

MEET VALERIE DREW

the famous girl detective and
her clever Alsatian dog

FLASH in this
issue

THE SCHOOLGIRL

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EVERY 2^D SATURDAY

Incorporating
"SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN"



A SECRET WORD WITH THE OUTCAST!

One of the many dramatic
moments from "Mabs Alone
Believed in Him"—this week's
superb Cliff House School story.

A most appealing Long Complete story of the girls of Cliff House School.



MABS Alone Believed in Him!

The New Recruit!



"T H I N G now," Mabel Lynn said cheerfully, "is to see Boker about the Hawaiian stage setting. You gave him the plan, Babs?"

"Oh, yes—yesterday!" blue-eyed Barbara Redfern replied.

"And you told him we're having a rehearsal in the music-room this evening?"

"That's right," Bessie Bunter chimed in. "I was with Babs when she saw Boker, you know. Boker said he'd rig up the stage in time for the rehearsal."

Mabel shook her golden hair in a happy nod. Barbara Redfern, captain of junior school at Cliff House, beamed as she carefully put away the banjo she had been cleaning. Plump, fatuous Bessie, with an adoring blink at the new reed flute which had been generous Aunt Annie's latest present, zipped up the cover with a sigh and carefully laid it on the desk in Study No. 4.

Not yet, in spite of her frequent boast that she was the greatest musician that Cliff House or any other school had ever possessed, had Bessie attained an efficient degree in the use of that instrument. But Bessie was trying and Bessie was in earnest.

She rather fancied herself as one of the leading lights in the Fourth Form's musical talent band.

The band was Mabel Lynn's idea.

Every term at Cliff House there was a talent competition or a concert of

some kind. Last term it had been a drama talent, and the Fourth had won that. This time it was to be a musical talent competition, with every Form except the Sixth entered, and it would not be the Fourth's fault if they did not win that.

As usual, Mabs had undertaken the task of organising the whole show, the piece de resistance of which, however, was to be a Hawaiian band playing in a setting which Barbara Redfern had designed.

Very keen, very eager were the Fourth on the concert, but particularly keen on the Hawaiian band. Eleven of them were playing in that band.

"Then everything's practically settled, eh?" Mabs inquired. "Topping! Pity, though, we haven't got a really good ukelele player," she added, with just the hint of a wistful sigh. "I mean a Hawaiian band should have loads of uke players in it, shouldn't it? Still, we can't have everything. Ready for Boker, Babs?"

"At your jolly old service," Babs agreed, with a laugh. "Hope old Boker didn't find the design too difficult. What about the costumes, Mabs?"

"They'll arrive to-morrow," Mabs promised.

"And then we're practically fixed," Babs said. "Whoops! Isn't it going to be fun! Come on!"

Together the three close chums passed out of their study. As they reached Study No. 10, Babs paused and gurgled, for from behind the door of that room came the lilt of a violin and the tuneful voice of Diana Roston-Clarke raised in song. Mabs' eyes sparkled.

"Still at it hot and strong!" she said. "I'm glad everybody's so keen. Hallo, that's Clara!" she added, as a sudden, decidedly enthusiastic but hardly musical voice roared from behind the portals of the Fourth Form Common-room:

"Let me like a so-oldee-ar fall!"

"My hat! You needn't be a soldier if that's your ambition!" snorted the voice of Lydia Crossendale. "Just wait till this cushion hits you!"

"Stuff and bosh!" sniffed Clara Trevlyn, and upraised her voice again:

"Upon some open plain—"

"Wow! Who threw that currant bun?"

Babs laughed softly. Mabs grinned. But they did not look into the Common-room. All too familiar were they with the scene which would meet their eyes there.

They hurried on. From other parts of the school came the tinkling of pianos and the singing voices of girls. No doubt Cliff House was taking its musical talent concert seriously.

Into the invitingly sunlit quadrangle the famous trio hurried, and across the lawns. Before them loomed up the old clock tower, which Piper, the porter, used as a sort of workshop and general storage place, and which was usually where Boker, the page-boy, worked when he had an important carpentry job on hand.

