

STIRRING, DRAMATIC TIMES FOR  
CLIFF HOUSE SCHOOL:—

“WHEN CLARA CHAMPIONED THE CAPTAIN!”

# THE SCHOOLGIRL

No. 513. Vol. 20.  
Week Ending  
MAY 27th, 1939.

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

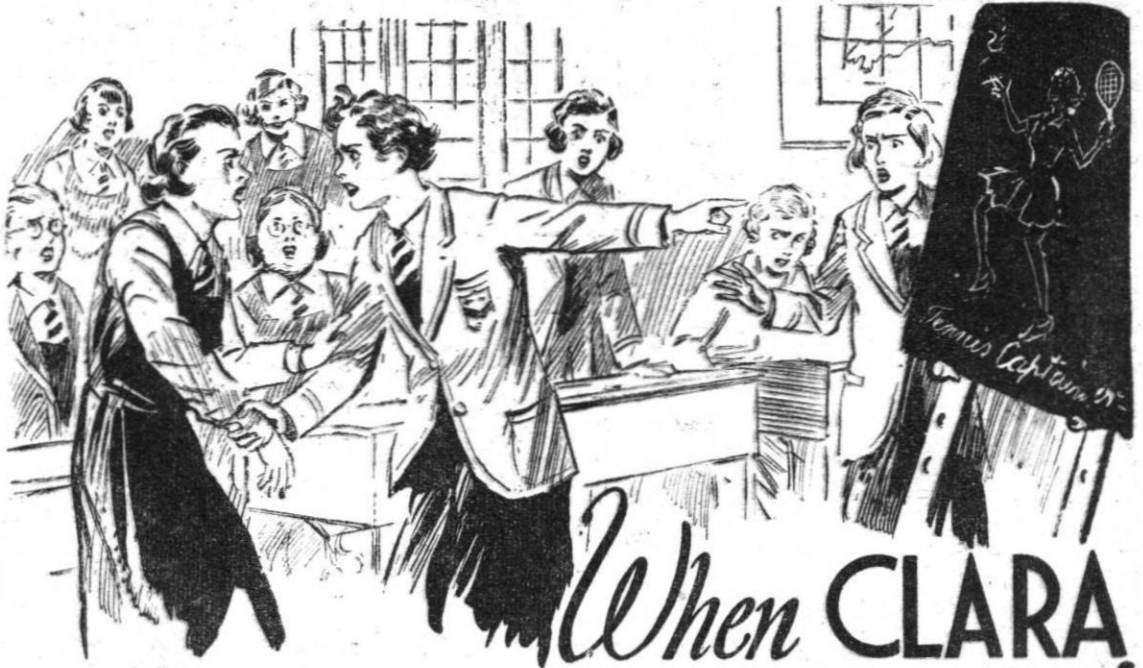
Incorporating  
“SCHOOLGIRLS’ OWN”



“—AND THAT’LL  
STOP YOUR SPYING,  
RONA FOX!”

An exciting moment from the  
grand story of Barbara Redfern  
& Co. inside.

Magnificent **LONG COMPLETE** story of Cliff House School, featuring the strong-willed Tomboy of the Fourth Form, and telling what happened—



# When CLARA CHAMPIONED the CAPTAIN!

Clara's Big Moment, But—!



"I SUS-SAY, you girls!"

The door of Study No. 4 in the Fourth Form corridor at Cliff House School crashed open with considerable force, and a plump, bespectacled girl, stuttering in excitement, hurled herself into that famous apartment.

"Kik-kik-kik—" stuttered Bessie Bunter, her eyes gleaming behind her thick spectacles—"kik-kik, you know—kik-kik—" she floundered hopelessly. "Listen, you girls! Kik-kik—"

Barbara Redfern, junior school captain, looked up from her task of fixing a new rubber grip to her tennis racket and stared blankly at her fat chum and studymate.

"What on earth's bitten you, Bess?" she demanded. "And who, or what, do you want us to kick?"

But Bessie, panting and blowing, obviously very much out of breath, and obviously most terrifically excited about something, just gasped and stuttered:

"Kik-kik-kik—"

Babs sighed. She turned to eye the other girl present—golden-haired Mabel Lynn, the third member of the famous Study No. 4 trio. Up to the moment of Bessie's whirlwind entrance and burst of stuttering, Mabs had been deeply engrossed in a book on amateur dramatics; but now, like Babs, her attention had switched to the fat duffer. Babs sighed again.

"It's come, Mabs," she said sadly. "Poor old Bess!"

Mabs chuckled, and winked.

"Perfectly dappy!" she said solemnly. "Even wants us to kick her! Well," she added resignedly, and rose, "I suppose we must humour her. Where shall I begin, Fattikins?" she inquired pleasantly.

But Bessie backed away, gulping and spluttering.

"L-look here, you kik-cats, don't you dare!" she gasped. "And dud-don't be sus-silly, you know! I've come to tut-tell you that kik—that kik—"

Babs and Mabs looked at each other, and then advanced ominously. Bessie made a terrific effort.

"That Kik-Clara has been chosen for the doubles championship with D-Dulcia!" she blurted triumphantly. "There! And I j-jolly well think—"

But Babs and Mabs weren't interested in what Bessie thought, for with one accord they gave a yell and leapt at their fat chum.

"Clara!" whooped Babs. "You—you mean that Dulcia has chosen her as her partner in the doubles—"

"That old Clara's going to represent the school with Dulcia in the South of England championships?" cried Mabs breathlessly.

"Of kik-course! Dulcia's just pinned the notice on the board, you know!"

Babs and Mabs stared at each other, their faces glowing. Oh, this was ripping! This was fine! Blunt old Tomboy Clara Trevlyn, their Fourth Form chum and junior captain of games, to partner Dulcia Fairbrother, the popular head girl of the school, in the big Southern championships!

Sensational news, indeed!

"My golly!" whooped Babs breathlessly, her blue eyes dancing. "What a score for the Fourth Form! What a score for old Clara!"

"And what will Rona Fox say?" burbled Mabs excitedly. "Everyone

thought she'd get the place when Christine had to drop out, specially as Rona's vice-captain of senior games and a Sixth-Former, too! My only aunt," she added, whistling, "this is going to make Rona see red!"

No doubt about that. It was common knowledge throughout Cliff House that Rona Fox, one of its most unpleasant prefects, had expected to be chosen for the doubles when Christine Wilmer's place had become vacant.

Christine of the Fourth, without question a wonderful tennis player—miraculously good for her age, in fact—had naturally been first choice when Cliff House had entered a doubles team for the Southern championships.

The next best in the school was undoubtedly the head girl, popular Dulcia Fairbrother. A fine pair, those two—a brilliant pair.

What a shock, then, when Christine at practice had taken a bad fall and damaged her right wrist! It was immediately evident that she wouldn't be fit in time for the championships, and so, after the first dismay following the accident, a new question had cropped up in everybody's mind—whom would Dulcia choose to partner her now?

At first glance the natural choice had seemed to be another senior girl—Rona Fox. Rona had been playing extremely well lately; but, then—as Babs and Mabs remembered excitedly now—so had Clara Trevlyn. Clara was at the peak of her form. Clara was steady. Clara was reliable, and in that respect Rona failed badly.

"That's it, you know—Clara's steadiness," breathed Babs shrewdly. "And old Dulcia's right to choose her. Let's go and congratulate her!"

And she dived towards the door, enthusiastically followed by Mabs and

Bessie. Excitedly they burst into Study No. 7.

"Clara!" whooped Babs. "Clara, congrats, you—you old marvel!"

Tomboy Clara Trevlyn was there, and Clara, her unruly hair more unruly than ever, her face aglow with happiness and excitement, was obviously just receiving congratulations from her studymates, gentle Marjorie Hazeldene and Janet Jordan. She whirled as her three chums burst in.

"You've heard?" She beamed and flushed. "Oh golly! Isn't it super? Dear old Dulcia!" she cried animatedly, for the captain was Clara's especial heroine at Cliff House; she had no more sincere admirer than the Tomboy. "It—it's topping of her to give me the chance!"

"No more than you deserve!" said Marjorie Hazeldene stoutly.

"Hear, hear!" applauded Janet Jordan.

Clara flushed and grinned.

"Thanks, Marjie!" she said gratefully. "But"—the sturdy Tomboy frowned a little—"there's Rona, you know. She expected to get the place all right. She'll be pretty sour; and when that particular prefect is sour—" She grimaced, and added in that blunt way of hers: "Well, she's pretty much of a cat!"

True enough, as every girl there knew.

"Oh, rats! And blow to Rona!" cried Babs smilingly. "You're the girl for the place, Clara! Rona's good, but no better than you. And she's unsporing, and that temper of hers—"

But there Babs broke off as she saw the sudden dismay on her chums' faces.

"Thank you, Barbara! Thank you, Clara!" said a cold, furious voice from the doorway. "I'm delighted to hear what you think of me—what all you nice kids think of me!"

Babs slowly turned, and Clara groaned.

"Oh, my giddy aunt!"

There, in the doorway, stood a tall prefect, dark-haired, green-eyed. And how those green eyes glittered now as she surveyed the group in Study No. 7!

"R-Rona!" gurgled Babs weakly.

Rona Fox, smiling her most unpleasant, tigerish smile, it was. And it was quite apparent that she had heard every word. She entered the study, and her glittering eyes roved over the dismayed chums.

"I came to complain about the noise you kids were kicking up," she said slowly, "and I arrive to hear you insulting me! I suppose," she added, with sudden viciousness, looking directly at Clara, "that you think you can behave just as you please—now that you've been put in the tennis doubles—eh?"

Tomboy Clara's eyes flashed indignantly.

"That's not fair, Rona!" she cried, flushing. "Perhaps we were making a bit of noise—but how were we to know that you were standing there listening to what we were saying?" she added with characteristic bluntness.

Rona's eyes flamed.

"Two hundred lines for cheek, Clara!" she snapped.

The chums gasped. Clara went a dull red and clenched her hands.

"That's rotten and unfair!" she cried furiously, her temper, always quickly roused by injustice, rising to boiling point. "No prefect would give two hundred lines for that! You know jolly well that old Dulcia—"

"Dulcia!"

The word almost hissed from between Rona's lips.

By

## HILDA RICHARDS

Illustrated by T. LAIDLER.

"Dulcia!" she cried furiously. "Oh yes," she sneered. "You would talk about Dulcia! Dulcia got you into the doubles, didn't she? Dear Dulcia likes you Fourth Form kids, doesn't she?" Her chest heaved. "A captain to be admired, eh?" she jeered. "A captain, a head girl, who jolly well breaks bounds! That's the captain Cliff House has, and if I had my way—"

"If you had your way, Rona—what?" asked a quiet voice from the doorway.

The girls whirled as if shot.

A girl had just entered, a perfectly built, athletic-looking girl. A girl whose pretty face was slightly flushed; whose eyes gazed full and contemptuously at Rona Fox. Rona's eyes dropped.

"Well?" asked Dulcia Fairbrother steadily.

Rona glared at her. Babs & Co. were standing tense, in every mind was one thought: What on earth had Rona meant about Dulcia breaking bounds? Dulcia? Why, it was absurd!

"I've nothing more to say," snapped Rona. "But I think you know what I'm talking about," she added, staring

Clara grunted.

"Well—you see—I was saying—"

"Perhaps it was my fault, Dulcia," interposed Babs quietly. "I was speaking about the championships, and—and Rona's temper, and Clara said something, too. Rona must have been listening, and—and—"

Dulcia's lips compressed. She understood. She knew Rona's unpleasant little ways.

"How many lines, Clara?"

"Two hundred, Dulcia!"

"What!" Dulcia's staggered look was swiftly replaced by a frown. "I will speak to Rona, Clara. In the meantime you can consider that two hundred cut in half. I'm afraid Rona was hasty. She probably didn't mean to make it as heavy as that!"

Clara glowed.

"Thanks, Dulcia," she said gratefully.

Babs & Co. looked at each other. Sporting Dulcia, that, trying to save Rona's face by pretending the unjust punishment had been a mistake. But wasn't that like Dulcia, fair and honest as the day!

And yet Babs wondered a little. She couldn't forget Rona's cryptic remark to Dulcia about being in Courtfield; her flat statement that the captain broke bounds. Dulcia had been a little worried about that. But to suppose that she was doing anything shady was absurd. Babs said:

**Dulcia Fairbrother, Cliff House's head girl, was the idol of everyone at the famous school. Clara Trevlyn just adored her. And when Dulcia fell under the shadow of rumour and disgrace; when it seemed that Cliff House's heroine was not the girl they all believed, it was Clara who stood by her; Clara who defended her from the attacks of a certain jealous enemy; Clara who even sacrificed her own ambitions in a big tennis tournament in order to try to save the girl she just knew was still true blue!**

at Dulcia. "I was in Courtfield yesterday afternoon, too!"

The pointed tone of her voice didn't escape Babs; neither did the little start Dulcia gave, the anxious look which crossed her pretty features.

"Perhaps," added Rona, her eyes narrowing, "perhaps there may be a new captain of the doubles team, after all!" Nodding significantly, she turned towards the door, paused to glare at Clara and snap: "I'll expect those lines by to-morrow morning!" and then stamped out.

There was a few moments' silence.

Clara was standing with clenched hands, looking almost apologetically at Dulcia. The head girl gave a sudden little laugh. Somehow it seemed a trifle strained.

"Well!" She made an attractive grimace. "I came along to congratulate you, Clara, and I find you in trouble. What were the lines for, eh?"

Clara flushed a little.

"Dulcia, that—that—" she gulped. "Didn't you hear what Rona said? What did she mean? She practically accused you of—"

"Clara, please!" Dulcia spoke quietly, but her tone plainly indicated that there was to be no argument. "Forget what Rona said. I—I"—she paused, and again Babs noted that fleeting, troubled look—"she—she's making a mistake. That's all. Now, what was the trouble?"

"We just came along ourselves to congratulate Clara, Dulcia. It's simply grand! Are you practising this afternoon?" she asked eagerly; for the afternoon was a half-holiday.

Dulcia's smile faded. She bit her lip.

"Matter of fact I wanted to speak about that, too, Clara," she said. "I—I shan't be free this afternoon, after all. Something's cropped up." Her charming smile broke through again. "Will you practise with Barbara, though?"

Clara looked a teeny bit disappointed. Dear old Babs would give her a game; but the Tomboy, overjoyed by the honour paid her, would have loved a game with the school captain herself. She nodded cheerily, however.

"Right-ho, Dulcia, I'll knock old Babs' head off!"

"Sez you!" retorted Babs, with a grin.

Dulcia nodded and smiled.

"Very well, then." She paused and looked at Clara. "No getting into scrapes, Clara," she warned smilingly. "I'm relying on you for the championships."

Clara flushed, but her eyes glowed. "I'll be as good as gold, Dulcia," she vowed sincerely.

"That's good enough."

And the captain left.

Clara beamed.

"She—she's a topper," she breathed.

"And to think that that cat, Rona, had the cheek to call her a rotten captain."

Babs looked at her quickly.  
"It's a bit funny, though," she said.  
"Oh, we all know old Dulcia's straight as a die, but she didn't give the lie to Rona, did she? And—and she looked a bit troubled, I thought."

Her chums looked at her curiously.  
"Bosh!" snorted Clara bluntly.  
"You know how spiteful Rona is. She'd say anything. Old Dulcia wouldn't even trouble to argue with her. And, Babs, if you're chump enough to think—"

she added rather heatedly.  
Babs held up crossed fingers.  
"Pax," she laughed. "I just thought it a bit odd, that's all. But let's forget it. Did I hear you say, Miss Trevlyn," she added, with mock politeness, "that you would knock my head off at tennis?"

Clara bowed.  
"You did, Miss Redfern," she said gravely. "Get your racket, and I'll show you! Coming, Marjie—Janet, and you, Mabs?"

They were. And ten minutes later—Babs and Clara having hurriedly changed into cooler garb—the five chums hurried down to Little Side, where good-natured Bessie promptly offered to give Clara a few tips!

Considering Bessie was about the poorest athlete in the school—a fact which Bessie could never see herself—Clara, somewhat naturally, did not avail herself of the offer.

On Little Side they found a court vacant, and Babs and Clara tossed for service. Quite a little crowd gathered immediately, and congratulations rather showered down upon Clara.

Christine Wilmer was there, too, one of the first to congratulate Clara. With her right arm in a sling, she mounted the tall ladder to umpire for the chums.

From the very first it was clear that Babs had little chance of taking many points off Clara! The athletic Tomboy had seldom played better.

She normally played a somewhat harder-hitting game than Babs, and to-day her drives simply sizzled over the net, whizzing down just inside the tram-lines, not giving the junior school captain an earthly chance.

It was true that Babs' remarkably fine backhand play—improved under Christine's tuition—took Clara by surprise at first. But Clara promptly altered her game and really skilfully concentrated upon Babs' forehand court and positional play.

Clara took the set at 6-3, and a ripple of applause went up from the little crowd of onlookers. Popular Miss Charmant, the Fourth's pretty young mistress, was there, too, and herself a fine player—applauded enthusiastically.

Flushed, sparkling-eyed, Clara grinned across the net at Babs.

"Thanks, Babs! Grand game!"  
"Super!" laughed Babs. "Phew! Hot work! You played wonderfully, Clara!"

"Never better!" nodded Christine Wilmer. "Well, anyone else for the slaughter?" she inquired, grinning.

Diana Royston-Clarke, who had been playing on the next court with Margot Lantham, offered at once. Diana, on her day, was showily brilliant, and now she took the court against Clara with her usual confidence.

But Clara wasn't to be touched to-day. Her fierce steadiness was much too good for Diana, and the set went in her favour at 6-2.

After that Clara and Babs played together in a doubles against Diana and Rosa Rodworth, and won by a similar margin.

A rest was indicated then, followed by drinks at the tuckshop. Clara was in high feather. Without the least trace of conceit, she knew she had played well; she knew that Dulcia would hear of it; knew Dulcia would be pleased—and that fact alone pleased Clara.

Pity that Dulcia couldn't have practised that afternoon; but, of course, something pretty important must have taken the head girl out of school.

In a very cheery mood, the chums left the tuckshop and, with tea-time not far off, wended their way towards the schoolhouse.

"I've got to look into the Common-room," said Clara suddenly. "As I'm playing with Dulcia in the Championships on Saturday, I shan't be able to turn out for that friendly match against the Friardale village girls."

"Who are you putting in your place?" asked Babs.

"Janet," said Clara, nodding thoughtfully. "You'll captain, of course."

So they turned off to the Common-room, on the notice-board of which Clara had previously posted up the team list. As they approached the slightly open door of that apartment, Babs blinked.

"Something up," she commented. "That's dear little Lydia's voice!"

Lydia Crossendale's voice it most certainly was—and every word clearly reached the chums.

"Can you beat it, girls? Our much respected captain, Dulcia Fairbrother, out of bounds—in a dance hall!"

"Oh, you're imagining things, Lydia!" came the voice of Gwen Cook. "Dulcia's not like that!"

Babs, Mabs, Clara, Janet, and Marjorie—they had left Bessie in the tuckshop—stared blankly at each other. Clara flushed angrily.

"What on earth—" she muttered.

"It's true!" came Lydia's voice. "Freda and Frances were with me. We all saw her!"

"That's right!" said Freda Ferriers maliciously. "Dulcia had cigarettes, and she was with that Fifth Former from Whitechester School and a gang of older girls!"

"Going the pace properly," added Frances Frost. "And that's our captain! That's the girl who should have been practising with Clara Trevlyn this afternoon! Some surprise, eh?"

Outside the room, Clara's flush had deepened to the dull crimson of fury. Babs' hand went out to restrain her too late. Fiercely, furiously, the Tomboy hurled open the door and burst in.

"You—you rotten sneaking fibber, Lydia!" she cried. "You'll jolly well take all that back!"

And, her eyes gleaming, body taut with anger, she strode across the floor straight at Lydia Crossendale!

### Doubts and Rumours!



SOMETHING of sensation then in the Common-room!

