

Magnificent Long Complete Cliff House
School Story inside:

“ALL TO SAVE THE SNOB!”

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**THEY MUST NOT
DISCOVER LYDIA HAD
BROKEN BOUNDS!**

Yet Freckles was helping a girl
not worthy of her efforts.

(From this week's long school story
of Barbara Redfern & Co.)

A Grand Long Complete story of Barbara Redfern, Bessie Bunter, and many other famous characters at Cliff House School.



ALL TO SAVE *the* SNOB!

No Time for Her Only Friend!



"THAT'S enough! Don't want to see any more," Clara Trevlyn said with decision. "You're in the team, Freckles."

Henrietta Winchester of the Fourth Form at Cliff House turned, cricket ball in hand, and gazed at the Tomboy in breath-suspended delight, as both stood by the teeming cricket nets on the Junior Side playing fields.

"You—you mean," she blurted, "that you're going to give me my junior cricket colours?"

"Why not?" Clara laughed heartily. "You've earned your colours on bowling alone. But practise, mind—bags and bags of practice," she added warningly. "You'll see your name on the team list after tea."

Henrietta's eyes sparkled in the sunshine. That good-looking oval face of hers, its prettiness enhanced rather than marred by the little freckles which seemed to pick out the dimples of her cheeks, was radiant. She was transported for the moment into the realms of utter ecstasy.

She—to have earned her junior school cricket colours!

She—to play in the most fashionable cricket match of Cliff's House's season!

She wanted to laugh, but in her excitement only gulped. She wanted to dance, but so bewildered was she with her sudden happiness that she could only tremble. This—oh, this was glorious! This was the biggest thing that had ever happened to her since the day, nearly twelve months ago,

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when she had so dramatically, so amazingly found that dear mother whom she had always mourned as dead. This seemed to be the summit of her ambitions.

"Clara, you—you do really mean it?" she cried. "You—you wouldn't joke with me!"

Tomboy Clara Trevlyn gazed at her. "Freckles, don't be a chump!" she said briefly. "Turn up to practice and practise hard, that's all I ask. Right—ho, Diana!" she added to the lordly Diana Royston-Clarke, who, with pads on and a brand new bat in her white-gloved hands, was taking up her position at one of the wickets. "See you later, Freckles," she said.

Happily Freckles nodded. Oh, this was grand, this was marvellous! She was going to play in the most exciting match of the season, and she was going to get her colours. And she was going to get her colours, if you please, on the very same day her mother returned from Egypt!

For Mrs. Winchester had been away these last few months, and Henrietta, for the first time in her school career, had become a full-time boarder in the school. Never, never had she known greater happiness. Her whole life at Cliff House had been happy—so gloriously happy that sometimes even now she wondered whether she was not dreaming everything. If there was just one cloud on her horizon, just one tiny discord in the harmony of her existence, it was—

Lydia—Lydia Crossendale! Always, in these uplifted moments, Freckles' thoughts turned to Lydia, that girl she so liked, to whose father she owed such an enormous debt of gratitude, but who was herself held in such dislike by the rest of the Form

that, with the exception of Henrietta herself, she had not a single real friend in it. Silly, silly Lydia, whose chief fault was her own vanity.

Still, Lydia would be pleased about this, and Lydia should know it at once, Freckles happily told herself as she joyfully skipped across the quad.

"Hallo, Freckles!" a voice suddenly called to her, and an extremely pretty, blue-eyed girl, wearing the junior school captain's badge, came out of the school, a letter in her hand. "I say, Freckles—"

"Babs!" Freckles breathlessly cried.

"I say—" "I've got a letter—" Barbara Redfern began.

"But I say, listen to the news—or do you already know it?" Freckles laughed. "Babs, Clara's put me in the team for the Lantham match!"

"Jolly good! Congrats!" Barbara Redfern smiled. "But just come down to earth for a minute, will you? I've a letter. It's just arrived."

"For me?"

"Yes, of course."

"Oh, thanks!" Freckles took it, laughing, and then her face became more serious as she glanced at the superscription. "Oh, it's from Mr. Crossendale!" she said, more soberly.

"Lydia's father?" Babs asked.

"Yes."

Babs smiled good-humouredly as Freckles, her face serious now, slit open the envelope. She knew Freckles' history, of course—everybody in the school knew it. She knew that Mr. Crossendale ranked first and foremost in the list of Freckles' great heroes. For it was Mr. Crossendale who, when Freckles had been a mere servant-girl, had given her her first chance at Cliff House School, and, through getting that

first chance, Freckles had found the mother she had never previously known.

Reading the letter through, some of the happiness faded from her face, and a quick look of anxiety came into her eyes.

"Hum!" she said, and shook her head. But she did not say what was in the letter, and because it was not Babs' way to pry into those things which did not concern her, Babs did not inquire. "Babs, have you seen Lydia?" she asked.

"Why, yes; she's in her study," Babs replied. "I spoke to her a few minutes ago. She's waiting for someone."

A quick shadow crossed Freckles' face.

"Anita?" she asked.
"Anita Maling—yes," Babs said.
"Freckles, who is that girl?"

But again Freckles, spurred by that loyalty which was so deep-seated a part of her, shook her head.

Truth to tell, she did not know much about the rather overdressed and extremely showy-looking Anita Maling, except that she was the daughter of a London man who was going to open a new dress shop in Courtfield in the near future. But she did not like her.

A deep and intense distrust of Anita filled Freckles' whole being, more especially as Anita had been in the habit, just recently, of bringing rather expensive dresses from her father's shop for Lydia to try on. And Lydia, of course, who was just crazy on clothes and liked to feel that she was the best-dressed girl at Cliff House, had fallen for that and taken Anita Maling to her heart in a big way.

"I'll go to see her," Freckles said abruptly.

And, with a nod to Babs, she hurried on her way, tramping into the school and up the stairs which led to the corridor in which the Fourth Form studies were situated. At the door of Study No. 1, which Lydia Crossendale shared with Freda Ferriers and Rosa Rodworth, she knocked.

"Hallo! Come in!" said Lydia's eager voice.

But when Freckles' face appeared she pouted.

"Oh, you!" she said somewhat disappointedly. "I thought it would be Anita—with my new dance frock. I thought you were at cricket practice," she added, with a scowl.

"I was. But I came away. Lydia, I had to come to tell you," Freckles said. "I've been selected for the Lantham team!"

"Jolly good!" Lydia said, but without any deep-felt interest. "Didn't see Anita?"

"Lydia, no."
"Wonder where the dickens she's got to?" Lydia asked fretfully. "She said she'd be here in time for tea. We're going to the Royal," she added inconsequently.

Freckles looked at her anxiously.
"Lydia, is—is that wise?" she asked.
"The Royal's an awfully expensive place, isn't it?"

"Well, anybody asking you to pay?" Lydia scowled.

"No; but I'll bet," Freckles said keenly, "that Anita's not paying. She and her friends never pay, do they, Lydia, and it must be costing you an awful lot of money to be running about with them?"

Lydia flushed a little.
"Your business?" she asked, with a hint of unpleasantness.

"Not—not exactly; and yet—well, as your friend it is!" Freckles shook her head. "Lydia, I—I've been wanting to talk to you about Anita," she said,

By HILDA RICHARDS

Illustrated by T. LAIDLER

"and—and—well, I've just had a letter from—"

And then she stopped, realising from the gathering storm-clouds in Lydia's face that this was not the time perhaps to tell Lydia that her father was becoming rather anxious about the large sums of money she was spending, and had asked her to use her influence with Lydia to prevent her from falling into any new scrape.

"Lydia," she suddenly exclaimed, "you don't seem very interested in my news."

"Well, I am—of course," Lydia shrugged, however, plainly implying that her interest was more in the arrival of Anita. "Hope you'll do well. Hallo, here is Anita," she cried excitedly—"and Sylvia and Kitty as well!" Then, ignoring Freckles altogether, she flung up the window. "Cheerio!" she cried gaily. "This way up."

Freckles bit her lip. From where she

"Freckles" Winchester chosen to play cricket for Cliff House—and Lydia Crossendale "going gay" with a trio of sponging, older girls! Two happenings which seemed far apart—certainly two girls who in natures were far apart. But Freckles owed Lydia's father a debt of gratitude, and Freckles

determined that even if it ruined her chances of playing in the big match she would save the Snob of the Fourth from her folly.

stood she could see into the quad, into which a trim little green four-seater car had just driven. A girl with fair hair—Anita Maling herself—was at the wheel, and as she saw Lydia she waved her hand and the car gave an alarming wobble. With her were her two friends, Sylvia Pettifer and Kitty Yale. Lydia turned excitedly to Freckles.

"And Anita's brought the dance frock," she cried. "Look, that's it in the box she's pulling out of the back of the car. Oh, Freckles, do wait and see it!"

"Dance frock? But when's the dance, Lydia?"

"To-morrow night, chumplet—in Jay's club!" Lydia retorted.

Freckles started.
"Jay's club—but that's out of bounds!" she protested.

"Well, what of that?" Lydia cried. "Jay's is the most go-ahead club in Courtfield, so naturally it's out of bounds—anything that isn't stuffy and old-fashioned always is out of bounds in this beastly hole of a school! That's Anita," she cried, as footsteps sounded in the passage. "Open the door, Freckles."

Freckles gazed at her for a moment, and then went to the door. Three laughing girls, each of them dressed in the height of fashion, all of them considerably older than Lydia, came in, Anita Maling leading the way with a huge parcel.

"Chips, Lydia, old thing!" she cried.

"Got it! Sorry we're late, but we went into the ditch on the way here—and gee; the fuss we had getting out of it. Three handsome young men with a lorry gave us a tow in the end, otherwise we'd have been there till midnight! But here's the frock," she added, "and with it a little tea gown we're sure you'd like to wear this afternoon."

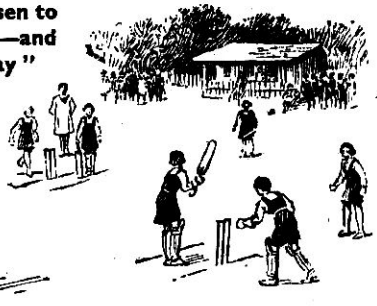
"Oh, Anita, you miracle!" Lydia breathed.

Anita laughed easily.
"Nothing miraculous about it," she said. "After all, why shouldn't you wear a few of the pater's frocks—there's a shop-load of 'em to go at! Go and put it on, there's a dear. By the way, did you book the table at the Royal?"

"Yes, of course."
"Oh, goodie." And while Lydia eagerly grasped the parcel, Anita threw a half-mocking look towards her two friends—a look Freckles did not miss. "Hallo," she added, noticing Freckles' existence for the first time. "You coming too?"

"Oh, Freckles, yes!" Lydia cried eagerly. "I'm paying."

But Freckles shook her head.
"No, thanks," she said. "I—I've something else to do. Lydia, let me help



hesitated; then, with a deep look of worry on her face, she trotted back. She didn't like it—definitely she didn't like it. Why couldn't Lydia see what was plain to her—that Anita and Kitty and Sylvia were just playing her for a fool?

But that was apparent to Freckles, keenly alive to Lydia's vanity. Not for nothing had these older girls taken Lydia up. Not for nothing was Anita so keen to lend those expensive frocks so that Lydia might have the pleasure of wearing them just once and then returning them to the shop.

If Lydia paid no money for that privilege, Lydia certainly paid out in other ways, for these three girls were just spongers, and Lydia, unfortunately for herself perhaps, was blessed with rather more money than the average girl.

Freckles felt disturbed and apprehensive—especially in view of Lydia's father's letter. Mr. Crossendale himself had noticed the amount of money his daughter was spending, and had also received a sharp report concerning Lydia from Miss Primrose, Cliff House's headmistress. For his sake, if not for Lydia's own, Freckles felt it her duty to save the self-centred snob of the Fourth from drifting into danger.

She reached the half-open door of Study No. 1, just as Anita Maline, on the other side, gave a low laugh.

"Well, if she does damage them—what then?" she asked, apparently replying to one of the other girls' question. "Lydia's father's got pots of money, hasn't he? He can't refuse to pay if we send him the bill."

"And Lydia knows that, of course?" Sylvia put in with a chuckle.

"Lydia doesn't. Lydia thinks everything in the garden will be lovely. No need to let her know unpleasant facts, especially as she's giving us such a ripping time. Ahem!" she added, as the door came open and Freckles came in. "Changed your mind?" she added.

Freckles gave her a withering stare. She did not reply, but she went to the mantelpiece, and there, picking up Lydia's brush and comb, departed without a word.

But she was choking as she went back to the dormitory, to find eager Lydia already pulling her school clothes over her head and Barbara Rodfern, her great chum Mabel Lynn, fat, bespectacled Bessie Bunter and Leila Carroll of America, who were also changing, staring at the frocks which lay on her bed in admiration.

"But I say, they must cost pounds!" Babs was exclaiming.

"Oh, of course," Lydia said off-handedly.

"And you mean to say you can wear them?"

"Wear any frock in the shop," Lydia returned casually. "That's the fun of having a dressmaker's daughter for a friend. 'Lo, Freckles!" she added.

"Do come and give me a hand to do up this thing! Isn't it just ripping? Do up those three buttons, there's a dear!"

But, Freckles, her face suddenly white, stood still.

"Lydia, no! Wait a minute!" she said tensely. "I've something to tell you! Do you realize that, if anything happens to these frocks, your father will have to foot the bill?"

Lydia glared.

"And do you realise," she said, "that you're just trying to make mischief? I tell you, Anita and I have an understanding about this. All right! Don't help if you don't want to! Mabs, you do it. And please," she said angrily

to Freckles, "don't slander my friends, because I won't listen!"

"But, Lydia, don't you think you ought to listen to what Freckles has to say?" Babs asked.

"No, I don't!"

"But, Lydia—" Freckles cried.

Lydia flung round.

"Oh, do shut up!" she blazed. "I've told you before I don't want to row with you. I don't interfere in your business, so I don't see you've any right to interfere in mine! There, now, I'm ready!" she cried, and snatched up her coat. "Good-bye!"

Freckles gulped.

"Lydia, no; you've got to listen to me!" she cried desperately. "Lydia, try to be sensible!"

But Lydia, with an impatient glower, pushed her on one side, striding for the door. Then—slam! She had gone.

Heading for Trouble!



"MY hat, there she goes again!" chuckled Clara Trevilyn.

"Bravo, Freckles!"

The scene was the practice nets on Junior Side again, and the time was after tea. And Clara, Babs, and Mabs, who were standing in a group at the bowling end, cheered lustily as Rosa Rodworth, at the nets, stared in astonishment at her wicket, which, for the second time running, had been played by Freckles' delivery.

"What a bowler!" Babs breathed.

"What a fluke!" Rosa Rodworth sniffed, and rearranged her stumps again. "Bet you don't do that again!"

Freckles Winchester laughed—a pleased and merry laugh it was, though it was noticed, as she picked up the ball, that her eyes strayed rather anxiously towards the gates. She called:

"Play!"

Rosa stood still, grimly determined. Freckles took that funny little run of hers—two skips, a hop, and then two little jumps. Over went her arm, and along the pitch whizzed the ball. Breaking just in front of the crease, it curled round Rosa's bat, and, though it missed the wicket this time, Rosa, stepping out to it, would probably have been stumped.

Rosa blinked.

"My hat! How the dickens does she do it?" she grumbled. "I made sure I'd got that one covered."

"Good old Freckles!" Babs enthused.

"What a bowler! What a rod in pickle," as Clara delightedly said, for Cliff House's opponents on Saturday!

Certainly Henrietta was a find, and certainly Henrietta was happy and enjoying herself. But her face was just a little shadowed as she joined Babs and Clara.

"That was Lydia who just went into the school, wasn't it?" she asked.

"It was," Clara said. "But blow Lydia! Freckles, stick to your bowling! At this rate you'll be playing for the first before you're much older!"

Henrietta laughed.

"Flatterer!" she chided. "Still, I am glad you're pleased, because—because—well—" She flushed. "Clara, I—I've been thinking about something."

Clara gazed at her keenly.

"Lydia?"

"Yes."

Clara frowned.

"Freckles, why bother about her?" she asked impatiently. "She's just being a snob, that's all. Your job now is to concentrate on cricket. Lydia's

shown pretty plainly that she doesn't value your friendship, even though you have tried to warn her against those other girls. Give her a rest, Freckles. Let her go her own snobbish, swanky way!"

"And perhaps get expelled?" Freckles asked. "No." She shook her head. "I can't forget what I owe to her father Clara, for his sake I've got to stop her from doing anything silly."

Clara gazed at Babs.

"And—and if you wouldn't mind helping—" Freckles faltered. "If—if, for instance, she had some other interest, like—like being in the cricket team—"

Clara decidedly shook her head.

"Not good enough!" she said abruptly.

"I—I know. But—but the idea's never been put into her head." Freckles looked at the junior games captain pleadingly. "I know I've no right to ask you to do anything, but you did say, Clara, that if Lydia would only give her mind to it, she might get her place in the team."

"Well, yes; I said that, and I meant it," Clara acknowledged. "But what's the good? She'll never turn up at practice."

"But that's only because she thinks she'll never get a real chance," Freckles pressed eagerly. "And you know she won't do anything unless there's a chance of being in the limelight at the end of it. Clara, you want a reserve for the Lantham match. What about telling Lydia she can be it? It—it would help her to feel she's got a real chance at last."

Almost imploringly Freckles blurted that, gazing at the Tomboy entreatingly. Clara's lips came together, plain refusal in her mind. But she caught Babs' eye. She paused, and again looked at Freckles' beseechingly embarrassed face. Yes; that certainly would be an encouragement to Lydia, and Lydia was just about good enough, with preparation, for the reserve position.

But it was not Lydia Clara was considering then. It was Freckles. Clara was fond of Freckles. Keenly was she anxious that Freckles should be happy, not only for her own sake, but because an untroubled mind was as necessary to her success in her first big match as her undoubted cricketing skill. Babs, too, felt something like that.

"It could be managed," Babs ventured. "It would, at least, bring Lydia up to scratch and make her practise."

Clara frowned. Then she shrugged.

"O.K., then! Give it a trial!" she granted.

Freckles' face radiantly lit up.

"Clara, you—you darling! And—and can I tell her?"

Almost quivering was her face in its joy and eagerness then. Clara grinned a little.

"Well, of course you can tell her," she said. "I'll confirm it afterwards."

Almos. trembling with joy, Freckles at once rushed off. Clara was a sport—a brick! She felt utterly transported with delight then. With a rush, she was across the lawn; and, breathlessly bursting into Big Hall, raced up the stairs which led to the Fourth Form studies three at a time. So great was her excitement that she did not even remember to knock at the door of Study No. 1. She just burst in

"Lydia!" she cried.

