, rain swept down upon the cottage. The black clouds had not made idle threat.

"Stay, stay!" begged the old woman. "Thou art not afeared, lass, because it's said I am a witch!"

Fayre took a quick breath.

"You are Mother Johnson?" she asked sharply.

"I am; but don't believe the wild tales you hear," said the old woman.

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food there was they would eat, without leaving a penny compensation—except the honour that they had deigned to enter so humble an abode.

"Cakes—are there cakes?" demanded the baron.

But one of his knights had taken a good look in the sack.

"Whence came this meat?" he asked sharply. "Who poached this hind?"

Fayre quaked, casting an anxious look at Mother Johnson, who had gone pale with dread.

The baron, looking in the sack, wheeled upon the old woman.

"You have menfolk—eh? Poachers! Where are the rascals?"

"Oh, my lord, have mercy! 'Tis a birthday," entreated Mother Johnson.

"What care I why rascals steal? They steal! 'Tis enough!" roared the baron in fury. "We'll await them, by my troth; and they'll rue hunting in my forest!"

Fayre turned from the fire, hoping that, her back being towards it, her face would be in shadow.

"My lord," she quavered, "'twas I brought the sack of meat here."

The baron stiffened.

"You? Whence came it?"

"I—I— From a man in green," said Fayre.

The baron put his head forward, and then roared with laughter that was echoed by his knights and squires.

"Robin Hood! Ha, ha, ha!"

As their laughter reverberated Fayre stood there blankly puzzled; for always before the mere mention of Robin Hood's name had sent the baron into a fury.

She soon learned the reason for the change.

"Robin Hood—eh?" went on the baron. "Well, wench, your friend will never more give meat. He lies now in one of my dungeons awaiting my pleasure—my displeasure, I should say."

"Ho, ho, ho!" roared the others.

But Fayre turned deathly pale. "Robin Hood is captured?" she said, her heart sinking.

"At last—yes! He blundered. He thought we were his men. We got him—alone; and now he lies in the dungeon!" chortled the baron. "Never more shall he rob me of my gold to give it to the poor, nor poach my game—the thieving rascal!"

Mother Johnson looked at him steadily.

"Evil will come to him who harms Robin Hood," she said.

Her tone was level, metallic, and impressive, and there fell a hush in the room. The baron, no longer chortling, fixed her with a heavy frown.

"Are you the old woman they call a witch?" he asked.

"'Tis said so by some," said Mother Johnson. "They talk without thinking, my lord."

But the Baron le Feuvre moved back a pace. He was as superstitious as any villager.

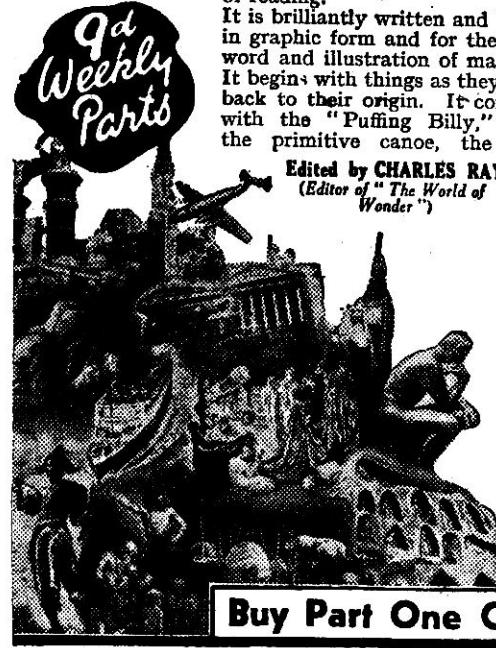
"Put no spell on me," he said thickly, "and try no fool's tricks—such as turning me into a dog! Old wives' tales! Pah!"

But he edged away from the old woman, who did not take her eyes from his. She knew that he was afraid, and meant to make the most of his fear.

Fayre had no love for her harsh, rascally uncle, and she was glad to see him cringing before this old woman.

"Who has a kind heart need not fear," said Fayre.

The baron, noticing then her blackened face, gave a convulsive start and drew so far back that his mailed right foot scrunched the toes of the knight Sir Geoffrey, who stood behind him.



"The kind of heart need never fear. Ah! Hark at that whistling wind—"

Fayre wrapped her cloak about her. She was not afraid, but she was awed; for the sky was darkening, the smoke was blowing about in the small cottage living-room, and there came to her mind strange tales of witchcraft she had heard.

The Venerable Brie, a learned man, who could both read and write, made fun of the foolish stories which villagers told of witches who could turn men into dogs.

But Fayre thought of the howling dog of the woods who was said to be an evil knight upon whom this very woman had worked a spell.

"Be a good girl and turn the spit, pray," said old Mother Johnson.

Her kindly face seemed more wrinkled to Fayre; her dark eyes appeared to have a strange glow. But, telling herself that the Venerable Brie was a learned man, and the villagers just superstitious, Fayre got busy turning the black rod on which the meat was pronged, so that all sides should be well cooked.

For five minutes she sat thus; and then, giving a sharp cry, sprang up, as with a mighty thump the door of the cottage flew open, the wind and rain whistled in, and a voice roared:

"A fire—and food! Well met!"