The little crowd of girls there whirled. Lydia Crossendale, the focus point of attention up to that moment, gave back a little. But she glared at the Tomboy's red, angry face.

"Why should I take it back?" she challenged.

"Because it's a rotten fib!" stormed Clara. "Because you ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourself, making up rotten stories like that about Dulcia! And if you don't—"

"But it's jolly well true!" shrilled Lydia indignantly. "We were passing the dance hall when Dulcia came out of it with that Whitechester girl, Shirley Mathels. Dulcia was just opening a cigarette-case, and—"

"And they got in a whacking great car with a gang of noisy older girls!" added Frances. She glared at Clara. "So put that in your pipe and smoke it!" she sneered.

Clara quivered. Clara, it must be admitted, was at the moment being unreasonable; but the Tomboy had a blind faith in Dulcia. Whatever the facts, she could not believe wrong of her.

"Look here—" she started thickly, but Babs caught at her arm.

Clear-thinking Babs was never unreasonable, and perhaps she was remembering what Rona Fox had said. Apart from that, it was hardly likely that Lydia & Co.—spiteful though they were—would dare to make up a story like that. Incredible that Dulcia was "going the pace," and yet—

"Here, let's talk this over!" said Pabs firmly. "Pretty mean of Lydia to spread the yarn about, even if there was some truth in it—"

"Which there well might be!" said Rosa Rodworth. She sneered a little. "Dear Dulcia may not be so goody-goody, after all!"

Clara flared on her.

"And you can shut up!" she stormed, and whirled again on Lydia. "Well?" she demanded grimly. "No, leave me alone, Babs!" For Babs, convinced now that Lydia & Co. believed what they said, had jumped anxiously forward. "Well, Lydia?" she repeated. "Oh, you would, would you?"

Lydia, retreating, had fetched up against a desk on which lay a duster. Almost instinctive the snob's action then as she whipped it up and hurled it.

Clara ducked. On whirled the duster and wrapped itself round Rosa Rodworth's face. Rosa flared instantly, grabbing the duster and hurling it back.

Smack it went into the back of Clara's head. She turned furiously.

"Why, you—"

And sneaking Freda Ferriers took that opportunity to hurl a text-book at the Tomboy. Her aim was wild, and a howl of pain went up from Lorna Millerchip, and she, grabbing up the book, let fly in return.

That started it.

In a moment books were flying everywhere. Lydia & Co., glad of the respite from Clara's wrath, concentrated upon the Tomboy herself. Many of the others, ripe for a rag at any time, just hurled things cheerfully and indiscriminately in all directions. The row grew and grew, until presently a senior girl glared in.

It was Rona Fox! And how the perfect's eyes flashed when she saw that Clara was in the thick of the turmoil.

"What the dickens!" she cried. "Clara, stop behaving like a hooligan! Do you hear me, you girls?"

At first they didn't; and then, one by one they saw the prefect. The last book flopped to the floor. Panting, red-faced, the Fourth Formers stared at Rona in dismay.

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Mabs.

"We're for it!" murmured Janet. Rona strode into the room. She walked right up to Clara, who, flushed, stood with a book in her hand, one she had just wrested from the grasp of Freda Ferriers. Rona's unpleasant smile appeared.

"Ah, it seems that you're the centre of all this, Clara!" she snapped. "Behaving like a young hooligan again, eh?"

Clara's hands clenched. "Thanks!" she said bitterly. "You would pick on me!"

And then Lydia broke in. Lydia was smarting with a sense of injustice. Glaring spitefully at the Tomboy, she shrilled indignantly:

"It was Clara, Rona! I was just talking to the girls here, when she burst in and went for me!"

Clara looked at her scornfully. "You know jolly well why I went for you," she said savagely. "Because you were telling a string of rotten fibs about Dulcia—"

"Dulcia?" Rona Fox was on the alert instantly. "What's this about Dulcia, Lydia?" she demanded keenly. "Oh, nothing, Rona!" interposed Babs hastily. "Lydia thought she saw—"

"No think about it," said Lydia. The snob meant to tell her story, and meant Clara to get into trouble because of it. "We—that is, Freda, Frances, and I—saw Dulcia coming out of a dance hall in Courtfield this afternoon with Shirley Mathels of Whitechester."

"Fibber!" stormed Clara.

"Silence!" cried Rona. The prefect's eyes were gleaming. Dulcia with Shirley Mathels of Whitechester's Fifth Form—a girl renowned for her wild ways, a girl who had already been on the verge of expulsion three times! Dulcia coming out of the forbidden dance hall!

"Go on, Lydia!" she commanded.

"And she had an open cigarette-case in her hand," continued Lydia with relish, her triumphant gaze on the fuming Tomboy. "Just about to light up, I imagine. And because I was casually mentioning the fact to a few friends, Clara came in and went for me. That started the row."

"Oh-ho, I see!" Rona nodded slowly. She turned to Clara. "So you've given yourself powers to dictate what a girl should, or should not, say, have you?" she asked bitingly.

Clara glared at her. "Do you mean you believe that rotten story?" she choked.

Rona's smile grew more tigerish than ever.

"What I believe has nothing to do with it," she answered smoothly. "The fact remains that three girls saw something, and are ready to stick by their word. And you, Clara—who were not even present at the scene—think you can behave like a hooligan because you don't believe them!"

She paused, and Babs watched her face uneasily. Rona obviously had all the cards on her side, thanks to Clara's stubborn loyalty to Dulcia.

"You will take two hundred lines, Clara," continued Rona, smiling. "And this time"—her eyes flashed—"you will do the whole two hundred straight away in your study! Go on! Get along! You other kids will take twenty-five lines each!"

There were plenty of sighs of relief at that. Twenty-five lines! Not too bad, after all. The Fourth Formers as a whole felt they had been let off lightly, and there were smiles.

But Clara—Clara hesitated, red roses of rebellion mounting once again to her cheeks. Then Marjorie Hazeldene's pleading whisper: "Please, Clara!" and Babs' touch on her arm decided her. With one glare at Rona and her chin in the air, she stamped out.

Along the corridor Clara went, her face still flushed. She knew she had been an impetuous, hot-headed lump, but to remain quiet under that lying story about Dulcia, would have been unthinkable.

She tramped gloomily to Study No. 7, entered, and sat heavily in the armchair. With angry eyes she stared straight before her.

As she sat, she calmed down, and then a tiny twinge of uneasiness spread over her. That story of Lydia & Co.'s—could there—could there possibly be a grain of truth in it?

"Oh, bosh!" cried Clara impatiently. And yet—not like Lydia, Freda, and Frances to stick to an untrue story if it meant trouble for them.

Well then, suppose Lydia & Co. had seen something? That didn't prove Dulcia was doing anything rotten. Old Dulcia could explain anything away easily.

Clara felt a little better then—until she remembered Rona.

"That cat! Out to make trouble for her, solely because she had got into the tennis team, and Rona hadn't! And Rona was out to make trouble for Dulcia, too.

"But she's not going to if I can help it," muttered the Tomboy fiercely. "Whatever Dulcia's doing must be all right." She frowned, and then sighed. "Suppose I must start those lines."

She took paper and pen and got down to it, working hard. She was more than half-way through her task when a quick, firm step sounded in the corridor. The door opened.

Clara looked up. "Dulcia!" she cried delightedly.

The captain it was, looking most charming in white shorts and blouse. A new tennis racket swung in her hand. She smiled.

"Just got back, Clara," she said. "I—I was held up a bit, but I changed right away, and—"

"Anything important, Dulcia?"

Clara just couldn't prevent that question slipping out. Suddenly, most desperately, she wanted Dulcia to explain about her activities that afternoon; wanted to hear the captain explain away the story Lydia had told.

Dulcia looked at her rather sharply.

"Well, fairly," she said. "Why, Clara?"

Clara flushed. "Dash it, she told herself, what right had she to question Dulcia's movements?"

"Oh, nothing!" she said a little awkwardly. She looked at Dulcia's racket, and her eyes glimmered. "Are you going to practise?" she asked eagerly.

Dulcia smiled, but still there was a slightly wondering look in her eyes as she faced the Tomboy.

"That's why I changed, you know," she teased. "Come on, kid; let's get a quick knock in before the light goes!"

Clara leapt up. "Rather! I'll—!" And then she paused, glancing down at the sheets of paper. Her lines!

Dulcia, following her gaze, started a little.

"Lines, Clara?" A tiny frown creased her forehead. "What happened?"

"Well—" Clara mumbled. Quite obviously she couldn't tell the whole story. "I—I— There was a bit of a rag in the Common-room," she said, "and Rona caught us. She lined me. She said I'd got to do them before I left the study."

There was a hint of reproach in Dulcia's gaze.

"Clara, you know I warned you about getting into scrapes," she reminded the Tomboy gently. "You must really be careful, you know, kid."

Clara went crimson. "You see, I'm depending on you," went on Dulcia quietly. "I—I wish I could have been here this afternoon; but—but it was impossible. I had hoped to get a knock in now, though."

Clara squirmed. Oh, dash it, this was awful! Dear old Dulcia, was being a sport, but it was certainly ironic that she was mildly reproaching Clara for earning a punishment that had its origin in the Tomboy's championing of her. She gulped.



"I'M going to stop Rona's little game against Dulcia!" Clara cried, and sprang towards the door. "Clara—come back—your lines!" Babs protested. But the Tomboy, whipping out the key, dived for the passage, desperate enough to lock her chums in the study to prevent them thwarting her.

"I—I'm sorry, Dulcia," she mumbled. Then her head jerked up. "Oh, dash it!" she cried. "Let the lines go to pot. I can do them afterwards, and it's jolly important that we practise—"

"Clara!" Dulcia's tone was quite sharp. "Clara, no! I can't allow that," she reproved. "That would be foolish. We'll just have to let the knock go. But, Clara, kid, do please try to be more careful."

The Tomboy's crimson grew deeper. With a pleasant nod the captain passed through the doorway. As she emerged into the corridor Mary Buller of the Sixth came along.

"Oh, Dulcia!" she cried. "You're wanted on the phone in the prefects' room. Shirley's voice. Said her name was Shirley."

"Shirley?" Dulcia's lips compressed. "Thanks, Mary," she said briefly, and hurried away.

But inside Study No. 7 Clara had heard.

Clara was standing by the table staring blankly towards the open door. Shirley? A Shirley wanted to speak to Dulcia?

She felt a little dazed.

For what other Shirley could that be except Shirley Mathels, of Whitechester, the girl with whom, according to Lydia & Co., Dulcia had spent the afternoon in a forbidden dance hall?

### The Tomboy's Defiance!



"WELL, you must admit it's jolly queer, Clara."

Clara Trevlyn did nothing of the kind. She shook her head stubbornly.

"Oh, rot, Babs!" she retorted. "I—I admit that Dulcia must have been with Shirley Mathels, but that doesn't prove Dulcia's up to anything shady—"

"Steady, old thing," said Babs hastily. "I'm not saying it does. I only said it's a bit queer."

Clara granted. Despite her stout defence of the school captain there was a troubled light in her grey eyes as she regarded Babs and the other girls.

For Clara was now in Study No. 4, whither she had repaired after overhearing that disturbing little conversation between Dulcia and Mary Buller. Babs, Mabs, Bessie, Janet, and Marjorie had also heard what Mary said, and it had set them all wondering mightily.

There was a rather uncomfortable silence now, broken by Clara striding silently to the window and saying rather irritably:

"I believe in Dulcia. And if you don't, then you're a lot of—of silly chumps, that's all."

Babs grinned.

"Well, O.K., Clara," she said soothingly. "Let it go at that for the time being. But don't forget," she added warningly, "that Rona will be on the look-out for any more—more funny moves of Dulcia. She'll—"

"Babs!" exclaimed Clara. She had suddenly stiffened. "Quick!"

The chums stared at her. The Tomboy was staring intently out of the window, and even as they rose to join her, she whirled, breathing heavily.

"That cat, Rona!" she cried, "Look!"

Babs & Co. stared through the window. Down in the quadrangle Dulcia Fairbrother was just passing out through the school gates, and another figure was stealthily moving along by the school wall.

"Rona!" Babs exclaimed.

"Yes," said Clara savagely. "Pretty obvious, isn't it? Dulcia's probably going out to—to—she hesitated—"to meet Shirley perhaps, and Rona's snooping after her—trying to get something on her!"

Mabs whistled shrilly.

Not much doubt that Clara was right, and each one of them had the uncomfortable feeling that Rona, if she trailed Dulcia, might learn something to her advantage. Even Clara, stubbornly loyal though she was to the captain, did not minimise the danger in her own mind.

"Right!" she declared grimly. "That settles it. I'm going to take a hand!"

And she whirled towards the door. "But, Clara, you chump," cried Babs, "have you finished Rona's lines?"

Clara's face took on its most stubborn set. She opened the door before answering.

"No," she retorted then. "But dash the lines—blow the lines. I'm not going to risk old Dulcia getting it in the neck. And you needn't think that you're going to stop me, because—"

With a sudden movement she whipped out the key from the inside of the lock. Before one of her chums could move she leapt out into the passage, slammed the door, inserted the key—and turned it.

Then she went streaking away.

Her chums could soon get themselves released; but by that time she would be well away from the school, on the track of Rona.

"Rona!" gritted Clara furiously, as she raced to the cloak-room for her hat and coat. "Spying, sneaking cat! Well, I'll show her!"

Her hat and coat donned, she sped to the cycle shed. Dulcia and Rona had a start; a bicycle would be useful.

Clara knew well enough that she would hit trouble—hard—if anyone in authority discovered that she had left her study without finishing the lines, but in that moment the Tomboy didn't care a jot. Her concern was all for Dulcia.

She pedalled briskly alongside Fairdale Wood until, rounding a corner, she applied her brakes swiftly. There, some sixty yards ahead, moving stealthily along in the shade of the overhanging trees, was Rona. Farther ahead, just turning into the woods, was Dulcia.

Clara's face darkened angrily. How she loathed girls who sneaked and spied! Pausing for a moment, she grew thoughtful. Dulcia was cutting into the woods, obviously to an arranged meeting-place. Suppose she, Clara, rode into the woods on the footpath just beside her? Then she would be able to get in front of Rona and somehow prevent her spying on Dulcia.

Instantly she acted on that idea, turning her cycle on to the footpath. It was narrow, but the surface was smooth, and she made good time. She was passing through a neck of the woods at this point, and as the trees suddenly thinned, she saw ahead the briskly striding form of Dulcia.

The captain was just leaving the woods, approaching a stream.

Clara smiled triumphantly. She was in front of Rona! But—how to scotch that spiteful prefect?

She slipped off her bicycle, taking care not to be seen by Dulcia. The captain was at that moment crossing the plank bridge over the stream.

Clara chortled.

"My hat—that's it," she gleed. "One in the eye for Rona!"

Hastily propping her cycle up behind a clump of bushes, she sped forward.

Dulcia was over the bridge now, passing along the fringe of the woods.

A hasty glance behind her assured Clara that Rona was not yet in sight. Over the plank bridge she hastened, and then got energetically busy. There were two planks end to end, supported by a pile in midstream. On the far side she grasped the end of the nearer plank and heaved. It shifted slightly. Clara braced her sturdy form and tugged harder.

The end, merely resting on the pile, abruptly shifted up.

"Got it," gurgled Clara. She tugged again. The far end of the plank fell into the water. Now she backed, still holding on, until at last she was able, panting, to dump the plank down on her side of the stream. "And now," she breathed triumphantly, "I should like to know how dear little spying Rona intends to get more than half-way across!"

Chortling, she sped away in the direction Dulcia had taken. A sudden yell made her turn her head, to see Rona breaking through the trees, obviously having seen her—but Clara did not stop.

"Shout away, little one!" she grinned breathlessly. "Spying's not on the menu to-day."

Out of sight of the stream, Clara turned into the woods again. She intended to remain there until Rona got sick of waiting and sheered off. For there was no way of crossing the stream now, save by a lengthy walk to the next bridge.

Aglow with triumph, immensely pleased that she had saved Dulcia from Rona's attentions, Clara plomped down rather breathlessly on a rotting tree-trunk. But suddenly she sat up, with a start. Behind her were thick bushes, and as voices came to her ears, it was obvious that two people were walking along behind them. Clara sat very still as she recognised one of those voices as Dulcia's.

"—five shillings each," the captain was saying in rather dismayed tones. "That's rather steep for dance tickets, isn't it?"

"I know," came an answering sulky voice. "But it's a select dance, you know."

"Maybe," said the captain, "but I'm pretty broke at the time, as you know, and ten shillings—"

Her voice faded away as the two passed on.

Clara held her breath. She felt rather sick suddenly. Ten shillings—dance tickets! Did—did that mean—Oh, what else could it mean except that Dulcia was contemplating going to a dance! To a dance with—with—

Clara leapt up. She felt she must make certain. She peered over the bushes—and her heart sank.

There, striding off alongside the woods, making away from the stream, was Dulcia Fairbrother, deep in conversation with—

"Shirley Mathels," muttered Clara miserably. "Oh, my hat—"

Fiercely she clenched her hands. Here was proof positive that the captain and Shirley were friends, and surely proof that they intended going to a dance together?

Moodily Clara stared before her. Oh, this was rotten, rotten! To think, to think—and then she shook herself furiously.

"My hat," she gritted angrily. "Call yourself a sport, Clara Trevlyn. Just—just because Dulcia's up to something you don't quite understand, you jolly well go and condemn her, just like any Lydia Crossendale would!"

Dulcia was true-blue—and that was

that! Now, come on, Clara Trevlyn, pull yourself together. Don't think about it! Think about the championships, the ripping game you're going to put up with Dulcia next Saturday—

Clara came to herself with a start. She must get back—or she might find herself getting into such trouble as would prevent her playing at all.

Only fifteen minutes before gates were closed!

"I'll have to cycle fast!" decided Clara, and sped. She came in sight of the stream, and hesitated a second. But of Rona Fox there was no sign. "Good!" she grinned. "Poor little Rona!"

It was the work of a minute to slide the plank in place; another minute to reach her bike. But then she got a shock. Both her tyres were perfectly flat!

Startled, dismayed, Clara peered at her front tyre. Slowly, the dismay on her features changed to fury.

"Rona—Rona!" she stuttered. "Why, the rotten—"

Both the valves from her tyres were missing! And there could be no doubt who had removed them. Rona! Rona must have noticed her cycle; and this was her way of taking revenge for being outwitted.

"Mean cat!" fumed Clara. "Wants me to miss gates!" She seized her handlebars determinedly. "But I'll jolly well beat her!"

It was hopeless attempting to cycle. Although the footpath was smooth for pumped-up tyres, it wasn't for flat; and anyway, Clara didn't want to ruin the rims of the wheels. She pushed the cycle, and pushed as fast as she could.

But when she arrived, panting and weary, at Cliff House, Piper had closed the gates three minutes before. Clara pulled on the bell, her heart sinking with dismay.

Out came Piper. He unlocked the gates.

"Which as how you're late, Miss Trevlyn," he grumbled. "And Miss Fox says as how you're to report to Miss Bullivant. Miss Bullivant's rare angry, she is!" he added, with a sort of gloomy relish.

Clara groaned. This just about put the hat on it. Grim, and rather apprehensive, too, she hurried into the school.

The interview with Miss Bullivant was not pleasant. She looked in her most formidable mood—and she was. The first thing she did was to ask for Rona's lines, showing that the prefect had made a report.

Clara had to confess she had not quite finished them.

"I see, Clara Trevlyn!" Miss Bullivant's mouth was a straight thin line. "Also you were late for gates. Now I warn you," her voice began to rasp, "you are going too far. I will not tolerate this behaviour. I understand that you are playing in some championship next Saturday?"

"Y-yes, Miss Bullivant!" And Clara's face went white with apprehension.

"Then understand this, Clara," snapped the mathematics mistress. "One more serious complaint—one more example of your lawless behaviour—and I shall detain you on Saturday! You will take another two hundred lines for your present escapade, and remember, my girl—I have given you a serious warning. You may go!"

Clara went—feeling rather weak. She knew the Bull had made no idle threat. If she got into more trouble—there'd be no tennis championship for her.