But as they neared that spot they looked at each other questioningly. Strains of music, excellently played and excellently sung in a fresh, boyish

treble, were emanating from the clock tower. And the music was that of a ukelele.

"My hat! That's never Boker!" Babs cried.

"Not his voice," Mabs said. "In any case, Boker can't sing. But a jolly nice voice!" she added approvingly. "And can that boy, whoever he is, play the ukelele!"

The door of the clock tower was open and they peeped in. And then they stood and blinked at the sight which met their gaze.

The floor was littered with shavings and odd pieces of wood—sure evidence of the faithful Boker's activities.

Boker himself was not there, but seated on a pile of logs, his back towards them, another boy was. He was a boy slightly smaller than sixteen-year-old Boker; slightly younger, too, by the view they had of his back. But it was he who was playing the ukelele—and playing it brilliantly at that.

"Oh, great gollywogs, what a star turn for the band!" Mabs thrilled.

They stood still, entranced, listening to the song and the music, yet each wondering who the strange boy was. With a soft chord the song ended.

Almost involuntarily, Babs, Mabs, and Bessie clapped their hands.

"Oh, fine!" Mabs cried.

"Ripping!" enthused Babs.

"I sus-say, you know, you play nunnarily as well as I do!" Bessie stattered glowingly.

Now the boy turned. He saw them and smiled. Such an impulsive, such a charming smile that—it seemed to light up his whole face. He was rather good-looking, dressed neatly, and his fair hair was perfectly brushed. Quickly he put his instrument down; beamingly came towards them.

"Oh!" he said. "Were you listening?"

"Rather!" Mabs said. "You play that uke awfully well! I say, who are you?" she added curiously.

Somehow she did not like that suddenly demure look which came into the ukelele player's face then.

"Please, my name's Cecil Hargrove," he said. "I'm on the staff, you know."

"On the—?" Mabs gazed at him. "You mean, you're a servant in the school?"

"Yes, miss. I'm helping Charlie Boker," Cecil said. "I'm assistant page-boy. I only came last night. Miss Charmant got me the job."

Mabs was thinking suddenly, swiftly, what an acquisition to her Hawaiian band Cecil Hargrove would be. All along she had sighed for a good ukelele player; and if Cecil was a member of the school staff—furthermore, if he was known to Miss Charmant, their own popular Form-mistress—all her difficulties were smoothed away. For Cecil could take his place in the band—if Cecil were only willing.

She bubbled over.

"Oh, my hat, what luck!" she cried. "Cecil, I'm looking for somebody like you! How would you like to play in the Fourth Form's Hawaiian Band?"

"Me, miss?" He looked at her.

"But I'm a boy!"

"Doesn't matter," Mabs said. "You belong to the school, that's all that counts. The Fifth have one of the maids singing in their Welsh quartet, so I don't see why we shouldn't have you, if you're willing to join us. My name's Lynn—Mabel Lynn," she added. "I'm organising the show, you see. I suppose you've heard of the Musical Talent Concert?"

By HILDA RICHARDS

Illustrated by T. LAIDLER

"Oh, yes, Miss Lynn! Miss Charmant told me about it. And I'd love to play, really," he added earnestly. "But Miss Charmant will have to be asked first, won't she?"

"Leave that to me," Mabs said. "I can fix that, I think—"

"Hi! Cecil!" interrupted a voice from outside.

Cecil Hargrove jumped.

"Oh dear, that's Charlie Boker!" he said apprehensively. "He—"

"What the dickens do you think you're jolly well playing at?" came the irate tones of Charles Percival Henry Boker, and the next moment the angry, freckled face of Cliff House's hard-working page-boy loomed in the offing. "What about—?" And then he saw the chums, and, seeing them, bit off in mid-sentence and turned a confused crimson. "Oh, crumbs! I—I'm sorry! I didn't know you were here, Miss Redfern!"

Babs smiled, though she regarded Boker a little curiously. It was the first time she had ever seen Boker's ruggedly likeable face wearing such an annoyed expression.

"Anything wrong?" she asked.

"Well—" Boker's eyes flickered for a moment. "Nun—not really," he said, but Babs noticed he darted a

But Boker, as he hurried Cecil away, was looking unusually cross.