And there, on the threshold, in his hunting clothes stood the burly, red-faced, blustering Baron le Feuvre, her uncle!

Fayre was too terrified to move for a moment.

One glance at her face should be enough for him to know her, and then—

### Captured—by Her Uncle!

FAYRE turned her face to the fire, quaking with dread; for the baron was a man of fierce temper and but a rough sense of justice.

As likely as not if he learned that it was Fayre in these ragged clothes speaking to a cottager he would order her to the dungeons as punishment, or even, if his anger was fierce enough, place her in the stocks.

"Come in, Sir Geoffrey!" he called. "There is room, I vow, for six—and food! Aha!"

"Good, my lord! Welcome!" said Mother Johnson in shaky tone.

"Food, woman! Drink!" said the baron brusquely. "Take my cloak to dry by the fire. Hey, there, wench—your, this cloak—"

His manners at the best of times were not gracious, but when dealing with simple villagers he was rough and often insulting.

Now he hurled the wet cloak at Fayre, laughed as it wrapped about her head; but he did not laugh when the end of it flapped the joint of meat. He roared angry protest.

"Clumsy clown, take care!" he warned her.

Fayre held the cloak by the fire; and then, guardedly putting out her hand to the soot that clung to the chimney, wiped it across her face, hot though it was. It was the only disguise available, and it might serve in this darkened room.

"More meat. Ah! Meat in the sack!" said the baron.

His men entered the cottage as though it were their own. Whatever

"Yowp!" gasped the knight, causing the baron to leap forward, his nerves on edge.

"Fool!" snarled the baron, and then put his hand to his sword pommel. "I have no fear of witches!" he said, drawing the blade an inch.

Fayre jumped forward. "Stay! For your life's sake, draw not steel when the rain comes from the east and the moon is newly risen."

The baron resheathed his sword. "So the wench, too, is a witch!" he said.

The old woman did not answer; but, muttering softly, she made passes over the meat, while the baron and his men watched.

"My good lord, pray wait. The meat shall be cooked soon," she said.

"Bewitched meat is not to my taste," sneered the baron. "But beware! Put no spells on me, or your cottage will be razed to the ground."

The others murmured; and already one was leaving the cottage, preferring the rain to the atmosphere of witchcraft.

The baron felt the same way. Though his hunger was not appeased, he would as soon have eaten the crackling embers as that meat over which the old woman had made passes, muttering incantations.

Fayre heaved a sigh as the baron backed to the door. She knew well his superstitious dread, how he blew kisses to the new moon, dreaded passing under ladders, and carried a rabbit's foot in his helmet.

He would not now have turned his back on the witch for a fortune.

Like a lion he had blustered in, and like a lamb he was going out. Her own peril was past!

But in the doorway a knight whispered to the baron, who halted.

"'Tis wisely said," he agreed, and then turned to Fayre. "Come you with me."

Fayre's heart went cold. "You heard?" he demanded harshly. "Come with me. You shall be hostage. If this woman has set any kind of curse upon us—if evil happens on the journey to the castle—then you shall pay the penalty!"

The old woman looked at Fayre. "Fear nothing," she whispered. "I make no curses—not knowing how!"

"Ahl! All the same, we'll make certain. Bring the girl," he commanded a young knight. "If one of us falls from his horse, or an outlaw's arrow flies, we'll know both the reason and the remedy!"

Fayre, her arms held, was taken from the cottage, watched with great sympathy by the old woman, who pleaded for her anxiously. But she pleaded in vain; and Fayre was hoisted up behind Sir Geoffrey on his sleek, swift horse.

As the baron mounted, his horse stumbled.

"All ready?" he said thickly, and shook his fist at the old woman.

Quaking, Fayre sat tight, hoping with all her heart that the horses would not stumble—that no rider would fall. For whatever ill occurred, the baron would now blame the witch for it. And Fayre would pay the penalty.

What that penalty would be depended on the baron's whim. She might be ducked in the moat, put in the stocks, in a dungeon—

At the thought of the dungeon Fayre's mind went to Robin Hood, captured at last, and at the baron's mercy. There were a hundred scores the baron had to pay Robin Hood, and now was his chance to pay them all.

"That old witch—her cottage shall be torn to pieces!" he growled. "And as

for you," he added to Fayre—"a whipping shall be your first portion if—Whoa there!"

He reined his horse just in time to avoid a deep hole in the road. The wind roared, the rain lashed down, and Fayre, gritting her teeth, clung on to Sir Geoffrey's belt.

But as she rode her mind was busy. If her true identity were known, her fate would be no less than if she were thought a friend and helper of the supposed witch. Somehow she must escape in the castle. And somehow, too, she must save Robin Hood.

Without mishap, the baron and his men reached the castle, and rode with thunder of hoofs over the drawbridge.

Then, in a twinkling, Fayre acted. Releasing her grip on Sir Geoffrey's belt, she put her hands on the horse's back and sprang off.

"Aho there!" roared Sir Geoffrey. "Hold her!"