## More Trouble!



CLARA TREVLYN was playing tennis as never before in her life!

Her drives, forehand and backhand, were simply sizzling over the net. Her service was devastating; her lobs were perfect, and her smashes had not once been returned.

There was Dulcia partnering her, beaming happily, giving little cries of admiration at the Tomboy's brilliance. As a pair, they weren't to be touched. Their opponents were helpless.

The first set they had taken at 6-0, the second at 6-1, and now it was 5-0 love in their favour in the third and final set—and Clara's service.

She served. The ball flashed. The girl receiving just couldn't get to it. 15-love. Now from the left-hand court. Another "ace"! 30-love. Then a screw service which most surprisingly broke at least two feet. Untouchable! 40-love! Only one point for game, set, and match!

"Go it, Clara!" breathed Dulcia. "You're wonderful!"

How the Tomboy flushed. How she swelled with pride. The cheers from the mass of spectators died. There was a tense hush. Clara took her stance, swung up her racket, and then—

A figure flashed on to the court. A cry went up. Rona Fox it was! Rona with furious, jealous features. She leapt at the very moment Clara made to serve. Fiercely she caught the Tomboy's arm.

"Now, you cat!" she panted. "Steal my place, would you!"

"Here, let go!" cried Clara. "Let go!"

But the prefect, her temper gone, savagely shook Clara. And to the Tomboy's horror, Dulcia suddenly raced over and caught her other shoulder.

"Clara!" she cried, and joined Rona in shaking her. "Clara!"

Fiercely the Tomboy struggled, struggled so desperately that abruptly her eyes opened, she sat up, and amidst the disarranged sheets of her bed in the Fourth Form dormitory, stared blankly into the smiling features of Dulcia Fairbrother.

"What—what—" stuttered the Tomboy blankly.

She blinked about her; saw the rows of girls asleep, the early morning sun streaming through the windows, and finally stared up at the captain, who, looking most charming in white tennis kit, held a racket in one hand. Slowly Clara grinned.

"My hat!" she breathed. "Oh, Dulcia, I was having the most amazing dream!"

Dulcia smiled. "So I should imagine," she chuckled. "You were screwing up your face and throwing your arms about in a most alarming fashion. If dreams affect you like that," she added, "I advise no more dreaming, kid!"

Clara sheepishly ran her hand through her tousled hair.

"I dreamt I was playing in the championship," she chuckled, "and that we were simply whopping up the opposition—"

Dulcia firmly jerked back the sheets. "So we shall, kid," she smiled. "always providing we get in enough practice. I thought we could get in half an hour before rising bell. You're game?"

Clara sat up with a jerk. Her eyes sparkled. "Game?" she breathed. "Rather!

Just two jiffies, Dulcia, and I'll be washed and dressed. Game? I should jolly well think I am!"

And out she bounced, leapt to the wash-basins, and got busy.

For a second the scandal hovering round the captain's name flashed into Clara's mind. Mentally she laughed scornfully. Anything shady about this bright-eyed, super girl? Bosh, rats, and rot!

A girl a few beds away stirred sleepily, and then sat up. She regarded Dulcia and Clara in surprise.

"Hallo!" said Babs. "What's up?"

Clara laughed and towelled herself vigorously.

"Early practice with Dulcia, you old slacker!" she gleed. "Jealous?"

Babs smiled. But almost immediately that smile vanished, and her brow creased. She looked at Dulcia uncomfortably, and then turned to Clara.

"Clara, I say—" She paused, flushing a little. "I—I thought you had something else to do—something for the Bull and Rona?"

Clara started and stood stockstill. Her lines! The hundred for Rona and the two hundred for the Bull! For the moment they had entirely slipped her memory; but obviously they must be done, and to do them meant a hard grind right up to breakfast. No practice!

"Oh, my only aunt!" she breathed. Dulcia stared hard at the crimson Tomboy.

"You mean lines?" she demanded. "You haven't done Rona's lines yet—and you've not finished the Bull's?"

Clara felt like sinking through the floor.

"I—you see," she stuttered miserably. "I was working on Rona's lines, and—and I had to go out. So I didn't finish them, and—and the Bull doubled them. That—that was late last night," she finished breathlessly.

Dulcia rose. Her pleasant face showed annoyance.

"Now, look here, kid," she said, just a little shortly. "I thought you promised to toe the line—not get into any more scrapes?"

Clara was brick red. What on earth could she say? What excuse could she put forward, without involving Dulcia herself? None!

"I—I'm sorry, Dulcia," she stuttered lamely. "I didn't know you'd want me to practise early like this."

Dulcia shrugged and allowed her sunny smile to break through.

"Oh, well, perhaps I should have warned you!" she admitted. "But, Clara, please do remember I'm relying on you, kid. We both need practice," she added warningly, "and if you go on like this—where shall we be?"

Clara hung her head.

"Well, O.K.!" Dulcia said, rather more gently. "Just try to be more careful, that's all. Now"—she turned to Babs, who had been watching and listening anxiously—"how about giving me a knock, Barbara? I've been watching you lately, and you seem right on form."

Babs, dreadfully sorry though she was for Clara, brightened.

"Me, Dulcia?" she cried eagerly.

"Oh, rather! I'd love to!"

And out she leapt. Clara tried to smile. She didn't begrudge old Babs the knock up with Dulcia, but, oh, how she wished it was herself!

"Well"—she grimaced a little—"I'd better go down to the study and get on with it." She looked at the captain.

"Aw-awfully sorry, Dulcia!" "That's all right, kid," was the captain's quiet reply. "I think I know

how you feel. But do try, won't you—for me?"

"Rather!" breathed Clara fervently. She hurried out, feeling a little better now. "For me," old Dulcia had said. Topping to hear that! But—Clara gave another little grimace—after all, her present punishments had been earned because she had been trying to do things for Dulcia—to help protect Dulcia.

As she entered Study No. 7 and got out pen and impot paper her mind dwelt on the conversation she had overheard the previous night between the captain and Shirley Mathels. Those dance tickets! Surely Dulcia wasn't really going to a dance with Shirley—breaking Cliff House rules? No, no! That was rot! Obviously there was some other explanation.

Firmly telling herself that, Clara got down to her lines. Her pen flew, and also the time. It seemed only a few minutes had elapsed when there was a light step in the corridor, and Babs' healthy, flushed face peeped in.

"How goes it?" she asked sympathetically.

"Nearly finished!" Clara looked up. "Last two lines. Good practice?"

"Topping!" enthused Babs. She paused. "Clara," she added, a trifle hesitantly, "I'm awfully sorry about blurring out about your lines, but for your own sake, old chump, I had to do it."

Clara nodded understandingly. "I know, and thanks, Babs," she said gratefully. "You were dead right—as you always are, blow you!" she added, grinning. "But clear the way! I'm off to bung in these lines. Breakfast-bell will be going any minute!"

And, with a cheerful grin at Babs, she rushed off.

She took her lines to Rona's study, left them on the prefect's desk, as she was not there, and then hurried down to breakfast.

At assembly immediately afterwards there was cheering news for the Tomboy. Miss Primrose, the headmistress, in giving out the orders for the day, announced that owing to the sudden indisposition of Miss Charmant the Fourth Form that morning would be in the charge of Dulcia Fairbrother.

Nothing could have suited Clara better. Dulcia taking the Fourth! Cheers!

But when the whole class had been assembled several minutes without a sign of Clara's heroine, the Tomboy, looking towards the door, began to wonder. Then she noticed that Lydia Crossendale seemed to be vastly amused about something. She was giggling and whispering with Frances Frost and Freda Ferriers, two girls as mean-minded and as spiteful as herself.

And all at once Freda glanced at the blackboard.

Clara saw that glance. Her eyes glinted. For a second she wondered, and then abruptly leapt to her feet and crossed to the blackboard. The facing side was bare, but Clara lifted it off its pegs and started to turn it.

Up leapt Lydia instantly. "Here, what are you up to, Clara Trevlyn?" she burst out. "Why are you fooling about with the blackboard?"

Clara, her face set, did not answer. Deliberately she turned the blackboard round and gazed at the other side. And then—

"Lydia—" she choked furiously. A little gasp went up from the Form; a few titters.

The other side of the blackboard was not bare. Someone—and it was not hard to guess who—had been busy with

the chalk. The result was quite a clever caricature, but not a pleasant one.

It depicted a girl with longish light hair, dressed in tennis kit, dancing a wild fandango. In one hand she waved an exaggeratedly large cigarette; in the other a tennis racket. Underneath in bold script was scrawled:

Tennis Captain, or—

There wasn't the slightest doubt whom the caricature meant to portray.

"My hat!" sniggered Beatrice Beverley. "Dulcia! Jolly like her, too!"

"Lydia," exclaimed Babs indignantly, "you did that! You knew Dulcia would see it—"

"So what?" sneered Lydia, a little uneasily, annoyed that Frances and Freda had given the game away. "Dulcia's up to something shady—"

"Lydia!" The Snob of the Fourth broke off as that one choked word left Clara's lips. And there was a note in her voice that stilled the Form; a note that made the snob lick her lips apprehensively.

Without another word, Clara leapt. Hands quivering with fury, she grasped Lydia's shoulders and dragged the struggling, yelling snob out in front of the class, straight towards the blackboard.

"Let her go!" shrieked Frances; and Freda's voice backed her up. But it was noticeable that neither of them attempted to render Lydia active assistance.

"Shut up, you two!" rapped Leila Carroll. "Guess Lydia asked for trouble—and sure looks," she whooped suddenly, "as if she's getting it!"

Lydia was! With amazing strength Clara had dragged her, kicking, to the blackboard, and was now rubbing out that insult to Dulcia with the back of Lydia's own head!

Lydia howled; Lydia struggled, but it availed her nothing. The sturdy Tomboy continued scrubbing, until the caricature was a mere blur.

Then, and only then, did she release Lydia—at the very moment the door opened.

"Clara—Lydia!" thundered a quivering voice "Upon my word! And what, pray, does this horseplay mean?"

A hiss, a gasp, and the Fourth were as still as mice. As Lydia, still howling, staggered back, Clara stood still, dismay flooding her.

Miss Primrose stood in the doorway, and behind the headmistress, Rona Fox.

"Clara—answer me!" Miss Primrose stepped sharply in.

Clara groaned, her temper dying under the threat of a new crisis. It was Babs who leapt to the rescue; quick-thinking Babs, who thought only of the Tomboy in that moment.

"Miss Primrose, please," she said desperately. "It was nothing, and—really my fault."

"Indeed, Barbara?" Miss Primrose stared at her.

"Yes. You see," went on Babs hurriedly, while the Fourth and Clara stared, "Lydia had done a drawing on the board, and—in a way it was a hit at Clara. Well, Clara was annoyed; but—but if I had kept order it wouldn't have happened."

"Here, wait a minute, Babs!" cried Clara. "You can't—"

"That was the real trouble, Miss Primrose," said Babs, unheeding her chum. "And Lydia hasn't any reason to grouse—have you, Lydia?" she added, facing the chalky snob grimly.

Lydia, furious though she was, realised that she would do well to let matters rest as Babs said. Certainly Miss Primrose wouldn't approve of her

respected head girl being caricatured. She said nothing.

Miss Primrose looked keenly at Barbara, and then Clara and Lydia. She understood her girls, and was wise in her dealings with them.

"Very well, Barbara," she said quietly, "in that case Clara and Lydia will take fifty lines each—incidentally, I have not been hearing good reports of you lately, Clara," she added meaningfully. "Be warned. And, Barbara, since you are partly to blame, you will also do fifty lines."

"But, Miss Primrose," protested Clara, "Babs shouldn't be punished because—"

"Please, Clara," pleaded Babs, and the Tomboy, after a hesitant look at her, said no more. Good old Babs, though. What a topper she was!

Miss Primrose looked at the mistress' desk.

"The reason I came, girls," she said frowning, "is because Rona informed me that no one was in charge of you. Where is Dulcia?"

"Why, I—I don't know," said Babs. "Miss Primrose!" Rona spoke from the doorway. "She's coming up the passage now."

Quick footsteps were heard, and then Dulcia, panting and flushed, a strained, worried look on her face, burst in. She paused on seeing Rona, and dismay leapt to her eyes at sight of Miss Primrose.

"Dulcia!" The headmistress' voice cut like steel. "Explain yourself!"

"I—I—" Dulcia faltered. "I'm terribly sorry to be late, Miss Primrose, I had to go out suddenly on—a private matter."

Miss Primrose frowned. "Indeed, Dulcia?" she said icily.

"Then may I inform you that I do not approve of private matters interfering with the routine of the school! Are you aware that you have lost this Form fifteen minutes of class? Are you aware that, thanks to your absence, Clara and Lydia have caused a commotion?"

"I'm sorry, Miss Primrose," said Dulcia, white and tense.

"Being sorry is not enough," said the headmistress evenly. "I am displeased, Dulcia—very displeased and surprised. Let nothing like this occur again, please; and now take charge. Come, Rona," she added, turning to the door. "I must thank you for your assistance."

"Not at all," muttered Rona, as she followed the Head out, darting back a sneering, vindictive smile at Dulcia. The door closed.

"Cat!" burst out Clara furiously.

Dulcia shot a quick glance at her. Obviously Miss Primrose's rebuff had hurt her.

"Please, Clara," she said sharply. "Girls, get out your books!"

She moved to the desk. All eyes were following her. It was apparent to most of the Form that she was upset—and that she had been worried and anxious when she arrived.

What, the Form and Clara in particular wondered, had Dulcia been up to? Why had she left the school like this? Where had she been?

Oh, decidedly it was a black look-out all round—with a definite triumph for Rona Fox.

### The Truth—But Only Clara Knew!

IT was not a happy morning in class for Clara Trevlyn.

Watching Dulcia covertly again and again, it became apparent to the Tomboy that there was much more on the captain's mind than the little brush with Miss Primrose.





Could it—could it be anything to do with Shirley Mathels? wondered Clara, conscious of a sinking of her heart. Could it be anything to do with the dance? Oh, what was Dulcia up to?

Morning lessons came to an end at last, and Dulcia immediately hurried away. Clara turned to Babs.

"Babs, thanks a million," she breathed. "That was wonderful of you."

"Oh, rot!" said Babs uncomfortably. "It just helped matters out a bit, that's all. But, Clara," she added anxiously, "for goodness' sake watch your step! Another bit of trouble and you'll find yourself out of the championships."

Clara stiffened, glaring after Lydia, who, not wishing for further conflict with the Tomboy, was hurriedly leaving the class-room.

"As long as girls like Lydia hit at Dulcia," she stated stubbornly, "I'm going to hit back. But thanks, Babs," she said softly, "and now I want to see Dulcia, and—and apologise for hitting more trouble—"

Leaving Babs shrugging rather helplessly, she hurried away.

Straight to Dulcia's study went Clara. She knocked once, twice. Receiving no reply, she entered, determined to wait.

By the fireplace Clara took her stance, glancing admiringly around the captain's charmingly furnished room. As her eyes fell on the bureau, she crossed to it with a smile. A sheet of paper had caught in one of the drawers, obviously when Dulcia had closed it.

As Clara opened that drawer and lifted the sheet of paper, it was almost inevitable that she should notice the writing upon it. Two lines seemed to jump right up at her:

"... and I know, my dear Dulcia, that I can rely upon you to watch over and help Shirley. With your influence to guard her—"

Clara's head slowly lifted. She read no more—did not attempt to. A flush slowly touched her cheeks.

"Watch over Shirley," she breathed.

Then—then Dulcia was helping Shirley! Dulcia was trying to protect her! This—and something inside Clara wanted to break free in a chortle of wonderful relief and glee—was the explanation! Dulcia hadn't done a single rotten thing!

For a moment Clara stood in a trance, tears almost coming to her eyes at the great relief and happiness that flooded through her. True blue after all—the girl she had just known Dulcia to be. It was wonderful—it was topping—it was stunning—it was—

"Clara!" exclaimed a startled voice. "What have you got there?"

The Tomboy jumped violently. She had been lost to the world; but now she whirled, crimsoning to the roots of her unruly hair, feeling like a caught criminal. Unheard by her, the door had opened. Dulcia had entered!

Slowly now she came towards Clara. "Clara—you have read that?"

Clara gulped. "Oh, Dulcia!" she exclaimed. "It was an accident—honestly. It was sticking out of the drawer. I went to put it back, and—and I couldn't help seeing part of it. And, Dulcia," she blurted, her lips trembling, "I—I'm so jolly glad!"

Dulcia stared at her, her own blue eyes fastened to the clear grey of the Tomboy's. Her expression softened.

"It was an accident, of course," she said gently. "I know you wouldn't pry, kid. But what do you mean—you're glad?"

Flushed, her eyes sparkling, Clara answered almost distractedly.

"Because, Dulcia, you've been seen, because the girls have been saying things—rotten things!" she burst out. "Oh, I knew they were lies! I told them! I—I—"

Dulcia's expression had changed. Her face registered bewilderment, but it was a little white, too. Gently she took Clara by the shoulders and forced her down into an armchair.

"Tell me, Clara—everything!"

Clara did, haltingly, and not actually naming Lydia Crossendale in connection with the first affair in the Common-room, but stating all the other facts. Dulcia heard her out in perfect silence, and beyond a slow tightening of the lips, showed no emotion. As Clara finished she leaned forward.

"Clara, before anything else, I want you to answer me something—honestly. You've surprised me, and yet I've been a fool to imagine that I could have kept everything secret, especially

sitting down. 'I'm going to tell you something. Just listen!'

She reached forward and took the sheet of notepaper from Clara's fingers.

"This," she said, "is part of a letter from Shirley Mathels' mother. She once nursed my mother through a very serious illness. You'll understand then, kid, that I would do a lot for Mrs. Mathels!"

"Of course," breathed Clara.

"Well"—Dulcia bit her lip—"you know the sort of name that Shirley has, of course. Her mother heard rumours of it, and above all else she didn't wish Shirley to be in danger of expulsion—at this moment. You see," she told Clara slowly, "Mr. Mathels is very ill, and a shock like the disgrace of Shirley—he's terribly fond of her—might—might kill him!"

Clara started. "Oh, my hat!" she muttered. "Then you've been trying to—to—"



**ANXIOUSLY**, Clara peeped over the hedge. And then her heart sank. No doubt about it. The girl planning to go to a dance with Shirley Mathels, the "outcast" of Whitechester School, was her idol—Dulcia!

with Rona!" she started to add bitterly, and then broke off. "Clara," she said, very, very gently, "all these rows you've been getting into—have they been because of me?"

Clara flushed. She hadn't expected this.

"Clara," Dulcia pressed. "Well—well, yes, Dulcia," Clara mumbled.

"Ah!" The captain rose. She looked down at Clara, a misty light in her blue eyes. "Kid—oh, kid"—her hand fell on the Tomboy's shoulder—"you—you've been rather wonderful! I hardly know what to say!"

"It's nothing, Dulcia," mumbled Clara, red and confused. But how she glowed inside. "I—I was glad to. And any chump," she added fiercely, "ought to know that you wouldn't do anything rotten!"

Dulcia smiled—a little wryly. "Perhaps others don't think quite the same," she said quietly. She regarded the Tomboy steadily for a moment, smiled, and shook her head rather wonderingly. "You did that for me! Clara," she added, abruptly

"To pull Shirley up," nodded Dulcia. "Her mother expressly asked me not to mention her father's illness to her. And, Clara," added the captain earnestly, "Shirley is not a bad girl. She's just weak. She got into debt with a rotten set and is finding it terribly difficult to get out again."

"You say some girls in the Fourth saw me leaving a dance hall with her, and I was in the act of taking a cigarette," continued Dulcia, with a little, twisted smile. "Well, I'd gone there to get Shirley away, and had in fact just taken the cigarette-case from her."

Clara's hand clenched. She understood perfectly.

"But, Dulcia," she asked anxiously, "how will you get Shirley away from that set?"