"A nice help you are, I must say!" he said angrily. "And pretty mouldy of you to try to make out I hadn't told you about Miss Bullivant's car."

Cecil's lips curled in a sneer.

"You mean, you were jealous of those girls talking to me?"

"I don't mean anything of the sort," Boker answered sturdily. "Those girls are jolly nice girls, and if you can do them a good turn you're doing me one, too—especially to Miss Redfern and Miss Lynn. All the same, you're being paid here to do a job, not leave it for me to do it for you."

"Well, who has?" Cecil flared up.

"You have. Who left the tables this morning, so that I had to do them? You! Who dodged out of helping cook in the kitchen after breakfast? You! Who slid out of washing up the staff's crocks after dinner? You! Who forgot to take Miss Primrose's telegram to the village post office?"

Cecil looked sulky.

"Oh, rats! The jobs were done, weren't they?"

"Yes; and who did them?" Boker gloweringly reminded him.

"Me! All those jobs were extra—put on, so's you'd have something to do. Instead of doing them, you sneak off to read and play that uke thing of yours, and I'm the one who has to get the work done, because I promised Miss Charmant I'd look after you. But don't forget," Boker went on warnily,

Once such a popular figure in the school, page-boy Boker abruptly falls from favour. Troubles mount thick and fast about him. "Boker has only himself to blame!" is the general verdict. One girl still believes in him, however—Mabel Lynn. And Mabs, scorning the doubts of others, fights fiercely to clear Boker's name.

dagger-like look at the new assistant page. "I just wanted to remind Cecil about something. Cecil, what about Miss Bullivant's car? You know she wants it for to-night."

Cecil stared at him in wide-eyed surprise.

"But, Charlie, you didn't say anything to me about Miss Bullivant's car—you didn't, really!" he grievously expostulated. "You know I'd have done it like a shot if you'd told me. What's the matter with it?"

"Wants cleaning," Boker said briefly. "Polishing, too. And be careful, 'cos Miss Bullivant is jolly particular. Now cut off, me lad!"

"But wait a minute!" Babs interjected, feeling a little sorry for Cecil, who looked crestfallen and snubbed. "We're bagging Cecil for our band, Boker. Mabs, what about a rehearsal?"

"Oh, yes," Mabs said. "Cecil, six o'clock in the music-room. Can you manage that? Boker, by the way, have you done the stage setting?"

"I've got the stuff in the music-room. Yes, miss," Boker returned, flushing. "But I haven't put it together yet. But don't worry, Miss Lynn, I'll see it's all in order by the time you want it. Now, Cecil, come on!"

Babs frowned a little as the two boys disappeared.

"Bit snappy with Cecil, wasn't he? Not like Boker."

Mabs nodded absently. She wasn't thinking of either Boker or Cecil in that moment. She was thinking, as usual, of her beloved show; and with the introduction of Cecil her last little worry was at an end.

"you also promised Miss Charmant something. You promised her you'd make good!"

"Well, I haven't done anything wrong!" Cecil defended with a sulky pout.

"Not doing jobs is just as much doing wrong as doing the jobs all wrong," Boker said, not very lucidly. "Anyway, here's the car. Now get to it. I'll be back in half an hour. Here's the cleaning rags. I've already run the hose over it for you."

Cecil scowled again as they reached the entrance to the garage in which Miss Bullivant's little car was at rest. He slowly picked up the polish and a duster, and then, as soon as Boker's back was turned, put them down again. With a grin he fished out a paperbacked nolette. Armed with the nolette, he climbed into the car, laid himself in luxurious ease against the back seat.

"And so much, Mr. Boker, for you!" he muttered, extending his tongue towards the empty door. "You can polish the rotten car yourself, later!"

But for once, perhaps, Cecil Hargrove had underestimated Boker. Boker, half-way back to his own quarters, paused, glancing round with frowning suspicion towards the garage he had left. Only twenty-four hours of Cecil Hargrove's company and assistance had Boker, but those twenty-four hours had been more than enough to reveal to him the worthless, shirking nature of the boy who was supposed to be helping him. And Boker was rapidly approaching the fed-up stage.