Lydia was there the unopened box containing the new dress on the table. And Lydia, standing by that table, had a letter in her hands, which had obviously arrived during her absence. She glared at Freckles.

"You—she began.
"Lydia, I've got something to tell you."

"Have you? And I"—Lydia scowled, her face suddenly venomous—"have got something to tell you, sneak!"

Freckles blinked.
"But, Lydia, I don't—"

"No?" Lydia's eyes glittered. Suddenly she waved the letter in her hand. "You know who this is from, don't you? My father. You know what he says—yes, you do, you tittle-tattling, poison-making sneak! Who told him that I've got friends who are leading me astray? Who told him that I'm breaking bounds? Who could tell him—except you? The very fact he mentions your beastly name so frequently shows you've jolly well been sneaking!"

Henrietta's face turned scarlet.
"Lydia, I haven't—"
"Yes, you have! Don't jaw!" Lydia said violently. "Now get out!"

Freckles gazed at her—overwhelmed, stunned. Not a word which could be construed as being against Lydia had she ever written to Mr. Crossendale; though Lydia, of course, knew that she was in frequent communication with him. She faced her, fighting down the resentment those violent words aroused within her.

"All right, I'll talk about this later," she said levelly, "when you are in a saner frame of mind. Meantime, I've something I want to tell you. There's a chance for you in the cricket team—Clara says so."

Lydia stared at that. Just for a moment her eyes betrayed a flutter of interest.

"I don't believe it!" she stated flatly.

"But it's true—really!" Freckles gazed at her. "Lydia, Clara wants you to be reserve for the Lantham match."

"Your idea?" Lydia asked.

"Well, yes. I thought—"

"You thought fiddlesticks!" Lydia sneered. "Think I can't see through your artful game? You're hoping that if you can only find some way of keeping me at school I'll chuck Anita & Co. overboard!"

Freckles bit her lip. The telltale colour of her cheeks told Lydia how shrewdly she had hit the mark.

"Well, you can go and tell Clara to eat coke!" she snapped. "And you can go and help her yourself! I just wouldn't play for the rotten team—no, not even if they made me the captain!"

And then, while Freckles stared, stunned, she caught up the box, disdainfully pushed past her, and stormed into the corridor.

Freckles stood still, anger, dismay, apprehension all suddenly at war within her. What was the good of trying to help Lydia? Why should she bother?

In that mood she was on the point of stamping out of the room when her eyes happened to fall upon the waste-paper-basket.

A Post Office savings book was lying on top of the rubbish.

Freckles stepped towards it. Lydia, no doubt, would be looking for it before long. She picked it from the basket open as it was, and then, gazing at the last list of entries, gave a start; and at once her anger against Lydia gave place to a wild feeling of alarm, for those figures plainly told a tale.

The last five entries were all "On demand," and against each was written the same sum—two pounds.

Ten pounds—in little over a fortnight. Ten pounds Lydia had drawn out of her Post Office account since

taking up with Anita Maling & Co. Apart from that, she had had her allowances from school; and, to Freckles' own knowledge, at least one remittance from home. Such was the price of her foolish friendship.

That sense of impending peril hanging above Lydia became sharpened then, banishing all her own sense of wrong immediately. What a reckless, spendthrift fool the girl was!

Freckles put the book back on the desk. Ought she to tackle Lydia about it?

But what would be the good? Lydia would only fly off into a temper.

Call-over bell rang then, and she tramped into Big Hall. Lydia was there, but as soon as Freckles looked at her she turned haughtily away. After dismissal Freckles anxiously touched her on the arm.

"Lydia—" she began.
"Thanks! Don't talk to me—sneak!" Lydia bit out, and stalked off.

And not till bed-time did Henrietta see her again, though in the meantime she saw Clara and Babs, who, not a bit surprised at the reception she had received, once again advised her to have nothing to do with Lydia Crossendale. But that, of course, was impossible—while she still considered the duty she owed to Lydia's father.

Next morning, however, Anita called again—with another new frock. After that Lydia did seem to relax a little, and, in fact, appeared so pleased with herself at dinner that she even flashed a smile at Freckles when she came in.

After the meal Freckles caught her in the corridor.

"Lydia, old thing—" she said.
"Well?" Lydia asked almost friendly.

"I—I—I—" Freckles stuttered; and then, deciding not to mention Lydia's Post Office book, which had been on her mind since yesterday, she shook her head. "We—we're having practice after lessons," she said.

"Hope you enjoy it," Lydia said

curtly. "I'm going to the tea dansant at the Courtfield Rooms."

"With Anita?"

"Who else?"

"But—but you know it's out of bounds."

"Now," Lydia said and scowled. "don't start the lectures, goodie! And don't," she added, with a flash of her old spite, "write and tell my father what I'm doing!"

"You know I never did write and tell him," Freckles protested. "But, Lydia, couldn't you come and practise? The offer still stands."

But Lydia only rather scornfully laughed at that, and, to avoid being pressed further, whisked off. Not until lessons did Freckles see her again, and immediately lessons were over Lydia vanished.

Freckles was dashing off to try to detain her when Clara caught her by the arm.

"Never mind Lydia! We've got a practice on," the Tomboy said. "Be at the nets in ten minutes, Freccs."

"Yes, right-ho!" Freckles replied. "Of course. But—but, Clara, if I can get Lydia to come along—"

Clara made a grimace.

"Blessed if I see why you worry about that outsider!" she said. "Still, if you can get her to come along, she's welcome, of course. But don't you forget," she added warningly. "It's you that really matters, after all."

Freckles laughed. Her heart beating high with hope, she darted off. After all, if Lydia could only be made to get enthusiastic about cricket, she might grow tired of her worthless acquaintances.

But barely had she reached Study No. 1 when Dulcia Fairbrother, head girl of the school, came along. Dulcia nodded to her.

"Steady on!" she said. "Something you can do, Freckles. Know where Lydia is?"

"In her study?" Freckles suggested.

"No. I've just looked in there. But her father's on the other end of the



"LYDIA'S father's got pots of money, hasn't he?" Anita Maling laughed. "He can't refuse to pay if we send him the bill!" Pausing in the doorway, Freckles heard that and realized more than ever the danger Lydia was running into.

phone. Better go and keep him entertained while I dig her out," she added. "But hurry! It's costing him three-pence for every three minutes he hangs on!"

Freckles laughed. Off, with eagerness, she bolted. Entering the prefects' room, where the telephone was situated, she caught up the receiver. At once Mr. Crossendale's voice came through.

"Oh, Lydia—"

"This isn't Lydia," Freckles interrupted, with a laugh. "It's me—Freckles. We're just finding Lydia for you."

"Oh, I say, is it really you?" Mr. Crossendale's voice held a note of warm pleasure. "Anyway, you needn't worry Lydia," he added; "you'll do, Freckles. Get my letter?"

"Yes, thank you, Mr.—"

"I wrote to Lydia, too," Mr. Crossendale said, more seriously. "I thought it was about time she pulled up. Freckles, do look after her for me, won't you? From all I can gather she seems to be heading slap bang for big trouble, and—and, well, you know what it would mean to me if she got into any serious scrape. Apart from that, her mother's not too well, and is also inclined to worry about her."

Freckles bit her lip.

"I—I'll do my best," she replied.

"There, I know you will." He laughed a little. "It's one of my great consolations, Freckles, having you at the school. If anybody can save Lydia from going to rack and ruin, you can. But that isn't what I really phoned up about," he added. "I'm phoning from Charing Cross, and I'm due to catch the Eastbourne train in two minutes. We've got a ten minute halt at Courtfield Junction at four-thirty, and so I—"

"You want us to meet you there?"

Freckles eagerly asked.

"That's the idea, smart girl! Just for a little chat—I'd like to see you both before I come down for the big day on Saturday. Whoa, I can see 'em pushing my train out! Don't make it late, will you? Till four-thirty, then!"

"Till four-thirty," Freckles promised, and laughed, rosy with joy. "Leave it to me!"

As she put down the receiver her eyes travelled through the window. That window gave a view of the gates, and through those gates, dressed in a new, rich plum-coloured coat, an elegant figure was in the act of sauntering.

"Lydia!" Freckles breathlessly cried.

Lydia it was. Lydia, going out in borrowed finery to meet her sponging pals when her father was expecting to see her.

Bang! Down went the receiver as Freckles turned and raced out of the prefects' room.

Almost upsetting Freda Ferriers as she plunged down the steps into the quad, she pelted down the drive just as the Pegg bus came along, and she saw Lydia step on it and vanish inside.

Too late!

The bus, gathering speed, was already under way.

Freckles stopped, panting, watching with dismay as the bus disappeared along the road. Still, she wasn't going to be beaten, and hurriedly bolting back into the school, she dragged her cycle out of the shed. Impossible, of course, to catch the bus up, but thank goodness she still had plenty of time.

Steadily she pedalled, reaching Courtfield twenty minutes later. Lydia, she guessed, would be meeting Anita & Co. at the dress-shop, and towards that shortly-to-be-opened establishment she

made her way. Her heart leapt as she saw the car which was drawn up outside.

In that car, with Anita at the wheel, and Sylvia Pettifer and Kitty Yale seated in the back, was Lydia Crossendale.

Even as she spied it, there was a thrum as the car started up, and a spurt of blue vapour came from its exhaust.

"Lydia!" she cried.

Lydia turned, then nudged Anita, who sent the car forward.

She turned it swiftly down a side-turning, a grin on her lips. Desperately Freckles pedalled in pursuit. But tantalisingly Anita kept the car some twenty feet ahead—until they were well out of the busy part of the town, and in a hedge-lined road.

Then Anita slowed, and, panting, Freckles managed to draw alongside.

"Lydia, listen, please!" she cried.

"Your father— Here, I say! Stop, stop!" she yelled, in alarm. "Lydia, your father—he telephoned—he wants to—"

But Anita had winked to Sylvia, and Sylvia had grinned at Kitty. Suddenly the door of the car—it was one of the open variety—was thrown open. Simultaneously, Sylvia and Kitty lunged at her from inside it, catching her arm.

"Let me down, let me down!" shrieked Freckles.

But she was dragged into the car, her cycle clattering over in the road. And as she floundered on the floor, all mixed up with the legs of Kitty and Sylvia, the others laughed uproariously. Swiftly the car gathered speed. Anita chuckled.

"Now," she said, "you can do all the chattering you want to do. Off we go. Whoops, girls, first stop the Courtfield Rooms!"

Freckles' Desperate Effort!



"BABS, did you find her?" Clara Trevlyn asked.

"No," Barbara Redfern replied, and patted her heaving chest,

for she had been running hard. "But Freda says she went tearing out of the school like a mad thing about twenty minutes ago, yelling after Lydia."

Clara Trevlyn, hat in hand, grunted crossly. Clara was at the nets on Little Side, and the team, clustered about her, had all been waiting for the arrival of Freckles, who, Clara had promised, should treat them to some bowling.

"Chasing that cat!" Clara's eyes glowed. "Running after her when I warned her specially for practice! Blessed if I know what's coming over the girl. And now," she added, glowering up at the sky, "here comes the rain!"

"Ciel, it am going to pour, too!" Marcello Biquet exclaimed.

A true prophecy, that—for even as the words left the little French girl's lips, the rain, which had been threatening all day, began to fall in heavy spots. In a few seconds it was a down-pour.

"Quick! Back to the pav!" Babs cried.

Helter-skelter the rush for the pavilion. By the time they reached it the rain was dropping down in torrents. Unbroker blackness in the sky as far as the eye could reach seemed to suggest that it was going to be no passing shower, either.

"Well, this finishes it!" Clara grumbled. "Thanks to Freckles, we've

had no practice at all! Who says tea at the creamery in Courtfield?"

"O.K.!" Babs said; and the other chums agreed.

In a somewhat disappointed body, Clara, Babs, Mabs, and Leila Carroll got out macintoshes and caught the bus for Courtfield.

It was still raining when they reached Courtfield, and, with the streets running with water, they raced down the busy High Street. Then suddenly there came a cry. With such force were the brakes of the bus jammed on that for a moment they were all flung together in a heap.

"Hey, what—" gasped Babs, and then yelled: "Look!"

She pointed to the window behind which they had seated themselves. A small car, driven by a girl, had just skidded out of a side turning in front of the bus. There were five girls in the car.

"Lydia!" cried Leila.

"And, my hat, Freckles!" yelled Clara. "Oh, my hat, look!"

This as the car, shooting across the road, whizzed through the traffic lights and, apparently out of control, disappeared.

"The—the fools!" gulped Mabs.

The chums gazed at each other, rather grim, rather disgusted. Freckles had not only let the practice down to run after the worthless Lydia, but was now gracelessly joyriding in the rain with Lydia and her friends.

Clara's lips curled in the contempt she made no attempt to disguise.

"And that's our Henrietta!" she said bitterly. "Joyriding with those cads! And not only joyriding, but getting the school a bad name into the bargain! My hat, just wait till I see her!" she breathed. "Just wait! If this is what she thinks is playing the game, she goes out of the cricket team to-night!"

BUT FRECKLES, had they but known it, was far from enjoying that ride. Freckles at that moment was furious.

Of course, it was a high old lark to Anita & Co., and a source of malicious satisfaction to Lydia to hold Freckles a prisoner against her will in the car driven by the crazy daughter of the dressmaker.

Every time Freckles tried to speak Anita mischievously changed gears with a noisy, grinding clang and accelerated. It was one of those frequent accelerations which had almost precipitated disaster at the cross-roads.

"Look here—" Freckles yelled for the fiftieth time, as they flew up Small Street.

"Hold tight!" said Anita. "Phew! Narrow squeak, that! Still, here we are at the rooms!" she added, as she hit the kerb, and, skidding round another corner, brought them in sight of the Courtfield Rooms. "Tumble out, girls!"

"But, Lydia—" Freckles panted.

"Stuff! Come inside!" Lydia said.

Freckles, fiercely gripped her. Her eyes were blazing then.

"Lydia, you idiot! Listen to me!" she said roughly. "Your father phoned. He wants us to meet him at four-thirty."

Lydia started.

"Where?"

"At the station."

"Oh!" Lydia said, and for a moment did look serious. "All right! Come inside!" she said. "We can't talk here in the pouring rain."

Freckles gulped. Exhausted though she was, she was glad at last to have held Lydia's attention. To be sure, she did not want to go into the forbidden

rooms; but anything then, she felt, was worth while if she could get Lydia away.

"Right-ho! But we'll have to hurry," she said.

Lydia shrugged. She led the way in. Anita grinned.

"Meet you in the cloak-room," she suggested. "O.K., Lydia?"

"O.K.!" Lydia said, and nodded to Freckles. "Come in here."

Freckles went in "there"—there being a small state room running off from the foyer. Lydia closed the door, and then faced Freckles.

"Well, what is this?" Freckles told her, Lydia laughed. "And so that's why you're chasing me about?" she said. "My hat, anybody would think it was a matter of life and death! There's nearly an hour, ninny, before the train arrives! No reason why we shouldn't have a dance and tea before we go. Anita will run us along in her car."

Freckles winced. "Lydia, why not come now?" she asked. "Why wait for Anita? In any case, what about me? I'm not anxious to hang about here."

"No? Well, did anybody ask you to?" Lydia sneered. "Please yourself. Go on to the station, if you like. I'll jolly well come in my own good time! If you don't want to wait inside, you can jolly well wait outside! I don't care, anyway! I'm going up to the cloak-room to change now!"

Freckles clenched her hands. She marvelled at her own self-control as Lydia deliberately turned her back upon her and disappeared through the door in the opposite wall. For Mr. Crossendale's sake, she was going to take Lydia along—if she had to drag her there!

She turned back, and, opening the door, went into the foyer. And then she stood stock-still, her heart giving a violent leap.

For in front of her stood Sarah Harrigan.

Sarah was a prefect at Cliff House, and a very harsh, ill-natured prefect at that. It was one of Sarah's hobbies to go snooping and spying around in these forbidden places on half-holidays, and Sarah, obviously, was on a spying expedition now. Her eyes fastened full upon Freckles as she came out of that door.

"Henrietta!" she rapped.

Freckles stood still.

"So I've caught you!" Sarah said, her eyes gleaming. "I suppose you know this place is out of bounds? I suppose you know that tea dances are forbidden? What are you doing here?"

Freckles gulped.

"Nun-nothing! I—I just popped in," she said.

"Have you? Then you can jolly well pop out again!" Sarah snapped. "And when you get back to school you can report to Miss Bullivant! Anybody else from the school here?"

Freckles faced her boldly.

"Well, does it look like it?" she asked.

Sarah glared at her suspiciously. She stared round. Freckles' heart, filled with dismay at her own plight, thudded anxiously for a moment. Supposing Lydia, unaware of the presence of the prefect, suddenly burst on to the scene?

"Well, go on! Get back!" Sarah snapped.

Freckles bit her lip. Her heart was heavy with despair then. What rotten luck! But, thank goodness, Lydia had not been spotted! In order to get

Sarah off the premises, she went there and then, and Sarah, pleased at having made one capture, at least, followed her out. Without a word, the prefect accompanied her to the end of the street. A Cliff House bound bus was coming. Sarah nodded towards it.

"Go on!" she said. Freckles steeled herself. It would never do to let Sarah become suspicious. For the prefect's benefit, she jumped on the bus, and Sarah stood in needle-eyed sternness until the bus moved off. But Freckles only took a ticket to the next stage. As soon as that was reached she hopped off and hurried back into the town.

Four o'clock then. Her eyes were glimmering a little. Impatience, exasperation were overwhelming her. With reckless disregard for watching eyes, she plunged into the hall again, making her way to the dance floor. Lydia was there, swirling round lazily in the arms of Anita. Freckles caught her by the shoulder.

"Lydia, isn't it time we were going?" Lydia flung round.

"You!" she choked. "You again! Get away! There's plenty of time—"

"There isn't—"

Lydia choked.

"Look here, I'm fed-up with this!" she broke out. "Who the dickens do you think you are? Scat!"

"My hat! She's clinging closer to you than a long-lost sister!" Anita chuckled.

"Thank you, shut up!" Freckles swung round. "I don't sponge on her and lend her frocks she's not entitled to—"

"Why, you—"

Lydia glared.

"Look here, Freckles, I'm not going to stand here and hear my friends insulted!"

Steadily Freckles eyed her.

"Are you coming? Or have I got to go and tell your father that you just refuse to come?" she asked tensely.

Lydia turned pale.