"By clearing off Shirley's debts with them," answered Dulcia quietly. "Once Shirley is clear of debt, they can't force her to remain in their set. That dance ticket money—that was money Shirley owed for a previous dance. I tried to get the money to her this morning, but couldn't. That was why

It was late in the Fourth Form classroom.

"But to-morrow—Friday—I am expecting a remittance which will enable me to clear off the complete debt. And to-night," she added worriedly, "I've got to slip out and take that ten shillings. Shirley's been forced to break bounds to-night by her—her set, and I've got to get the money to her. She owes it to one particularly nasty girl who's been worrying her."

Clara eyed her in dismay. "You—you mean you'll have to break bounds yourself to-night?"

Dulcia eyed her steadily. She gave a little grimace.

"That's exactly it—I must, kid!"

"Dulcia"—Clara drew a deep breath—"I—I think you're being wonderful to help Shirley like this, to risk so much, and I want to go on backing you up like anything—please!"

Dulcia, gazing at her eager, earnest face, smiled a trembly smile.

"Great kid," she whispered. "But you've got to lie low. Remember the tennis championships."

"But you, Dulcia," cried Clara—"what about you?" She hesitated a little, then blurted fiercely: "I've got to say it! Dulcia, you know that Rona Fox hates you, and would do anything to get you out of the championships yourself. She's trying like anything to get you into trouble."

Dulcia's face darkened. "I'm not afraid of Rona, Clara," she said quietly. "Don't worry about her. I shall be all right. Just go steady yourself. And, kid"—she stared deep into the Tomboy's face—"bless you for what you've done!"

But Dulcia was wrong! There was every reason to worry about Rona, had the captain known. For, pausing outside the study door, Rona Fox herself had heard quite a lot of the conversation!

And Rona, hurrying on along the passage, knew a thrill of exultation.

"So," she muttered. "Dulcia is going out to-night, eh? Is she really playing some shady game?" she wondered, frowning, and then smiled crookedly. "Doesn't matter; Rona! What does matter is that you're going to strike a blow!" Her eyes glimmered wickedly. "I wonder—I just wonder—if Dulcia and Clara will play in the championships, after all?"

### Her Loyalty Meant Disaster!



"A GOOD show—a good show indeed, Clara!"

Clara Trevlyn, flushed with pleasure, beamed up at Dulcia Fairbrother.

"And you, too, Barbara!" The captain turned to Barbara Redfern, who, with Lady Patricia Northanson, was walking off the school tennis courts after Dulcia and Clara.

"Thank you, Dulcia," Babs dimpled. "But, my hat, you and Clara were much too good for us!"

The four were in high good-humour, for the practice, taken after tea before a large and interested crowd of girls, had been a decided success. That practice had been called by Dulcia to Clara's huge delight, and as Lady Pat and Babs had been down at the courts, Dulcia had roped them in as opposition in a doubles game.

They had had a keen, well-fought set, but Dulcia and Clara, playing wonderfully together, had taken it comfortably at 6-3. No doubt that, as a pair, they

were perfectly fitted to represent the school.

"I'll fix up another practice as soon as possible, Clara," smiled Dulcia, dropping back and joining Lady Pat. "Bye-bye for now, both of you!"

And the captain walked on with her chum.

Babs glanced a little curiously at Clara's radiant face.

"You seem a lot happier, old thing," she remarked quietly.

Clara beamed.

"I am, Babs; jolly, jolly happy. You see—" She hesitated. "Well, Babs, it—it's because I know what Dulcia is really doing. I can't very well tell you, as Dulcia told me in confidence; but you can take it from me," she added firmly, "that old Dulcia is absolutely true blue."

Babs nodded. Naturally, she was a little curious, but she did not press her chum. Above all, she was vastly relieved.

"That's grand!" she approved. "Now, what about those lines for Primmy? We'd better get on with them now. And, Clara"—she side-glanced her chum—"I hope this means no more rows, so far as you're concerned?"

Clara glanced quickly at her, and chortled.

"Old worriekins!" she mocked fondly. "But, no, Babs. Everything should be O.K. now, providing," she added, a little grimly, "that Rona doesn't get up to anything!"

Babs sighed. "Then I jolly well hope she doesn't!" she said fervently.

But, oddly enough, in the dormitory, when Rona came to turn out the lights, Clara felt apprehensive; for, as the girls got into bed, she looked straight at the Tomboy, and said softly:

"Topping game you and Dulcia put up after tea, Clara!—Wouldn't it be just an awful pity if you two couldn't play together in the championships!"

Snick! Out went the lights. The door closed gently behind Rona.

Clara, in the act of drawing the sheets over herself, sat still, staring towards the dark patch which was the door. It wasn't just Rona's remark, but the way she had said it—the mocking ring in her voice—that suddenly made the Tomboy's heart jump unpleasantly.

What had Rona meant by that?

The usual chatter before sleep began to die down as girls became sleepy. But Clara remained very much awake. She couldn't rid her mind of the feeling that there had been a hidden threat behind Rona's last remark. The minutes ticked away as Clara brooded uneasily. Rona couldn't hit at her—Clara—anyway. She'd done Primmy's impot, and was now clear of any punishment. And Rona hadn't anything definite "on" Dulcia, unless—

Clara sat up with a jerk.

Unless by some means Rona knew Dulcia was breaking bounds to-night! Clara's heart raced at the thought. But how could Rona know? How—

"Hallo!" came Babs' sleepy voice from a few beds away. Clara's sudden jump up in bed had obviously disturbed her. "Who's that? Wasam-marer?"

Clara hesitated, and then swung her legs out. Babs was the one to ask about this—Babs, with her quick, clear-thinking brain. Softly she crept to the junior school captain. Babs sat up sharply.

"It's Clara, Babs!" breathed the Tomboy. "It's about Dulcia and Rona! You see—well, I can tell you

this, anyway. Dulcia's sneaked out to-night—"

Babs started.

"Dulcia? Broken bounds, you mean?"

"Yes," Clara whispered. "But it's for a jolly good reason. The thing that worries me is: Does Rona know?"

"Well, how could she, unless she overheard something?" Babs hazarded.

"Overheard?" Clara felt a chill.

"But, Babs, she could only have done that if she had been outside Dulcia's study when I was there. Here, what's the matter?" she jerked, as Babs' hand flashed out and caught her wrist.

"Oh, just a minute—oh, just a minute!" whispered Babs. "I remember now! Not long after you went off to see Dulcia, I called in on Lady Pat about the next gym show. When I left, Rona was in the passage, and it seemed to me that she had been standing by Dulcia's door!"

Clara felt cold inside.

"Then she heard!" she breathed—

"she heard! Oh!"

She stood up with a jerk, her hands clenched.

"Clara," whispered Babs tensely, "what are you going to do?"

"Do?" hissed Clara savagely. "I'm going to save Dulcia if I can! It's obvious what Rona's game is, isn't it? She'll have a mistress on the scene, waiting to catch Dulcia when she returns! Babs," she added sharply, "be a sport, though, and try to cover up my absence if someone looks in! Will you?"

"Of course!" breathed Babs. "But, Clara, for goodness' sake, be careful!"

Clara did not answer. Her face white and set, she hurried to her bed and began dressing. Her actions were feverish and quick. Three minutes later, her dim form watched by an anxious-eyed Babs, she was stealing from the dormitory.

Along the passage she crept, her whole being quivering with apprehension for Dulcia. If Dulcia were caught—She shuddered at the possibility. Dulcia would probably be asked to resign her captaincy of the school and games. In that case, Rona, as vice-captain of games, would take over!

And that most certainly would mean no tennis championships for Dulcia on the day after to-morrow—no championships for Clara, either! For, obviously, Rona wouldn't choose Clara as a partner!

"YOU'RE CERTAIN that you saw a girl go out, Rona?"

"Quite certain, Miss Bullivant," returned Rona Fox smoothly. "I—I happened to come in here, found the window open, and was going to shut it when I saw a girl, in hat and coat, running towards the school wall."

In the darkened lobby Miss Bullivant frowned.

"Disgraceful—disgraceful!" she ground out. "The girl shall be punished most severely—most severely! You do not know who the girl was, Rona?"

"I have no idea," said Rona smoothly.

Outside the lobby door, Clara Trevlyn, hearing that, grew almost frantic. She had slipped down to the lobby, knowing that Dulcia had probably left by the window of that room. Immediately she had heard the voices of the two in ambush, and learned the worst.

How to save Dulcia now?

Before Clara could solve that problem Rona gave a sudden, excited exclamation.

"Look, Miss Bullivant! There! Climbing over the wall! She's coming!" "You are correct, Rona!" Miss Bullivant peered through the window. "The audacity! The wretched girl—but wait, Rona," she gasped. "She appears to be making for another window! See! I will keep guard here. Go and catch her if she enters by another window! Quick, Rona!"

Rona jumped to the door. And outside, sick with apprehension, Clara silently flashed away. There was one desperate chance of saving Dulcia—a chance that meant danger for herself.

Ahead of Rona, Clara raced for the cloak-room. Entering, she dived for her hat and coat, frenziedly wriggled into the latter, jammed the hat on her head, and sped back the way she had come.

Dulcia must be entering in a few seconds by one of the other windows. If Rona were allowed to keep on her course, then most assuredly she would catch the captain. But that was where Clara came in!

She reached the end of the passage leading from the cloak-room just as a figure panted up from the corridor to the left. Rona! She saw Clara and gave a shout.

"Stop! I know who you are! Stop—"

Clara, with a grim little chuckle, turned down the corridor to the right and simply flew. Lead Rona out of the way—and Dulcia could get to her study in safety.

"Stop!" yelled Rona furiously. "Miss Bullivant! She's here! Quick!"

And after Clara, her teeth gritted, the prefect pounded. Behind, Miss Bullivant stormed from the lobby, and at a lesser pace, took up the chase.

It was a breathless dash through the darkened corridors of the school, fleet-footed Clara running full-out. And she seemed like getting clear, when she stumbled, tripped and fell headlong. Gasping, she jumped up again, just as Rona panted to the scene.

"Got you, Dulcia!" Clara sprang away too late. The prefect's grasp fastened viciously on her arm. Frenziedly the Tomboy struggled. The two figures swayed in the dark. Then came the hurrying footsteps of Miss Bullivant, and snick! Clara was bathed in light as the panting mistress clicked down the electric switch. Rona reeled.

"Kik-Clara!" Blankly she stared. "You! I—I thought—" "I know!" blazed Clara defiantly. "But you've tripped up this—"

"Clara!" Miss Bullivant rustled up, fairly quivering with fury. "Clara—again, girl!" She breathed hard. "Is there no limit to your lawlessness? Did my warning mean nothing? Where have you been?" she raged.

The Tomboy remained mute. There was no excuse she could offer—without incriminating Dulcia. And that was the last thing she meant to do. One blessing—the captain must be safely in her study by now.

Perhaps Rona, glaring savagely at her, realised that, too; for Rona definitely knew that Dulcia had broken bounds and had in fact—having sharper eyes than the Bull—recognised Dulcia as the girl slipping in over the school wall. Oh, yes, Rona realised full well now how she had been tricked.

"Very well, Clara," said Miss Bullivant grimly. "As you refuse to speak, I must draw my own conclusions. I shall report you to Miss Primrose! And you may take it as definite," she snapped, "that you will be detained next Saturday!"

## "That Settles Dulcia!"



AND Clara was. The news burst like a bombshell over the school next morning, and especially in the Fourth Form was there blank dismay.

Before breakfast Babs & Co. gathered round Clara and simply bombarded her with anxious questions. Babs, of course, knew something of the truth, but as far as the other girls were concerned, Clara had for some amazing reason broken bounds.

The Tomboy herself, awakening afresh to the realisation of what the previous night's affair meant to her, was in low spirits. She had saved Dulcia—and that was fine—but oh, golly, at what a sacrifice! She faced her chums almost stubbornly.

"I'm sorry—there's nothing to say," she said. "Old Babs can tell you a bit—but, Babs!" And she suddenly flashed round on the junior captain. "I'm standing this racket alone, remember," she warned. "It wouldn't help anyone if the real truth was known."

Before Babs could answer, little Letty Green of the Second Form appeared on the scene.

"Please, Clara," she said shyly, "Dulcia would like to see you."

Clara glanced quickly at her chums. "Right! Thanks, Letty! Excuse me, girls; I'll have to get along."

And off she hurried, rather glad to get away.

When she entered the captain's study, Dulcia, white and worried, crossed to her.

"Clara," she said steadily, "let me talk to you for a moment. I've heard what happened last night—how you were caught. And, Clara, you've got to explain to me, kid—because I think you did it for me."

Clara shifted uncomfortably.

"Well, yes, Dulcia," she blurted. "And I was jolly glad to. You see—"

And forthwith the Tomboy related the whole story. When she finished Dulcia smiled tremulously at her.

"Dear kid, I thought so," she murmured, and turned towards the door.

"Dulcia!" cried Clara. "Where are you going?"

Dulcia paused.

"To tell Miss Primrose the truth, Clara," she said quietly. "Do you think I'm going to let you be punished because you did a fine thing for me?"

"But, Dulcia—no, no!" Clara desperately seized her arm. "Don't—please don't! Don't you see? Even if you tell Primmy, that won't excuse me helping you to break bounds—unless you can give her a jolly good reason why you did. And how can you do that—without giving away Shirley?"

Dulcia started at that and frowned. Seeing her expression change, Clara pressed the point. "You'll just get into a terrific row, Dulcia, and I shan't be any better off. Please, Dulcia," she pleaded, "I know I'm right this time. I—I don't mind so terribly."

Dulcia hesitated, obviously fighting a mental battle. At last, she slowly nodded. Her eyes, on Clara's flushed, earnest face, were sparkling.

"Clara, you little brick," she breathed huskily. "Perhaps—perhaps you're right. It wouldn't help anyone in the long run, would it? Well"—she pressed Clara's shoulder—"you might tell Barbara that she'll probably partner me. Her play has improved immensely."

"You mean it?" cried Clara.

"Certainly," Dulcia nodded. Her

eyes shone a little as she saw the eager look on Clara's face. What a sport the kid was, taking it like this, pleased because her chum might get the place. "One little thing, Clara," she added, smiling "which you might like to know. To-day I hope to clear everything up for Shirley."

"Dulcia!"

"Yes—this afternoon. I can get time off. It means going to that dance hall again," and Dulcia bit her lip; "because Shirley has to go with those other girls. But I had that remittance this morning. I shall be able to pay over the money for her."

"That's grand!" breathed Clara.

"Well, there it is, kid—and my only regret," added Dulcia sincerely, "is that you're not playing to-morrow! I would have liked that to be—especially after all you've done!"

Clara flushed.

"Thanks, Dulcia! My hat, somehow I feel better about it all now I know you've made things right for Shirley. Can I go and break the good news to Babs now?" she added eagerly.

"Do!" laughed Dulcia. Then one steady look she gave Clara, and:

"Thanks for everything, kid!"

Clara left then. Rushing off, she joined Babs, Mabs, Bessie, and Marjorie as they were going into breakfast. Then and there she told Babs what Dulcia had said—that Babs was a possible for the championships.

As Babs' face lit up, Clara knew a little pang. It should have been her championships—hers and Dulcia. Oh, she wasn't jealous of Babs, but if only—

But you'll jolly well have to practise hard, Babs," she said, a little abruptly. "We'll have a knock-up before lunch, and another before tea, eh?"

And so it was decided. Of course, the news that Babs was a possible for the great game soon spread, and before lunch a little crowd gathered to watch her practise. Dulcia was there—and Rona, too, simply blazing with fury at having been passed over for another junior. Also there was Lady Pat, a definite possibility herself.

Babs was in form, and to Rona's further chagrin, Dulcia told the junior captain so warmly after practice.

Dinner came, then afternoon lessons. Clara was almost happy then. Dulcia would be with Shirley now—Dulcia would be clearing everything up. That, at least, was fine.

And after lessons—down in a body to the tennis courts went the chums, and hard at it Clara kept Babs.

"Jolly good, Babs!" Clara congratulated her chum, as they left the courts.

"And jolly good for you, Clara!" cried Babs happily. "I don't know what it's all about concerning Dulcia, but I do know—"

"My hat!" Mabel Lynn broke in. She was staring towards the drive. "Why, there is Dulcia! Who on earth is she with?"

The chums looked round. True enough, a big car was swinging up to the schoolhouse steps. Yes, and there was Dulcia, seated beside an elderly, portly man-at the wheel.

They knew his identity next second! It was Lydia Crossendale, strolling near by with Frances and Freda, who imparted the information.

"See that, Frances—Freda," she breathed in wonder. "It—it's—"

"Mr. Dixon, the manager of the dance hall!" gasped Freda Ferriers.

Clara heard! And Clara whitened to the lips. What had happened?

(Continued on page 14)

# OUT OF SCHOOL HOURS

*PATRICIA is your very own friend—young and gay, yet old enough to be wise and helpful, too. She writes to you each week, in that typically cheery way of hers, telling you about herself, her family, things to do, and things to talk about. In fact, hers is the sort of letter all schoolgirls love.*



**W**ELL, if it isn't nearly Whitsun already!

I don't know what you gay young things feel about it, but to me it seems that we have only just got over Easter. Let's hope it's going to be as fine for Whitsun!

As Whit-Sunday means White Sunday, 'tis said that you should wear something white on this day.

White gloves is one idea—and white socks another. But for bigger schoolgirls who like more colour in dress, and are promoted to sun-tan coloured stockings—what's this "something white" to be?

I suggest a white belt on a pretty dress, or a white flower as a shoulder trimming.

## ● Left or Right

Isn't it amazing, these days, the number of girls one meets who are left-handed? At one time, of course, it was thought to be very wrong if you used your left hand for writing and drawing, and so on.

And at some schools it was the practice for a teacher to strap the left hand behind the pupil's back—so that she would have to use her right hand.

This, fortunately, has died out now, and people realise that it's not a disadvantage at all to be left-handed.

And why on earth should it be?

Who said that to be right-handed was right, after all?

One girl whom I know is what is called ambidextrous—lovely word! That is, she can use both hands equally well—for writing, drawing, or games.

Most useful she finds it at times. You know, for example, how tired one arm can grow through brushing your hair for several minutes. Just think how nice and restful it must be to switch the brush to the other hand and start again!

Very nice at examination time, too. No writer's cramp for those who can write equally well with both hands.

And personally, I should think it helps considerably with piano-playing, wouldn't you?

This Patricia of yours sometimes tries writing with her left hand. The result is perfectly appalling. I can hardly read it myself!

## ● Mirror-Writing

But one thing I can do—and that is mirror-writing.

Here is an example of it:

It's time to go to school

back, as this has, you can just hold the paper up the other way to the light, and look through.)

Do try this mirror-writing some time. It's quite fun. Some girls will find it remarkably easy—like I do—while others will find it just impossible.

## ● A Tiny Gift

Don't you think this box in the picture here would make a very nice little present for a chum, to whom you want to give something very tiny for a birthday—or for Whitsun?

It looks like a spider box, but is really only a matchbox, with pipe-cleaners fixed to it, to give it that fearsome look. It would be most useful for holding pens or drawing-pins.

First get the empty matchbox, then cover the outside with silver paper, and paint a face at one end.

Now get three pipe-cleaners, and with one stitch to each, fix them to underneath of the box. Finally, bend up the ends like legs.

It'll look very quaint and be so useful.

Mention of spiders, reminds me that we seem to get the most enormous ones going for a stroll in our house.

I suppose it happens in other people's houses, too, but I'm quite sure ours are the biggest. They're garden spiders—and perfectly harmless, so my father says, but that doesn't make me like them, I'm afraid.

But they've certainly snobbish spiders, for they come in by our front door, which is always open this weather. Why they don't enter by the windows, which are also always open, or by the back door. I just don't know.

Perhaps you can suggest a reason!

## ● Moth Proof

Moths also are beginning to enjoy themselves just about now. Do keep an eye on your woolly clothes, won't you? They particularly like clothes that can't be washed—such as tweedy skirts and dresses. So these should be put away with extra care.

You know that to wrap garments in newspaper is good don't you?