Cecil was a hypocrite. Boker had discovered that fact, and was rather

dismayed at his discovery, especially as he had undertaken so much on Cecil's behalf.

For Cecil, if you please, was a distant relative of the adorable Miss Charmant, mistress of the Fourth Form. It was because Miss Charmant believed in Cecil, because she wanted him to have a real chance, that she had used her influence at Cliff House to get him this job.

Now Boker had always regarded the mistress with a sort of reverence; but just lately that reverence had changed to utter worship. For it was Miss Charmant who, learning that Boker's invalid mother needed recuperation after an operation, had, at her own expense, sent her to a seaside convalescent home.

Mrs. Boker was home again now, fit and well, and Boker's dearest ambition in life was to repay Miss Charmant for her good turn.

It seemed his opportunity had arrived when Miss Charmant had first mentioned Cecil Hargrove. The mistress had said then:

"And I'm sure, Boker, I can trust you to look after him. You see, Cecil hasn't been a fortunate boy. He hasn't had many chances. He got into disgrace at his last school and was expelled—but another boy was at fault, and Cecil, like the little Trojan he is, sat quiet and took all the blame. His father, however, wouldn't listen to that. Instead of sending Cecil to another school, he's decided that he shall have a chance of working for a living—"

"Poor Cecil!" Boker had said sympathetically.

"And so—I have got him this job," Miss Charmant had gone on, with that captivating sincerity which made Boker feel that she was entrusting her own life into his hands. "If he makes good during his trial period here, his father will give him another chance at school. I want him to do well and make good, and you, Boker—you can help him more than ever I can do. You will, won't you, to please me, Boker?"

To please Miss Charmant Boker would have given everything he possessed. Cecil Hargrove had a large place in Boker's heart before he had even been introduced to him. But now he—

The place in Boker's heart had shrunk rather rapidly. Whatever Miss Charmant might think about him, Boker was pretty sure that Cecil deserved all he had ever got. But he could not tell the mistress about his discovery, of course; that would have hurt her; made her feel that he was not playing the part she had asked him to play. He just couldn't repay all Miss Charmant's wonderful generosity by telling her what he thought of Cecil.

Yet—
He paused now, suspicious because of the strange quietness from the garage. Then he turned back towards the door. Still no sound. He threw the door open. His face became bitter as he saw Cecil reclining in the back of Miss Bullivant's small car.

"You—you rotten washout!" Boker choked. "What about the cleaning?"

Cecil looked round. Rather hastily he put his novelette away. Then, with a shrug, he levered himself out of the car.

"Oh crumbs! You again?" he said sulkily.

"Me again—yes!" Boker's eyes blazed. "What about this cleaning?"

"Well, give a chap a chance," Cecil said sulkily.

"Chance!" Boker snorted. "Chance! How many chances have I given you? Get hold of those rags!"

"But—"

"Get hold of 'em!" Boker said angrily. "If you don't, I'll rub your nose in that metal polish!"

"And if you do, I'll tell Miss Charmant!"

"Then jolly well tell her!" Boker said, not meaning that, of course. "Now put a jerk in it."

"You bully!" Cecil shrieked.

"Am I? I—"

And then Boker swung round, and his rigid features became beetroot red.

In the doorway stood a slim, extremely pretty mistress, looking on with surprised and slightly horrified eyes. It was Miss Charmant herself, known affectionately among the Fourth Form girls as the "Charmer."

"Why, Boker!" she said, and she glanced from one to the other. "I hope you two are not quarrelling?"

"Well—well—" Boker stammered.

"No, Miss Charmant, we're not," Cecil swiftly put in—and Cecil's simpering smile was once again in evidence.

"We—we were just doing something, you know—just pretending to—to say the lines Miss Lynn is going to give in the show, you see, and Charlie is just helping me to—to rehearse. Aren't you, Charlie?"

"Well—" mumbled Boker, yet gladly clutching at any straw. "Er—something like that."

Miss Charmant's face cleared. She laughed.

"Oh dear, how silly of me!" she cried. "I really imagined for a moment that you were quarrelling."