But Fayre, before they could wheel their horses, fled into the darkness of the courtyard, knowing that she could easily outwit all pursuit!

### Fayre Works Magic!

FAYRE, changed into her own clothes, with the rich red velvet frock, gold-embroidered, crept down to the dungeons, where Robin Hood paced up and down in a dark room with only a small hole through which light and air could reach him.

For half an hour soldiers had jeered at Robin Hood through the grid of the dungeon door, but now the warden had sent them away, lest with so many one of Robin Hood's men might secretly himself unnoticed.

A swinging lantern hung from a hook, and the warden, hearing Fayre's steps, snatched it down.

"Who's there?" " 'Tis I—eager to see this rascal outlaw!" said Fayre.

"Aha! The Lady Fayre!" said the warden. "Welcome! See our brave lion in his cage! Ho, ho, ho!"

"The baron hails you, warden. A

newly caught prisoner above has escaped," said Fayre.

The warden went to the foot of the stone stairway and called up, and while his roaring voice reverberated, Fayre spoke through the grid to Robin Hood.

"You shall be freed," she whispered. "By witchcraft. Mother Johnson's friend shall free you. But take heed!"

Then, with lowered voice, she spoke swiftly until, hearing the warden come back, she pretended to mock Robin Hood.

"Ha—king of the woods, eh?" she jeered. "Where are your merry men now? Bring out your fine bow and arrows, my friend. Let's see your skill!"

The warden guffawed heartily. "I'll give him skill, the rascal!" he said.

Fayre moved away, ran up the stairs, and did not pause until she was in her own bed-chamber. There she put off her velvet frock, and changed back into the shabby one, anearning her face again with dirt and soot.

Thence she went to the school-room, where there was a flask of writing-ink and some special dyes that the Venerable Brie had been taught to use in an Irish monastery—where the finest painting of letters was done.

Thus armed, and with a basket, Fayre went downstairs again, and boldly entered the Hall, where the baron and his knights were gathered, talking of the witch-girl's vanishing. One knight had definitely seen her turn into a cloud of smoke. Another was sure that she had become a cat; but Sir Geoffrey, having with his own eyes seen her riding on a broomstick up to the mogn, knew better, and said so.

"Ahem!" said Fayre. They wheeled and saw her.

"There she is!" roared the baron, but did not move; for by now he more than half-believed some of these strange stories of her vanishing.

"Noble lords," said Fayre tremulously, her head bowed, "I do beg my freedom."

"No!" snapped the baron. "A spell lasts for a month and a day, 'tis said, and for so long you shall remain here."



"Oh jabber, gowabber, capiffy!" cried Fayre, trying not to laugh. Before she whisked away the cloak Robin Hood had been in the cell, but now a black cat stood there—and of Robin Hood there was no sign. The baron and his knights drew back, astonished and awed.

## 20 "Secret Helper to Robin Hood!"

Fayre shook her head. "My lord, I could not stay so long, but should need turn myself into a cat." "There!" said the knight, who swore he had seen her change into a cat. The baron stroked his beard with trembling hand, for he did not like this kind of thing at all.

"My lord, let me serve you with my spells," begged Fayre. "Let me turn an enemy of yours into a dog. Let me turn Robin Hood into a cat!"

A shout of applause came from the men.

"Turn him into a cat!" "By my halidom!" roared the baron. "If it could be done—"

He shook with laughter at the idea, while his knights, thinking of Robin Hood's fear and horror, at finding himself a cat, chortled in delight.

The baron, however, suddenly ceased laughing.

"Bah! Old wives' tales. I should believe it if I saw it done."

Fayre stepped forward, took dyes from her basket and spilled them over the floor.

"It shall be done," she said. "But take me to the dungeon, and with my magic I will weave the spell. Under your very eyes he shall change into a cat."

The baron stood irresolute, torn between a fear of the supernatural and an

"Turn round all—three times," she said.

"One at a time," said the baron cunningly. "We do not take our eyes from the rascal."

One at a time they turned round.

"Kneel," she commanded Robin Hood. Then: "Oh, jabber, gowabber, capiffy! Oeeee—"

And at that she knelt, too, and shrouded the lantern with her cloak for a moment. But even as the baron shouted in suspicion, she flicked the cloak away.

Robin Hood was gone. In his place stood a black cat with shining golden eyes—all black save for a strange red patch!

The baron fell back; his men were silent, and Fayre backed from the dungeon.

With a quick spring the cat leaped, brushing past her, so swiftly that the baron gave a jump of horror.

"There he goes—" he yelled. "Hold him—"

The knights ran in chase of the cat, and the warden, gaping open-mouthed, ran after them.

"Take the lantern," cried Fayre.

The warden snatched it from her and ran up the stairs, while the baron clattered on in roaring rage.

"Fools—idiots!" he shouted. "The

"Uncle—uncle, what is it?" asked Fayre.

The baron turned to her.

"Ha! A black cat with a red mark. If you see it hold it—'tis Robin Hood."

Fayre widened her eyes.

"Robin Hood? But he is no cat. He is an outlaw."

"He is a cat!" stormed the baron.

"I saw the change. I saw it happen. By my halidom, if he gets free he will run to Mother Johnson, and she will change him to a man again."