Moths don't like the smell of printer's ink, 'tis said. (In which case, their noses,

or whatever they smell with, must be more sensitive than mine, for I never notice it! Still, that's hardly the point.)

Camphor balls are also good keepers-away of moths. But some people object to the powerful smell of these.

In which case, there are still cloves to do the trick. A few of these placed in the pockets of your winter coat, and tucked into the cuffs, should keep Mrs. Moth and her eggs away very nicely.

Or you can place a handful in a silky hankie, tie it up in a Dick Whittington bundle, and hang it over a hook in the wardrobe, to make all your clothes moth-proof.

## ● Old Lino

Did you have any new linoleum in your home round about spring-cleaning time?

If so, I wonder what mother has done with the old?

An excellent idea is to use it for covering the shelves of the larder cupboard. (Unless, of course, your larder is one of those very posh ones, with marble—or near-marble—shelves.)

That was what we did—and it works beautifully. It not only looks nice, for it is green linoleum, but the shelves are beautifully easy to keep clean.

Another notion is to make a cover for the top tray of the tea-trolley, if you have one.

## ● Pretty Frilling

Isn't this dress in the picture perfectly sweet? (That corset looks good, too!)

Yet if you look at it closely, you will see it is really a very simple one. It is only the pretty frilling on the bodice and round the sleeves that makes it look so different.

And you can buy this frilling, all ready-made, for sixpence a yard in all dainty colours, you know.

Two pieces about four inches long can be sewn on to the bodice of a dress, to make mock-pockets, and more can be sewn around the sleeves.

It's surprising what a garden-party touch this can give.

Bye-bye now until next week, my pets.

Your friend,  
PATRICIA.



# MAY FLOWERS— AND THEIR MEANINGS

ALL you country-lovers—and who isn't?—and you with gardens must be revelling in the riot of early summer flowers that are abounding just now.

I'm sure when you pick them you often wonder what meaning they have. So I have compiled a list for you of the flowers that you are most likely to meet with this month—and the meanings that are given to them.

Even if we don't take the meanings very seriously, some of them are very charming and worth knowing, if only to make something to talk about to the family or our chums.

**APPLE BLOSSOM.**—This means "good news."

**BACHELOR'S BUTTON.**—This pretty little wayside flower should be worn as a buttonhole. If it fades quickly it is said to mean that you are rather fickle in your affections. If it stays fresh, then you are constant and true.

**BIRD'S EYE.**—Watchfulness is what this signifies.

**BUTTERCUP.**—This is a favourite with us all, but strangely enough, it means "ingratitude."

**COLUMBINE.**—Here's a flower that should cheer you when you are down in the dumps, for its message is, "resolved to win!"

**CORNFLOWER.**—We could all wear this flower gladly, for it means "kindness."

**DAISY.**—This humble little blossom has played an important part in the language of flowers for many years. In olden days a fair lady would wreath daisies in her hair and then her brave knight knew she meant "I will think of you." When she had made up her mind and accepted him, the knight would have the daisies engraved on his shield, which meant "I share your love."

**FORGET-ME-NOT.**—Here the flower name is its meaning—and a very sweet one.

**GERANIUM.**—The pink one stands for "true friendship," the red one for "comfort," and the white one for "innocence."

**HAWTHORN.**—Though this shrub is often considered unlucky—especially when brought into the house—its meaning is "hope."

**LABURNUM.**—A very sad meaning this has in flower language, for it says, "forsaken."

**LILY.**—This, of course, is the flower chosen by brides. It means "sweetness and purity."

**LILY OF THE VALLEY.**—"Return of happiness" is what this stands for.



**LONDON PRIDE.**—This rather gay flower has a very un-serious meaning—"frivolity."

**MIGNONETTE.**—"Your qualities even surpass your charms," says this little flower, which is not much to look at, but which smells so fragrant.

**PERIWINKLE.**—This flower is supposed to have been used by wise old women in days gone by for the making of potions. Nowadays it signifies "early friendship."

**WALLFLOWER.**—Here's a favourite with us all and with a lovely meaning: "I will comfort you when you are sad."



## THE WAY THEY DO THEIR HAIR

Miss Richards and Patricia have planned this little feature between them, describing to you one of the Cliff House Fourth Former's hair styles each week.

**This Week : CLARA TREVLYN.**

**M**ANY girls at Cliff House School have spent weeks trying to make their hair look like Clara Trevlyn's.

"How DO you get that sort of wind-blown look to it?" they ask.

Clara just looks baffled.

"It's the way it grows, I suppose," she says vaguely. "I'm not sappy enough to sit up all night training it, if that's what you want me to say."

And that is the secret of Clara's hair. It grows that way.

Clara has no parting at all. She just combs her hair back from her forehead—and Nature and the wind do the rest.

But, one little secret. Clara's hair is rather coarse in texture, and that's what helps it to keep in place without that too-set look.

She does brush it, though not as much as she should, I'm afraid. Marjorie is always telling her that rather dry hair like Clara's requires even more brushing than naturally greasy hair. And she does succeed in making her smear a little (of Jemima's) brilliantine over it when she's going anywhere special.

This isn't poured on to the hair, mind you. A drip or so is smeared on to the palms. These are rubbed together and then smoothed lightly over the hair.

As for shampooing, Clara uses an oil shampoo when Marjorie insists, but ordinary soap-flakes when no one is looking.

But that characteristic quiff of hers. It started with a habit of Tomboy Clara's.

Her hair grows very quickly, you see, and she always has rather a number of short ends of new hair. These she twirls around and around her fingers when she is worried—which is quite frequently, for, as you know, Clara doesn't find lessons very easy.

**Next Week : MARJORIE.**

## JUST JOTTINGS

**A** NEW pen-nib should always be dipped in warm water for a moment or two before being used. It holds the ink better after this.

Badly marked mirrors or windows can be polished beautifully if they are rubbed with a duster to which a few drops of methylated spirit have been applied.

When cork table mats have become very badly stained it's a good idea to make a set of loose covers for them. These can be of pretty cretonne or linen, which is easily washed.

Your bicycle pump, or a pair of bellows can be very useful for blowing the dust out of difficult corners. After which it can be swept up in the usual way.

If you thread your needle with the end of the cotton that is still on the reel and not with the end you break off, you will find the cotton will not work itself into knots as you sew.

When the drawers of dressers, chest, or sideboard are difficult to move, they can be made to run more smoothly if soap is smeared along the edges.

Fine handkerchiefs should always be very lightly starched after washing and blueing.

The best way to wash delicate lace—collars, cuffs and so on—is to make a lather of good soap-flakes and lukewarm water in a clean jam-jar, then to immerse the articles, and shake the jar vigorously.

(Continued from page 11)

"Come on!" she jerked, and raced towards the steps, where the car was even now halting.

"Trouble," muttered Babs anxiously, leading the chums in pursuit.

Quite a crowd had gathered by the time the portly man swung out of the car. A hard-looking man, whose face was flushed with anger; he glared back into the car, and now all could see how deathly pale Dulcia was.

"Get out, my girl!" snapped Mr. Dixon. "We're going straight to your headmistress—"

"I am the headmistress, sir," said an even voice, and Miss Primrose rustled down the steps. She started as Dulcia stepped out of the car. Her brow furrowed. "Who are you, please?"

The portly man glared.

"My name is Dixon!" he rasped, while the girls listened with bated breath, while Clara stared wonderingly, apprehensively at the white-faced Dulcia. "This girl"—he stabbed a finger towards the captain—"was in the dance hall I run in Courtfield—"

"What?" Miss Primrose almost reeled. A hissing gasp went up. All eyes flashed to the captain.

"That's not the point!" snapped Mr. Dixon irritably. "The point is that the wretched girl footled about in the electrician's room at the fall, and fused every light in the place—burnt them up—messed up the lighting system! And what I want to know," he demanded pugnaciously, "is what you're going to do about it?"

Not a soul paid the slightest attention to his last remark. Amid a deathlike silence Dulcia was submitted to a battery of wondering, staggered stares. Clara broke the spell. With a little cry she jumped forward.

"Dulcia! Oh, Dulcia, you didn't do—"

"Clara!" cried Miss Primrose angrily. "Stand back! Dulcia"—she choked—"and you, sir—please come to my study immediately! I cannot understand! I am shocked, disgusted! I—"

The little party entered the school, Dulcia last, walking almost mechanically. A tiny, strained smile she flashed at Clara, and then she was gone.

Not a girl moved until suddenly someone brushed between Clara and Babs, and whispered triumphantly, vindictively, into the Tomboy's ear before passing on into the school.

"And that, I think, just about settles our dear, honourable captain, Dulcia!" It was Rona Fox.

### Clara Sees a Chance!



CLIFF HOUSE buzzed with the sensation, astounded and staggered.

Could this amazing thing be true? That was the question on everyone's lips—that was the question everyone asked each other. Meanwhile, Dulcia was still in the headmistress' study with the Head and Mr. Dixon.

Clara was almost frantic, flatly ridiculing the whole story of damage done by Dulcia. Within half an hour she had been lined twice for creating a disturbance—on each occasion because she had been speaking up for Dulcia, fiercely refuting any slur on her name. She even—remembering Rona's sneering remark—burst without knocking into that prefect's study.

She hardly knew why she went there,

unless it was because she knew Rona was Dulcia's enemy. But she received short shrift at Rona's hands.

For Rona, turning in fury from her task of rather ineffectively trying to clean a patch of purple paint from her blazer, simply flew at Clara, and bundled her into the passage.

Gasping, a little surprised by Rona's fury, Clara tramped off to Dulcia's study, knocked, and entered. The study was empty. Dulcia was obviously still with Miss Primrose. What was happening there? Oh, what was happening?

Torn by anxiety, Clara sat down, determined to wait.

A step in the corridor at last. The door opened. Clara leapt up, a strangled cry escaping her at sight of Dulcia's white, drawn face.

"Oh, Dulcia!" she choked. "What—what—"

A wan smile touched the captain's lips.

"Hallo, kid!" she muttered. "Well, it's the worst! Mr. Dixon is still there, and as Miss Primrose has to go out now, she's seeing me again to-morrow morning. But one thing's certain," she added miserably. "I'm out of the championships to-morrow!"

"Dulcia!" Clara stared in horror. "Oh, Dulcia, no—no!" she panted. "She can't do that—she can't! She—she— Oh, what does it all mean? That man's rotten story. It isn't true, is it?"

Dulcia shook her head wearily.

"No, kid, it's not true," she said quietly. "I met Shirley at the dance hall with her set. I'd given her the two pounds. Everything was cleared up and we left. But I'd forgotten my comb. I dashed back for it. Suddenly there was a bang—all the lights went out, and—she paused, shaking her head—"and then the manager and another man appeared and grabbed me. They both said they had seen me enter the electrician's room—they both swore I had caused the damage!"

Clara stared.

"But, Dulcia, they must be mad!" she cried. "They couldn't have seen you. They're lying!"

"But why should they lie?" asked Dulcia wryly. "That's what Primmy pointed out when I denied it. I—I just can't understand it. And Primmy, of course, was so furious at me being at the dance hall at all that she would hardly listen to me!"

Clara's head was in a whirl. Dulcia wasn't guilty—oh, she knew that! But why on earth had those two men sworn she was?

"But—but—" stuttered the Tomboy bewilderedly. "There must be some explanation. Primmy must listen! And, Dulcia," she burst out, "if she knew why you were there, what you have been doing for Shirley—"

"That wouldn't explain the damage done," cut in Dulcia wearily. "And, Clara," she added, "I don't want Shirley dragged into this. She's clear of trouble at last, and I rely upon you not to try to get in touch with her—not to mention this trouble to her. She knows nothing as yet!"

Clara gulped. That was Dulcia all through—true blue to the end.

"When I see Primmy again to-morrow," continued Dulcia steadily, "she'll probably ask me then to resign my captaincy of the school. Please, kid," she added, as Clara gave a choked little cry, "leave me now, will you? I—I want to think this over!"

The Tomboy almost tottered from the study.

She felt dazed. It had all happened

so suddenly—this disaster to Dulcia. And the damage done—oh, that was just inexplicable!

That evening brought fresh sensations. The news flashed round the school that Dulcia was out of the championships—that she might be asked to resign her captaincy of the school. Dulcia was guilty!

And while Cliff House was still gasping, a note in Rona Fox's handwriting went up on the notice-board. It was to the effect that Rona, as vice-captain of games, had been chosen to take over the captaincy of the tennis doubles team, and that she and Lady Patricia Northanson would represent the school on the morrow. Trust Rona, now triumphantly in power, to disregard Babs' claims!

Cliff House buzzed with it all. Such sensations were rare. Girls were a long time wooing sleep that night, and Clara tossed and turned for many hours.

In the morning the chatter broke out afresh. Everyone knew now that Dulcia would have to see the Head. Everyone knew that she would probably be asked to resign the captaincy—perhaps her prefectship, too. Everyone waited—breathlessly.

Rona and Lady Pat—the latter with no heart for the game which should have been Dulcia's—were preparing to depart for the championships, but that departure was quite overshadowed by the dramatic happenings around Dulcia. True, Rona was objectionably triumphant, swaggering round the school, but little attention was paid to her, until at—

Until Clara, who, missing breakfast, had roamed around in a daze since rising, ran into the prefect in Big Hall. Rona did not pause. She shot a sneering, mocking look at Clara, before hurrying on to her study to bag her tennis gear.

The Tomboy gazed at her dully, and noted, quite subconsciously, that Rona was looking extremely shabby. Why on earth should she be wearing that worn old blazer when she had a better one? Oh, but, of course—because the other one had pained on it! Thus the answer flowed into Clara's mind.

And with it came a sudden startling thrill, bringing up Clara dead in her tracks. Paint on Rona's other blazer! Why hadn't Rona taken that blazer to the matron to be cleaned properly? And why her surprising fury when she—Clara—had burst into the prefect's study without knocking and seen her trying to clean that blazer?

The Tomboy's walk quickened. Her breath was coming quickly. Faster and faster she walked. Abruptly she broke into a trot—the trot into a long lope—the lope into a mad sprint!

She burst into Study No. 4, almost startling Babs and Mabs out of their wits.

"Babs—Mabs!" Clara could hardly speak for excitement. "You've got to do something—something that will save Dulcia—quick, quick!"

They stared blankly. "You've got to go to Whitechester!" Clara rushed on frantically. "You've got to get hold of Shirley Mathels—tell her that Dulcia is in trouble because of her. Oh, don't stare, you ninnie!" she almost yelled. "Dulcia's been helping Shirley all the time. That's the reason for her breaking bounds, the dance hall, smoking—"

"My hat!" gasped Babs. "Dulcia—Shirley! You mean—"

"I mean," panted Clara, "that I can't get hold of Shirley because I promised Dulcia I wouldn't tell Shirley of this trouble. But you haven't

promised. You can go! You've got to go!"

"But—but," stuttered Mabs, "can Shirley clear Dulcia of the charge of messing about with the lights?"

"Leave that side to me!" cried Clara. "I believe—I believe I've stumbled on the truth. Oh, but don't hang around, please!" she begged frantically. "Dulcia will soon be called into Primmy's study. I've got work to do. We've got to save her!"

For a second Babs stared hard at her. Then she nodded.

"Come on, Mabs!" she said crisply. "Cloak-room!"

And they flew.

Gulping, Clara rushed away, too. But her steps took her towards the Sixth Form corridor. She was there three minutes only. Two minutes after that she was sprinting down to the gates, a parcel under her arm, just in time to catch the bus. And the Tomboy was muttering feverishly.

"I've got to be right—I've just got to be right, for Dulcia's sake!"

### When Seconds Counted!



"DULCIA, I cannot tell you how deeply shocked and grieved I am by this whole terrible affair. I have sent for you this morning to give you my final verdict!"

Miss Primrose's kindly features were set and hard. White-faced, but with her chin up, Dulcia faced her across the desk.

"I have always trusted you, Dulcia," continued the headmistress quietly. "Always have I considered you as one of the finest captains this school has ever had. And now—"

Real pain showed for a fleeting second on her face. She suddenly rose and placed her hands on Dulcia's shoulders.

"Dulcia—my dear," she said gently, "won't you be frank with me? Won't you tell me why you went to that dance hall—what prompted this breaking of school rules?" Her voice was almost pleading then. "And the damage done—why don't you admit to it, Dulcia? You must see that it is folly to deny in face of what Mr. Dixon said? If you make a clean breast of everything, perhaps I can be lenient."

Dulcia gulped. Her lips trembled a little. Dear Primmy. But what could she say? She couldn't give Shirley away? And as to the damage—

"Oh, Miss Primrose, please believe me," she begged. "I—I cannot explain my reasons for going to the dance hall, but on my honour I know nothing of the damage—nothing!"

Miss Primrose drew back. There was no anger on her face, only hurt.

"Very well, Dulcia," she said stiffly. "I am sorry, but I cannot believe you. And as you refuse to give any explanation of your conduct there is only one course open to me. Naturally, in view of this affair, it was impossible for you to play to-day in the tennis championships. Now you will be officially deposed from your captaincy of games. And your position as head girl of Cliff House—that, Dulcia, I must now—"

The words that would take the captaincy of the school from Dulcia were trembling on her lips, when there came a rapid tapping on the door. Before Miss Primrose, pausing, could issue a summons to enter, the door burst open. Barbara Redfern and Mabel Lynn stepped in quickly. But behind them—

Dulcia started at sight of the tall, fair-

haired girl who resolutely followed Babs and Mabs.

"Shirley!" she cried.

The girl flashed her a smile. She was pale, but looked very, very determined.

"Yes, Dulcia," she said quietly.

"These girls told me. I had to—"

"Barbara—Mabel!" Miss Primrose

was on her feet, frowning thunderously.

"What, pray, does this intrusion mean?

And who—she stared at the White-

chester girl—"who are you, miss?"

"Shirley Mathels, of Whitechester

School." A slight, bitter smile touched

the fair-haired girl's lips as Miss Prim-

rose's eyes widened and then hardened.

The Head had heard of Shirley ob-

viously. "I had to come," she added

steadily, "because Dulcia—"

"Shirley—no!" cried Dulcia

dance hall in Courtfield, her parcel still under one arm, sprinting for the bus-stop.

But as she flashed out into the road, Clara's heart sank. There—the bus, in the act of pulling off!

The Tomboy almost lost her head. She yelled wildly, raced into the road, and ran, ran. Then came a yell—warning cries:

"Look out, girl—look out!"

She faltered in her stride, and suddenly screamed herself.

For a motor-bike had shot out of a side road, and she was sprinting dead across its path. Clara tried to check herself, leap clear.

Next second the Tomboy had slipped and was sprawling flat upon her face. The motor-bike roared straight at her.



**TUGGING** the hat well down over her face so that she should not be recognised—yet!—Clara dived down the corridor. "Hi! Come back! I've seen you!" shouted Rona Fox, and tore in pursuit. That was just what Clara wanted. It all fitted into her plan to save Dulcia Fairbrother!

agitatedly. "You mustn't speak! Think of yourself. Think—"

"That's just what I've been doing too long," flashed back Shirley bitterly.

"Miss Primrose, you must listen to me. You must learn the truth! I am to blame for everything!"

"You?" cried Miss Primrose.

"Yes, I. Dulcia has been wonderful," blurted Shirley. "She has been helping me—saving me. Oh, it's no use, Dulcia," she smiled, as the captain made a movement. "I've got to speak. Please, Miss Primrose, will you hear me out?"

The headmistress stared keenly at her. Her glance flickered to Dulcia. Slowly she sank back into her chair.

"Continue, Shirley," she said quietly, and the Whitechester girl started to tell her story.

While she was telling it in that study at Cliff House, the other figure who belonged to the little drama was striving to get back to the school in the shortest possible time.

Clara Trevlyn, in fact, was hurrying as she had never hurried before in her life. She came shooting out of the

**AND AT Cliff House—**

In Miss Primrose's study Shirley Mathels' voice was just dying away as she finished her story—the story of Dulcia's great efforts on her behalf. And her last sentence—

"I know you—you will tell my headmistress, Miss Primrose," she faltered. "I know what it will mean to me—but I had to speak."