Cecil, my dear, I'm pleased—about your part in the show, I mean. Miss Lynn has just been mentioning the fact to me, and, of course, you have my permission—readily. Boker, it is so nice of you to be interested in Cecil's doings. By the way, did you repair the heel of the shoe I gave you?"

"Oh, yes, Miss Charmant! It's in my shed," Boker said. "Shall I get it?"

"I'll come along with you," Miss Charmant said, and with a smiling nod to Cecil, passed out with Boker. "Cecil is—is really shaping well?" she asked, once they were outside.

"Well, y—yes," Boker said, wondering if he was telling too big a fib.

"And you will look after him, won't you, Boker?" Miss Charmant went on. "I'm d—doing my best," Boker mumbled.

"There, I knew it! I knew," Miss Charmant said, with that delightful dimple appearing on her cheeks, "that I could rely on you. Cecil's making good does mean so much to me. If I hadn't pleaded with his father I'm afraid he wouldn't have had this chance. I can never be grateful enough to you, Boker."

Boker glowed. To her his heart melted. But if only she knew what he knew! If only he told her the truth!

He couldn't. He daren't. To shatter Miss Charmant's illusion was just unthinkable. He'd have to manage Cecil his own way—try to cover up the little hypocrite's faults.

He took her to the shed. There he gave her the shoe. When she had gone Boker, with a very determined expression, returned to the garage. Cecil Hargrove was going to have a good talking to!

But when he reached the garage it was not Cecil he found there. It was Miss Bullivant, the acid mathematics mistress of Cliff House. Cecil had bolted into the blue—goodness knows where! Miss Bullivant, however, was looking decidedly tart.

"I suppose you know," she said with that dreaded rasp in her voice, "that

I want this car in half an hour? I shall be very much obliged, Boker, if you accelerate your efforts to get it cleaned. And, seeing the job has already taken you the best part of the day, I will remain here while you do it. Now, please hurry!"

And Boker, inwardly seething, picked up the absent Cecil's rags. Where was Cecil? Above all, how was he going to clean Miss Bullivant's car and rig up Mabs' stage setting at the same time?

Boker to Blame!



"HALLO, Cecil! Here you are, then!" Mabel Lynn said brightly. "Got your ukulele, I see. We're just going along to the music-room."

"Yes, rather! Have one of these jam tarts?" Bessie Bunter generously invited. "I made them, you know."

Shy and demure, Cecil Hargrove stood outside Study No. 4, where Babs, Mabs, and Bessie had just completed tea. Very neat, very immaculate he looked with his face newly washed, his hair newly oiled and brushed, and his shoes polished brilliantly. The chums eyed him with approval.

"I—I hope you don't mind my coming along early," he said. "But I thought there might be something you wanted to say to me before the rehearsal starts."

"Nice and thoughtful," Babs laughed. "Still, Mabs will tell you all about that as soon as we get going. Has Boker fixed the set yet, do you know?"

"Oh, I expect so!" Cecil answered casually, but inwardly he smothered a grin. For, although Babs & Co. did not guess it, Cecil had just come from the music-room, and Cecil had spent a very interesting ten minutes indeed in that apartment. "Boker wouldn't let you down, would he?" he asked innocently.

"Boker wouldn't," Mabs replied firmly. "Let's get along, shall we? It's nearly six now. Bring the old flute, Bess. Babs, don't forget your banjo. Cecil, this way."

She led the way to join Clara Trevlyn, Marjorie Hazeldene, and Janet Jordan, who were just emerging from Study No. 7, also armed with instruments. They had all heard of the inclusion of Cecil in the band by this time, and all most heartily approved the new addition.

They reached the door of the music-room, and Mabs flung it open. Then she halted as if petrified.

"Oh, my goodness!" she cried. "Look!"

"What?" Babs asked, and then started. "My hat!" she cried in dismay. "What the dickens has Boker been doing?"

They all stared as they crowded in. They stared in dismay. In a moment all happy excitement and enthusiasm was dashed; for the music-room, which they had expected to find fitted up with the scenery Babs had designed and which Boker had made, was a scene of utter chaos.