"And wouldn't you love to do that?" she cried. "Wouldn't you? Suits you, doesn't it—sneaking telltales to my father, making him write me ticking-off letters? Well, all right. I'll come—just not to give you the satisfaction of sneaking behind my back! But after this, Freckles Winchester," she blazed—"after this, I warn you, keep your beastly interfering nose out of my business! Anita, is the car ready?"

"Yes," Anita said, and scowled at Freckles. "Pretty nosy little busy-body, aren't you?" she said. "Why can't you let Lydia alone?"

"Get the car," Lydia said angrily. "I'll go and pay the bill. You needn't come," she added to Freckles.

But Freckles, who did not mean to let Lydia out of her sight, did go now. Lydia paid the bill; and even in that moment of her exasperation Freckles blinked at the amount.

At last they were all outside and clambering into Anita's car again. As they did so the bus bound for Cliff House passed them.

And Freckles, climbing into the car, saw four faces staring out at her.

Babs, Mabs, Clara, and Leila. Half-heartedly Freckles smiled. But she could tell what they were thinking. They had seen her come out of that place with these girls; they thought, obviously, that she had been hitting the high spots with Lydia & Co.; and suddenly, with a pang, she remembered the cricket practice.

With heavy heart she settled down in the car. Everything, it seemed, had gone wrong for her that afternoon.

But, thank goodness, she had got her way with Lydia!

But, alas for Freckles! her disappointments of that afternoon were not over yet.

A mile from the station the little car suddenly gave out and came to a stop; and Anita, gazing at the petrol gauge, groaned in dismay.

"Oh, my hat! We've run out of juice!"

"Lydia—quickly! We'll have to walk!" Freckles cried.

"Bother it! I'm not going to walk!" Lydia protested.

But Freckles grasped her arm, and, ignoring the protests of Anita & Co., tugged her up the street. Half-past four—the train was in now!

"Look here—" Lydia panted.

"Come on!" Freckles urged, and pulled her so fiercely that for a moment even Lydia was subdued. "Hurry—hurry!"

But Lydia did not hurry; Lydia, protesting and exclaiming, only dawdled. Panting and tugging, Freckles led the way on until at last the station hove in sight. As they reached the courtyard she heard a shrill, guard's whistle. "Lydia—quickly!" she cried. "The Eastbourne train?" she gasped to the collector at the door.

He grinned.

"That's the Eastbourne train—just going out," he said; and as Freckles, with a last desperate, despairing spurt, sprinted on to the platform she was just in time to see the train moving and someone draw back from a carriage window. It was Mr. Crossendale.

She had, after all, let him down. What would he think of her now?

Not a Complete Success!



"HERE she comes," Barbara Redfern announced.

"And now,"

Clara Trevlyn said, with a glint in her eyes, "she can jolly well do some explaining! My hat, though, what's the matter with her!"

And she, Babs, and Mabs, waiting on the steps of Cliff House for the arrival of Freckles Winchester, stared.

Freckles it was coming up the drive—Freckles looking utterly forlorn—certainly not like a girl who had been having a jolly good time; she looked somehow as if all the life had been drained out of her.

And, for the time being, it had.

There had been a blazing row between her and Lydia at the station. They had parted in a temper—Lydia to go back to her waiting friends; Freckles to return to Cliff House.

Babs moved forward as she came up. The white, wan wistfulness of her face struck a shaft of pity to her heart.

"Freckles—" she said.

Freckles looked at her.

"I—I'm sorry!" she mumbled and passed on.

"Sorry!" Clara snorted. "That doesn't jolly well—"

"No, not now, Clara," Babs said and quietly shook her head. "Leave her alone. Something's happened, I think. Anyway, there's Sarah," she added, as that prefect, looking very grim, bore down upon Freckles. "She seems to be in a mess all round."

They watched as Sarah stopped, speaking to Freckles; then they saw that girl nod dumbly and move off with Sarah to Miss Bullivant's study. Ten minutes passed while the chums waited outside; and then Freckles came out looking rather white.

Angry and annoyed as the chums had been with Freckles, it was impossible to feel anything but pity for her then.

"Freckles," Babs said, and again shot a look of warning at Clara, "what's the matter, old thing?"

"Everything!" Freckles said, drawing a deep breath.

"But what did the Bull want to see you for?"

"Just," Freckles said bitterly, "to detain me for to-morrow."

Clara jumped.

"Detained? You mean— My hat!

What about practice?"

Freckles bit her lip.

"I—I'm sorry," she said. "It—it's not completely my fault, though."

"What's happened, then?" Clara demanded.

"Come into the study and I'll tell you," Freckles said.

They went up to the study, softened now, compassion weakening the anger which had stirred them. Freckles had no secrets from Babs & Co., and remembering how thoroughly they understood the relations between her and Lydia, she told them the story of the afternoon's affairs.

"And you mean to say," Clara snorted, "you're going through this mill for that cat's sake?"

"It's not for Lydia's sake—exactly," Freckles looked bitter. "It's her father. I owe everything to him. I'm here because of him. I found my mother because of him. Whatever I do can never, never repay him for all that he's done for me. If would break his heart if Lydia got herself into disgrace, and I should feel a pretty poor sort of friend to let it happen. Now do you understand?"

They did, but it did not help matters. But later, when they were alone, Babs looked thoughtful.

"Strikes me," she said, "this is where we've got to take a hand. And the only way I can see of doing that, is to find some way of making Lydia break with this sponging crowd she's got in with."

Clara granted. The theory sounded all right, but her knowledge of Lydia told her that what Babs suggested was well-nigh impossible. All the same, the Tomboy mentally resolved to have more than a few words with Lydia when she got the opportunity. That opportunity came immediately after prep, for Clara, Babs, and Mabs found Lydia entering her study.

Lydia, her new dresses in a brown paper parcel, turned towards them as they approached. Clara looked at her grimly.

"We want to see you," she said, "about Freckles. What do you mean by landing her into a row?"

"Me?" Lydia scowled.

"Yes. I suppose you know she's detained to-morrow because she was found by Sarah Harrigan in the Court-field Rooms—where she went to save you?"

Lydia sneered.

"Was she?" she retorted. "Then serve her jolly well right! I didn't ask her to come there. Perhaps it'll teach her to stop interfering in my affairs. You can get out!"

They got out, mainly because Babs could see that Clara was dangerously near a flare-up. But later, in the Common-room, when Lydia, in a most exquisite taffeta frock, was showing off to an admiring crowd of other girls, Babs got the great idea. It was Lydia's own boastful words which gave it to her.

"And to-morrow afternoon, immediately after lessons, we're going to the Fields-Crofts' garden-party," she said

haughtily. "I'm taking Anita & Co., of course—and I'm wearing the most lovely pink mode you ever saw. Of course, Anita and her friends are calling for me in the car," she added.

"Lucky thing!" sighed Gwen Cook.

"Fancy show-off!" sniffed Clara, but Babs' eyes suddenly glimmered.

"Hallo, what's the matter?"

"Come outside," Babs said.

Wonderingly, Clara and Mabs followed her. Babs was chuckling then, and her eyes were gleaming with excitement as she led the way to the notice-board in Big Hall.

"There"—she pointed to the time sheet—"see that?" she said. "Afternoon lesson to-morrow is a garden lesson—which means, dears, that I'm in charge. And which also means," she added, while her chums stared, "that Lydia will be wearing her oldest and shabbiest clothes, as we all have to do. Now suppose," Babs asked, a twinkle in her eyes, "that when Lydia goes to change she can't find those posh clothes of hers?"

They blinked.

"And supposing, while she's still searching, that Anita & Co. turn up for her?"

"Well, she'd never go!" Clara decided.

"Exactly!" Babs laughed softly.

"And mightn't that rather smash up things between her and Anita & Co.?"

Anyway, it's worth risking it, don't you think?"

"Do we?" Clara gurgled. "Babs, you're a giddy marvel! But come along and explain the idea in full."

And to have explained the idea in full, the chums, chuckling, flew back to Study No. 4.

THE GARDEN "lesson" at Cliff House, which occurred twice a week, was regarded by the Fourth as a treat.

Babs, as Form captain, was in charge of all the work done, and did the organising of the whole lesson. It was an arrangement which suited the girls, since they were allowed to talk as they worked, and such a relief from the usual weary round in the class-room that they all looked forward to it with joy.

They all, of course, wore their oldest clothes, rough gloves, and heavy shoes. One or two of them proudly sported soiled overalls, but for the most part they had to be content with coarse aprons. At two o'clock the following afternoon, Babs assembled them on the lawns.

"Orders for the afternoon," she said. "Please listen, everybody. Frances Frost, Eleanor Storke, Faith Ashton, Bridget O'Toole, Joan Charmant, and Murial Bond will do digging work in the garden."

"Goodie!" said Frances Frost.

"Jean Cartwright, Gwen Cook, and Lorna Millerchip will clean tools and do general tidying-up jobs."

"Oh!" Jean Cartwright said.

"Marjorie Hazeldene, Janet Jordan, Clara Trevlyn, Peggy Preston, and Jane Mills, will prepare the ground and sow the salads."

"Suits me!" grinned Clara Trevlyn.

"The rest," Babs went on, "will be engaged in general weeding and hoeing work, with the exception of Lydia Crossendale and Rosa Rodworth. Lydia and Rosa, you will transport the load of soot from the frames to the various beds, dumping a barrow load on each so that it can be hoed into the ground. That's all, girls. Now let's get busy. Don't forget we want to win the prize at the Annual Garden Show."

The girls grinned, even the fastidious Lydia. Not that Lydia looked fastidi-

ous, for Lydia was dressed in her oldest drill tunic overall, rough shoes, and old stockings. But for Lydia, gardening this afternoon was only a method of killing time before the arrival of Anita & Co.

Babs, watching her as she trundled off with the wheelbarrow, winked at Mabs and Clara. With vim and energy the girls settled down to their work, and in a few moments the Fourth Form garden was a scene of swarming industry.

A whole hour and a half was given up to that "lesson," but so congenial was the work that the girls never even noticed the passing of time.

Except, of course, Lydia. Lydia, thinking of her glamour friends, very frequently and impatiently consulted her wrist-watch. But at last the bell chimed, proclaiming that lessons for the day were over. Babs gave the order to dismiss, then called Lydia back as she started to scamper off.

"Ahem! Better put that barrow back, Lydia, old thing," she said.

Lydia glared.

"Oh, rats! Can't Merryweather attend to it?"

"Leave tools as you find them. You know the golden rule," Babs said severely.

Lydia gave an impatient cluck. Babs was in the right, of course, though on another occasion Babs would never have insisted on that small duty being attended to. With bad grace, she wheeled the barrow back to the other end of the garden.

"And the spade," Babs said.

"You've left it by the lettuce bed. Bring it along, Lydia."

"You know I want to get away!" Lydia raved.

"Sorry, old thing! Duty first, you know," Babs said, and smiled sweetly as Lydia, with a glare, ungraciously snatched up the spade.

The rest of the girls had moved off now, and Clara, Mabs, and Leila were watching from the other end of the garden.

"That's it," Babs said, when Lydia came, fuming, back, throwing an anxious look towards the gate. "That's fine, Lydia, old thing! Suppose you wouldn't like to stop to help me shift this pile of weeds?"

"No, I wouldn't!" Lydia said between her teeth. "I'm off."

And off she was—almost at a run. Babs again smiled as she rejoined her friends and with them casually stepped into the school. As they reached the steps a small green car, with Anita at the wheel, nosed in through the gates.

"Here they are," Babs said to Clara.

"Come on; let's see how Lydia is getting on."

They hurried up to the dormitory. Lydia was there, still dressed in her soiled and shabby gardening kit, feverishly searching in her trunk. The bag in which she usually kept the finery borrowed from Anita was open, disclosing only a rumpled pile of wrappings.

"Lo, Lydia!" Babs said cheerily.

"Your friends have arrived."

Lydia glared.

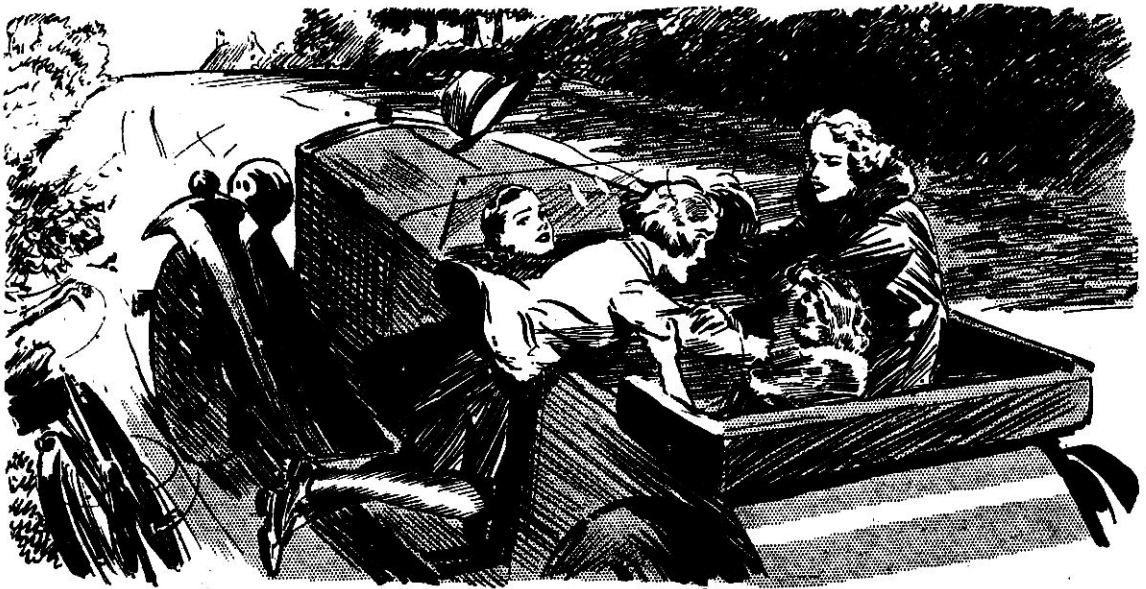
"My clothes!" she cried.

"Your clothes!" Babs asked innocently.

"They're gone!" Lydia stood up, panting. "Somebody's pinched them—the whole lot of them. Somebody's playing a joke—and a fine time it is to play a joke, I must say!"

"Tough," Clara said. "But you can't keep your friends waiting, Lydia."

"Well, let them wait!" Lydia snarled. "Oh, my hat, where are they?"



"LYDIA, listen, please!" cried Freckles. "Your father—" But with a wink at each other, Lydia's new friends suddenly grabbed Freckles, dragging her into the car. And Lydia herself looked on with a sneer.

Wait till I find out who played this silly joke, that's all, I—I—I'll—"

And then she glared again as the door opened and Freckles Winchester, her face pale, came in. "You!" she bellowed. "You've done this! You've hidden my clothes so that I can't meet Anita & Co.!"

"I!" Freckles looked staggered. "Where are they?"

"I don't know anything about it."

"Don't you—fibber!" Lydia hissed. "I suppose this isn't your little plot to keep me away from Anita & Co.?"

And suddenly, her fury over-mastering her, she jumped at Freckles, catching her by the arm. "Hand them over, you thief!" she cried violently.

"Here, I say!" Babs cried. "Hold on! Freckles—"

But Freckles was quite able to look after herself. She was stronger than Lydia. Easily she tore her arm away.

Lydia glared as she paused. From outside came a sudden impatient blast of a motor horn.

"Ahem! Your friends, Lydia," Babs said. "Hadden't you better go?"

"How can I go without clothes, you fool?"

Honk, honk!

"Getting impatient," Babs murmured. "Lydia, come on!"

"But I tell you—"

"I really think you ought, you know," Babs said. "So disgracefully ill-mannered to keep your guests waiting." And she winked at Freckles, who, not understanding, was staring in frank bewilderment. "Clara, grab her arm."

"Here, leave me alone!" Lydia shrieked. "I tell you I can't go!"

"Well, at least you can tell them to stop that terrific hooting," Babs said, as she caught the other arm. "This way, Lydia."

"I won't—"

"Push her from behind, Mabs."

"Look here—" Lydia choked.

But Clara, Babs, and Mabs had the upper hand then. With Clara's iron grip upon one arm, Babs' firm hold upon the other, and Mabs pushing behind, Lydia stood no earthly chance. Struggling and raving, she was propelled into the corridor and hustled down the stairs, Freckles anxiously

following in the rear. Honk! again from the quad.

"Hurry, Lydia!" Babs gasped. "But I—I tell you—"

But Lydia had no time to tell them anything. Grimly the chums rushed her along, Lydia scarlet with rage and humiliation now. They reached the quad, where a crowd of girls were gathered around the impatient occupant of the car. Anita threw up a hand, then started.

"Hi, Lydia! Oh, my hat! I say, you aren't dressed!" she cried.

"That's all right. Here she is!" Clara said cheerfully, trotting Lydia up at a run. "Jump in, Lydia!"

The three girls stared.

"But—but she can't come to the Fields-Crofts' like that!"

"Why not?" Babs asked. "She's your friend, isn't she? Surely friendship counts above appearances? In you get, Lydia."

"Anita—" Lydia gasped.

Anita froze.

"You're never coming like that?" she said distantly.

"But she is," Mabs said cheerfully. "It's smart to wear shabby clothes these days, isn't it, Lydia? Jump in, old thing!"

Lydia choked. Anita looked at her two companions.

"Per—perhaps," she suggested, "we'd better meet you there, Lydia?"

Lydia breathed furiously.

"But if you'll only wait—"

"We're late already," Anita pointed out, "and you did promise to be all ready dressed. Er—er!" She changed gears. "See you later, then, old thing!" she said finally.

"But look here—" Lydia hooted. "Anita, don't go! Anita—"

Transfixed, she stood, as the car moved off.

"Nice friends, I must say," Clara said.

"You—" Lydia choked, and turned upon her. "You—and you!" she flamed, as Freckles came up. And suddenly, boiling passion overcoming her, she lunged—

If Freckles had received the blow which Lydia aimed at her she would surely have measured her length in the

quad. But Freckles didn't. Just in time she stepped aside.

And then, rustling out of the school, came another figure—the figure of Miss Bullivant.

"Lydia!" she cried. "How dare you, girl! What is the meaning of all this?"

"She's stolen my clothes, so that I can't go out with my friends!" Lydia raved.

"What?"

"I didn't," Freckles said. "I know nothing about it."

"Ahem!" Babs coughed as she gazed round at her chums. "I—I'm afraid Lydia is making a mistake, Miss Bullivant. You see," she added gently, "it was we who took Lydia's clothes."

"For—for a joke," Clara stammered. Miss Bullivant's lips came together. Freckles blinked. But Lydia stood still then, her hands clenching as the truth dawned on her at last. Now she knew why Babs had delayed her in the garden.