Dulcia, thinking of Mrs. Mathels—Mr. Mathels—was almost in tears.

"Shirley—you shouldn't, oh, you shouldn't!" she choked. "You don't know what it means—you—you—"

"Dulcia—please, my dear." Miss Primrose had risen. Like Babs and Mabs, she was regarding Dulcia with a new expression. "Do not distress yourself. Nothing of Shirley's actions shall be spoken by me. She has been foolish—but she has repented—"

"Miss Primrose!" cried Shirley joyfully, and Dulcia gulped in relief.

"No," said the Head quietly. "I shall say nothing, Shirley. At least you have done this honourable thing. You may go, my dear. And you, please,

girls," she added, turning to the beaming chums. "Thank you for your assistance."

They turned towards the door, Shirley flashing a tremulous smile at Dulcia. Shirley thought all was well. She knew nothing, as yet, of the damage done at the dance hall.

The door closed. Miss Primrose turned slowly to Dulcia.

"Although Shirley Matels' story has greatly relieved me and explained much, there is still the damage done at the dance hall, Dulcia," she said.

"Miss Primrose—"

"No, Dulcia, I am decided. I am glad, however, that I may now be more lenient. Instead of depriving you of both captaincies—why—why—what—Goodness gracious!" broke off the Head, gasping. "What ever is that?"

She turned to the open window. Startled also, Dulcia crossed to her side. From the quadrangle below had sounded a roaring, swiftly becoming louder and louder.

"A—a motor-bicycle!" stuttered Miss Primrose in scandalised tones, staring downwards. "And—upon my word, it is Clara Trevlyn on the carrier!"

Dulcia blinked. It was true. And now Clara, leaping off, with a parcel under her arm, was tearing towards the school steps. Miss Primrose rustled indignantly to the desk and pressed the bell. Boker, the page-boy, appeared.

"Boker," snapped Miss Primrose, "find Miss Trevlyn instantly, please, and tell her to report to me at once! Such behaviour—such—"

"I'm here, Miss Primrose!" came a cry; and the Tomboy almost sprinted into the room. "I'm here!" she gasped breathlessly. "And I've proved it—I've proved it! I'm sure I have!"

While Miss Primrose reeled, and Dulcia could only stare in wonder, Clara plonked her parcel down on a chair.

Miss Primrose, recovering, glared. "Clara," she rasped, "how dare you! How dare you, I say! First, I see you careering up the drive on the back of a motor-cycle—"

"He nearly ran over me in Court-field!" cried Clara. "My fault! And—and, as I was in a hurry, and I missed the bus, and he was a sport, he—he ran me here!" she gabbled breathlessly.

"Clara—"

"And—oh, Miss Primrose," raced on the Tomboy, unheeding the Head's dazed anger, "you must send Boker to stop Rona and Pat leaving! You must! Because," she gulped, "I can definitely prove that Dulcia did not do the damage at the dance hall—on my honour! Oh, please—please—please!" she begged frantically.

The Head passed a hand over her forehead. Like Dulcia, she stared hard at the Tomboy. But how could they doubt her earnestness?

"Boker," said Miss Primrose rather weakly, "Miss Fox and Miss Northanson are about to leave the school. Stop them if you can, and bring Miss Fox here!"

The gaping page-boy nodded, and, with an almost scared glance at Clara, hurried from the room.

"And now"—Miss Primrose sat down heavily in her chair—"and now, Clara," she said grimly, "please explain!"

"Yes, Miss Primrose!" said Clara breathlessly. "But, please, will you wait until Rona comes? Please will you let me do the talking to her, because—because I can prove Dulcia is innocent! Oh, Dulcia, I'm sure I can!" she gasped gleefully at the wondering, flushed prefect.

Miss Primrose stared hard at her. "Very well, Clara," she said slowly.

They waited. Rona, two minutes later, was shown into the study. And Rona was annoyed and impatient at this delay. She stared at Clara and Dulcia, and then turned rather sullenly to the Head.

"Really, Miss Primrose, we shall miss our train—"

"I am sorry, Rona!" said the Head quietly. "Clara, proceed!"

The Tomboy drew a deep breath. Her eyes glinting, she planted herself squarely in front of Rona. She met the prefect's glare with a curling lip.

"Dulcia went to a dance hall yesterday to save Shirley Mathels," she commenced steadily. "A certain girl, trying to hit at her, followed Dulcia—followed her into the dance hall—"

Rona stiffened. "Miss Primrose," she blurted, but Clara rushed on.

"That certain girl," she cried, "nearly ran into Dulcia. She was afraid that Dulcia might see her, so she dodged into a little room—the electrician's room."

Miss Primrose and Dulcia started. Rona was staring at Clara as if hypnotised.

"That girl," went on Clara remorselessly, "pressed back hard into the right-hand corner of the room, just in case Dulcia had seen her and might glance into the room! That girl stumbled over some wires, and thus fused all the lights! That girl—"

Clara's voice was hard now—"didn't know the commissionaire had seen her enter; she didn't know at the time that, in pressing back against the wall of the electrician's room, she had got paint over her coat! And that girl—"

Clara drew a deep breath, staring into the chalky face before her—"was you, Rona Fox! Look!"

She grabbed her parcel from the chair amidst a deathly hush, wrenched away the brown-paper wrapping, and held aloft a Cliff House blazer. A patch of smeared purple paint defaced it near the armpit.

"Yours, Rona!" flamed Clara. "Yours! A suspicion came to me. I took a chance, and at the dance hall I discovered the wet paint in the electrician's room; I discovered that the commissionaire remembered that another Cliff House girl had entered. He would recognise you. Do you dare to deny now?"

Rona looked about to faint. She stared around her wildly, desperately.

"It—it was an accident!" she sobbed. "I didn't know it was the electrician's room! I—I was frightened when I heard of the damage!"

"Rona!" The Head stared at her in scandalised horror. "Rona, you—you were the guilty girl, and you let Dulcia

take the blame!" Disgust claimed her features. "Go to your study!" she rasped. "Wait there until I send for you! Go at once, you wretched girl!"

Rona stumbled, sobbing, from the study, and—

Dulcia caught Clara in her arms, and kissed her full on the lips.

"You—your little marvel!" she breathed huskily. "You did this—for me! You saved me!"

"You bet!" breathed Clara, with shining eyes.

The Head was staring at them. Her kindly face was very, very gentle. She rose, and placed her hands on their shoulders.

"My dear girls! Dulcia, I am sorry with all my heart, and yet glad! What could I do but assume that Mr. Dixon was telling the truth? Instead, of course, he quite unknowingly lied. The girl he assumed must be you, because of the Cliff House blazer, was, of course, Rona! And Clara—"

She smiled down at the radiant Tomboy.

"Bravo, indeed, Clara!" she said softly. "And now"—her grey eyes twinkled at them—"you two girls, I believe, were to represent Cliff House to-day?"

"Yes, Miss Primrose," breathed Dulcia. "But Pat and Rona—"

"Rona," said the Head icily, "will most certainly not be playing. And Patricia has already informed me that she would much prefer that the team was as before. I really cannot think of two girls more worthy to uphold the honour of Cliff House! And I think that—"

She paused, and met their delighted stares with a smile.

"I think," she finished, "that you two should hurry if you want to catch the train!"

"You dear!" whooped Clara. "Oh, Dulcia, come on—come on! And we'll win for Cliff House!"

**A**ND WIN FOR Cliff House they did! They won on play that astounded the onlookers. They won on perfect understanding as partners. And how Cliff House cheered! How Cliff House glowed when they heard, and when the full story of Dulcia, Rona, and Clara came out!

Rona was sent home until the end of the term, but no one cared. It was all Dulcia and Clara, Clara and Dulcia, the heroines of the hour, the day, the week! And Clara's biggest moment?

That perhaps was when Dulcia, receiving the cup after the great game, and listening to the donor's remark that "She was lucky to have such a fine young partner," turned to Clara, and added softly:

"And such a friend!"

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

Thrilled and excited were Barbara Redfern & Co. when Stella Stone, Cliff House's old head girl, came back to the district, to open up a kennels. Round her they swarmed, eager to help their old "idol" make a great success of everything. But little did Babs & Co. dream that—



## "THE PET THEY PROTECTED!"

—a most adorable little stray dog—would bring disastrous trouble upon Stella, and dismaying complications for themselves. Don't miss this very appealing, very unusual Hilda Richards story, featuring your favourites. It appears, COMPLETE, next Friday.





Another fascinating COMPLETE Middle Ages story featuring young Lady Fayre, the—



# SECRET HELPER TO ROBIN HOOD

By IDA MELBOURNE



## By King Richard's Orders!

"TIS hard indeed," sighed the young Lady Fayre, "to be busy with dull lessons when the sun is shining so brightly!"

Fayre was in the school-room of Longley Castle.

Warm sunshine came through the window and fell in a wide beam of gold across the old, roughly hewn wooden table at which she sat writing with a quill pen. Facing her, looking very learned with his long white beard, was the Venerable Brie, her tutor, unusually wakeful—perhaps because recently the Baron le Feuvre, Fayre's uncle and guardian, had rated him severely for falling asleep during lesson-time.

"Tis as hard for me as for you," said the Venerable Brie. "But from much learning comes great wisdom and happiness. Do you but write down the figures one, two, three in that same order and divide them by nine. You will be glad later when you can use suns to aid you in counting your gold."

Fayre wrote down the figures, and sighed again. Her long golden plaits hung down her back, their splendid colour heightened by her rich red velvet frock. In truth, her heart was not in these dreary figures. She was thinking of the village fair which was to be held on the morrow.

"One, two, three," she murmured; and then there came an interruption not of her own making.

In the stone corridor outside the school-room heavy footsteps told of a man's approach, and by the slinking, jingling sound, Fayre judged that it was one armed in chain mail; a soldier, in fact.

When the curtain was pulled aside, her judgment was proved sound; for in the archway stood a soldier in glinting chain mail, his snow-white tunic bearing proudly the red cross of one who had been on the Crusade.

Saluting the soldier spoke gruffly. "My lady, there are wenches from the village would have word with you in t' courtyard!"

"With me?" cried Fayre eagerly. She ran to the window and looked down at the courtyard. Soldiers and castle servants moved to and fro, but

not far from the main doorway she saw half a dozen village girls, clad in the usual dark green frocks of the period. They were talking in low tones, and looking about them with obvious delight at everything they saw. Fayre, leaning from the window, called down.

"Aho, there!"

Before she could say more, or hear the answer of the girls, her arm was taken by her tutor, who pulled her back, speaking sternly, and frowning his disapproval.

"Are you a common wench that you shout from windows?" he asked. "Go down to them, and remember, please, that you are the young lady of the castle!"

Fayre lowered her eyes meekly, and bowed; then she turned and went skipping from the room, delighted at this wonderful excuse to have leave from dull lessons.

She ran ahead of the soldier down the stone stairway of the castle, fairly skipping with excitement, and was breathless when at length she passed

fair. There will be fun and games and much merriment. There will also be one who is to be styled the Queen of the May."

"Why, yes!" said Fayre, nodding. "Who is the lucky girl?"

The Queen of the May would be garlanded, feted, treated like a queen for a while, and the honour would last her for a full year.

Fayre now looked from one to the other, wondering which was the prettiest, and most likely to have the honour. But to her great surprise the tall girl, spreading her frock, curtsied again, and then said:

"Oh, my lady, if—if it is not asking too much, we wish—"

"We would like—"

"We dare ask—"

**Fayre's bullying uncle, the baron, was extremely cunning. He meant to punish the villagers, and blame King Richard. Lady Fayre and Robin Hood weren't cunning—but they were too smart for the baron!**

into the brilliant sunshine, where, on a patch of smooth grass, stood the group of girls.

They regarded her in awe, and then the leader, a girl some inches taller and a few months older than her friends, curtsied. In those days the niece of a baron was someone of great importance, and it was customary to show such respect.

But Fayre smiled and held out her hand in friendly manner.

"Well, this is nice of you," she said. "It is me you have come to see?"

"Yes, my lady," said the tall girl, eyeing that rich velvet frock enviously. "It is indeed; and it is most gracious that you deign to see us."

"Deign? Why, it is a pleasure for me!" said Fayre, laughing. "In my room I have been doing sums. I would rather talk with you in the sunlight than sit cooped in a shady room with pen and ink. But what is it you wish to say to me?"

The tall girl looked at her friends, and there were whispers and nudges before she spoke again.

"My lady. It—it is a great favour we ask. To-morrow is the village

"You, m'lady."

It was out! The deputation's reason for coming to the castle was clear.

"I?" said Fayre, quite taken aback.

"Yes, m'lady. Oh, in your lovely frock it would be so splendid! We could rejoice. We should feel proud!" said the tall girl.

Fayre's eyes sparkled, and a touch of colour came to her cheeks; for this was indeed an honour. She knew how much this meant to the girls of the village, and it touched her to think that they had chosen her.

And yet, it was not an honour she could accept. A poor girl should be the queen, not someone from the castle.

"How kind you are," she said gently.

"I do much like this honour you do me. And yet, I have so much wealth and luxury all the year. For the one day, would it not be best to choose one from the village? I would be glad to help you choose—yes, and to let her wear a lovely frock of mine, and braid her hair; and she shall have flowers, and pretty shoes—"

She saw how the girls' eyes lit up at such a thought; but the leader, although a moment or two silent, as

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

## BETWEEN OURSELVES



**MY DEAR READERS.**—  
Horse lovers and riders,  
forward!

I know there are many of you. Your letters have told me that. Indeed, quite a lot of you Australian readers own your own mounts. Lucky girls!

What would have been your reaction to this piece of doggerel, quite neatly carved in the wooden side of a stall:

Ride him handsome and high,  
Hit the earth—then the sky!  
Top buckin' an' weavin' an'  
snappin',

Makes you jolt like to die.  
Swappin' ends—yippi-yi!  
Now you sure ought to try  
This ornery, sun-fishin' crittur—  
Yep! We names him Malpie.

Rather startling—and intriguing, eh, girls? I found it so, anyway, and promptly inquired of a groom at the stables who had carved it, and if it related to the horse now in that particular stall. (Incidentally, this took place last week-end at a little village I often visit for riding.)

According to the groom, it did relate to the horse in that stall—a meek enough animal in appearance. The doggerel had been put there by the previous owner of the horse, a Canadian rancher.

The groom also informed me that Malpie—curious name—used to be all that the doggerel claimed for him. Now he was considerably quieter, but even so, there were only about two people who could manage him—the owner of the stables and his daughter.

"Bit too hot for you, sir," the groom told me very candidly.

"He's pretty fresh now. Mebbe the guv'nor would let you ride him after his daughter has taken him out and let him let off steam a bit."

That was rather a nasty smack in the eye for your editor. Apparently the owner's daughter—quite a young girl—was capable of "gentling" this "sun-fishin' crittur" so that he would be quiet enough for me to mount!

It so happened that I hadn't time to take out a horse then, but I have firmly decided that I shall ride Malpie at the first opportunity—and without anyone riding him just before me!

So if this "Chat" does not appear one week you'll know that a certain pony has lived up to his reputation!

From horses and lovers of horses it is a simple journey to dogs and those who love them, and in dogs we have the central theme of next week's Long Complete Cliff House story. The title is

### "THE PET THEY PRO- TECTED,"

and many old readers will be pleased to read once again about Stella Stone, the popular ex-captain of Cliff House.

Stella opens a kennels not far from her old school, and naturally Babs & Co. are among the first to visit her. There is a big dog show in the offing, and they take their own pets with them to place under Stella's expert attention for the big event.

It is on the journey to Stella's that they run across a stray dog—a dog they befriended, and a dog which brings adventure to them and to Stella in sensational fashion.

This latest story by Miss Hilda Richards will appeal immensely to dog lovers—to all of you.

Next week's issue brings you another story of Robin Hood and Lady Fayre, further intriguing chapters of "Brenda's Task of Mystery" and two more of Patricia's ever popular pages.

And, by the way, it will be published on Friday, May 26th, instead of Saturday, the 27th. Bye-bye until then.

Your sincere friend,  
THE EDITOR.

though lost in dreams, shook her head, and then held out a folded piece of parchment to Fayre.

But before she handed it over, she looked warily about her, as though this was something she did not want observed, and noting that an officer of the guard was watching, she charged her position in such a manner that he was unable to see what had happened.

Fayre, puzzled, took the note. She was puzzled because in those days there were few who could read and write.

Unfolding the paper, turning away so that the officer had no chance to watch, she saw the round scholarly writing, and at once knew whose hand had penned it—Friar Tuck's.

Slowly Fayre read the message, and her brows knit with puzzlement.

"Your green-clad friend begs that for the great happiness of the village you do wear the May crown on the morrow. He has not yet asked in vain."

It was strange that her green-clad friend, gay and daring, should ask her to do this, but Fayre's mind became made up at once.

She turned to the girls, who stood in hushed expectancy for her answer.

"I am honoured and happy," she said. "I will be your May queen. It is indeed an honour. Thank you all! And I hope that to-morrow the sun will shine."

"Thank you!" said the tall girl, her eyes sparkling; and, taking Fayre's hand, she dropped to her knees and kissed it.

Fayre pressed her hand, and then, to the amazement and joy of them all, kissed the village girl's hand in return.

"We are friends," she said. "Tell who sent the message that I will indeed—"

But Fayre did not finish the sentence, for there rode through the castle gateway over the drawbridge a rider who bore the stains of travel, but whose magnificent cloak and splendid mount

proclaimed him as one in the service of royalty. The lion of England was emblazoned in red and gold on his black velvet cloak, and, as he clattered over the drawbridge, he reined in and threw up his hand.

"In the king's name, I seek the Baron le Feuvre!"

The village girls drew together, and Fayre stood silent, wondering what this portended.

The baron, who had been supervising a modification to a castle window, crossed to the messenger.

"In the king's name! What is it?" he demanded. "I am the Baron le Feuvre."

"Then let it be known; let the criers go forth," said the messenger in Norman French, "and proclaim what is the will of his most Royal Majesty King Richard of England!"

"And that?" said the baron amidst a hush.

"There shall be no fairs held without his royal consent, on pain of death for the leaders and of severe punishment for all who attend!"

### "Here is the Warrant!"

THERE was a stricken hush in the courtyard of Longley Castle, for there had been no hint that such a ban as this was to be imposed on the merry life of the village.

"No fair!" murmured the Lady Fayre, aghast.

"Ah, it has come, then!" sighed the tall girl.

Now from the soldiers and servants came an angry murmuring, but the baron stilled it.

"Silence!" he roared. "Who speaks against this edict is a traitor to his king! The king's word has gone forth!"

The muttering and murmuring died to mere whispers, but Fayre, arms akimbo, had a glint in her eyes.

"It is unlike King Richard to mar his people's pleasure," she said. "I do doubt the truth of it."

But the tall girl plucked her arm.

"Nay, 'twas whispered that this might happen," she said nervously. "Twas for that reason, methinks, the secret message was writ."

Fayre stepped forward.

"I will have word with the messenger," she said.

Fayre had plenty of courage, and she so loved the people that she was ready to dare even her stern uncle's wrath to give them happiness. That the fair was banned seemed to her most unjust, and it was likely that there had been some grave error. For Richard, the king, whom she had met, was a great-hearted man, as fond of merriment as he was of brave deeds.

"Uncle, my lord—" said Fayre, as she reached the baron, who was now conversing with the dismounted messenger.

He had his back to her, and she decided to wait until his talk was finished.

"'Twas the best way," said her uncle to the messenger. "How has the news been taken elsewhere?"

The messenger shrugged.

"Pah! There are murmurs and groans. Mayhap there will be revolt."

"It shall be crushed," snapped the baron, "in the king's name!"

And he laughed harshly.

Fayre stiffened as she heard that, and all at once a suspicion leaped to her mind.

This ban could only rob King Richard of his popularity. The people would

resent it, and transfer their loyalty to Prince John.

Once before Prince John and her uncle had schemed to betray the king; but, thanks to her own quickness and the loyalty of Robin Hood, the plot had failed.