The scenery was there, but it was not erected. It was not even stacked neatly. Battens and struts, odd pieces of wood and canvas were all over the place. A tin of paint, apparently kicked over in a hurry, had spread itself over a portion of the jungle backcloth, completely obliterating the bright yellow moon which had been painted on it. A tree made of wood was smashed in three places. Apart

from that, nails and screws were strewn all over the floor; so were various tools.

"Oh, my goodness! What a mess!" Marjorie Hazeldene cried.

"What the dickens has Boker been up to?" Janet Jordan wanted to know.

"And where," demanded Clara Trevlyn, "is Boker?"

Mabs frowned. For Mabs, if the most vitally affected of all of them, could not, somehow, associate this with Boker. Even if Boker had been unable to keep his promise, he would hardly have spoiled his own work like this. She was on the point of saying so when the door opened and in came—Boker himself!

Rather breathless and flushed Boker looked—rather dirty, too. He still wore the soiled apron in which they had seen him earlier in the afternoon. Smears of polish were on his face from the cleaning of Miss Bullivant's car, and there was black oil on his hands as a result of cleaning Miss Bullivant's car engine. Against the shiny, spick-and-span Cecil Boker looked a wreck.

"Oh, Miss Lynn, I'm sorry—" he began; and then, as he saw the damage, he jumped. "Here, who's done this?"

"Oh, Charles, didn't you?" asked Cecil, and looked so innocently surprised that no one would have suspected that he had done the damage himself as a little spiteful act against Boker.

"Me?" Boker stared at him. "Think I'd mess up my own work like that?"

"All the same," Clara reminded him, "you haven't erected it."

"No, I—I'm sorry," Boker gulped. But he still looked angrily at Cecil; and the others, seeing that look, could not help but wonder at it, and could not help, perhaps, but draw a comparison between the oily faced, dirty Boker and the clean, neat assistant page. "I—I've had to do other things," Boker said. "Miss Lynn, give me half an hour; I'll put it right for you then."

"Thanks!" Janet Jordan said. "But half an hour is the time we want for rehearsal. Really, Boker, you shouldn't make promises you can't keep."

"Yes, Charles, it is a shame to let the girls down, you know," Cecil said seriously. "If you couldn't manage it, why didn't you ask me to do it? I'd have done it like a shot!"

Boker glared. That from Cecil, when it was Cecil's fault he had not been able to erect the set himself! He swallowed hard, remembering his promise to Miss Charmant.

"Shall I clear up?" he asked.

"Thanks, I don't think you need bother," Janet Jordan said tartly. "We'll do all the clearing that's necessary. Marjorie, get a broom, will you?"

"No, I will!" Cecil eagerly volunteered, and, without waiting for a reply, darted away. Perhaps he did not like the look in Boker's eyes.

"But—" Boker said.

"Come on; let's get these struts together," Clara said.

"But can't I—"

"Thanks; we'll manage better on our own," Janet Jordan said. "In any case, don't you think you'd better go and wash yourself?" she added pointedly.

Red as a brick, Boker turned at that. Then, with a hesitant look round, he opened the door. At that moment Mabs saw him, and something in Boker's attitude touched her. She hurried after him as he stepped outside.

"Boker, wait a minute! Don't—"

don't look so hurt. I'm sorry, but accidents will happen, of course."

"Y-yes," mumbled Boker. "But it wasn't my fault, really."

"But how did it happen?" Mabs asked.

"I don't know."

"I mean, why weren't you here?"

"I—I was doing other work," Boker said, and bitterness welled up within him as he thought of that other work. For an instant he was tempted to blurt the truth concerning Cecil, but memory of his promise to Miss Charmant restrained him. "I—I tried to get away, but I couldn't," he added miserably, "and that's why I—I've let you down. But I'll do it to-morrow—really! Miss Lynn, you—you're not wild with me, too?"

Mabs gazed at him. Despite her own disappointment, her feelings underwent a swift change. Never before had Boker let her down. Impulsively she smiled.

"No, Boker, I'm not cross—of course not."

"Th-thank you, Miss Lynn!" Boker gulped gratefully. "Sure I can't do anything!"

"No; just run along," Mabs said.

She patted him on the shoulder. Boker flushed, but with pleasure this time. In the embarrassment of that flush he turned, walking away rather quickly.