"Raze her cottage—" snarled Sir Geoffrey in fury. "She shall suffer for this!"

"Indeed she shall!" thundered the baron.

Fayre spoke gently.

"But my lord uncle, if you do anger the woman, and if she be as you think, a witch—why, then might she not change you into a cat?"

The baron paled. Such a horrifying thought had not occurred to him.

"Who harms that woman's cottage, or anything that is hers, dies," he said shakily. "Henceforth any man with a wise head will not go within a furlong of that cottage."

Then, abandoning his search, he stamped away, while Fayre, running to her room, picked the black cat off the cushion, to which it had made its way from the dungeon, and hurriedly cleaned off the red dye.

"Poor thing!" she said. "I knew they wouldn't hurt you. But thank you for saving Robin Hood, and being so quiet in the basket."

Then quite sure that the red mark was gone, Fayre found the Venerable Brie to acquaint him with this happening. But the baron had already sought him out.

"Say not now that such things are impossible," grunted the baron, scowling.

The venerable Brie stroked his beard. "My lord, with your own eyes you saw this transformation?"

"I did."

"Ah! Otherwise," murmured the learned scholar, "I would have dared to think it but a trick. At the moment when there was darkness, doubtless Robin Hood could have moved to some place of easy concealment, perchance behind the door, while the cunning wench released the cat, which heretofore had been well hidden beneath her cloak."

"Fool," said the baron—and then paused, staring and frowning.

He stroked his beard, and all of a sudden went clattering down the stone steps to the dungeons.

But to his dying day the baron was never really certain whether the Venerable Brie had given the just solution of the baffling mystery, or whether the witch-girl had worked magic. Which-ever the solution, Robin Hood was free and himself again, for the very next day he robbed the baron's bailiff of a bag of gold!

And Fayre laughed, and danced and laughed again at the memory of that simple trick; laughing all the more when she was told by several knights different versions of how they had seen a man transformed into a cat.

There was a merry birthday party in Mother Johnson's cottage, and from that day on her home and her menfolk, and she herself were given a wide berth by the baron and his men, especially when an east wind blew, and the sky was black, and the moon new risen.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

**BE sure to meet the young Lady Fayre and her daring outlaw friend in next week's SCHOOLGIRL.**

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inquisitive desire to see such a wonder performed.

It was the thought of Robin Hood's finding himself a cat that decided him.

"A cat he shall be, and I'll set the dogs on him," he said, thumping his right fist into his left palm.

He led the way to the dungeon, followed by the knights, and halted at Robin Hood's door.

"With swords drawn!" he ordered. "If he tries to bolt—then run him through."

"Give me the lantern that I may see the mixture I make," begged Fayre.

The door of Robin Hood's cell was open, and he stood confronting her, frowning, arms folded.

Mixing some fluid in a cup, Fayre held it to him.

"Drink," she said.

Robin Hood took it, but shook his head.

"Drink," roared the baron, drawing his sword.

Robin Hood tossed back the cup, which contained nothing but water, as he could tell, and swallowing, made a grimace and shuddered.

"I see no likeness to a cat," said the baron.

Fayre spilled dyes on the floor, and went round them in a circle.

cat will run to the witch. And the witch will change it back to Robin Hood again."

In the dark dungeon below, Fayre called softly.

"Robin Hood?"

"All is well?" he chuckled, and stepped out from behind the door.

"Go straight on, through the trapdoor to the moat," urged Fayre. "A boat is below. Row silently for your life's sake. There are archers at the embrasures."

Robin Hood laughed softly.

"Was the cat hidden in your basket?"

"It was indeed. But the baron does not know his own cat from another," said Fayre. "It is his own cat with a red dye mark."

Robin Hood, giving thanks, slipped away, and Fayre, under cover of darkness, peeled off the shabby green frock and brown cloak, stowing them secretly in a dark corridor.

Under that frock she wore her own long red one, rolled up. Letting the hem drop, and wiping her face carefully with a handkerchief, she mounted the stone stairs to the hall.

There, confusion reigned, tables were upturned, armour moved, as the hunt went on for the black cat with the red mark.

Fun and Excitement Galore—and Mystery as well—if you go—

# ON TOUR with YIN SU



## FOR NEW READERS.

MAY JOLIPHANT, a cheery English girl, and her less daring chum, DAPHNE YARDLEY, have the task of conducting around England a quaint, high-spirited but most likeable Chinese girl, YIN SU. Yin Su's governess is apparently too ill to accompany the girls. They visit an expensive hotel for a meal, not realising a certain woman wearing an emerald ring has followed them—until May discovers her bag has been stolen. It is returned mysteriously, with the money intact. But a cloak-room girl at the hotel, blamed for carelessness, is dismissed. May & Co. however, help her to get employment at a circus. After adventures there, they discover that the mystery woman has had their luggage sent to a certain house. They become servants at the house, and are warned not to open a certain red door. Determined to find out if their luggage is hidden behind it, May creeps towards the door.

(Now read on.)

## May Meant to Find Out!

MAY JOLIPHANT'S heart was in her mouth as she tiptoed towards the forbidden red door.