"Ahem!" Miss Bullivant said. "A very foolish and absurd joke. Where are Lydia's clothes, Barbara?"

"In—in Attic No. 2."

"Lydia, you had better go and get your clothes. In the meantime, take a hundred lines for attempting to strike Freckles. Barbara, Clara, and you, Mabel, will take fifty lines each. And, Lydia—"

"Yes, Miss Bullivant?"

"Please tell your friends, next time they come to the school, not to make such a noise with that motor-horn."

"Yes, Miss Bullivant," Lydia scowled. She turned away. But Freckles, who saw the whole scheme now, flashed a grateful look at Babs & Co., then hurried after Lydia.

"Lydia—"

"Get out of my way!" Lydia snarled. "But, Lydia, you're never going—now? Not after the way they've treated you?"

"I'd go," Lydia said, "if it was only to spite you, mischief-maker! I'd go if—if they hated me. Oh, don't stare. I'm not blind. If you didn't steal those clothes, you jolly well put Babs & Co. up to it, the same as you're trying to poison my father's mind against me. Well, I'm going now—if only to spite you, you cat! And please," she added

fiercely, "don't ever speak to me again, you rotten schemer!"

With that she flew towards the school. It looked, after all, as if Babs' plot had only recoiled on Freckles' own head.

No Gratitude At All!



LYDIA, in spite of everything, went to the Fields-Crofts', refusing to have her eyes opened by that tiff to the little regard Anita Maling had for her.

Perhaps clothes mattered more to Lydia than the affection of those girls; perhaps it was that the snobbish vanity which urged her always to preen herself in the company of older girls, mattered more to her than the real, devoted friendship of Freckles Winchester.

And so, while Freckles ground away at the detention which she had earned for Lydia's sake, Lydia went off, and Babs & Co., chastened and fed up, practised at the nets—again without Freckles.

Hopeless to tell Freckles that Lydia was not worthy of her friendship. Hopeless to persuade Freckles to take Lydia at her own word and have nothing more to do with her. Freckles' own common sense agreed with everything they said, but her gratitude to Lydia's father held her steadily to her course.

A very worried girl was Freckles Winchester in spite of all those happinesses which should have been hers. That night she could not sleep. Oh, if only Lydia were not so blind, so vain, so utterly foolish!

Yet what could she do?

"Nothing," reason answered.

But loyalty to Lydia's father answered that she must do something.

Somehow she had to save Lydia, somehow she must—

There was a creak somewhere along the vaguely white row of beds. Freckles started up with keen, anxious eyes.

"Lydia!" she breathed.

"Shut up!" Lydia growled back.

Freckles gulped. That was Lydia—rapidly dressing in the darkness. Lydia, obviously, was going out, and Freckles, remembering that reference of Lydia's yesterday to Jay's Club, could guess where. She heard the rustle as Lydia donned the expensive oyster-coloured dress which Anita Maling had lent her. "Lydia," she faltered, "you're not going out?"

"You mind your own business!" came Lydia's ungracious retort. "And shut up! Do you want to wake everybody in the dorm?"

Freckles lay back. She felt helpless. If she tried to stop Lydia there would only be a row, and if a row resulted a mistress might come on the scene, and Lydia, discovered arrayed in all her finery, would be immediately "for it."

The door creaked, and, with a soft plop, closed. Lydia had gone.

Freckles lay still, feeling somewhat like a traitor. She ought not to have let Lydia go, she told herself angrily—and yet, what could she have done to prevent her?

Half an hour went by. The clock chimed out eleven. An hour, and still she did not sleep. Imagination deepened her apprehension. Now that Lydia was out of school she was seeing, in her mind's eye, some accident, some unexpected adventure. Supposing a mistress took it into her head to peep in on the sleeping girls?

Just in case of that eventuality, Freckles got out of bed and arranged a bolster and pillow in Lydia's bed in the shape of a dummy, adding a dark stock-

ing to represent hair. Just as well she did so! For barely had she returned to her own bed than she heard footsteps and soft voices in the corridor outside.

One of the voices was that of Miss Bullivant, deputy headmistress; the other belonged to Miss Wright, the little English mistress, who was just completing her round as duty mistress. They paused outside the Fourth Form dormitory door.

"Piper is careless," Miss Bullivant was saying. "I shall take him to task for leaving the lobby window open tomorrow, Miss Wright. Please make a note of it."

"Yes, Miss Bullivant. But the window is closed now?"

"Yes; I closed it myself. Just peep in the dormitory, Miss Wright. Better not turn on the light in case you awaken the girls."

Freckles' heart stopped beating as she heard that. She held her breath as little Miss Wright peeped in, and with a glance round went out again, apparently satisfied. Heart drumming in her ears, she listened to the footsteps of the two as they retreated along the passage.

The lobby window was closed!

Piper, of course, was not responsible for it being opened. That was Lydia's fault. Lydia had left that window open as a means of entering the school on her return. And now Lydia would find herself locked out!

Freckles waited perhaps another quarter of an hour. Silence again then. Suddenly she rose from her bed, and, slipping her feet into her slippers, donned her dressing-gown and silently crept down into Big Hall. Holding her breath, she tiptoed past Miss Bullivant's room, from beneath the door of which a light still glowed. She reached the lobby window and slipped back the catches.

Well, thank goodness that was done. Lydia would be able to get in now.

Back she crept to Big Hall. Again she sneaked past Miss Bullivant's door, but as she reached the bottom of the stairs, the weighted tassel of her dressing-gown cord struck against a suit of armour. In the deep silence, the steel gave out a ring that was almost like the peal of a bell.

"Oh!" Freckles gasped.

She started back. And just at that moment, Miss Bullivant, who must have had the ear of a lynx, emerged from her study.

Too late Freckles made a wild dash for the stairs. She had barely negotiated the first three when light flooded Big Hall behind her, and Miss Bullivant's voice, vibrant in the silence, rang out.

"Henrietta! Henrietta, how dare you!"

Lost, dismayed, Freckles swung round.

"What are you doing out of bed, girl?" Miss Bullivant thundered.

"I—I—I— Oh dear! I—I was going to the study!" Freckles stammered.

"You know you have no business to be out of bed at this time of night!" Miss Bullivant rasped.

Freckles gulped, her heart quaking. If it should occur to Miss Bullivant to link her transgression with the lobby window! If the mistress spotted that it was again unfastened!

But at that moment there was another interruption. It came this time in the shape of Miss Primrose herself.

"Why, good gracious me, what is this?" she cried. "Henrietta, what are you doing out of bed?"

"I—I just came down," Freckles said feebly.

"Oh!" said Miss Primrose. "That

is no sort of explanation, Henrietta. I might say," she added a little exasperatedly, "that I am far, far from being satisfied with your conduct recently, Henrietta. You will go back to bed, miss—at once—and you will consider yourself confined to school bounds for the next two half-holidays. Now, please go!"

Freckles went, gulping a breath of thankfulness. Just for one dismal second she had fancied that Primmy was going to pronounce a detention—which would have meant, of course, that instead of playing cricket on Saturday, she would have remained in the class-room grinding at some wretched task.

She got back to bed, deciding to say nothing of what had happened to either Clara or Babs. After all, as things had turned out, nothing of a disastrous nature had happened.

But she had to be careful in future, she knew that. Primmy had threatened her with detention the next time she was caught, and Primmy wasn't the one to make idle threats. At the same time, she reflected, Lydia should know how jolly nearly she had come to getting caught.

And then, next morning, in spite of Lydia snarling "Get out!" when she entered her study, she told her.

Lydia's eyes glowed.

"Well, and what do I do?" she sneered. "Grovel on my knees in gratitude because you stick your head into trouble through trying to interfere in my affairs?"

Freckles' eyes flamed contempt.

"Lydia, I'm only trying to warn you," she said.

"Then you can chuck it!" Lydia said roughly. "I can do without your assistance, thanks! Buza off!"

And Freckles, because of the quivering anger within her, went, disgusted and bitter, telling herself that Lydia wasn't really worth her consideration and very, very much inclined from that moment, to let her go her own silly headstrong way!

The Wrong Girl Caught!



CERTAINLY, for a time, that disgust of Lydia got the upper hand of Freckles.

For the rest of that morning she did almost completely banish Lydia from her mind.

At break the exhibition of cricket prowess she gave at the nets sent Clara wild with delight, and brought a great roar of cheering from the girls gathered to watch—everybody's interest now concentrated upon the girls who would try to uphold Cliff House's honour on the cricket field on the great day, to-morrow.

Lydia was not present at that exhibition. As soon as lessons were over, Lydia, most peculiarly, bolted from the school, returning in a great hurry just before dinner with a brand new green leather case.

When Freckles, after dinner, went up to the dormitory to get a clean handkerchief for afternoon lessons, the green case was open on the bed, and Lydia was in front of the mirror preening herself in a gown of such exquisite beauty that even Freckles forgot for the moment her uneasiness in her breathless wonder.

"Oh!" she said.

Lydia turned. She scowled. Then she looked at her reflection and laughed, for most certainly she did look marvellous in the dress. So utterly delighted with her appearance, indeed,

was Lydia, that she was willing to forget for the moment that she looked upon Freckles as an interfering enemy. "Marvellous, isn't it?" she asked. "I'm going to buy it, you know." "But the money?" Freckles stared. "It must cost pounds!" "Eight guineas!" Lydia said loftily. "Eight?" Freckles gulped. "But—but you haven't got eight guineas!" "Haven't I?" Lydia shrugged disdainfully as she looked over her shoulder. "That's all you know," she retorted. "Pater sent me a ten-pound note this morning. Look!" She picked a letter up from the bed, and held in front of the astonished Freckles' eyes a crisp, rustling ten-pound note. Freckles had a sense of shock. Ten pounds! Surely Mr. Crossendale would never have sent his daughter such an amount—especially in view of his recent complaints. More closely she regarded the bed as

when she went downstairs. For there Babs pounced upon her, and Babs had another letter in her hand—for herself this time. Freckles opened it, her cheeks flushing with pleasure. As she did so, something fell out. It was Babs who, with a laugh, stooped to pick it up. And then, as she touched it, she gave a shriek. "Freckles, a five-pound note!" A five-pound note it was; but there was no mistake about this one. With excited Freckles read the letter. It was from mother, who, expressing her happiness at the prospect of seeing her again on the morrow—she was coming straight from the station—she was coming straight from the station to the school—had sent her the five pounds as a reward for having earned her place in the school team.

all went to bed, and in still greater excitement the next morning—which was as fine and as sunny as though the weather had been ordered specially for the event—they rose. It was after breakfast when Freckles, with Clara, Babs, and Mabs, was on her way to the pavilion to change for the great match which was to begin at half-past ten that morning that Dulcia Fairbrother came up to her. "Henrietta," she said, "there's somebody on the phone for Lydia. I can't find her. Perhaps you will take the call?" "Oh, yes!" Freckles' delighted mind immediately leapt to Mr. Crossendale. "Clara, have I time?" "Bags!" Clara said cheerfully. "But don't hang it out too long, you know." Freckles, with a laugh, flew off. She reached the prefects' room and grabbed the telephone. And then her face fell. For it was

"I know," she went on, "that you would like to buy yourself some mascot

And then her face fell. For it was



LYDIA's friends stared. "She—she can't come to the Fields-Crofts' like that!" protested Anita. Holding the furious, red-faced Lydia, Babs and Clara grinned. "Why not?" asked Babs sweetly. "She's your friend, isn't she? Surely friendship counts above appearances? In you get, Lydia!"

Lydia turned, and her eyes, staring down, saw then the brief letter which had accompanied the ten-pound note. It was not from Mr. Crossendale himself, but from Reynolds, Mr. Crossendale's secretary, and it said briefly: "I have been instructed by your father to send you the enclosed remittance. Your father hopes to see you to-morrow at the school." "Lydia," Freckles said, "you're sure Reynolds hasn't made a mistake?" Lydia glared. "Pater doesn't make a mistake about ten-pound notes," she said. "In any case, it's like your interfering cheek to read my private correspondence. Now don't start again," she added, her eyes beginning to glitter. Freckles did not start again. But she went out, feeling somehow that something was wrong. Her own sound common sense told her that Mr. Crossendale would never have entrusted so much money to his wayward daughter—and if he had, would surely have made a special point of mentioning the amount. But Lydia was going to spend that; Lydia was going to buy that handsome frock with it. Supposing, after all, there should be some mistake? The matter, however, was again temporarily banished from her mind

for to-morrow, and I know you are keen on that horseshoe silver wrist-watch which Primms' have for sale. I hope, my dear, to see you wearing it when I arrive." Henrietta's eyes danced. For many, many weeks she had longed for that wrist-watch; wasn't it just too adorable of mums to remember it at this moment? There and then she wanted to rush off to buy it—until she remembered that she was confined to school bounds. Couldn't be done, of course. No sense in asking for further trouble. She'd explain to mums when she arrived on the morrow, and they'd both have the pleasure of buying the wrist-watch afterwards. Meantime, she carefully folded the note and stored it away in her purse. And so, at last, that day of excitement came to an end, with everybody looking forward with the most terrific eagerness to the great day to-morrow. For once that afternoon Lydia did not go out. Lydia, with an excited throng of admirers, was busy showing off in the new dress she declared she was going to buy and which she was going to wear to-morrow. In happy excitement that night they

not Mr. Crossendale's voice which came through. It was that of Anita Maling. "Oh, Lydia, thank goodness!" she said, with a gasp. "Wait a minute!" Freckles returned. "This is Henrietta!" "Well, I want to speak to Lydia—it's urgent—desperate!" "Anything serious?" Freckles asked swiftly. "Serious? I'll say!" Anita groaned. "My father's coming down to-day. We didn't expect him until Monday. Henrietta, listen! Tell Lydia to bring those frocks I lent her along at once, will you? The model I lent her yesterday is one of the show pieces of the shop, and he's bound to spot that it's missing as soon as he comes. And if he does—" Freckles' lips curled a little. "You'll be in the soup!" she suggested. "Yes, of course! And not only me, but Lydia as well. He's bound to insist she pays for it. My father doesn't believe in letting dresses go out on approval. Henrietta, tell her to hurry, please!" she finished desperately. Freckles slowly replaced the receiver. She had half expected something like

(Continued on page 14)

OUT OF SCHOOL HOURS

How popular PATRICIA is with you all : youthful and gay, yet wise and helpful, too. Each week she writes to you in that cheery, chummy way that you all love, telling you of her own and her family's doings, of things to do and things to talk about.



I EXPECT you're all working very hard at school these days, aren't you—or at least, trying to? For it isn't easy to concentrate on things like Isothermas and Isobars, Simple and Compound Interest, and the Roman Influence in Britain, when the sun's beaming in through the class-room windows, is it?

All the same, I think June is a lovely month, even for school.

I hope you're all remembering to make a dash for the school fountain at play-time, and before lessons, to have long drinks of cold water.

If you have one before going into school, one at playtime, one at the end of morning school, one before afternoon school, and one just before you go home—that will make five. And how all these cold-water drinks will improve your good looks!

I don't know about you, but this Patricia of yours finds it rather difficult to take all this very wise advice about cold-water drinking in the winter. B-r-r! I know the experts say you can drink it warm, but, then, I think warm water's horrid.

So summer is definitely the time to start this good habit. But try to squeeze in another drink at home between meals, won't you? For six a day is the perfect number.

● Long or Short

Of course, you young things wouldn't remember, but there honestly was a time when it was considered rather "fast" to wear light-coloured stockings. (Or "flesh-coloured," as they were all called then!)

What those people who worry about such things thought when "trousers" became fashionable for women and girls, I just can't imagine.

"Daring," "unbecoming," "immodest"—and so on. I expect these were only a few of the words they used to describe them.

But we, of course, just think they're sensible, comfy, and economical.

This year, they're definitely attractive, as well. Just notice those you see around at week-ends; I'm sure you'll decide that they really have improved in appearance.

The secret of good-looking trousers on women, is the "cut," of course, and now, all tailors seem to have discovered the secret of making them really fit becomingly.

Even the popular shorts have come under this spell, and can now look adorable. No more falling off the hips, dipping at the back, or creasing too readily.

They can be bought in all charming colours, are almost creaseproof, and will fit as snugly as a bathing-suit.

Shorts are also being worn a bit shorter this year, you'll notice. So if you want

to be in the swim of fashion, then you could shorten them yourself—unless, of course, your shorts are already briefer than they were last year because you've grown.

And don't make a new hem. Just turn the present hem up—but on the outside. Catch it in one or two places, press it firmly—and your shorts will look as modern as the next new moon, with the very latest turn-ups, such as men's trousers have.

Do you like peanuts—or monkey nuts, as they are sometimes called?

I'm not very keen on them, as a matter of fact—not that it matters, mind you! I find the skin on the nuts worrying—and I never know what to do with the shells!

They make such a mess if you just drop them around, and to go around looking for a rubbish receptacle is rather a fag.

What I do like, though, are those hot, salted peanuts that you can buy in our favourite "shop-of-many-counters."

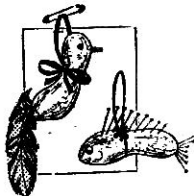
When I'm not feeling in an ice-cream mood, I often buy myself a bag of these to nibble as I stroll around gazing at all the threepenny and sixpenny wonders.

But, here am I, prattling on about myself, when I meant to tell you how to make these fascinating little ornaments in the picture below.

Of course, you can guess by now, that they are made with the aid of peanuts—the sort you buy at a penny a bag.

● Nutty Notions

If you can find one the right shape, try tying a tiny bow of ribbon around the thin part, marking an eye with ink, and sticking a feather into the "tail-end." The result is the cutest little bird to hang on the lapel of your coat. A tiny piece of match-stick for a beak will help the effect, too.



The fish is just as easy to make. He has a piece of cord or ribbon tied round his middle, and a marked with ink.

His fins and tail are suggested by pins jabbed into him. This isn't intended to hang on your coat, but meant as a novelty to sell at a bazaar, or to give to a chum who's always wanting pins. The joy of it is, that it can be made in a twinkling. As for cost—well, it's just slightly more than nothing!

● Holiday Thoughts

There's a great discussion going on in our family at the moment—about holidays.

Father says they're a nuisance, anyway, and far too expensive, but he supposes we have to have them, and as long as there's some good golf he doesn't mind much where he goes.

Mother says a "family holiday" will be great fun, and she looks at your Patricia as she says this, for, as you know, I have spent the last two summer holidays in the South of France with Aunt Monica—who isn't really my aunt, but my small brother's godmother.

Aunt Monica, by the way, is in America now. She went there for the World's Fair, and the King and Queen's visit, and looks like staying there for some time.