This might well be a more cunning scheme to rob the king of his subjects' trust and loyalty.

So Fayre, anxious for her uncle not to know she had overheard, moved back, and then, speaking loudly to attract his attention, stepped forward again.

The baron and the messenger turned to her.

"A messenger from King Richard?" Fayre murmured.

"Indeed so," the man answered.

"Sir Rupert la Moye!" said the baron, presenting him. "My niece, the Lady Fayre!"

"How fares his Majesty?" asked Fayre.

"Indeed well when last I saw him," said the messenger, with a sly glance at the baron which Fayre did not miss.

"How sad that there shall be no fair to-morrow, when I have been asked to be the May queen!" said Fayre, with a sigh.

Her uncle swung upon her.

"You, May queen! Queen at a common fair for the people! Bah! 'Tis a dishonour! Small wonder the king bans such riotous assemblies!"

And then, seeing the village maids, he scowled upon them.

"Let them begone!" he commanded to a soldier.

The soldier ran forward, gesturing. "Begone, ere the baron's rage grows!" he said gruffly. "There shall be no fair, more's the pity!"

The girls awaited no further persuasion, but, with a swift glance at Fayre, hurried to the drawbridge and went over it to the lane.

Fayre's eyes gleamed, but otherwise she gave no show of her anger at this harsh treatment.

It was not the time to show anger for fear she played into the baron's hands. If he locked her in the castle there was nothing she could do to help the villagers have their fair, and to learn if there was indeed a plot against Richard afoot.

As soon as the girls were gone the baron released his grip on Fayre's arm.

"Get you into the castle! Ask your aunt, the baroness, to see that a meal is prepared for the messenger!"

"I will tell the baroness," said Fayre eagerly.

And she ran indoors as fast as she could to do the baron's bidding. Then she loitered until he came to the dining-hall, where, with great efficiency, a meal of cold meat was served him.

The messenger, flinging aside his cloak, took his place, while in the stable a fresh horse was saddled.

"I would fain see the king's warrant and his mark on it, and the great seal," murmured Fayre eagerly.

The baron frowned and the messenger cast her a swift look.

"Warrant—begone, girl! 'Tis not for such as you to see!" her uncle thundered. "Pry not into affairs of royal importance."

Fayre turned away, excited by the rebuff.

The messenger had no warrant. Of that she was sure; and she took note that he carried nothing with him but his cloak.

Satisfied, she stole out and, light of tread, went to her room. There, opening the chest in the corner, she busied herself with a task dear to her heart,

It would have startled the baron could he have seen his niece a moment later and known that it was she; for no longer did she wear her rich velvet frock. She wore instead a humble garment very similar to those that the village maids had worn in the courtyard. In colour, it was bottle green, and of the poorest material, sadly worn. Over it she wore a hooded cloak of dark brown, also very shabby.

When, thus attired, she reached the drawbridge a moment or two later the guards did not bar her way; for they had seen her in that attire quite often, and supposed that she was a village maid who ran errands for the Lady Fayre.

At her best speed, then, she hurried to the near-by woods, where, in a secret glade far from the road, Robin Hood had his headquarters. Braving the roving wolves, Fayre meant to find him. But to-day her journey was cut short. She had gone but a few yards into the wood when a well-known voice hailed her gaily.

"My Lady Fayre—" sang Robin Hood.

And there he was, high in a tree, looking down at her. As she waved, he swung down from branch to branch and landed at her feet with a light spring.

"Aha! I knew that you would not fail!" he said. "You are to be Queen of the May?"

Fayre sadly shook her head.

"Not so, Robin Hood. A messenger is newly come from the king. The fair is banned!"

Robin Hood folded his arms and into his eyes came a glint.

"Talk of it reached me, but I had heard 'twas the baron's evil intent, 'not his Majesty's."

"You heard truly," said Fayre. "For I believe that Richard himself had no say in this. The messenger bears no warrant. The king's name is taken in vain."

Robin Hood started.

"A trick? So-ho! A trick, is it?" he said.

Robin Hood walked to and fro in solemn thought, then laughed.

"By my troth!" he said. "Shall the

people suffer for this trick? Already there will be murmuring 'gainst the king. Shall he suffer, too?" He swung round to Fayre. "Robin Hood is the people's friend. He has sworn that they shall have the fair. And have it indeed they shall. If you would help Robin Hood—"

"Anything," said Fayre eagerly; and her eyes shone with admiration for the gallant outlaw.

"'Tis dangerous," he murmured, eyeing her shrewdly.

"I fear not."

"Then—" And his strong hand dropped on to her shoulder and pressed it. "Get you to the castle, and see that you have certain news of the road the messenger will take back."

"An ambush will await the messenger—"

"And the truth shall be urged from him!" said Robin Hood.

Dancing to the lane, Fayre's heart was light; for daring Robin Hood was the very man to outwit such an artful schemer as the baron.

Back at the castle she changed into her own frock, and then, as the Lady Fayre, descended to the banquet hall, where the messenger, wrapping his cloak about him, was on the point of departure.

"Ah! The Lady Fayre," he murmured. "Come here, my dear. You asked the favour of seeing the king's warrant. You shall do so. Here it is—"

And, taking from under his cloak a roll of parchment, he untied the ribbon that bound it!

### Fayre Guesses The Truth!

FAYRE fell back as the messenger unrolled the parchment, at the foot of which was a large red seal. For a moment her heart almost stopped beating, so great was the shock.

Could the messenger be genuine, after all? If so, then for Robin Hood to ambush him would be an act of treason in itself.

"See—such is a Royal Warrant," said her uncle. "'Tis but an ordinary-look-



FAYRE and the village girls ceased their excited discussion of the festival, of which she was to be queen, and turned towards the drawbridge. A messenger, riding up, halted and raised his hand for attention. "By order of King Richard!" he cried. "All fairs and festivals are in future forbidden!"

ing document, yet it may lose lives. Who dares to defy such a warrant ruses it to his last moment."

Fayre, recovering herself, mumbled a word or two.

"'Tis indeed a most impressive document," she said.

The messenger rolled it up again, and Fayre moved forward too late to give it close scrutiny.

"I did not see the seal close to," she said.

"You had the chance. 'Tis gone," said the baron. "And you begone, too. The messenger has hard riding before him. Take you the road over the moor," he added to the messenger. "A troop of horsemen shall accompany you until you have sight of the New Manor."

The messenger passed out into the courtyard, and Fayre, heavy of heart and alarmed, hurried up the staircase to go to her bed-chamber. As soon as possible she must warn Robin Hood, lest, learning by some other means the route the messenger was to take, he set out to waylay him.

Before she reached her room, however, the Venerable Brie confronted her.

"So. At last you are ready to do your task," he said sternly. "The baron has raged at me so that my ears still burn, and only the good fortune that I was able to do him some slight service with my pen spared my old bones from cruel blows. I was asleep when he came to the room."

Fayre said that she was sorry. To soothe him she took interest in the service he had done with his pen.

"Ah! I am glad the baron had need of your pen," she said. "Had I been there, though, he might have preferred my pretty hand," she added teasingly.

"I think not," said the Venerable Brie. "'Twas a secret commission."

"Indeed?" said Fayre, mildly curious.

They entered the school-room, and the tutor motioned her to her desk, where parchment rested, and the flask of ink and her quill pen, lately used by the tutor himself.

On the desk, too, was sealing wax.

"You have been sealing," she murmured. "'Twas indeed important—"

And then, with a jump of her heart, she broke off, remembering that warrant with its bright red seal which she had been shown—at a distance!

Fayre sat down at her desk, and unrolled the parchment. From the large sheet a smaller section had been cut—just such a portion as she had been shown!

Her suspicions hardened to certainty then.

"'Tis indeed a great honour that the king's messenger eats at the castle," she said.

"'Tis the time for sums not for gossip," said the tutor.

"But I have news to tell. I saw the warrant he bore," said Fayre, meeting the tutor's dimmed eyes. "My good sir, I have seldom seen writing neater or finer."

Her keen eyes saw the tutor's light up and noted the faint smile on his lips.

"'Twould be hard to imitate such royal writing," Fayre went on. "Hard and indeed most perilous, for it is said that he who falsely writes a warrant purporting to come from the king is drawn and quartered!"

The Venerable Brie stiffened, and his hands shook.

Her heart smitten by his alarm, Fayre leaned forward.

"Have no fear!" she whispered. "I know the truth, but I do not tell; but 'twould be safer if that false document were taken from the messenger."

The Venerable Brie was white as his

beard now, and his eyes were large with fright.

"How—how—" he quavered. "If Richard the King should learn— But I swear I did it at the point of a sword! I swear—"

"Hush!" murmured Fayre, finger to lips. "Not so loudly, I prithee, good sir! There is a brave man in the woods to whom I can send word. No one shall know that you had hand in it. For gladly will we wrest that document from the messenger."

Fayre unrolled the parchment in businesslike manner.

"But first let another be written," she said. "Do this for me, kind and noble man of wisdom, and I swear that that other false document shall be wrested from the messenger. There shall be another false messenger—but one who will do honour to Richard's name."

Then, taking the pen, Fayre wrote busily in her best handwriting.

"Know ye," she recited, "that we, Richard Plantagenet, King of England, have been most falsely wronged by one who took our name and power to rob the good people of their pleasure. Be it known that it was not our royal wish that the fairs should be banned. Let merriment rule. Go to it!"

"HERE THEY come!" murmured Fayre.

She crouched with Robin Hood behind a bush at a point where the New Manor was in sight. By swift running, and their knowledge of short cuts, the outlaws had worked their way ahead of the troop that rode with the false messenger from the baron's castle.

### GOOD NEWS FOR YOU

One day less to wait for next week's issue of your favourite paper, for THE SCHOOLGIRL will be published on Friday, May 26th, instead of Saturday, the 27th. Don't forget—one day earlier. So order your copy in good time.

Soon the messenger would ride on alone—at the outlaws' mercy!

But Robin Hood had not planned to attack him. Close by was treacherous, marshy ground, and it was just beyond it that the main party of the outlaws were hiding, bows ready for action.

At a word from Robin Hood, the arrows went screaming over the heads of the troop, which instantly reined up.

Robin Hood and his men were not, as was their habit, clad in green. Today they wore chain mail, taken as trophies of war in their numberless encounters with the baron's soldiers.

As the arrows flew, Robin Hood himself, wearing a white tunic blazoned with a red cross, leaped forward, a sword in hand.

"In the king's name, halt, rascals!" he roared.

But already the troop had turned to charge, leaving the messenger with one escort to gallop on.

They charged unprepared into the marshy ground, the sheen of which had been artfully disguised by torn bracken and grass. And not until their horses were plunging helplessly did they guess the trap.

"In the king's name—traitors!" cried Robin Hood.

And he himself dashed to the messenger and the escort.

Fayre, hands clasped, heart thumping,

watched in suspense. While the messenger, crouching low, galloped on, the escort turned to meet Robin Hood.

"In the king's name—give me that false warrant!" cried Robin Hood, whose face was partly covered by a visor.

The escort, clashing swords with him, was too taken aback to put much heart into his fighting.

"False warrant! I know naught of false warrants!" he cried.

Ahead, two outlaws, leaping for the messenger's horse, clung to the reins and brought it to a halt. The messenger was terrified, not knowing whether these were king's soldiers or not. The cloak was dragged from him, his hat, his belt, and—the warrant!

"You shall know that King Richard himself comes with an army to vent his royal rage on the baron at sundown!" shouted Robin Hood, as he shattered his adversary's sword at the hilt.

Dragging their horses from the marsh, unnerved by this news, the baron's troop re-formed. The messenger, deprived of his false raiment, ran like a hare, clutched at the stirrups of an officer's horse, and was helped on to a place behind the rider.

With arrows whistling over their heads, the troop went thundering back the way it had come.

"Well done!" cried Fayre, in great delight. "And now—"

"And now—to the village!" said Robin Hood, swinging the cape about him and buckling on his sword.

IN THE village all was excitement and gaiety. There was the sound of hammering as platforms for dancers were erected, as the maypole with its merry streamers was raised and as tables for feasting were fitted.

A messenger had ridden in with a royal warrant; and the news of treachery having already spread to the village there was no surprise when that messenger, wearing the magnificent cloak, read the royal warrant that denied the supposed ban on the fair.

Another messenger arrived, too, after hard riding, to say that a mighty army was but ten miles away—Richard's army. As the messenger was an outlaw suitably attired, he did not alarm the Lady Fayre; but his news, reaching the castle, redoubled all efforts there.

The baron would not leave his castle; let the villagers do what they pleased. He must stay to await Richard. And he was still waiting there at sundown on the morrow, thinking that a mistake had been made in the day.

From the roof his soldiers watched all the village merriment. They saw the maypole, and they saw the May Queen; but from that distance they could not recognise her as the Lady Fayre, who, so the baron understood from the tutor, was abed with a chill. Only when the siege was lifted did Fayre return, to find the baron in sullen rage, half aware of the trick that had been played, but unable, because of his guilt, to take action.

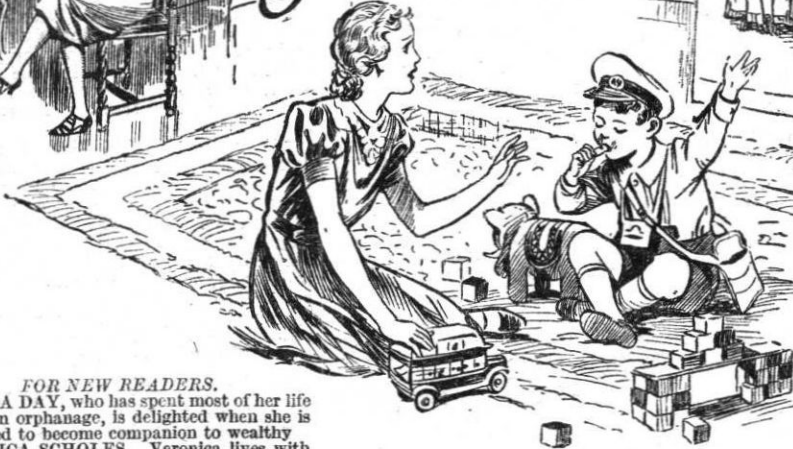
And the murmuring in the village was not, as he and Prince John had hoped, against Richard, but against the traitors who had sought to besmirch his name and rob the people of their pleasures!

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

ANOTHER fascinating COMPLETE story featuring these two delightful characters in next Friday's SCHOOL-GIRL, so order your copy well in advance, won't you?

Don't miss a word of this enthralling and unusual story.

# Brenda's Task of MYSTERY!



## FOR NEW READERS.

**BRENDA DAY**, who has spent most of her life in an orphanage, is delighted when she is asked to become companion to wealthy **VERONICA SCHOLES**. Veronica lives with her aunt and uncle and her five-year-old brother, Dickie. Part of Brenda's duties consist of looking after the lovable youngster.

On arrival at Fernbank, the Scholes' house, she meets a mysterious boy, **RONALD BENSON**, who tells her he is working on her behalf and that for the sake of her future happiness she must remain at Fernbank and do well in her new position. He warns her to let no one know that they are friends and working together.

During a rehearsal of a pageant, Brenda slips off to meet Ronald. Veronica, intrigued by Brenda's behaviour, follows. Brenda gives her the slip, however, and on arriving back at the rehearsal before her young mistress, is asked to read Veronica's part in the pageant. When Veronica hears of this she storms off home in a rage. Later, returning to Fernbank, Brenda is told that Veronica wishes to see her. Knowing her young mistress' temper, Brenda fears that she is going to be dismissed.

(Now read on.)

## Not the Ordeal She Had Expected!

"If only it had never happened," Brenda Day murmured, and bit her lip.

A distressing ordeal lay ahead of her. It might mean dismissal. If Veronica Scholes, her young mistress of the strangely conflicting moods, was as furious now as she had been at the pageant rehearsal two hours ago, Brenda knew that nothing could save her.

And what else could the summons to Veronica mean?

If only she hadn't had to slip away from the rehearsal and meet Ronald, her mysterious young friend, at the spinney! If only dear little Dickie hadn't spotted her and, in his childish innocence, told his sister! If only Veronica, shadowing her, hadn't got into that muddy, bedraggled condition! If only she herself hadn't been asked to read Veronica's part in order to save time, thus making Veronica more furious than ever! If only—if only—

Fiercely, Brenda checked those rioting thoughts. She had reached Veronica's room. The door was closed. She tapped and entered.

Veronica was standing by the dressing-table, facing her. She fought down her agitation, and looked at the girl, scanning her dark, handsome face.

For if Veronica looked angry, or malicious, or supercilious, her fate was sealed. Dismissal! That's what it would mean. Bidding good-bye to so many things she had come to love—the house, the Scholes, the new friends she had made in the district, and—adorable young Dickie. And it would mean disaster, too, to the baffling activities which Ronald was engaged on for her sake.

But Veronica showed no trace of

## MORE AND MORE BAFFLING!

Why did Brenda's strange boy-friend insist that she had her photograph taken with his scarf about her head?

anger! Veronica, in fact, was smiling broadly—and—why, yes, now she was coming towards her with outstretched hands.

"Oh, Brenda, darling, I simply had to send for you," Veronica said, in a tremulous voice. "Come in, dear. Sit down over there and have some chocolates. I—I want to have a chat with you."

Rather dazedly, Brenda found herself drawn into the room.

Then all at once she realised what decency demanded of her.

"Veronica," she said earnestly, leaning forward, "I'm terribly sorry for everything that happened to-day. I didn't try to steal your part in the pageant, honestly I didn't. You can have it back. You've only got to say 'Yes' and it's yours—any time—now!"

But to her astonishment, Veronica, laughing quite gaily, drew up a chair beside her, took hold of her hands and patted them.

"But I don't want to say 'Yes,' dear," she said. "Brenda"—the laughter deserted her then—"Brenda," she said unsteadily, "I want to say 'No.'"

"No? Oh, but, Veronica, you—"

"And that's not all I want to say, Brenda. I want to say something you're probably thinking—that I'm a beastly, jealous, vicious little cat! Oh, yes, I am! And if you don't think it, you ought to. I am a cat—I've been horrid to you, Brenda, and—and ever since I got back here I've felt—oh, I don't know—" She choked. "I—I just feel utterly ashamed of myself, Brenda, and—please—will you forgive me?"

Brenda stared at Veronica, eyes slowly widening. In her heart amazement and overwhelming gladness fought for mastery. Veronica asking her forgiveness! Veronica asking no questions, making no direct reference to that visit to the spinney—when it might have proved so awkward for her—but just being completely humble and penitent.

"Oh, Veronica, why, of—of course I forgive you!" she cried, her face aglow. "And—and I don't blame you for getting annoyed. But that part, Veronica, I'd rather you had it back, really—"

But Veronica, pressing her hand, shook her head.

"No, old thing, you keep it. You'll be tons better than I. And, Brenda, I've an idea!"

"Yes?" said Brenda, still hardly able to realise that this wasn't all some extraordinary dream.

"I've thought of a way to prove how sorry I am—and to help you at the same time," Veronica went on enthusiastically. "How would you like to have one or two rehearsals here?"

"You mean at Fernbank?" Brenda cried.

"Yes. Why not? We've bags of room. You'd like it?"

There was no need for Brenda to say "Yes."

The radiant look on her face told Veronica her answer.

"That's fine!" Veronica said. "I'll fix one up as soon as possible." She looked at Brenda quizzically. "Friends again?" she asked.

"Oh, Veronica—yes!" Brenda cried. Oh, happy indeed was Brenda when

By

MARGERY MARRIOTT

she left her young mistress and went down to tea.

But she might not have been so happy if she had seen the peculiar smile on Veronica's lips as the door closed upon her; a smile which seemed to give Veronica extreme satisfaction, for she turned to her dressing-table mirror in order to gloat over it!

"YAAA-AAA-AAWWWW!"

Luxuriously, Brenda stretched herself, yawning and blinking open her eyes.

Morning again! The sun was streaming in between the gay curtains. And Brenda, whose own heart was full of sunshine to-day, sprang out of bed and flung the curtains wide so that the whole room should be just like she was.