She was convinced that if she could open that door and pass beyond it, she would quickly learn the reason for the mystery in this strange house, if not actually find their missing luggage.

Daphne and Yin Su were obediently mounting the stairs, making considerable noise to allay the suspicions of the woman below; but peering over the banisters, they managed to keep May in view, so that they did not miss seeing what happened when the door of the room was opened.

Very softly, fearful of making a noise, May took the door handle in her fingers and turned it. But, as she had suspected, the door was locked.

Standing close to the panels she listened intently. To her excitement she heard sounds of movement, the scraping of a chair, footsteps, and then a cough.

Someone was on the far side of the door; and the thought instantly jumped to May's mind that the someone must be the woman with the emerald ring, who had so mysteriously stolen their luggage.

If their luggage was hidden in this house—as she was convinced it must be—there was no likelier hiding-place for it than behind this red door.

But the door was locked; and May remembered that they had been forbidden to go near it on pain of dismissal. Now they were in the house, with time and opportunity to search, May did not want to do anything rash that would rob them of their chance.

There would be other opportunities to try this door. Whoever was behind it must at some time or other emerge, and unless she chose her time of exit very carefully, one of the chums was bound to see her.

After listening for another moment,

"Warmer? It's like a frig up here," said Daphne. "There's no fire—"

"I mean hot on the scent," said May. "Well, I don't like that much, either," said Daphne, who at times had a one-track mind. "It's a cheap scent, and there's a smell of soap, too—"

"Duffer. Will you listen?" pleaded May. "I mean that I listened at the red door, and there's someone behind it. You know what that means?"

Daphne gave it thought.

"I suppose it means that there's a room on the other side," she hazarded. It was only a guess.

Yin Su gave a faint titter, and May sighed.

"Don't be goopy, Daph; shake yourself," she urged. "Of course there must be a room behind the door. What I'm

## WHY HAS MADAME X, THE WOMAN WITH THE EMERALD RING, DELIBERATELY HIDDEN THE CHUMS' LUGGAGE?

May backed from the door, and then stole up the stairs, keeping close to the wall so that the boards would creak as little as possible.

Daphne and Yin Su had now reached the upper bed-rooms which, small and barely furnished, were entirely devoid of luxuries. They were typical "servants' rooms" of the most Spartan kind, and Daphne, sitting on the bed, prodded it and sighed.

"It's awfully lumpy," she said dismally.

"The weary worker, exhausted by toil, sleeps as well on a wooden plank as on a feather bed," said Yin Su, her eyes glimmering. "Ah! How happy this lazy girl will be to work so hard that her hands are as leather, her arms are numb, and her knees, as she moves, make soft creakings of protest like the ill-oiled hinges of cheap doors."

"Oh, I say!" protested Daphne. "We shan't have to work as hard as that!"

"Harder," said May, joining them. "My word! We're getting warmer—"

trying to say is that there's someone there that our—er—mistress doesn't want us to see. And if I gave a guess—"

Daphne guessed right this time, and gasped aloud.

"The woman with the emerald ring?" she jerked out. "Oh, no! Gracious! She's not in this same house."

But May pointed out that, all things considered, it was the likeliest solution of the riddle, for, after all, the woman had come to this house with their luggage.

"I don't like it," frowned Daphne.

"You don't have to, dear; you're a skivvy now," said May sweetly. "If she's here, she's here; and we'll know by the washing-up whether meals are being taken up for one extra. And if

—BY—

ELIZABETH CHESTER

that door is ever opened, I'll find a way of seeing who answers it."

A bell which they had not noticed rang loudly, making them jump. They had forgotten for the moment that they were supposed to be changing into uniform, but the summons reminded them.

In the cupboards they found the

"Not many things; birds' nests," said Yin Su.

"Birds' nests!" yelled Daphne. "Oh, no!"

"Yes, yes," said Yin Su. "Very delicious and succulent dish much favoured by emperors."

"Birds' nests!" echoed Daphne. "W-w-where do you get them? From trees? You mean you fry them, or something?"

There was no time to explain to her that the Chinese bird's nest was not a nest found in a dusty English lane, recently evacuated by sparrows; for the bell rang again, and they went scurrying down the stairs.

pepper and salt, and glasses, and napkins."

"Where shall we have ours?" asked Daphne.

"Here, on a piece of newspaper," said May humorously. "Unless you care to wrestle with a cutlet on the mat."

Housemaiding duties being over, except for the chambermaiding, May decided to supervise the cooking. Yin Su knew how to strike a match and set the gas-stove working, but very little more; for she had not completed her course on home-cooking.

"We'll manage all right," said May easily. "We can take one cutlet and experiment with it to learn the tricks. I'll have that."

"Lizards' eggs delicious," murmured Yin Su thoughtfully.

Unfortunately, as May said, they were out of lizards' eggs; nor were there any dragons' trotters in the otherwise well-stocked larder. Coupled with a shortage of tinned birds' nests, the sad deficiency suggested that they must fall back on their mistress' menu.

When May had succeeded in finding a cookery-book their mistress looked in at the door.

"You will set the table for two," she said. "I am expecting a friend."