Mother's chief requirements for a holiday are a comfortable hotel, with good food, a nice deck-chair, and plenty of knitting wool.

Small brother Heath (or Heatherington, in full) gets his holiday ideas from the comic papers, I'm afraid.

"I like grey donkeys, an' strawberry ices, an' pink rock, an' blue sea, an' white piers an' things," he says quite clearly.

While your Patricia asks for somewhere that's not too crowded, where the scenery is beautiful, the sea warm, the sun blazing, and the people friendly.

So where we shall go, I just don't know.

● Show Buttons

With all these thoughts of holiday in the air, we shall soon have to be planning "what to take away," shan't we?

There'll be shorts, and slacks, and playsuits—all very exciting.

There will also be dresses—for we just can't manage without some, even if we do intend spending most of our time in the sea!

I saw such a pretty—and simple—way of making a plain, summer or tennis dress more exciting, the other day.

Down the front of it were sewn two rows of pretty buttons—shaped like daisies.

You'd be astounded what a gay look they gave the dress.

Why not try the idea yourself?

Bye-bye now until next week, my pets!

Your friend,

PATRICIA.



CYCLING—FOR FITNESS AND FUN

Now is the time to revel in long days out of doors, with your chums and cycles for company.

WHAT lovely times all you lucky cycle owners are going to have this summer! (Especially if it is going to be as hot as some kind weather prophets have promised us.)

Cycling is, without doubt, one of the grandest and most fit-making exercises, so get out into the country on your glittering "steel steed" as often as you can on half-holidays and week-ends.

In addition to being so good for you, cycling can also be very beautifying, you know—so that's extra cheering, isn't it?

There's nothing like a rush of wind in your face to give you a lovely tan. The pedalling motion with your legs makes shapely calves and slim ankles. While the fresh air works wonders with your complexion.

PROTECT YOUR SKIN

But sometimes you can have too much wind and sun all at once, so you must avoid this if it's a tan you want and not a bestroot-red complexion.

Before you set off on a long spin it's a good idea to dab your face all over with milk and let it dry in. This leaves a protective film over the skin which guards it from the fiercest rays of the sun.

Your hair will revel in a good blow, but it's sensible to take a scarf or hair-net

with you in case it becomes too breezy. For hair swishing in your eyes can be dangerous as well as annoying.

THE IDEAL OUTFIT

I expect most of you wear shorts for cycling—and very wise, too. But be sure that the blouse or jersey that goes with them is long enough to tuck well in, won't you?

To see "a parting where a meeting ought to be" looks very unsightly—and might even give you a chill.

Some girls wear rather thin-soled cycling shoes when off for a bike trip. These are ideal if you intend to spend the whole time cycling. But if you hope to go for quite a long walk as well, into the woods or beside a stream, where your bike can't go, these thin-soled shoes are not always suitable.

So think of this when you are preparing for your trip, won't you? And if you are in any doubt, wear a pair of oldish school shoes—some that are not too heavy for cycling comfortably, yet not too light for walking.

THE RIGHT NUMBER

I think we all like company on any sort of trip, don't we? (Except just a few who prefer to be alone, like Greta Garbo.)



If you have a best chum with a bike, then the two of you can have a grand time.

Four is a good number also, for then you can "pair off." But do avoid a party of three, for so often one girl finds she is the "odd man," and it's very easy to get a dose of the sulks when you're feeling a bit out of things.

Never, never include in your cycling party any over-risky girls who regard cycling as a lark, for they can be a perfect pest and ruin your day—quite apart from the danger they are on the road!

Select for your "gang" girls who know the Highway Code and who will cycle with every caution until the main roads and houses are left behind.

Ride only two abreast, and keeping close together. Use the cycle tracks wherever possible. And be sure always to give signals if you are going to stop suddenly or make an unexpected turn.

Once you have reached the quieter roads and the lanes, you can relax a bit, enjoying the scenery around, your chums' company, and feel that you are Queens of the Road.



THE WAY THEY DO THEIR HAIR

Miss Richards and Patricia have planned this little feature between them, describing Fourth Formers' hair styles.

This week: **FAITH ASHTON**

THERE are several girls at Cliff House School who have dared to ask Faith Ashton if she has ever had her hair permanently waved.

To which Faith has just flatly said: "No."

And the fact remains, that a good many girls still think Faith has had a perm.

She certainly does seem to be able to do marvellous things with her hair. She can make "rolls" and "bangs," "bubble curls" and "baby curls"—which is pretty wonderful. In fact, this variety is almost impossible with naturally wavy hair.

All the same, her latest hair-style is quite becoming. It would particularly suit the girl with a rather long face and long neck.

Faith combs her hair straight back, and then makes a parting. But this parting doesn't go upwards from her forehead—it goes across her hair, leaving a thick fringe of hair in front.

She divides this fringe up into at least ten strands, and then twirls each one up separately.

Sometimes it takes her ages, I can tell you—but Faith doesn't seem to mind, though I'm sure other schoolgirls wouldn't go to all that bother.

One sensible idea she has is to use a "rat's tail" comb for the curling.

This is a fine-toothed comb, with a thin handle to it—yes, like a rat's tail. It really is most useful for twirling the hair around. All hairdressers use them, and they can be bought for threepence each.

Faith's back hair is quite long—shoulder-length in fact.

She divides this up into three layers—yes, every morning, and then divides it up again into strands. Each of these strands she curls separately—and that is the secret of Faith's bouncy-looking curls.

Although Faith will spend all this time on the curling of her hair, she simply won't brush it. The result is that it is rather dull-looking—"hey-ey!" Clara calls it.

Next week: **JEAN CARTWRIGHT**

FOOT-NOTES

TRIM toe-nails straight across, and then snip them at the corners. That's the ideal shape—and the most comfy, too.

AFTER your bath is the best time for a pedicure (which is just the way of indicating a "manicure" for the feet).

PUSH back all the dry skin around the toe-nails—for feet are going to be much on show this year, what with toeless shoes and sandals.

FILE toe-nails slightly after snipping them—especially if you treasure a pair of silk stockings. The filing takes off those scratchy edges—which can catch on a stocking and make a run before you can say "bother!"

TRY giving your feet an occasional rub over with methylated spirit—especially on a very hot day, or on a special occasion when you'll be on your feet a lot. They'll feel as if they have wings after this.

SHOES with thick, clumpy soles are going to be all the rage this summer, for street as well as for beach wear. And my, aren't they a boon to the girl who thinks she's too short!

ACHY feet can make even the prettiest girl look plain, poor dear! So there's nothing for it but to rest them—either by lying down or by placing them up on a chair. When the ache's a real misery, plunge them first into hot water, then into cold, then into hot, then into cold—and so on, finishing up with cold. They'll feel like new—and so will you!

(Continued from page 11)

this. A row for Anita, of course, if that frock wasn't there—but a bigger row for Lydia who had borrowed it!

Lydia, the reckless idiot, had believed in Anita. Anita, all along, had had no more right to lend Lydia those frocks than Freckles herself.

Freckles was suddenly acutely conscious of impending trouble—dreadful trouble. Supposing that Mr. Maling came to the school just when Mr. Crossendale arrived?

She hastened off, almost colliding with a girl who was coming up the stairs. It was Lydia herself, towel on her arm, dressing-gown covering her form, as she walked away to the bathroom. Freckles caught her arm.

"Hey," Lydia snapped, "what's the game?"

"Lydia, that frock—all those frocks you've got from Anita—"

Lydia scowled.

"Well?"

"Anita wants you to take them back—now!" Freckles panted. "She says her father's coming down, and she never had any right to lend them to you. Lydia, she says— Oh, Lydia!"

Lydia's eyes glittered. She drew away.

"What's this?" she asked roughly.

"Lydia, it's the truth!"

"Yes?" Lydia's lips curled in scorn. "And you expect me to believe it? My hat, you must think I'm green!"

"But, Lydia, I tell you—"

"I don't care two halfpenny jots what you tell me! Anita said I could wear that frock to-day, and I'm going to wear it—yes, and the other, too! In any case," she added irritably, "I'm going to buy it. Go and bluff somebody else, sneak!"

And with a flick of the towel, she strode off. Freckles looked after her.

"Lydia!" she cried desperately.

But Lydia did not even pause.

For a moment Freckles felt helpless. Lydia was going to wear that frock— Lydia was going to buy it—with money, she felt sure, which had been sent to her in mistake. Inevitably would come the show-down, then, and the show-down in front of the school before Lydia's own father. That would hurt him dreadfully.

The bath-room door closed with a slam.

And then Freckles' eyes gleamed. Well, if Lydia was too great a fool to save herself, she would save her.

In a moment her mind was made up. While those frocks were in Lydia's possession danger overhung Lydia. Once the frocks were returned to the shop, then—well, Lydia could rave as much as she liked.

She—Freckles—would take them back!

Up to the dormitory she rushed. It was empty now. By Lydia's bed the green case was open. Three frocks were already in it, and with them was a corked bottle of perfume which vain Lydia always kept among her newest clothes.

On the bed, already laid out for the snob's return from the bath, was the show frock which Anita had lent her yesterday.

Breathlessly Freckles caught the case up. Swiftly but calmly she folded the dress, laying it on top of the others. With the bottle of perfume in her hand she hesitated, wondering if she should put that in, too; and then, just in case it should be another "borrowed" article, she included it.

Case in hand, she darted out of the school. There was a hail from the pavilion.

"Freckles!"

Freckles jumped. Babs was coming towards her.

"Freckles!" Babs cried, and looked at the case. "What on earth—"

"Babs, I've got to go out—in a hurry!" Freckles gasped. "These frocks—there's going to be trouble about them. I can't explain now, but I'll be back in half an hour. Tell Clara, will you?"

"Oh, my hat! Freckles, shall I come?"

"No, but thanks all the same, Babs. I—I've got to hurry."

Babs nodded, though she did not look very happy. Freckles, with a wild glance back towards the school, rushed off. Supposing she was seen—she, confined to bounds? But she had to risk that.

Not, as a matter of fact, that there was a great deal of chance of her being noticed. Already the first visitors were arriving, and happy girls, greeting mothers, fathers, and friends, were too preoccupied with their own affairs to notice Freckles.

She hastened to the cycle-shed, but rushed away again as she saw Miss Bullivant there talking to Miss Charmant. She couldn't afford to risk being detained now.

She reached the road. Pantingly she started along it. No time to wait for the bus, of course; she could catch that farther down the road when she had got safely away from Cliff House.

Then, reaching the bend, there came a sudden hail, and a shiny black car stopped. And from the driving-seat a hand was waved, and her name was called:

"Freckles!"

Freckles swung round in utter dismay. The man in the car was Mr. Crossendale himself!

"Freckles!" he cried. "Why, fancy seeing you! Where are you going in such a hurry? And where's Lydia?"

"Lydia is—is at school," Freckles floundered. "I—I've got to go to the dressmaker in Courtfield."

"So!" He laughed. "And carrying that bag? Come on! Jump in!"

Freckles blinked.

"But Lydia—"

"Plenty of time to see Lydia," he said. "You don't really think I'm going to see you walking into Courtfield lugging that bag while I have a car? No," he said; and, stepping out of the car, he gently took the bag from her suddenly helpless hand. "Jump in!"

"But, Mr. Crossendale—"

"In!" he said jovially. "Where's the dress shop?"

"Maling's," Henrietta said. "But, Mr. Crossendale, no, no!" she gasped. "Let me walk, please!"

Useless! He bundled her into the car and started off, and Freckles, realising all at once the significance of his presence, gasped.

"Mr. Crossendale—"

"Don't worry!" he chuckled. "I'm enjoying this! Maling's, did you say the shop was? I've got a friend named Tom Maling who's opening a dress shop or something here next week. Well, perhaps we'll see him."

Freckles almost swooned.

"Oh!"

He laughed merrily. She sat numb, her mind chaotically whirling, as the car purred on its way. What a cruel stroke of luck to meet Mr. Crossendale, of all people!

What could she say? What could she do?

She had never, never visualised a situation of such horribly embarrassing circumstances as this.

The car bowled on swiftly. Slowing in Courtfield High Street, Mr. Crossendale smiled.

"Maling's," he said. "This is the shop, isn't it? Here we are, Freckles. Out you get! I'll bring the case in for you."

"But—but—"

"Please!"

He handed her out. He caught up the case. Freckles felt weak, helpless. Desperately she made an effort to get hold of it.

"Please, Mr. Crossendale—"

"In you go!" he said.

He pushed the door open. Freckles, groaning, went in, while Mr. Crossendale followed. Then she stood still.

Two people were in the shop—Anita, looking white and desperate, and a man in a bowler, looking crimson and furious. Freckles did not need to be told that the row Anita had feared was already in progress. This man was her father.

"I—I—" she faltered, to be interrupted by a cry from Mr. Crossendale.

"Why, Tom, so it is you!" he said.

"Well, well! And so we meet again. I'm almost a customer, too," he added, with a laugh—"or, at least, I'm helping one. A friend of mine, Miss Winchester. She's got something here for you."

Mr. Maling started, and, in the act of shaking hands with Mr. Crossendale, he looked at his daughter.

"Is this the girl?" he asked grimly.

Anita hesitated. For a moment it was obvious she did not know what to say. Then she gulped.

"Y-yes!"

"So! Charles," he said to Mr. Crossendale, "there's a little matter to be settled up before we go any further. Apparently, this daughter of mine has been lending some girl at Cliff House frocks out of this shop without my permission. Among those frocks is a show piece. Anita had no right to lend those frocks, any more than the girl who borrowed them had the right to wear them!"

Mr. Crossendale looked amazed.

"But what has Henrietta to do with this?" he asked.

"If Henrietta is the girl, Henrietta has brought those frocks back now,"



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Mr. Maling said. "Unfortunately for Anita, I arrived before I was expected, and I've forced her to tell the truth about this girl to whom she has been lending frocks. And if," he said, with a glare at Freckles, "any one of those is damaged— Give me that bag, miss!"

Freckles gulped. Anita turned a beseeching gaze on her. Mr. Crossendale stared curiously, his brows showing a line of disapproval as he looked at Freckles. She saw what he was thinking—saw that faint disgust upon his features—and she wanted to cry.

But she wasn't guilty. Anita, deliberately, had already fastened that blame on her herself; and how could she blurt out the real truth—that it was Mr. Crossendale's own daughter to whom the guilt belonged?

She gulped as the lid of the case was thrown open. And then Mr. Maling's face became like a thundercloud.

For on top of the show frock was the bottle of perfume, and that bottle, obviously, had a faulty stopper. A large stain was spreading over the beautiful creation.

"Look at that!" he gritted; and, while Anita gave a cry and Freckles stared dismally, he held the dress up. "Spoiled!" he said. "I feared as much! Miss Winchester, your parents will have to pay for this!"

"Her mother, you mean," Mr. Crossendale said abruptly. "It will be a bit of a blow to her. Really, Freckles, I must say I'm surprised! Tom, how much?" he asked.

"Five pounds!"

"Hum! Pretty steep, isn't it?"

"That frock's worth it—or was worth it!" Mr. Maling retorted. "This girl's responsible, Charles, and I'm coming along to the school to see her mother—or her headmistress—myself!"

Freckles was white now. She saw all that might happen then. At Cliff House, Babs & Co. would never allow her to bear the blame. The matter must be disposed of now.

Yet how?

There was only one way.

"I—I'm sorry!" she blurted. "But—but I'll pay for the damage! I'll pay now!" she added feverishly, and fished her mother's five-pound note from her purse. "There!"

Mr. Maling blinked.

"Well, if you insist on settling—" he said uncertainly.

"I do," Freckles panted.

"Then—then that's all right," he said more calmly. "Ahem! Anita, give the young lady a receipt."

And Anita, with wondering eyes, hurried off. But Freckles turned to meet Mr. Crossendale's eyes, and burned as she felt his gaze fastened upon her; for in those eyes were expressed not that old affection she knew, but disgust and contempt.

Oh, if only he knew the truth!

"What Have You Done With My Frocks?"



NOT a word he spoke to her on the drive back to the school. He, who had been so anxious to be jovial before, seemed utterly disgusted with her now.

Easy to read the thoughts that were racing in his brain; and Freckles, though burning in the injustice of those thoughts towards herself, was glad that the matter had been disposed

of. Anyway, Lydia was safe. By-and-by he would forget all this.

But as soon as they reached the school—

There were Babs & Co., and with them was Henrietta's own mother—and Miss Primrose. And Miss Primrose was looking severe in the extreme, and her mother was looking most dreadfully disturbed. As soon as she climbed out of the car she rushed towards her.

"Freckles, my dear, what is this? Miss Primrose tells me you are confined to bounds."

"Henrietta had no business to go out," Miss Primrose said. "I warned her what would happen. I am sorry indeed to have to take you to task before your mother, but discipline has to be maintained. Henrietta, I forbid you to play in the cricket match this morning."

Freckles' lips quivered. From Clara came a cry.

"But, Miss Primrose—"

"I am sorry," Miss Primrose said



"LOOK at that!" Mr. Maling gritted, holding up the damaged dress.

"Miss Winchester, your parents will have to pay for this!"

Freckles clenched her hands. Should she take the blame or tell Mr.

Maling and Mr. Crossendale the truth about Lydia?

faintly. "Mrs. Winchester, I regret in the extreme—"

"Please, Miss Primrose, do not apologise," Mrs. Winchester said. But her eyes were full of hurt disappointment as they fastened upon her daughter. "I am sorry, too—deeply sorry. Freckles, I had hoped that you would have been happy as a boarder here; I had intended to allow you to remain. But I see, my dear, that your proper place is at home."

Freckles almost burst into tears then. She looked appealingly at Mr. Crossendale, who, however, turned his head away.

But Babs & Co. were looking at each other. And Babs' face was grim. She knew there was some other explanation behind all this.

"But—but, mums—"

"And perhaps," Mrs. Winchester said, "you will tell me what you did with the five-pound note I sent you yesterday. I see you are not wearing the wrist-watch you wanted. Where is it?"

"I—I—I—" Freckles wretchedly

stuttered.

"You've spent it?"

"Y-yes."

"On what?"

Freckles was pale and silent. But it was Mr. Crossendale who, speaking in a rather scornful voice, spoke then.

"I think you ought to know, Mrs. Winchester," he said, "that she had to pay it out to Maling's for the damage she caused to a dress she had no right to be in possession of."

"What?" cried Babs. "Freckles—"

"It—it's true!" Freckles said feverishly. "I'm sorry!" But she cast a wild, pleading look at Babs.

"Mother, please—please come away!" she added, seeing by the expression on Babs' face that she was going to blurt out something. "I—I'll explain."