Thoughtfully shaking her head, Mabs went back into the music-room. Shortly afterwards Cecil returned, and the work of clearing up progressed swiftly.

"Right; that's it!" Mabs said. "My word, Cecil, how you can wield a broom! Just push this canvas aside, Mabs. That's the ticket! Clara, let me give you a hand with these struts. Whoops! We're practically clear!"

"Now, band, fall in!" Mabs added gaily. "We'll have to imagine the scene, but to-morrow we'll go through it with costumes and everything. Cecil, you stand there, will you? Is everybody else here?"

Everybody else was, including

Jemima Carstairs, Leila Carroll, Peggy Preston, Gwen Cook, and Diana Royston-Clarke, who, completing the band, had just arrived. Mabs nodded.

"Right! Then let's do the opening number," she said. "Cecil, here's the music. I'm rather keen to hear this again with the ukelele."

Cecil beamed. Ukelele on knee, he sat down, glancing with an expert eye at the sheet presented to him. Mabs, with a laugh, took up her baton, and Peggy Preston struck an opening bar at the piano.

Down swished Mabs' baton, and the band crashed out.

"Whoops, no! Jemima, for goodness' sake don't shriek on the clarinet!" Mabs protested. "Softer, please! Now—again!"

The band started, more harmoniously this time. Twang, twang, went the ukelele behind in perfect time. A bit ragged the performance was, to be sure, but not so bad.

"Now again," Mabs urged. "Don't make too much row. Cecil, the ukelele's fine. You certainly can play. Take your time from Cecil, everybody," she instructed. "Again!"

They were warming up now, some of them quite breathlessly. But again they went through it, and this time very commendably indeed. Taking time from Cecil was certainly a good idea, for it was obvious that Cecil was the most accomplished musician among them. They all glowed at the shiny-faced boy with the sleek, fair hair.

"Topsy-wops, Cecil!" Jemima Carstairs congratulated. "Going like a steam-engine—what?—whistle and all. What one might call a shrieking success."

"You've said it, I guess!" Leila Carroll chuckled. "Say, Mabs, what about the next item on the agenda?"

"The next item," Mabs announced, "is a ukelele solo. I've got a bit of an idea about this one, but I'll tell you about that later. Cecil, can you play the 'Hawaiian Dance'?"

"Oh yes!" Cecil eagerly agreed.



"THERE you are, give him that, will you?" And Mabs produced half-a-crown. She thought she was helping Boker out of a grave family difficulty. But Cecil Hargrove, eyeing the money with secret glee, hadn't the slightest intention of passing it on to the page-boy.

"Right; then we shall have it. Listen, everybody!"

Cecil beamed. The musicians settled down and listened to their new star, who certainly seemed to make that ukelele speak. In perfect time, with perfect harmony, the solo proceeded, until, just near the end—

There came a jarring note, followed by a cry from Cecil.

"Oh, dear! I—I've broken one of my strings!"

Everybody at once was all sympathy. "Oh, I say, haven't you got another?" Bessie Bunter asked.

"No." Cecil miserably shook his head. "And—and I haven't got any money to buy one, either. That means I won't be able to play in the band—"

"Oh stuff!" Mabs said. "You don't think we're going to lose you for the sake of a ukelele string? How much will a new one cost?"

The boy hesitated a moment. "Strings like these, they're very special; cost four shillings."

"Four?" Mabs looked at him sharply. "That's rather a lot, isn't it? I always thought they were about a shilling at the most."

"Well, I don't know; but—but that's what it cost last time I broke a string," Cecil said. "You—you don't think I'd try to stick it on, do you?"

"No, of course not!" Mabs cried, and glanced rather disapprovingly at the doubt expressed on Mabs' face. "Cecil knows; and, dash it, it's our fault the string broke, so let's have a whip-round, girls. Four shillings is the sum required," she added gaily, "and four shillings we must have! I'm in funds. Here's a bob. Mabs—"

"I can spare a bob, too," said Mabs. "And here's another," Diana Royston-Clarke said. "That's three. Small change now, girls!"