She withdrew, and May glanced at Daphne meaningly.

"Ah!" she said.

Daphne found everything she wanted to lay the table, which looked not unlike the railway lines at Clapham Junction by the time she had arranged all the available knives, forks, and likely spoons. It was a large dining-room with a round table, and Daphne began to like her work.

Yin Su, watching May cook, went so far as to find the place in the cookery-book when May lost it. Then she suddenly remembered a Chinese dish she could make, and, locating a bowl, broke eggs into it, added spices, potatoes, minced meat, breadcrumbs, and a number of other ingredients when May was not looking.

May was quite a successful cook, and a little before time the soup plates were hot, the soup ready, and the cutlets on the way.

Daphne then carried in the soup, two bowls, and two dishes; but instead of serving them to the two places, she was asked to leave the tray and go. Even Daphne, although not particularly imaginative, thought it significant. It seemed proof that the other guest was not to dine with the woman in the dining-room, but upstairs. And where else upstairs but in the room behind that mysterious red door?

Daphne hurried back to the kitchen with her news, and May was thrilled. She guessed the same answer as Daphne had done.

"It can only mean," she said, "that the woman with the emerald ring is having a tray upstairs. Daph, you've got to take that tray, and you've got to see her somehow."

But Yin Su held up her hand, listening.

"Well-bred hostess takes guest's tray with own fair hands," she murmured.

They could hear the creak of the stairs, and held their breath. The woman was taking up the tray herself. Why? Surely because she did not want them to see who it was behind the red door!

"Wait!" murmured May, as Daphne crept to the door. "She'll come down in a minute, and then we'll go up."

"Oh! Ought we to?" murmured Daphne. "She told us not to."

"If she forbade us to go to a cupboard where our own luggage was

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"Hurry," said their mistress sternly. "I shall expect dinner to be served at seven-thirty. There is soup, some cutlets, and potatoes. I prefer the potatoes mashed."

"Yes, ma'am!" they chorused. In the kitchen they looked about them, and laughed; for even though they were working, it really seemed more a joke than reality.

"Thank goodness it isn't a permanency," said Daphne. "But as soon as we find the luggage we can go. I suppose now I had better set the table."

"You had," agreed May. "Soup spoons, and all the rest. Don't forget

uniforms, and Daphne decided to be the parlourmaid; for that uniform was brown with a light biscuit-coloured apron and cap. May agreed to be a housemaid, and Yin Su, who had learned simple home-cooking in China, agreed to be cook.

"You really can cook, Yin Su?" asked Daphne.

locked in, should we obey?" asked May, with a tinge of irony. "No. If the woman with the emerald ring is in that room, then I'm going to see her."

She opened the door. "Wise person pause before making leap," suggested Yin Su. "Give deep brainful consideration to many things."

"Such as?" asked May. "Mysterious secretive person see face of May and close door," explained Yin Su. "But if May wears clothes of noble lady of the house—"

"Ah!" said May. "Good idea! There are some coats and hats of hers in the lobby. Good for you, Yin Su!"

May crossed to the dining-room door, and for caution's sake turned the key, locking the woman in, and hoping that if by chance the woman should try to open the door before finishing her soup they could explain things away.

That done, May put on a coat and felt hat from the lobby, and, practising an imitation of the woman's voice, mounted the stairs.

Daphne and Yin Su, at the foot of the stairs, watched and waited, hardly breathing as May boldly rapped the panels of the red door.

### Mystery Inmate of the Room!

**M**AY turned her back as she heard footsteps on the far side of the door, for her disguise was anything but perfect, front view.

Her face was obviously young; their mistress' was lined and wrinkled with age. But rear view it was possible for anyone to be mistaken.

The red door suddenly opened, and Yin Su and Daphne, peeping up the stairs, stifled gasps.

"Aunty!" exclaimed a girlish voice. May wheeled, and in sheer astonishment stared as she saw a girl of her own age in the doorway. But her surprise was no greater than the other's.

Both had expected to see someone grown-up.

"Oh!" said May. "Why, I thought—"

"My word!" said the other, with a soft, nervous giggle. "What ever would aunty say if she knew? That's her favourite hat! And, anyway, she's forbidden you to come here. What's more, she's forbidden me to talk to you."

May took off the hat and coat, and tossed them downstairs to Daphne. Then she turned back to the girl, who was regarding her with amusement and yet alarm.

"I say," said the girl, who had fluffy hair, pink cheeks, and rather vague eyes, "you oughtn't to speak to me. I shall get into a row. And if I say too much, aunty will never forgive me. She says I'm a chatterbox, but, of course, I'm not. I can hold my tongue as well as she can. If anyone let's anything slip about your luggage—"

She broke off. "Go on," said May keenly. "Don't worry about letting anything slip, you know."

The girl shook her head and made to close the door.

"No good trying to get anything out of me," she said. "If you want to find it, you go on searching this house." She giggled. "Search every bit of it, but don't try to pump me."

She pushed the door to, but May put her foot in the opening so that it would not quite shut.