"I hope you can," her mother said quickly.

Freckles caught her by the arm. Babs turned to her chums. Clara clenched her hands.

"So she took the dresses back—to

save that cat!" she said. "She's still saving her, and going through the mill like this for doing it! And because she's worrying about the Lydia worm," Clara said bitterly, "I'm to lose my best bowler!"

"You are not," Babs said.

"What—?"

"I've got a wheeze," Babs faced them. "Freckles is taking the sacrificing stunt too far—doing it because she doesn't want Mr. Crossendale to know what sort of a worm his daughter is. But Freckles isn't going to get away with it—and neither is Lydia."

"But—but what—" Clara said.

"Say nothing. Wait here," Babs counselled.

And Babs rushed off towards the School House.

Admire Freckles' sacrifice as she might, this had gone too far. Freckles was risking her happiness and the success of the team. And all because of graceless, ungrateful Lydia.

Well, it had got to stop—and Lydia herself should stop it. Babs had heard

enough to make her guess the rest, and apparently Lydia knew nothing of Freckles' sacrifice. It should be Lydia's own lips which should free Freckles.

Into the school she raced. Up to the dormitory she went. Lydia, her face burning with anger, was there, furiously searching through her locker.

"Hallo!" Babs said. "Lost your frock?"

Lydia glared.

"Do you know anything about it?"

"Me?" Babs shrugged. "Not much. But I can tell you who does."

"Who?"

"Freckles."

Lydia jumped.

"You mean she's hidden it?"

"I mean," Babs said, "she had it. I saw her with it half an hour ago. But why not ask her?" she added casually. "There she is now—down on the lawn."

Lydia choked. Inwardly Babs chuckled. Lydia was in the right sort of mood which would help her plan. Feeling furious and thwarted, Lydia was in no shape to think of caution.

She stamped out.

Babs followed, a quiet smile on her face.

Out of the school Lydia raved. Up to Freckles and her mother she fumed. And then, catching Freckles by the shoulders, she flung her round.

"You cat!" she cried. "What have you done with my frocks?"

Freckles gasped.

"Lydia—"

"Out with them!" Lydia rapped.

"No, you needn't look; I know! Your own precious pal Barbara Redfern has given you away!"

"Lydia, don't be silly!" Freckles cried and looked nervously at Mr. Crossendale. "Mr. Crossendale, take no notice of her."

"You've stolen my frocks!" Lydia stormed. "You stole that show frock!"

"Be quiet!" cried Freckles.

"I won't be quiet! I want to know! You've always been jealous of me wearing those frocks—that's why you tried to bluff me about Anita half an hour ago."

"But, Lydia—"

"Wait a minute—wait!" Mr. Crossendale intervened quickly, his eyes suddenly glimmering. "I think," he said grimly, "I begin to see now. Freckles, you—you little chump," he added softly, "why didn't you tell me that you were taking those frocks back to get Lydia out of a scrape?"

Freckles stood tongue-tied.

"But there wasn't any scrape," Lydia protested. "I tell you—"

"There was—a big one." Mr. Crossendale looked at her. "Freckles was afraid you would get into trouble through borrowing those frocks."

"That's at!" Babs chipped in.

"And, as it happens, Freckles was right, because one of them was damaged."

Lydia looked staggered.

"Damaged?"

"Damaged with your perfume. Those dresses, Lydia, were your responsibility, and it is I who should foot the bill. Freckles, to save you, fastened it on herself. Freckles, why did you do it?"

"Oh, nun-nothing—" Freckles mumbled.

"But," Babs spoke up firmly, "I can tell you, Mr. Crossendale! She did it for your sake! She realised all along that Lydia's head was being turned by her friends, Anita Maling & Co., and she was afraid Lydia would end up in trouble."

"Instead of which," Mr. Crossendale

nodded, "it is Freckles herself who has landed in the trouble. Lydia—" he cried.

Lydia turned slowly towards Freckles. Dimly, if too late, she was beginning to realise the truth; dimly she was seeing the sacrifice that had been made for her. She didn't understand fully—not yet—but caution told her to speak carefully. Instinct told her that here, instead of an enemy, she faced the truest, the most loyal friend it was possible for a girl to have. Wondering, almost with a trace of awe in the glance, she looked at the girl.

"Please—please," Freckles begged. "don't—don't say any more!"

"But I do want to say something more—a lot," Mr. Crossendale said. "In the first place, Freckles, you have spent five pounds of your own money. That expense is mine—we can deal with that here and now. Lydia, yesterday my secretary sent you a ten-pound note in error for a pound—"

Lydia jumped. For a moment she felt a wild tug of panic. That ten pounds with which she had intended to buy the frock which was now back in its owner's possession.

"You have it, of course?" Mr. Crossendale said.

"Y-yes," Lydia stuttered.

And she gasped. If she had had no feeling of gratitude to Freckles, she had a sudden burst of it then. Supposing she had spent that ten pounds?

"Thank you. I am glad to see," her father said, "that you can hold money for a little while. If you had spent that amount, Lydia, I would, without hesitation, have taken you away with me to-day. At my request, Miss Primrose has been supplying me with private reports of your conduct recently, and I may say now, Lydia, that what she has told me in those reports has disturbed me to an extent where I am seriously contemplating taking you away in any case. Still, if you have the money—"

"I have," gasped Lydia.

So Freckles hadn't told tales about her to her father. Mr. Crossendale had gathered his information from the Head! Tremblingly she produced the ten-pound note.

"Thank you!" He took it. "Mrs. Winchester, remind me that I owe you five pounds of this. In the meantime," he added, "it seems that we have a

series of matters to clear up. And the first of those," he added, "is to settle this quarrel between Freckles and Lydia. Lydia, I hope you are going to apologise to Freckles?"

Lydia turned scarlet.

"I am. I—I'm sorry," she said—and there was that in her face which showed that she meant it. "I've been a fool, and—and— Oh, Freckles, I'm sorry for having been such a cat to you!"

Freckles smiled.

"Shall we," she suggested, "say nothing else about it?"

"And shall we," whooped Clara, "collar Miss Primrose and ask her if she won't reconsider the decision not to let her play, Mr. Crossendale? Because, after all, it was to save Lydia that Freckles broke bounds—"

Mr. Crossendale smiled at Mrs. Winchester.

"I think," he murmured, "it is a case for a joint appeal to Miss Primrose, Mrs. Winchester. If we both plead for Freckles—"

Mrs. Winchester smiled happily, her eyes glowing with pride as she looked at her daughter.

"Let us try," she said.

Try they did, and were successful, too. For when Miss Primrose had been told as many of the details which were necessary, she gave permission willingly enough.

And Freckles performed the hat trick in the first innings of the great match which followed, and it was Freckles' thirty-six not out which helped substantially to pull off Cliff House's final victory.

No happier girl was there than Freckles Winchester that day, and no more chastened girl than Lydia Crossendale, who, realising now the peril into which she had been drifting, and the mistakes she had made, had done some very serious and very unpleasant thinking about things. She knew now that the sneaking she had accused Freckles of had been the result of Primmy's secret reports. Remembering how Freckles had tried to warn her, to save her, reflecting what sacrifices she had made, Lydia indeed felt small and mean.

Altogether, it was a very good frame of mind to find the snob of the Fourth in for once in a way.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.



The Return of JUNGLE JESS!

Never was there such a girl as Jungle Jess—amazingly strong, still something of a native at heart, uncanny in her power over wild animals, headstrong, almost unmanageable, and yet devoted to the famous Cliff House chums, especially gentle Marjorie Hazeldene. Again, Jungle Jess comes into the lives of Babs & Co., bringing with her a mystery and a problem. For Jess and her favourite leopard are performing in a nearby circus, and . . .

But you must read this magnificent Hilda Richards story for yourself next week. Order your SCHOOLGIRL well in advance.

Are You Reading This Dramatic and Unusual Story?



Brenda's Task of MYSTERY!

was out of range of Veronica and her companion, Brenda fluttered her hands at Ronald.

"Ssssh!" she hissed urgently, and stabbing a warning finger towards the doorway.

But Ronald did not understand. Straightening up, he placed hands on hips in mock indignation.

"I say, old thing, what sort of a game is this?" he demanded. "Why the 'shushing' and 'hand-flapping' I—what on earth!" he ended in blank amazement.

For Brenda, without any warning, had behaved in a most extraordinary fashion.

A party of other pupils, all fellows and girls about her own age, who had recently arrived by car, came swarming towards the lounge, chattering and laughing. As they streamed in between her and Ronald she tagged herself on to them.

Then, while Ronald just stood and gaped, so utterly dumbfounded that she felt quite sorry for him, Brenda seized the arm of the nearest fellow, and passing through into the lounge, began chattering away for all she was worth.

"So awfully decent of you to bring me here," she said, beaming gratefully at him, and then glancing about the brilliantly lit lounge. "First time I've ever had a lesson, you know, and I'll—"

"B-b-but—but, I sus-say, you know—" the young man gasped.

"Oh, not at all!" Brenda cut in quickly. "My people won't mind. They're awfully decent, especially Veronica, and she doesn't need me to-night because she's gone to a show. Lucky thing—"

The young man, gulping, staring, and flushing, obviously did not know whether he was on his head or his heels. He tried to speak more than once, but Brenda gushingly interrupted each time. But that wasn't all she did. Never once did she cease glancing into one of the mirrors.

And she saw several things. She saw Veronica and the dark-faced man exchange looks; saw Veronica say something, nodding in her direction, and the man shake his head.

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 SCHOLLES**. 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.

Veronica discovers that Brenda has a mysterious friend. She is intrigued, and with the help of a friend of hers, a certain Mr. Jones, sets out to discover what her companion is up to. Learning that Brenda and her friend are paying a visit to a dance academy together, Veronica and Mr. Jones get there first, determined to learn the identity of Brenda's friend.

(Now read on.)

out Miss Allen. I'd like a few words with her first. Enter, mam'selle!" He disengaged arms, stepped to one side, and, with a twinkle in his eyes, bowed for her to go past him.

Brenda, about to step through the doorway, suddenly checked herself.

Her eyes slowly widening, she stared at one of the huge gilt mirrors. A moment ago a movement reflected in it had attracted her attention. The movement had ceased now, but the reflection remained.

Two faces, half-obscured by thick ferns, were depicted in the mirror. The faces of a dark, thin-featured man, and of—Veronica Scholes, her young mistress!

AT THE DANCE ACADEMY.

And Brenda's baffling boy friend tells her that her future happiness may depend upon the way she dances that night.

Brenda's Turn to be Baffling!

"WELL, it can't do any harm if we do barge in early, anyway," Brenda Day said, chuckling, as she and Ronald Benson, arm-in-arm, made for the lounge of Miss Allen's Dancing Academy.

"Better early than anything else," Ronald agreed.

But that was where both of them, had they but realised it, were making a dangerous mistake. For they were not the first arrivals, as they so fondly imagined. Two other people had forestalled them by many minutes; two people who now, secreted behind a huge mass of ferns in one corner of the lounge, were expectantly watching the open doors for a sight of Brenda and her friend.

Those two were Veronica Scholes and the mysterious man who called himself "Mr. Jones."

Cleverly and cunningly they had schemed for a chance to get face to face with Brenda's unknown friend, and now the chance was theirs; in another few seconds, judging by the footsteps in the hall, their object would be achieved.

"Natty little place," Ronald observed, nodding towards the doorway. "You'd better take a pew while I dig

Brenda was spellbound, petrified.

Veronica—here! Veronica who, according to Ronald, must never learn of their association, lurking behind a mass of ferns just as though she were hiding, spying! And—great goodness! She remembered now. Veronica was supposed to be at a theatre. Then she must be spying; spying on her!

"I say, go on, for goodness' sake," came a plaintively bantering protest from Ronald.

Brenda, roused by her friend's words, took calm possession of herself.

In some manner Veronica must have discovered that she was visiting the dance academy this evening, and already being curious about her peculiar activities, had got here first to spy on her.

To try to learn, for instance, the identity of her secret friend!

And the man. Who was he? A perfect stranger to Brenda, what part did he play in this startling tangle?

Stepping back so that she knew she

By **MARGERY MARRIOTT**

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

BETWEEN OURSELVES



MY DEAR READERS.—This week I want to chat to you about a new character whom you will meet next Saturday. Her name is Kit Hartley; her home the Red Ranch, Canada.

I know you must have read many stories of ranch life before—quite a few have appeared in THE SCHOOLGIRL—but I can promise you that Kit Hartley herself will come to you as something delightfully fresh and sparkling.

Kit is a new character, perhaps the most vivid Miss Elizabeth Chester—yes, that popular writer is the author—has ever created. Kit definitely lives! She is the true Western girl, perfectly portrayed.

Next week, in Story No. 1 of this new series, you will read how she returns to her home—Red Ranch—from school. She arrives in exciting times, for there is a feud raging between her father and a rival rancher, two men who were once great friends.

Because there might be trouble, Kit is ordered to return to school. But Kit isn't having any! Kit loathes the thought of a feud, and in her own original way, sets out to smash it. She teams up once again with a friend of her childhood, Redwing, a delightfully quaint little Redskin girl, and together they start things moving.

"KIT OF RED RANCH"

is a series of stories quite apart from anything you've ever read before. When you meet Kit you'll realise why.

I know you'll be sorry to say good-bye to Lady Fayre and Robin Hood, but they may return again some day—and, believe me, Kit will amply compensate you. She is, I think, Miss Chester's finest character, and with her you will live Western life in a newer, truer, and more exciting way.

And now a word about your great favourite—Cliff House. Miss Richards has written for next Saturday's issue a story featuring an immensely popular character, a character, in fact, for whom many of you have been asking. Therefore, I know you will be delighted to read:

"THE RETURN OF JUNGLE JESS."

For the sake of new readers, just a word about Jess. She is the white girl Babs & Co. met last summer on a tropical island. Jess had lived there from childhood, with wild animals as her companions and friends.

Babs & Co. brought her back to England, and she spent a short while at Cliff House. Now the famous chums meet her again in very unusual circumstances. A very intriguing and exciting story this, with Jungle Jess herself as quaint and surprising as ever. She has her pet leopard, Kullo, with her, too, so you may be sure there are thrills.

Margery Marriott gives you another instalment of her fine serial, and with Patricia's two pages as instructive and gay as ever, you may count on an especially attractive issue next Saturday.

Lastly—and important as well to you all, I hope—there will be another Editorial Chat from

Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.

Brenda's eyes gleamed. They were approaching an alcove, and Veronica and the man had their attention focused away from her for an instant. Here was her chance.

Willy-nilly, she dragged her companion through some curtains, and there, breathless and rather embarrassed, she explained as best she could. The young man was a sport. He didn't understand, even then, what it was all about, but with a grin he slipped off to rejoin his friends, leaving Brenda, filled with anxiety, to wait for Ronald.

Impatiently she strode up and down behind the curtains. At last came the sound of footsteps; the curtains swished aside. Ronald, his jaw set, strode in.

"And now perhaps you'll explain what all this tomfoolery's about, Brenda!" he snapped. "I didn't bring you here for a game of hide-and-seek."

"I'm sorry, Ronald," Brenda said quickly, a hand on his arm, "but it was the only thing I could do to save us."

"Save us?" Ronald frowned. "What do you mean?"

Swiftly Brenda told him. Ronald was thunderstruck.

"What? Veronica—and a man—out there? My stars!" A look of alarm in his eyes, he half-turned towards the curtains, then swung back. "Oh, gee, Brenda, I'm a prize chump! I'm sorry! If only I'd realised what was up! They probably saw me—but you don't think they connected us?" he added anxiously.

"I hope not," Brenda said. "But, Ronald, you see what this means! She suspects me—knows I'm up to something. Knows I'm meeting someone, and she's deliberately trying to find out things."

"There's more in it than that," Ronald said thoughtfully.

"More?" Brenda echoed. "How do you mean?"

"Oh, just—just more, that's all," Ronald said, shrugging. "I can't explain now. It's another of those little things I've got to keep under my hat for a while. H'm!"

Brows knit, he pondered, hand to his chin.

"We'll have to do something about it, though, Brenda," he presently resumed. "We daren't risk Veronica learning too much. We've got to put her off the scent. But don't you worry about that; I'll think up some little wheeze. In the meantime, your job is to make a smashing hit with this dancing. Just a tick!"

Cautiously parting the curtains, he looked through, and almost at once gave a "thumbs up" gesture.

"O.K.!" he announced, turning towards her again. "The birds have just flown. Wonder if that man—oh, let's forget it!" he added abruptly. "We've other things to think about at the moment. Brenda, old thing, you'll put up the show of your life in front of Miss Allen, won't you?"

"You bet I will!" Brenda declared, eyes beginning to sparkle.

For from what Ronald had said, in that vague, cryptic way of his, it appeared that the success of her dancing would affect her own future happiness.

BEFORE THEY left the lounge, partly baffled partly chagrined, Veronica and Mr. Jones found plenty of food for thought.

When, peering out of their hiding-place, they saw Brenda so animatedly chattering to the dumbfounded boy, they exchanged puzzled looks.

"Know that chap?" Mr. Jones whispered.

"Never seen him before," Veronica returned. "Wonder if I know any of the others. If that's the fellow she's

been meeting it doesn't help us an inch."

Together they scrutinised the other fellows crossing the lounge, and all at once Mr. Jones gave a low, sibilant hiss.

"Veronica—quick!" he cried, grabbing her arm. "That fellow over there, dodging in and out of everyone—I'll swear I've seen him before!"

Veronica, swiftly glancing in the direction he indicated, gave a start. "Ronald Benson!" she gasped.

A Dancing Discovery!

IT was Mr. Jones' turn to be astounded.

"You know him, too?" he said keenly.

"I should think I do!" Veronica produced a few facts concerning Ronald. "But where on earth have you seen him before? I mean, to make you sound surprised?"

"He's been getting in my way," Mr. Jones stated ominously, his dark eyes switching back to Ronald's dodging form. "I wouldn't mind betting he's the fellow we want!"

"Getting in your way? Oh, don't be so absurd! What's Ronald got to do with us? But come on! Let's make ourselves scarce before either of them spot us."

Choosing a moment when Brenda was no longer in evidence, and Ronald was swallowed up by the crowd, the two plotters stole out from behind the ferns and hurried through the doorway.

Once beyond earshot, they started a hectic argument, but for the first few moments Veronica was more concerned with thinking than talking.

Ronald Benson at the dance academy! That was rather a shock. She didn't know he was so keen on dancing. And undoubtedly it was rather strange that Brenda should be there, as well. But as for him being her unknown friend—oh, it was just too fantastic for words! Hadn't Brenda been with some other fellow? Hadn't they seen her with him?