Humming to herself, she put on a dressing-gown and slippers, and hurried off to young Dickie's room. But surprisingly enough the youngster was not there.

"Now where on earth is the young monkey?" she began, and then started as there came sounds from the bathroom. "So that's it! My goodness, if he lets the basin overflow—"

Brenda flew then. Into the bath-room she rushed, to pull up with a jerk. Incredibly enough, Dickie wasn't even concerned with the usually fascinating taps. Dickie, standing on a chair, was staring into his father's shaving mirror, a bottle in one hand, the cork in his mouth, and the other hand vigorously rubbing all over his cheeks, chin, and upper lip.

"Dickie—gracious me!" Brenda ejaculated, hurrying forward. She took the bottle, looked at it, and blinked. "Hair oil! And you're putting it on your face."

"Uuum!" he said proudly, putting up his face for inspection. "Dickie have whiskers like Uncle Arthur now!"

"Whiskers?" said Brenda, in astonishment. "But—but—"

"Yes, Auntie Brenda—real, long whiskers that I can shave off in the morning, and nice thick whiskers under my nose that I can tickle people with

when I kiss them." Dickie declared, round-eyed with awe. He blinked at the bottle in Brenda's hand. "That'll make them grow, won't it, Auntie Brenda?"

"Who ever told you that, Dickie?" Brenda asked.

"No one, Auntie Brenda. Only I heard Uncle Arthur say that that made hair bootifully, and as he's got such lots an' lots—"

Laughing, Brenda took the little chap in her arms.

"But Uncle Arthur didn't mean it makes hair grow, Dickie," she explained patiently. "He mean it makes hair look beautiful—the hair on your head. I'll show you, shall I? But first let's wash your face before it starts to sting!"

"Like the waspies do?" Dickie spluttered, as Brenda set to work with a warm flannel. "Cos I want to be a waspie 'stead of a dragonfly in the pageant, you know, an' you said p'r'aps I could—"

But even Dickie forgot his one abiding ambition regarding the pageant when Brenda had put a judicious amount of oil on his dark curls. They gleamed brightly, and downstairs he rushed, dragging her by the hand and gleefully calling for his aunt and uncle.

To Dickie this was one stage nearer manhood.

Anxiously Brenda awaited Veronica's appearance at breakfast, wondering if that strange girl had changed her mood again since last evening. But—no! Veronica was as friendly as ever, frankly telling her aunt and uncle that she was withdrawing from the pageant in Brenda's favour.

It was quite an exciting morning altogether. A couple of Veronica's friends came round, and Brenda took part in a really thrilling tennis doubles. Afterwards—lunch. And then, having induced Dickie to lie down for his afternoon rest, Brenda had the biggest thrill of all.

One of the maids called her to the phone in the study, and when she went

there she was more intrigued than ever to be addressed by a completely unfamiliar voice.

"Is that Miss Brenda Day?" "Yes, Miss Day speaking," Brenda said. "Who is it, please?"

Then she started. It was the village photographer—Langford! But what ever did he want with her? She soon knew, for he at once explained.

He was photographing the principal members of the pageant cast, and would she give him a sitting that afternoon?

"Oh, I'd love to! Yes, I can manage it!" Brenda cried. (Surely Veronica could have no objections in her present mood!) "Oh, you'll want me in costume, I suppose?" she added, her face falling. "I'm afraid I haven't got it—"

"Costume?" said Mr. Langford.

"Oh—er—let me see now. Er—um!" He hummed and hahad for some seconds before coming to a decision. "Oh, no, I don't think it'll matter, Miss Day," he declared. "There'll be no need for a costume. Would half-past three suit you? At the studio? Thank you! Good-bye!"

Brenda, hanging up the receiver, pursed her lips. Queer—about the costume. She'd have thought that to be most essential.

"I'd better see Veronica straight away," she mused.

Veronica, in her room, beamed when she heard the news.

"Oh, you lucky old thing!" she cried. "Of course you can go. And you can run a little errand for me, if you will. It won't take you long. Just give a note to Madame Duprez, the costumier, and wait for a reply."

In a moment the note was written and sealed. Then off Brenda went to get dressed, even though there was plenty of time. She wasn't going to miss a thrill like this!

Alone, Veronica slowly crossed to the window and stood there, looking down until she spotted Brenda hastening down the drive. Then, a brooding, far-away look on her face, she nodded to herself.

"I think it's time I did some phoning," she murmured, and turned towards the dainty occasional table beside her bed.

## MEET YOUR CLIFF

### HOUSE FAVOURITES AGAIN

in this superb book-length story dealing with Babs & Co.'s early adventures at the famous school.

It is one of the Four May issues of the

## SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN LIBRARY

Now on Sale, price 4d. per volume.

The other three lovely stories are:

- No. 681. "Morcove's River Holiday!" one of the finest stories of Betty Barton & Co. ever written by Marjorie Stanton.
- No. 682. "Treasure Trail of the Tremaynes!" Sheila Austin's thrilling mystery-and-adventure yarn.
- No. 683. "The Schoolgirl Speed Star!" an exciting story of school life and motor racing, by Hazel Armitage.



### Strange Happenings at the Photographer's!

"MISS DAY is the name. I've an appointment for half-past three."

Brenda tried to keep the excitement out of her voice as she addressed the smart, efficient young man in Langford's.

"Mr. Langford is almost ready for you, Miss Day," came the smiling reply. "Would you step inside? He won't keep you a minute."

As the man drew back red plush curtains Brenda stepped through them. She saw at once that she was in the studio. There were one or two chairs, a settee, numerous portraits, and some rather striking examples of Mr. Langford's art on the walls, and an elaborate camera to one side. Interestedly, Brenda began to gaze about her, until suddenly—

"Hallo!" exclaimed a cheery voice.

With a gasp, Brenda jumped round. Astonished she gazed at the young man who, smiling of face, with neatly brushed hair and a gaily coloured black-and-yellow scarf twined around his neck, had risen from one of the chairs.

"You!" she cried, for it was none other than her mysterious friend and ally, Ronald Benson. "But—but, Ronald, how did you know I was coming here?"

"I'd have been pretty dumb if I hadn't known, considering I jolly well got Mr. Langford to invite you!" was Ronald's grinning reply.

"You did?" Brenda stared more than ever. "But I thought—I mean, Mr. Langford told me it was to do with the pageant."

"Well, so it is," said Ronald, but he did not sound too convincing, and Brenda experienced the queerest of little thrills.

No costume! Again she thought of the strangeness of that; and she recalled the photographer's hesitancy when she had mentioned it. Sharply she looked at Ronald, though her eyes were twinkling.

"Are you sure it's to do with the pageant, Ronald?" she asked, and then gave a gasp as, gently but firmly, he pushed her on to one of the chairs. "Ronald, what are you doing? Please, I asked you—"

"And, please," Ronald begged, unmistakably urgent, "don't ask anything at all, Brenda, until I've finished what I'm going to do. Can you shift round a little?"

Head on one side, studying the effect, he got her to move so that she was not quite facing him fully.

"A little more to the left—that's better," he said. "Now hold it, just for a moment. Let me see—" He looked about him, seeking something. "Oh, dash it! There's nothing here that'll do. Wait a sec, though—I've got it!"

And he whipped off his scarf.

If Brenda was already astounded and intrigued, she was positively amazed at the subsequent actions of her friend. For Ronald, flattening out his scarf on a table, stepped up to her and began arranging it over her head with the greatest of care—certainly more care than he showed in removing her hat.

"Got a pin?" he finally asked. "Oh, good! Thanks!"

Brenda said nothing, but she was thinking intently. Amazed she still was; intrigued, too, but not completely in the dark. For she felt positive there was more in this visit to the photographer's than there appeared.

Ronald could say what he liked, but it wasn't really connected with the pageant. If it was the genuine reason, why no costume—why this scarf, arranged with such care and planned in such a special way? And why Ronald's manner, his air of suppressed excitement, suggesting that he, at any rate, considered the whole thing most tremendously important—far more important than the mere taking of an ordinary portrait?

Pretending to study the effect in the mirror, Brenda pursed her lips.

She had an inkling of the truth. It must be related to the extraordinary mystery surrounding her—the mystery which Ronald had set himself to tackle on her behalf.

"Please, Ronald," she entreated, "won't you explain?"

"I would if I could, but I can't," was Ronald's bantering reply. "In the pageant, aren't you?" he went on chattily. "Good work! Dance much? You'll have to do a little, you know. Put your best into it. I'd like you to make a hit."

"You would?" Brenda said, drawing a long-suffering breath. "What does this mean, Ronald? Won't you just let a tiny part of the cat out of the bag?"



"I IS a wasp now, isn't I?" cried little Dickie, dancing around the room. "Everyone—look! Buzz-buzz-buzz!" There were many chuckles, but Brenda started up in dismay. The scarf Dickie wore belonged to her mysterious friend, Ronald. Dickie must have taken it from her room. What could she say when questioned as to how it had come into her possession?

"Not even the tip of its tail!" Ronald said, shaking his head. "You can probably guess something of what I'm up to, but—Oh, here's Mr. Langford!" He turned as another pair of curtains swished aside. "How's this, sir?"

The photographer—a tall, lean, melancholy-looking man—stopped in his lengthy strides towards the camera to glance at Brenda, and she noticed he studied her intently—so much, in fact, that she shifted uncomfortably.

"Seems just about right to me," he said, turning to Ronald. "I'll get to work."

He adjusted the camera, requested Brenda to change her position an almost negligible amount, held up his hand, waited a few seconds, and then—the thing was done.

Brenda, relaxing, breathed more freely; and, feeling stuffy with the scarf over her head, she pulled it down about her shoulders as Ronald hurried across to her.

"Topping!" he enthused. "Now, I shan't be a sec."

More intrigued than ever, Brenda saw him draw Mr. Langford on one side and engage him in earnest whispering.

"You're sure?" Ronald's eager, excited voice suddenly arose. "Oh, boy, but this is great! Thanks, Mr. Langford! I'll see about it right away."

He spun round and darted over to Brenda.

"Awfully sorry," he said breathlessly, "but I shan't be able to have a chinwag, after all! I've got to dash off somewhere. It's tremendously important, and simply can't wait a jiffy. But thanks for coming along, Brenda, and being so patient!"

"But wait, Ronald! Your scarf—" But Ronald, already at the main curtains, waved her away.

"Hang on to it! I'll get it back some time!" he cried, and next moment had disappeared.

Brenda, half-smiling, looked at Mr. Langford.

"He was in a hurry," she commented. And then she remembered. "Oh, and

I'd better be in a hurry, too! I've a call to make."

Before she left the photographer's Brenda unpinned Ronald's scarf and let it hang down loosely beneath her coat. Then off she strode for Madame Duprez's, the village costumier—and an unusually select and well-stocked establishment it was.

Brenda whiled away the time, while Madame Duprez retired with Veronica's note, in admiring gowns and coats and frocks. They made her eyes sparkle. Gorgeous creations, but—oh, so frightfully expensive, and on her salary quite out of the question.

"Anyway, I'm an awfully lucky girl as it is!" Brenda told herself. "I've got everything I need—a good home, quite enough money for things that matter, and little Dickie!" Her heart warmed at thought of him. "And the pageant, lots of friends there, Mr. and Mrs. Scholes, and Veronica—"

And Veronica, yes. And even Veronica was being absolutely perfect at the moment. If only she didn't have such awful moods, or if only, Brenda mused, you could anticipate them! But, there, what did it matter this afternoon? Veronica was in her most charming mood, so everything in the garden of her own life was simply grand.

Everything except—Madame Duprez. For that short, dark, eagle-eyed business woman kept her waiting in the shop, while customers trickled in and out, for nearly an hour. And all she said was:

"Please tell Miss Scholes the matter will be attended to at once."

By then Brenda felt she really needed the fresh air that greeted her in the High Street, and she didn't in the least mind the walk home. It invigorated her, striding briskly down country lanes.

Meeting one of the maids near Fernbank, Brenda accompanied her to the servants' entrance, and, swiftly removing her outdoor things in the room, sought out Veronica.

A peep into Veronica's room showed that the girl was not there; but as Brenda withdrew, closing the door, she

heard something that told her where her young mistress was.

Voices were coming from the hall.

Downstairs Brenda went. As she saw the half a dozen girls and the tall, aristocratic lady who stood before the open front door, with Veronica in their midst, Brenda's face lit up eagerly.

People associated with the pageant! People she'd made friends with. And Mrs. Venables a most influential lady, the pageant's producer, and the leading light of Fernbank society.

Smilingly Brenda hurried down to the hall. But her smile froze, and she stopped, spellbound, as the visitors stared angrily at her.

"Is this your idea of a joke, Brenda?" demanded Mrs. Venables curtly.

In bewilderment, Brenda looked from one hostile face to another.

"A—a joke, Mrs. Venables? But I don't understand—"

"You understand sufficiently to invite us here to a rehearsal," Mrs. Venables retorted, drawing her coat about her, "and then to keep us waiting over an hour while you were gallivanting about in the village! If you consider this is the way to treat new friends, my girl, you'd better go back to your orphanage!"

And as Mrs. Venables, darting a disdainful glare at Brenda, strode for the door, the others began to trail after her.

### Was Veronica an Enemy?

AS though stricken, Brenda stood there.

And that was exactly how she felt—stricken dumb and motionless with amazement and shock. A rehearsal this afternoon? But that was ridiculous. She hadn't arranged anything of the sort.

Even as Mrs. Venables reached the open door Brenda, rousing herself, tore after her and caught at her arm.

"Mrs. Venables," she cried, "please let me speak. There's something wrong here. I didn't arrange a rehearsal. This is the first I even knew about one."

The whole party halted then. Mrs. Venables frowned.

"You didn't arrange it?" she ejaculated. "But, my dear girl, Veronica said quite distinctly—"

"Veronica? Why—why—?" Brenda turned to her young mistress, who seemed dreadfully distressed. "Veronica, did you arrange a rehearsal?"

Veronica seemed strongly affected by what had happened, though whether she was disconcerted or upset Brenda could not be sure. She pondered. Had Veronica arranged this? And if so, why? Surely she couldn't have done so deliberately, in order to bring about this unpleasant situation?

Brenda was nonplussed, for there could scarcely be any doubt about the genuineness of Veronica's distress as she suddenly came forward.

"Oh dear, I'm so terribly sorry about all this!" she cried. "Yes, Brenda, I did fix things up. Don't you remember, I said last night I'd arrange rehearsals for you?"

"But you didn't say to-day," Brenda demurred. "And you sent me to Madame Duprez—"

"I know, dear," Veronica agreed, twisting her hands, "but only because you were going to Langford's. If I'd known you'd be so long—"

"I saw you in Langford's, Brenda,"

one of the girls, Phyllis, interposed sharply. "You were with some boy. I went in to buy some films and I saw you in the studio."

"I—I was in Langford's, yes," Brenda said. "But a boy—" She gave a shaky little laugh. "You must have seen the assistant."

For part of the secret she shared with Ronald was out now. Thanks to Phyllis, Veronica knew she had met a boy. But to Brenda's relief, Veronica did not seem to have noticed the information, for she was talking to Mrs. Venables, begging her to give Brenda another chance.

Actually, Veronica had heard that significant announcement, and was deeply puzzled. Could Brenda have been meeting a boy? There was no reason why she shouldn't, of course—but if she was, why should she deny it? And this wasn't the first time Brenda had acted strangely—there was the smuggling of the photo out of the *l'oiseau*, for instance; and Brenda's extraordinary trick in slipping away from rehearsal to meet someone at the spinney.

Veronica, without betraying her thoughts, decided to get to the bottom of Brenda's puzzling and intriguing behaviour.

Brenda, unaware of that train of thought and determined to vindicate herself, laid a hand on Veronica's arm.

"Let me phone Madame Duprez," she said with quiet determination. "She'll bear out what I say. And Mr. Langford will tell you the time I was with him. And, Veronica, you didn't tell me you had fixed things up. Don't you remember?"

"Oh, my giddy aunt, do you know—I really believe I did forget," Veronica exclaimed. "Oh, do please forgive me, everyone!"

In an instant the visitors' annoyance veered round. It was Veronica who came in for a battery of glares, and a few hard words. But Brenda, elated at her own vindication and delighted at Veronica's frank admission, soon drove away the unpleasantness.

"Well, we all make mistakes at times, you know," she said. "But it takes a brave person to say so. Thank you, Veronica."

The rehearsal, saved from fiasco, began straight away. Veronica had tea brought in, and everyone began to enjoy themselves—especially young Dickie.

Thoroughly happy, Brenda threw herself heart and soul into her part. No doubt about it, she was going to be a great success. She sang, she acted, and she danced as though each of those accomplishments had been hers since birth.

"I'm delighted with you, dear," Mrs. Venables' confided enthusiastically, when they were alone, while others took a turn. "Your dancing's marvellous! And you say you've never had a lesson. Born to it, obviously!"

Not long afterwards Mrs. Venables called for an interval. As everyone, thoroughly satisfied, relaxed, little Dickie made himself really conspicuous for the first time.

"Ooo, Aunty Brenda!" he gurgled, clambering on to her lap and putting both arms round her neck. "I thought you were gorjus!"

"Why, thank you, Dickie!" Brenda exclaimed, hugging him.

"An—an please, can I be a wasp now, stead of a dragonfly?" he went on, in wheedling tones. "I—I won't eat

lots of jam, an' honey, an' things, like waspies do—really, I won't! Only pretend."

And, shaking his head in the most serious fashion imaginable, he looked from one to another, all round the gathering, until his wide-open eyes roved back to Brenda.

By that time everyone was smiling, and Brenda's heart glowed.

"Couldn't he be a wasp in the pageant, Mrs. Venables?" she asked.

"Well—ahem!" Mrs. Venables was torn between official considerations for arrangements already made and Dickie's irresistible appeal. "Well, I dare say it could be managed, Brenda," she said. "Yes, I think so. He can change places with someone else!"

"I know where there's a gorjus wasp costum!" Dickie piped.

He wriggled off Brenda's lap, flopped to the floor, and raced out of the room.

The sound of his scampering feet and gleeful cries could be heard as he tore up to his room. Brenda's face was soft and tender.

"Dear little fellow!" she said. "He does so want to be a wasp."

Presently a thumping on the stairs announced young Dickie's return. Crash! went the door, hurling back on its hinges. A diminutive figure burst in, breathless, red-faced, hair all awry, and agog with excitement.

"Look, alls-you!" Dickie cried, lifting his arms. "I is a wasp now, isn't I? Aunty Brenda, Aunty Joan, V'ronica! Everyone—look! Buzz—buzz—buzz!"

Everyone did look; and all save two of them sat back and chuckled.

For there could be no disputing Dickie's childish ingenuity. Around his waist was wrapped a yellow-and-black scarf, so wide in comparison with his small figure that it covered most of his tummy and chest. Round he scampered, flapping his arms like wings and buzzing for all he was worth.

"Jolly good, Dickie!"

"What a delightful idea!"

"How perfectly droll!" declared Mrs. Venables.

Brenda, however, had pressed a hand to her mouth, for she alone knew the secret of that scarf. It was Ronald's; the one he had used in the photographer's!

With some idea of trying to take possession of it before any damage was done, she got to her feet. She actually moved towards Dickie, but someone else forestalled her.

Veronica, her face working queerly, reached her young brother and seized him by the arm.

"A boy's scarf!" she exclaimed.

"Where did you get this, Dickie?"

Dickie, bursting with pride, flung out a hand towards Brenda.

"From Aunty Brenda's room!" he announced. "I saw her wearing it when she came home. Isn't it a gorjus waspie?"

Brenda felt as though she would sink through the floor as Veronica, releasing Dickie's arm, slowly turned towards her.

"And where," Veronica asked keenly, "did you get it, Brenda? I thought you said you hadn't met a boy to-day."

A DIFFICULT question to answer—yet Brenda must answer it, and without arousing Veronica's suspicions. Next Friday's chapters bring further surprises. Don't miss them.