The girl became afraid then. "I—I'll call out!" she said tensely. "Aunty said I wasn't to see you or speak to you. She'll think this is my fault, and then—"

May held up her forefinger. "Tell us where our luggage is," she insisted. "That's all we want to know."

The girl spoke with a sincerity that showed she was honest.

"I don't know—really I don't. Please don't stay here. There'll be a fearful row!" she implored. "Why do you think aunty shut me away in here if she wanted us to meet?"

May took her foot away from the door, which was instantly slammed and locked. Then she hurried down to where Daphne and Yin Su awaited her, both greatly excited. Daphne had just unlocked the dining-room door, and so that they should not be caught in the hall they returned to the kitchen.

"Well," said May, "what do you make of that, eh? That kid's a chatterbox, and aunty thought she was best out of our way."

"Which means we were expected," said Daphne.

Yin Su shook her head. "Nothing valuable; simply homely things, like American people call five and ten cent."

"Well, they're up to something," said Daphne, and then spun round as though shot as the dining-room bell rang.

When she returned from taking in the next course, she grimaced.

"She wanted to know what all the fuss was, and said we must be quiet, or go."

May gave a jump. "Go? My golly! That's an idea!"

"What is?" asked Daphne. "Why, go!" said May, with a laugh. "We'll just disappear. Next time she rings, there'll be no answer. And we'll leave a message to say that we have found the luggage."

Daphne did not quite grasp it, and looked thoroughly perplexed; but Yin Su nodded her head slowly. "Dismayed mistress rush to where



**CAUTIOUSLY**, May and her chums watched as the strange woman and girl crept downstairs. It looked as though May's clever plan to discover the whereabouts of their stolen luggage was going to succeed.

Yin Su's eyes twinkled, and she frowned.

"Girl of simple mind easily deceived," she mused. "Doubtless luggage concealed behind red door. And doubtless tongue of simple-minded girl wagging like a bulrush in breeze, might let forth many secrets."

"Doubtless," agreed May, with a smile. "But I say, kidlets, we are getting warmer. There's a plot afoot here. We were expected. Our luggage was brought here, and in a way we're prisoners—prisoners so long as we have to stay here and hunt for our luggage."

"Or," cut in Daphne, "are they hunting through our luggage? Is that why they took it? I shouldn't be at all surprised, y'know, if the woman with the emerald ring is behind that door going through everything."

May said that it would surprise her very much. As she pointed out, if that woman had been there, she would certainly not have allowed the garrulous girl to chatter much.

Yin Su, with clasped hands, walked to and fro in thought.

"Much mystery makes for weary brain," she said. "Can it be possible that the luggage of this humble and insignificant person hides something that is sought?"

"That's about it!" exclaimed May. "And when they've found it, they'll lose interest in us. It must be an idol or something you've got, Yin Su."

luggage is hid? Astute girls follow?"

"That's it," agreed May. "We could hide in an upper room. It's worth trying out, anyway."

"But supposing the woman doesn't go after the luggage?" Daphne demurred.

May looked at her witheringly. "She won't be half as smart a schemer as we think if she doesn't!" was her confident reply.

Yin Su clapped her hands, and her eyes sparkled.

"Much fun," she agreed. "Bad people play tricks on us—take luggage. We also play pranks."

Their talk with the girl had given them a new view of the matter, and opened their eyes to the fact that they had been expected. Now was the time to strike.

"A notice—quick!" exclaimed May. "Ah, the white paper from the dresser drawer! And the order-book pencil, please, Daph, dear."

May sketched out the notice in large capitals, and clipped it to the tea-towel line, so that it could not be missed:

**"GOOD-BYE! WE HAVE FOUND OUR LUGGAGE, AND GONE! THE CUTLETS ARE IN THE OVEN. APOLOGIES FOR NOT ANSWERING RING."**

"Now upstairs," breathed May—"to hide and wait and watch!"

## On the Trail!

MAY, Daphne and Yin Su crept upstairs, and went into a first floor bed-room, leaving the door open so that through the chink by the hinges they could have a clear view of the staircase, and of the red door.

Three minutes passed, and then the bell rang. They all chuckled softly. Again the bell rang. It continued ringing, and Daphne, by now a part-trained parlourmaid, showed signs of restlessness.

But they did not move from their hiding-place, and presently had the satisfaction of hearing their mistress hurl wide the dining-room door, step

across to the kitchen, and hurl open that door with a crash against the dresser.

Her surprised gasp came to them clearly.

"Good gracious!"

Next moment they heard her open the back door. Returning, she came hurrying up the stairs, made as though to climb to the next floor, but instead rapped on the panels of the red door.

Three pair of eyes, intent, stared at her.

"Who's there?" came her niece's voice.

"I—Open!"

The door was opened, and the niece stood there looking scared, her guilty

conscience apparent to the three girls who were prepared to find signs of it.

"Agnes, those girls have gone. According to their message, they have found out where their luggage is hidden. Have you defied me, and spoken to them?"

"Oh, aunty, I wouldn't defy you!" faltered the girl, evading the direct reply.

"You had better not. Madam X would be furious if she learned this. How on earth can they have guessed? There was not a clue, even. So far as I know, they did not leave the house."