That decided Veronica. But it didn't decide Mr. Jones.

"I don't care what you say or think," he almost snapped, as they strode down the short drive of the house, "but that young fellow you call Ronald Benson is remarkably like a chap who's been dogging me all over the place."

"And I tell you it's impossible!" Veronica retorted. "What could Ronald have on us? If you have seen him knocking about, then it's just a coincidence. Or it may be someone like Ronald."

"Whoever it is," said Mr. Jones slowly, "we've got to track him down. Now let's get things straightened out. This is the position."

He looked at Veronica intently, holding her own restive eyes in a keen, unwavering stare.

"You and I are up to something—there's no need for me to say what," he added, half-sneering. "We suspect Brenda and her friend, whoever he is, to be up to something, too. Now the question is: are they clashing with us? If so, we'd better look out! And we daren't run any risks. Our next move is—"

"To find out for certain who Brenda's friend is?"

"Precisely! At all costs—for the sake of our own necks—we've got to know whether it's Ronald Benson. And if it is—"

He did not finish; nor did Veronica supply the missing words. But his voice rang to a fierce threat:

"If it is," Veronica said, through her

teeth, "then I think I know of a way to find out—from the servants at Fernbank. Listen!"

The scheme Veronica outlined was simplicity itself, but filled with danger for Brenda and Ronald. She would question the servants. Had they seen a boy visiting the house, or loitering near? They were bound to have done. And if that boy was Ronald, then he would have been recognised.

"Excellent, excellent!" said Mr. Jones, and rubbed his hands.

"RONALD TELLS me you've the makings of a very clever dancer," said Miss Allen.

"Oh!" said Brenda, in surprise.

Smilingly she looked from the pleasant-faced, middle-aged dance instructor to Ronald himself, who, arms folded, stood with them at one end of the academy ball-room.

"I think so, anyway," Ronald declared. "That's why we want you to do some impromptu steps, if you can, Brenda. Ready, Miss Allen?"

With a nod, Miss Allen crossed to the piano and commenced to play.

Brenda did not notice the rather queer look that passed between the two of them, but as a simple melody came from the piano she started.

"Why, I know that," she said. "What is it?"

The music ceased. Miss Allen, darting another look at Ronald, who was hurrying forward, swung round to Brenda.

"You are sure, my dear?" she asked quickly.

"Quite sure, yes. Why? There's nothing strange about it, is there?"

"Well, no," said Miss Allen, laughing. "But it's a tune of my own; one I composed years ago specially for my beginner pupils when they're improving steps. How did you get to know it, dear?" she added seriously.

"Try to think, Brenda," Ronald urged, coming to her side. "It wasn't at the orphanage?"

"No," said Brenda, shaking her head. "I don't think so. I can't really place it at all. I only just feel, inside me, that I've heard it before."

And then, as she saw the expression on Ronald's face, the colour of excitement, almost of jubilation, that tinged his cheeks; as she saw the gleam in his eyes as he looked at Miss Allen, and noted the air of suppressed excitement about that kindly lady, too, Brenda caught in her breath.

Another mystery!

Another mystery around her. Why, everything relating to this visit to the academy was shrouded in mystery, even the frock she was wearing, for Ronald had induced her to make it on exactly the same lines as an old-fashioned child's dance frock that had been hidden away in an attic at Fernbank.

She thrilled. Oh, what did it all mean? If only she knew; if only Ronald would tell her just a little. Wonderingly, pleadingly, she looked at him, but with a quick gesture he motioned her to commence.

Miss Allen resumed playing. Brenda started to dance. She did so almost unconsciously, immediately inventing steps of her own to fit the simple tune, for her mind was agog.

What could possibly be the motive behind all this? What did Ronald expect it to lead to?

"Well, you certainly are a remarkable young lady," Miss Allen declared at last, rising from the piano. "You know a tune that, to my knowledge, has never been played by anybody but me; and you also know some of the steps I teach my pupils!"

"You mean, I've been using some of them?" Brenda breathed.

"Quite a lot. Are you sure you've never had any lessons from me? Not necessarily here. I've taught elsewhere."

"Quite sure," Brenda said, but wondered if she really was, after all.

More puzzled than ever, she watched as Miss Allen turned.

"Ronald—" the lady began, and then broke off, staring about her. "Why, where ever has he got to? Oh, there you are!"

For Ronald, who had been missing, now came hurrying rather breathlessly into the ball-room. As Brenda looked at him curiously, he gave an apologetic grin.

"Sorry I had to hop off," he said, gasping. "Just—just thought of something. Everything O.K.?"

"I think so," said Miss Allen. "But, Ronald—" she looked at him appealingly—"don't you think you ought to—"

But Ronald gently interrupted. "Can I have a word with you alone? Thanks." He smiled at Brenda. "You'll excuse us, won't you?"

"Of course," Brenda agreed.

Thoughtfully, she watched them retire out of earshot; in gathering puzzlement she saw them converse, now and again nod in her direction. Amazing indeed! Even apart from everything else, it was amazing that she should know that tune and those steps.

"That's why Ronald's talking to her now, of course," Brenda mused. "But I do wish he wouldn't always keep me so much in the dark. I wonder if he'll tell me anything now?"

Expectantly, she scanned his face when he and Miss Allen returned. Exultation shone in his eyes; his grin was wide and triumphant.

But Miss Allen, Brenda realised, was staring fixedly at her as if unable to drag her gaze away. The good woman appeared to be in a daze.

"Well, that's that!" Ronald cried breezily. "Thanks for all you've done, Miss Allen!"

Miss Allen hurried away then to take her next pupils, and Ronald escorted Brenda to the cloak-room. Outside the

house, Brenda, falling into step beside her friend, looked at him inquiringly.

"Why did Miss Allen give me such a funny look when she came back, Ronald?" she asked.

"Why?" Ronald lifted quizzical brows. "Well, if I told you, you wouldn't believe me. But I'm not going to tell you. All I will say is this! Brenda, old thing," he went on, in an eager, vibrant voice, "you're doing wonderfully! We're making grand strides. To-night has helped me, a tremendous lot. It's convinced me I'm on the right track."

"Of what?" Brenda said patiently.

"Oh—things," Ronald said vaguely.

"Things I daren't even explain to you. But there's one thing I've no need to explain—the danger to us if Veronica isn't put off the scent!"

Brenda started in sudden dismay. "Oh, golly-pips, yes. She saw me, Ronald, and you, too, probably. If she connects us—"

"She does," was Ronald's quiet, tense reply. "How do I know?" He gave a wry grin. "Because I've been doing some detective work. Remember I slipped off while you were dancing? Well, I sneaked off after Veronica and her pal. Fortunately, they were too busy talking either to walk very quickly—or to listen intently. I crept up alongside of them, hidden by a hedge, and overheard the neatest little stunt you've ever struck!"

"To bow! us out?" Brenda said, catching her breath.

"Yes," Ronald's face set. "Veronica's going to cross-examine the servants at Fernbank to-morrow to discover if any of them ~~that~~ ^{has} seen you with a fellow, or spotted a fellow hanging about near the house—"

"But—but one of them's almost bound to have done," Brenda said, in dismay.

"Oh, Ronald, what ever can we do? You're known so well to all the servants. They'll have recognised you. Veronica'll know it's you—"

"She'll know it's me who's been hanging around the house, and perhaps talking to you," said Ronald, a gleam appearing in his eyes, "but what she won't know is why I've been hanging around. And that's where my little



KNOWING that enemies were spying, Brenda suddenly caught hold of a perfect stranger's arm and: "So awfully decent of you to bring me here," she said, beaming. Ronald just stood and gaped. What on earth was Brenda doing?

counter-plan comes in. What do you think of this for a wheeze?"

And in low tones, he outlined his scheme for warding off disaster.

All a Question of Acting!

"MY golly, it's a gorgeous idea!" Brenda exclaimed, her eyes sparkling. "She's almost sure to fall for it. She'll remember that row we had at the squire's party—"

"Which incidentally was about the finest piece of acting outside Hollywood anyone's ever been privileged to watch for nothing," Ronald chuckled unblushingly. "Of course she'll fall for it. Early to-morrow morning, then?"

"I'll be awaiting my cue," Brenda told him, laughing.

Undoubtedly Ronald's scheme to put Veronica off the scent was a stroke of genius. It could scarcely fail to convince Veronica that she and Ronald were definitely not friends, and that Ronald had had other reasons for being around the house. And it was equally certain to pander to that moody girl's sense of vanity.

But Brenda was not quite satisfied. Indeed, she knew she could never be really satisfied while there was so much that baffled and intrigued her.

"Ronald," she said quietly, and as he looked at her with an inquiring smile, she took hold of his arm, "Ronald, won't you tell me something of what it's all about—please?" she begged. "I've tried to be so patient, but—"

"You've been a perfect little brick," Ronald assured her, "but all the same—" Regretfully he shook his head, sighing. "I'm sorry, Brenda, I can't. All I can let on is that I'm working on your behalf, doing things which I hope will make all the difference to your future—"

"Taking me to be photographed with your scarf over my head?" Brenda gently teased, hoping to persuade him by that means into telling her more. "And now getting me to dance steps of my own, wearing this frock, copied from any old thing that must have been in that attic ages and ages?"

Ronald linked his arm through hers. "Yes, Brenda; by doing those things," he confided. "They're all related; they all lead one to another. The photo at Fernbank led me to the photographer's," he explained; "the photographer led me to Miss Allen, and Miss Allen—why—"

His face lit up. Animateedly, he gestured with his free hand.

"Why, the very fact that you knew that tune and those steps put me on to something else. I'm not quite sure about it at the moment, though I hope to be by to-morrow. But everything's working out beautifully—providing we can settle Veronica—and that man!"

"Well, your brain-wave ought to do that," Brenda told him, nodding.

"It must, Brenda—simply must! We daren't let Veronica know, or even dream, what we're doing. It's going to be a pretty grim morning to-morrow," he reflected, his face hardening. "It'll probably mean one thing or the other for you and me, especially you, old thing—sink or swim!"

He became silent then, brooding, pensive. Brenda did not interrupt his thoughts, partly because she was busy with her own.

Sink or swim? To-morrow would tell. How it would tell she hadn't the faintest idea. Neither did she know why such vital importance was attached to their preserving the "secret of their friendship.

But she had confidence enough in Ronald to believe that unless they did preserve that secret, all their joint activities on her own behalf would probably end in disaster!

Parting from Ronald shortly afterwards, Brenda hurried to Fernbank and, retiring to bed immediately, was soon sound asleep.

She awoke with a start, for as she turned over, still semi-conscious, there came a loud squeak.

Blinking open her eyes, she raised her head. Came another squeak—and a gurgle of childish laughter. Brenda sat bolt upright, jumped as a third and even more insistent squeak sounded at her side, looked down, wonderingly picked up a tiny rubber lion, and then, the truth dawning on her, turned round.

There, beside the bed, his chubby face radiant, and his dark curls flopping up and down as he pranced about like a jack-in-the-box, was little Dickie Scholes, her adorable young charge.

"Morning, Dickie!" Brenda greeted him. "My word, you've dressed yourself, too." (With his pull-over back to front and his socks inside out, she noticed.) "Did you put Smacker-Squeezie in bed with me?"

Smacker-Squeezie was Dickie's pet name for the rubber lion, because, as he explained, it squeaked when you smacked or squeezed it.

He nodded, then, clambering on to the bed, gave Brenda her usual morning hug and kiss.

"You looked so awfu' lonely all on your -self, Aunty Brenda," he said, "and Smacker-Squeezie didn't mind. Smacker-Squeezie likes you."

"Well, that was nice of you. Thank you, Dickie. And thank you, Smacker-Squeezie," she added, making the toy squeak. "But goodness, this'll never do, lying here. Lazy Aunty Brenda! Up you jump!"

She sprang out of bed and dragged on her dressing-gown.

Dickie, clapping his hands with delight at such acrobatics, decided to emulate them himself. He took a flying leap on to her back. And Brenda, a twinkle in her eyes, carried him into the bathroom.

When they went down to breakfast, Brenda forced herself to seem quite composed.

Mustn't do anything to put Veronica on her guard for when Ronald called. And certainly mustn't let Veronica realise she had been detected at the academy.

"Good-morning, Mr. Scholes," Brenda smiled, entering the dining-room with Dickie sedately trailing from her hand. "Good-morning, Mrs. Scholes. Good-morning, Veronica. Did you like the show last night?"

"Oh, rather! Topping show," Veronica said shortly, and then made to get on with her breakfast.

But her aunt gave her a look of gentle rebuke.

"Well, tell Brenda more about it, dear. I'm sure she'd be interested."

"I—I'm sorry," Veronica said. "I was thinking about something else. But if Brenda would like to hear about it—" she added pleasantly.

"I'd love to!" Brenda exclaimed, hiding a smile.

Veronica started to describe a purely imaginary show, faltering, flushing, contradicting herself, until she got into such a tangle that Brenda felt almost sorry for the girl.

Poor old Veronica! What deception had led her into. And all through those oddly contrasting moods of hers. If she wasn't so curious this would never have happened. Or—and Brenda bit her lip—was there something more

than mere inquisitiveness behind Veronica's determined efforts to discover her secret?

But Veronica ended her rambling description before Brenda could delve very far into that question, and Brenda had to appear enthralled.

Breakfast finished, Mr. Scholes left on a business jaunt; Veronica retired to the study to write some letters, and little Dickie was taken out of Brenda's charge in order to have an elocution lesson. Therefore, as Mrs. Scholes went off to take an inventory of the larder, Brenda had time on her hands.

It was half past nine. Ronald might be along any minute now.

Tingling with suspense, Brenda watched from a downstairs window.

Half an hour went by. No sign of Ronald. Forty minutes, and Brenda began to get apprehensive. Then, just as she was turning away, she spotted his familiar figure coming up the drive.

Quietly, she tiptoed into the hall, stole past the partly open door of the study, catching a glimpse of Veronica hunched up in an armchair in an attitude of deep concentration, and managed to open the front door without a sound.

Ronald, mounting the steps, waved, then gave a gesture meaning "Is it all right?"

"Yes," Brenda whispered. "She's in the study. But don't come in yet. Knock."

She skipped back and closed the door, waiting until Ronald, outside, had knocked loudly. Then, calling "All right, Veronica, I'll go," she opened the door again.

"Oh, hallo!" she exclaimed, off-handedly. "What do you want?"

"You, eh?" Ronald replied, in similarly raised tones, and he seemed embarrassed and nonplussed at being confronted by Brenda. "Er—is Veronica knocking about?"

"She is. Why?" was Brenda's curt answer.

"Well, I—I wanted to see her," Ronald said hesitantly, "although I'd rather you did something for me first."

"What?" Brenda managed to sound convincingly astounded. "You want me to do you a favour after the beastly way you behaved at the dance?"

There was a pause, as though Ronald was absorbing this retort. But actually it was so that he and Brenda, exchanging winks, could listen.

Their attentiveness was rewarded almost at once, for from the study there came the sound of a heavy chair being scraped back over the carpet, and then footsteps stealthily tiptoeing towards the door.

Brenda and Ronald looked at each other tensely.

"She's coming," Brenda whispered.

"Creeping towards the door."

"Shall I—start?"

"Not yet. Wait till I give the signal."

While Ronald, head half-turned towards the study, raised a restraining hand, Brenda waited, quivering with suspense. She saw a shadow fall across the floor just beyond the study door. Then it stopped moving.

Down came Ronald's hand.

"Now," he hissed. "Play up for all you're worth. This may mean everything for us."

Brenda gulped, gripped her hands, and drew a deep breath. Then, trying to make her tones sound perfectly natural, she began to address Ronald again.

THE continuation of this intriguing incident will hold your interest from the first line. Order next Saturday's SCHOOLGIRL early, won't you?

COMPLETE THIS WEEK

Another fascinating story of Merry England in the Middle Ages.

SECRET HELPER to ROBIN HOOD



The Earl's Prisoner!

STRANGE that Robin Hood does not reply!"

The young Lady Fayre took the whistle from her lips and looked about her in the pretty wood where the birds sang and there were gay flowers. Not far away was the lair of the famous outlaw and friend of the poor—Robin Hood; she could hear the voices of his men, but no answer to her whistle came from Robin Hood.

Fayre blew her whistle again. It was one that the outlaw himself had given her, and had a special note. Not only did it warn him of her approach, but it drove away wolves—and there were plenty of wolves in the woods in the far-off days when Richard Lion Heart was king of England.

"Robin Hood," called Fayre, and ran tripping lightly through the undergrowth towards the outlaw's lair.

No one, looking at her, would have realised that she was the young heiress of Longley Castle; for she wore a shabby green frock under a hooded brown cloak that was even more ragged.

Fayre was disguised—dressed as a village maid. It was the only way she could escape from the castle.

Fayre loved the open fields and the fun of the village, but she had to use great discretion on her wandering. For had her uncle, the Baron le Feuvre, learned of her daring exploits, he would have been likely to put her in a dungeon and keep her there—on a diet of bread-and-water.

At the moment the burly, bullying baron was far from her thoughts; and in gay, light-hearted mood she ran into the clearing, where men in green sat about.

They had been talking a moment before, but silence fell as she was seen. Friar Tuck looked at her solemnly before doffing his green cap; Little John, rising to his immense height, bowed gravely.

There were a dozen men in green

sitting on the sun-warm grass, or leaning on staves. But Robin Hood was not among them. And, as Fayre became aware of the outlaws' glum expressions, a great uneasiness seized her.

"Why—what is amiss?" she cried. "Robin—where is he?"

Friar Tuck stepped forward.

"My lady—" he began.

"Oh, please!" begged Fayre. "I am a friend. Call me now Maid Marian and forget I have anything to do with the castle."

He bowed.

"So be it, Maid Marian," he said gravely. "Yet I do think it is well you have something to do with the castle. Come, tell us—" he added more briskly, regarding her with intensity. "Is there excitement at the castle? Have—have they a prisoner? Robin has not returned. There is no word from him!"

Fayre's heart jumped. There had been no unusual excitement at the castle; but it was possible that there had been a prisoner without news of it reaching her ears.

"My faith!" she gasped. "You do not say—oh, but this is bad indeed! Robin, my uncle's prisoner? He would be shown no mercy. He would be flung into a dungeon. He might—"

She broke off, clenching her hands.

haste, she changed from her shabby frock into the rich, red velvet one she wore every day in the castle.

That done, she went along to her uncle's large apartment. His booming voice was audible when she was still many yards away.

"I shall indeed know him. Let me but see your prisoner, my friend, and I shall not be fooled!" roared the baron.

Fayre pulled up with a start; then, quickening her steps, rapped on the heavy door and opened it. The mention of "prisoner" had fired suspicion in her mind. Was that prisoner Robin Hood?

As she walked into the room Fayre suddenly realised that she was lost for an explanation of her entry; but her quick wits saved her.

Again, the rascally Baron le Feuvre, uncle of Lady Fayre, plots against the king. But again, thanks to Fayre, and Robin Hood, he is made a sadder, if not wiser, villain.

There was only one thing to do. She must return to the castle. And if the outlaw had indeed been captured—

"Wait!" she said. "I will return."

Fayre ran all the way back through the wood to the lane, forgetting even to blow her whistle so greatly was she agitated.

Gasping and breathless, she reached the barbican of the mighty castle.

Guards stood at the barbican, the small fortress that guarded the outer edge of the drawbridge. But Fayre was known to them by sight, and she hurried in across the courtyard. Soldiers were there drilling; knights were shouting commands; their attendant pages were standing by. To Fayre it was an ordinary, everyday spectacle, yet because of the shining armour and gay plumes, always worthy of watching.

No one paid her much attention, and she reached her bed-chamber without being questioned. There, with practised

She turned to a fat man—the Earl of Dorford—who sat by a window, and dropped a curtsy.

"Good morrow, my lords," she said. "I did come to pay my respects—"

"Hah! Your daughter!" asked the earl, peering at Fayre and turning to the baron.

The red-faced Baron le Feuvre guffawed.

"My niece, the Lady Fayre," he said. "A comely enough wench, and not of mean intelligence."

"Thank you, uncle," said Fayre. Her uncle grunted, and then suddenly stepped forward, snapping his fingers.

"She would know, too. She knows him," he said to the earl.

"What, the king?" asked the earl.

Fayre, catching the warning look her uncle gave him, knew that something was being planned, that there was some dark scheme afoot, most likely directed against King Richard, home secretly from the Crusade to raise money.

"I do indeed know the king," said Fayre.

By IDA MELBOURNE

"Who speaks of the king?" asked her uncle roughly. "Give ear, child. There is one who pretends to be the king. The Earl of Dorford has him prisoner in his castle, twenty miles away. You are a bright child and your sight is keener than mine. You have met the king. It seems well that your childish judgment should be our guide."

"But—but King Richard is hard to mistake," Fayre exclaimed. "So big, so handsome—"

"This one is big and handsome, despite much growth of beard; he has, too, a ring of the king's," said the earl. "But he does not talk; he claims to be dumb."

"Get you into a riding cloak and come down to the courtyard!" ordered the baron.

Fayre left the room; but as she closed the door she hesitated. There was no need to eavesdrop; the baron, even when he lowered his voice, spoke loudly.

"If she says it is the king, make pretence of setting him free," he advised in a deep growl. "She must not think that we wish to hold Richard prisoner."

Fayre moved away from the door, her heart thumping. She understood now what had happened. The Earl of Dorford had taken prisoner a man he believed to be Richard the King. He, like the baron, sided with Prince John.

But the earl did not know the king by sight; that was why he had called on the baron. And now, in the baron's estimation—as his own sight was rather bad—Fayre should be called upon to recognise him. Besides, if it really were the king it would not do for him to see the earl and baron.

"The king—can it be?" Fayre asked herself, as she moved away. "But the king would not pretend to be dumb! And yet that ring—"

The prisoner was big, strong, handsome. He had a ring of the king's. But so was Robin Hood big and handsome; he, too, had a ring of the king's, given him for some gallant service!

"Robin Hood—it is. That's why he pretends to be dumb!" gasped Fayre. "And if the baron recognises him—"

Feverishly, then, she wrapped a riding cloak about her, and in heart-thumping excitement ran down to the courtyard.

"SHALL I go down to the dungeons?" Fayre stood at the head of a long stone stairway and turned to the

Earl of Dorford, whose castle this was. Near by was a gaoler, a burly fellow who had a dagger in his belt and jingling keys at his waist; a man whose face was the picture of cruelty.

"The gaoler will take you down," said the earl. "Take this lantern, too."

He gave Fayre the lantern, and she looked down at the darkness below and shivered.

"Fayre," added the baron, taking her arm. "Look keenly. You know the king by sight. If it is he, say nothing but return instantly."

"I understand, uncle," said Fayre. She followed the warder down the stairs to the long corridor on the left-hand side of which were the dungeons, on whose mighty doors prisoners banged.

At the last dungeon the warder halted.

"He is here," he said. "Rascal, come to the grille! Here is a friend!"

A face showed at the window, un-kemptly bearded, the hair on the head tousled, the face wrinkled.

As Fayre stared at it her heart stood still. She knew at once the eyes that met hers; keen blue English eyes, wide with surprise.

Robin Hood's! The prisoner was her outlaw friend, as she had feared!

Fayre's Clever Scheme!

EVEN though she had hoped to see him, yet she had a shock. He looked so changed.

"You recognise him?" asked the warder eagerly.

Fayre stood motionless, her heart thumping, for in this awful dilemma it was hard to know what to do for Robin Hood's best.

"Yes," she said in a low tone. And, turning, ran back to the stairs.

Her uncle and the earl hurried to meet her.

"It is he?"

"You knew him?" they asked.

"Yes," Fayre said. "It—it is he." But under her breath she added: "Tis indeed Robin Hood."

But the baron, not hearing that, naturally jumped to the wrong conclusion.

"By my halidom! The king—in our power!" he cried, and thumped the earl on the shoulder.

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"He shall talk," grunted the earl.

"Wait!" said the baron, taking the earl's arm. "We must think. We must step with wariness, my friend, lest things go wrong, you understand."

Fayre hardly knew yet whether she had done a wise or foolish thing. But she had hoped that if Robin Hood were thought to be the king he would be well treated.

"Come!" said the baron to the earl. "We must talk awhile. Fayre, wait here! No, come with us! Your chattering tongue might well wreak evil."

Fayre went with them to the earl's private apartment, richly ornamented with tapestries, golden goblets, and plates and trophies of the war and hunt.

There baron and earl argued, while Fayre was told to wait outside the door.

Presently, thinking that she might explore farther, she moved away; and then, a daring plan coming to her mind, she turned to the stairs that led down to the dungeon.

Carrying the lantern, she went down, and halted when a guard hailed her.

"I would have word with the warder," she said.

She was escorted down and the warder summoned.

"Ah, my lady, what business now?" he asked, saluting respectfully.

"I must have word with the prisoner," said Fayre. "The baron and the earl await me. You know who this prisoner is?"

"Why, no; but someone that my lord values highly," said the warder.

"Ah! 'Tis best you should not know," said Fayre, "so please stand back when I address him."

Fayre then followed the warder to the dungeon, and again Robin Hood was summoned to the grid. Fayre met his eyes, and then curtisied.

"Your Majesty," she said. "May it please you to recognise me?"

At that moment she saw the baron at the end of the corridor. He had followed her! Quickly she turned back to Robin Hood.

"Pretend to be the king," she warned him. "It is the only way I can save you."

Then she moved back, and saw the quick look that the warder gave her. As she passed him, he signalled her, and then, looking right and left, spoke slowly.

"M'lady!" he murmured. "Beggin's pardon; but there seems a likeness of the prisoner to one who—who does deserve our loyal regard."

Fayre purposely eyed him sternly.

"How so?" she asked. "Who, think you, is the prisoner then?"

The warder stroked his scrubby chin, and eyed her warily.

"Ah! 'Tis but a guess," he muttered. "There are dark doings in castles."

"Ay—and prisoners offer rich rewards for their escape," said Fayre. "So haply not all warders know who their prisoners are, or they might strive to become earls themselves by winning royal favour."

Then, as the baron had by now disappeared she hurried off. She knew the kind of man she had to deal with. Warders were not beyond taking bribes when they were sure of protection afterwards! And she had artfully put the idea into this man's head that he might be made an earl.

If the prisoner had indeed been King Richard instead of an outlaw, it was possible. But Robin Hood had no earldoms to bestow.

Had Fayre heard what happened next she would have been delighted. The warder walked back to the dungeon and rapped on the door.

"Ha, prisoner!" he said. "Some while back you asked for water. Perchance I could now grant some. It would be sweet music, sir, to hear your voice."

The prisoner indicated his mouth and moved back his head to signify that he needed drink; and the warder, who had refused it but a moment before, moved away.

As he went there came a deep chuckle from the dungeon.

"By my halidom!" said the soft voice of Robin Hood. "The sweet Lady Fayre has more brains in her little finger than all my band have in their score of heads! Tra-la! King Richard of England, eh? Ho, ho, ho!"

But his laughter was low indeed, and there was a glimmer in his eyes that spoke of impish fun. Not even incarceration in a dungeon and the threat of torture could subdue his brave spirit.

Robin Hood's hopes had sunk low—but the coming of his secret helper had sent them soaring again. He was still a prisoner, true; but now he could see the way to freedom.



LOWERING her voice so that the warder should not hear, Fayre spoke to the captive Robin Hood. "Pretend to be the king," she whispered urgently. "It is the only way I can save you!"

FAYRE TAPPED on the door of the earl's room, and then walked in as the baron called. She could see by their sullen faces that the conspirators were not of one mind, and, knowing earls and barons, guessed that both wanted the lion's share of the bargain.

"Huh!" grunted the baron, as she entered.

The fat earl did not even look up, but sat with sully expression, arms folded, brows knit.

"My lords," said Fayre gently. "Although but a simple maid, yet I have given the matter thought, and with your permission I should like to say what is on my mind."

"Bah!" said the earl.

The baron glared at him.

"Speak!" he said to Fayre.

"It is this, then," said Fayre. "The prisoner is hungry. It would be well if he were tempted with food. Then he might speak. Some tasty fowls, some wine—the sight of them might loosen his tongue."

"Bah!" said the earl.

The baron stood up. He did not as a rule approve of Fayre's ideas; but the mere fact that the earl scorned this one made it attractive.

"'Tis what I had in mind," he said.

"Who should want his tongue loosened?" asked the earl angrily. "We know he is Richard. That is all we need know. The rest remains with Prince John. So I say!"

"Hear, hear," agreed Fayre, and frowned warningly at her uncle, who did not understand.

"We have him," said the earl. "Let us keep him as a common prisoner until we hear what Prince John would give as reward for his capture. If the prince knows he is here—why, he might come and take him, and give us nothing but the blade of a sword for payment."

"Likely as not," agreed Fayre. "Yet it might still be well to tempt him with food; he might even offer greater reward for freedom than the prince for his capture."

The earl looked at her sharply; then, without a word, he rose, crossed to the door, and went out. The baron sprang up, too.

"Idiot girl!" he snarled. "You have put an idea into that empty head of his. Do I want him to take a reward for setting the king free!"

Fayre shook her head and drew back. "No, uncle—but—but I was gaming time."

"Gaming time," he thundered. "Gah! You have an idle tongue that may yet bring me to hook for treason."

Fayre was not dismayed; for she had planned the line she was to take with her uncle.

"But, uncle—surely," she murmured, "don't you see? I did but say that to get him from the room? And now—I can speak with you alone. Why should the earl hold this prisoner? Suppose you were to capture him?"

"I?"

"Yes, indeed—to save the king," said Fayre. "It might win noble reward from him. Or else, should Prince John wish to have him, why the prince would reward you!"

The baron gaped at her. It was a subtle suggestion that took his breath away.

"By my halidom!" he gasped. "Hey! Fayre, we go home at once! Come!"

And, seizing her wrist, he almost dragged her from the room.

Robin Hood's Pose!

ENCOUNTERING the earl, he was brief but blunt.

"Have it your own way. I wash my hands of it!" he snorted. "'Tis too dangerous an enterprise for my liking."

Then he marched down to the courtyard where he had left his escort, whispered to one of the knights, and mounted.

"Take good note of the defences," he advised. "See the dispositions of the guard. We shall come back more heavily supported by arms."

Inside the castle the earl was supervising servants, who were taking down refreshments to the dungeons.

"Let the prisoner be tempted," he said to the warder. "But let him not eat without my command."

"Ay, sir!"—said the warder, and ordered that the foodstuffs which had been prepared for the prisoner's benefit be put on the floor.

The prisoner, looking through the grille, smiled faintly.

"My lord earl," he said, "I would have word with thee."

The warder stared. "I'm no earl," he said. "Not yet," answered Robin Hood.

"But you could indeed be Earl of Dorford, for I am King Richard."

"Speak softly," muttered the warder.

"I will, indeed," said Robin Hood, in cooing voice. "I am now a prisoner; but with an army ten thousand strong, I shall be another man; and rascal traitors shall reap their reward. A king is a maker of earls, and a breaker of earls, my friend. Would I rather that old fat knave had this castle, or one who gave me water when I was thirsty, and a nice roast chicken when I was hungry? A good chicken, I see, lies on the floor."

Robin Hood chuckled as he saw the warder's expression. The man was visibly shaken.

"Come fellow!" said Robin Hood curtly. "Waste no time. An army is already on the way to my rescue. Every rascal who had a hand in my imprisonment shall suffer."

"Indeed, so," said the warder slowly.

He had a respect for the earl's power; but a king's power was greater. A king could certainly smash an earl.

After a moment's silence, the warder picked up the chicken, and passed it through the grille. Wine followed, and bread.

Robin Hood, humming softly, drew back, and got busy. It was a delicious chicken; the wine was good, and the bread wholesome. Not having had a meal for many hours he thoroughly enjoyed himself.

But before he had finished the Earl of Dorford came down the corridor, followed by his guards. He marched to the dungeon, then sniffed.

"Ho, there! Fellow!" he called.

Robin Hood, holding the wing of a chicken, stood up.

"Well, fellow," he answered, "what is it?"

"What—eating!" the earl cried, and wheeled upon the warder. "What means this?"

The warder fell back, pale-faced, and anxious.

"My—my lord—the—the young lady did tell me he is King Richard of England."

"King Richard!" came a startled murmur from the soldiers.

"Open this dungeon door!" commanded Robin Hood boldly. "Who dares to keep the king prisoner? Are you traitors?"

The earl looked at his men, at the warder, and then at the prisoner. He had not expected the secret to be learned so quickly.

"The king," he murmured, "why, sire, this is indeed a most grievous blunder. Open the door, warder. I trust you have dealt kindly with the king."

The warder opened the door, and Robin Hood stepped out, patting him on the shoulder.

"An earldom shall be your reward for this," he said.

"But—but, my sire," protested the earl, "he is but a common fellow. You cannot make him an earl."

"Pah! Am I not the King of England?" asked Robin Hood. "I could make each of these common soldiers a knight, if I will it. You traitor! You sought to hold me prisoner. My army, even now marching on your castle, shall give no quarter. Soldiers, arrest him! You, warder—you are now the Earl of Dorford in his stead!"

The earl drew back, goggled at his men, and put his hand to his sword.

But Robin Hood, striding forward, knocked his arm aside, then pulled him forward, and twisted him round.

Such was his strength that he easily mastered the fat earl, and spun him through the open door into the dungeon.

"Lock him in, my lord earl!" he said to the warder.

The warder hesitated but a moment before he slammed the door, and turned the key.

"Where is the Baron le Feuvre?" asked Robin Hood.

"He is gone, sir."

"Gone? Then bring me a suit of armour. Say nothing of this yet to the others in the castle," advised Robin Hood. "Then when the trumpet sounds we will rally our forces, march upon the Baron le Feuvre's castle, and deal with that traitor as he deserves."

And Robin Hood, rubbing his hands, chuckled deep down in his chest. Ten minutes later, clad in armour, he strutted out into the courtyard only a few hundred yards from the gates and freedom.

But suddenly a rider clattered into the courtyard over the drawbridge, red cloak flying, two golden plaits trailing in the wind.

The Lady Fayre had returned.

Panting and gasping, she fell from her nearly exhausted horse and choked out a cry.

"The Earl of Dorford—quickly—urgent—"

The warder strode forward.

"Well? I am now the Earl of Dorford!" he said. "What is it?"

"You?" exclaimed Fayre. "I—I have come to say that the king's army is on its way—"

"The king's army! Hurrah!" cheered the warder, and turned to the armed figure of Robin Hood. "Your Majesty, your army is coming—"

Fayre spun round to the man in armour, eyes wide.

"Why—why—" she gasped.

"Tis I, Richard of England!" said Robin Hood, lifting his visor a little and winking.

Fayre, startled though she was, kept her head and dropped a curtsy.

"Sire," she said, "your army is ap-

proaching. I must need whisper certain matters—"

She went near to him and lowered her voice.

"Take care! King Richard himself rides with them. They are but half a mile from the castle now."

Robin Hood stiffened, then turned to the warder.

"Earl Dorford," he said, "get me the freshest horse; then gird yourself in armour and follow."

Already soldiers were running forward. There was not a moment to be lost. But the warder, still duped, brought the horse and helped the outlaw to mount it.

"Get behind!" said Robin Hood to Fayre.

He drew his sword and swung it aloft.

"St. George for England!" he shouted.

Then, with Fayre clinging on behind him, they cantered over the drawbridge to the roadway.

"There they come!" she cried, pointing.

"Ah—then here we go!" answered Robin Hood, and, turning his horse to the other direction, did not draw rein until he was riding in a forest. There he cast off his armour. "Take the horse, fair maid," he smiled. "I need no horse in a forest. In some hours I shall be again with my merry men."

"Good luck, Robin Hood!" said Fayre. "Oh, but I am so happy that you are free!"

He patted her cheek and smiled.

"Fayre, my friend," he said, "with-

out your brave help I should still be a prisoner. If you should meet the new earl riding from his castle, tell him not to stop riding until he reaches a far distant town. It was a good chicken he gave me, and I fear there will be no warm welcome for him from the fat prisoner in my dungeon."

He waved good-bye and went running into the wood, Fayre, turning back, met the warder and gave the message.

"After all, 'twas not King Richard," she said. "For here comes the king now!"

And Fayre, riding to greet King Richard, joined her uncle, who sat quaking on his horse for fear that she might let slip an unguarded word. But Fayre had far too much sense for that, and, after all, as she frankly admitted, the mistake in recognising the king had been hers.

And so once again the young Lady Fayre and Robin Hood, the outlaw, working together as secret friends, had frustrated the rascally baron. But it wasn't the last time, by a long way. Over and over again Fayre and Robin Hood proved too clever for the baron until that bullying tyrant began to wish that he had been born a common soldier—or else one of Robin Hood's own band!

As for Fayre, she was happy in the knowledge that one day, when she came of age, Longley Castle, its soldiers, servants, and the gold in its coffers would all be hers, and then things would be different for everyone!

THE END.

KIT OF RED RANCH



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