"They're pretty cute, aunty," said simple Agnes—"especially the one with the keen blue eyes."

"What! How do you know what eyes she has? Agnes, you have spoken to them! Oh, you wifful, foolish girl! You have let everything out in your silly way. Oh, why didn't I lock you in from the outside?"

Agnes gasped.

"But, aunty, I didn't let anything out at all—really, I didn't! I don't exactly know where the luggage is myself, except that—well, it's not in this house."

May nudged Daphne; for that last phrase told them much. And what May noticed most of all was the emphasis of the "this."

"Bring your powerful torch, Agnes, and come with me," said her aunt. "They can't lift all that luggage alone, and they can't carry it away. I have an idea that this may be but an artful bluff."

Agnes went into her room, and returned with coat and hat and powerful torch, following her aunt downstairs.

Daphne would have started following them, but May pulled her back.

"Don't be a chump!" she whispered, peering round the door and watching Agnes and her aunt descend the stairs. "If they see us the game's up!"

"But how can we follow them, then?" Daphne protested.

"Listen to their voices," advised May.

The voices grew fainter, were no longer heard, and then only did May creep out from hiding.

"Come on!" she whispered. "They're going to look for us, and they'll look for us where the luggage is hidden. Not a sound. Pick your step."

Like mice they went down the stairs. May, after a peep into the kitchen, realised that if they went out through it they must surely be seen; for the lights were on. To leave by the hall door was safer, and, turning back to it they slid the bolts, and crept out into the darkness.

Agnes' voice could be heard.

"We'd better hurry, aunt, or they'll be gone."

"Quiet, Agnes! You have done enough damage already."

With their torches showing just where they were, the two were easy to follow, and May, Daphne, and Yin Su crept in pursuit, hopeful at last that they would find the mysterious hiding-place of their luggage, and perhaps the woman with the emerald ring, too.

**WILL** the chums' ingenious plan succeed, after all? Next Saturday's enthralling chapters of this great story will tell you. Order your copy well in advance.

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

## BETWEEN OURSELVES



day—in honour of our 1,000th number!

Well, having taken up so much of my precious space already, I simply must pass on to next week's topping programme. First of all:

## "CHAMPION—BUT WHAT A TEMPER!"

—that is the title of the superb Long Complete! Cliff House story, and rarely have we had a story in which so many popular elements were blended.

It features Christine Wilmer, the finest tennis player Cliff House has ever seen, and an equally outstanding table tennis player; it deals with a big table tennis tournament; it brings into the limelight Lady Pat, that extremely likeable Sixth Former; it provides a small part for the Hon. Beatrice Beverly, who has not been featured for some time; and, of course, it gives the famous chums, Babs & Co., plenty to do.

In fact, it gives Babs a most important responsibility, for it is she, more than anyone else, who can help Christine to win the tournament.

As you know, Christine has one failing—her blazing temper. Call her "Temper," and she flies into a rage. That same weakness threatens to ruin her table tennis chances. Not that it is altogether Christine's fault, for Babs discovers that some mysterious person is deliberately provoking Christine.

In every possible way Babs helps Christine to keep herself under control; but the more she does, the more cunningly Christine's enemy strives to make her break out again. You'll love this grand story, for Hilda Richards has packed it with every kind of appealing feature, and the table tennis scenes are a real thrill!

As usual, next week's issue will contain another magnificent instalment of "On Tour With Yin Su," another delightful COMPLETE story of the young Lady Fayre and gallant Robin Hood, together with more of Patricia's Bright and Useful Pages, so—make sure of your copy well in advance, won't you?

And now, with very best wishes, and more than a trace of pride that this is such an eventful number of our paper, I must bid you au-revoir until next Saturday.

Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.

MY DEAR READERS,—I had such a delightful surprise one morning this week. When I walked into my office I thought at first I must have gate-crashed a florist's, by mistake, for my usually sedate "Den" was a perfect picture of lovely blooms, all most tastefully arranged on desk, mantelpiece, and bookcase.

I knew Gusty, our office-boy, couldn't have been responsible. (He'd have dived head-first into the wastepaper-basket at the very idea.) No. There was an obvious feminine touch about the way those flowers were arranged. Somehow they didn't in the least look out of place. In fact, the whole room seemed perfectly natural, and very, very attractive.

"Now who—?" I was beginning to ponder, when the door opened and in came Patricia, the very charming writer of our article pages.

There was a smile on Patricia's face; a merry twinkle in her eyes.

"So you've seen them?" she said.

"And—you like them?"

"I think they're lovely," I enthused. "But you mean you—"

"Guilty!" Patricia chuckled.

"At least, half-guilty. Miss Richards is the other half. We got them between us, just to celebrate the 500th number of THE SCHOOLGIRL. And here's a letter from us both, patting you on the back!"

Now, wasn't that a charming thought on the part of our two popular contributors? Naturally I hadn't forgotten we were celebrating our 500th number—why, I told you about it last week, didn't I?—but it hadn't occurred to me that Patricia and Miss Richards, two such dreadfully busy people, would also realise it. Their letter was full of the nicest things imaginable, and I'm going to treasure it always. Perhaps I'll even have another one