The whip-round was soon completed. Cecil's eyes gleamed. Almost greedily he watched Mabs collect that money. Money, like leisure, was a magnet which Cecil could never resist. He was sorry, seeing it flowing so greedily, that he had not mentioned more. And the joke of it was that he could replace the ukelele string for ninepence, or a shilling at the most!

Even as Mabs counted the money, Cecil's greedy mind was already spending it. Four shillings for nothing! Out of that, a shilling, say, for a new string, leaving three shillings. Half-a-crown he already possessed of his own money, making five-and-six.

Now, if only he could get hold of another half-crown! He thought of the telescope in Richardson's shop in Courtfield—a cheap second-hand one. Always had Cecil wanted a telescope; it was such fun watching the private doings of other people who had never even guessed they were subject to scrutiny! That telescope, he knew, was going for eight shillings. It seemed within his grasp.

"There!" Mabs said. "There we are, Cecil!" And she handed the money over, and Cecil, with a melting smile, restrained his impulse to grab, and took it. "That'll put things right, won't it?" she added. "Though I must say it seems an awful lot of money for a ukelele string. You're sure it will cost all that?"

"Well, of course!" Clara Trevlyn said. "Don't be so jolly suspicious, Mabs! Cecil's bought ukelele strings before."

Mabs flushed a little—not at Clara's rejoinder, but because she realised all at once that what Clara said was right; there was suspicion in her mind. Abruptly she turned away.

"Well, let's get on," she said defensively. "Diana, what about you and Gwen in the duet? Ready, Di?"

"Yoicks! Am I?" Diana Royston-Clarke said. "Come on, Gwen!"

And the rehearsal, with Cecil looking on, proceeded. Cecil's brain was busy. It was busy with the enthralling prospect of possessing that telescope and the problem of how to get hold of the necessary extra half-crown.

A Helping Hand from Mabs!



"O H dear!" sighed Charles Percival Henry Boker.

Worry, apprehension, and anxiety showed on the rugged features of Cliff House's

page-boy.

Rather dashed and dejected he had been on his return to the staff-room after his little upset with Babs & Co.

But he had cheered when Piper, the porter, had handed him a letter from Mrs. Boker. That bright interval among his worries and gloom, however, had been immediately obliterated upon reading the letter.

Mrs. Boker, well again, was at home. While she had been away the expenses of the little home had still been going on; rent had to be paid whether the house was occupied or not, and so had the subscription to the sick club to which Mrs. Boker belonged. A little money she had, thanks to the regularity with which Boker had sent her the major part of his monthly salary, but it was all too small for her needs.

"And I'm sure, Charles," she had written in one part, "I don't know where to turn. I've given the landlord what I have, but he's not satisfied, and is threatening to turn me out unless I pay up by Friday. But don't worry, my dear. Somehow I'll find a way out of the difficulty."

Boker gulped as he read that again. How could his mother find a way out of the difficulty? He knew exactly where every penny she handled came from. He knew exactly what she had in her possession now.

Boker shook his head. He placed the letter on the table. Then suddenly he plunged his hand into his pocket, collecting all the coins therein. He counted them—a half-crown, a two-shilling piece, a sixpence, and two coppers. Not much help to his mother, that; and the worst of it was, he wouldn't receive any more until his next month's salary was due. What could he do?

Unheard by Boker, the door came open. Unseen by Boker, Cecil Hargrove, fresh from rehearsal, peered in. One quick look Cecil darted round the room, and his eyes lit up as he saw the money in Boker's hand. He took a pace forward.

Boker, deep in thought, still did not suspect his presence.

Cecil paused. His eyes went to the letter. Rather large was Mrs. Boker's handwriting, and even though he was three or four feet away from it, he had no difficulty in reading it. His lips curled in a sneer as he read it. What an awful hard-upper this Boker was, he reflected. But again, irresistibly, hungrily, his gaze turned to the money in Boker's hand.

"Ahem! I say, Charles—"

Like a startled rabbit, Boker spun round. Impulsively his hand closed over the letter.

"Hallo! What do you want?" he said abruptly.

"Nothing," Cecil smiled. "At least, that is—I say, Boker, I've broken one of my ukelele strings."

Boker grunted.

"Well, why don't you get it mended?"

"That's what I want to do," Cecil said. "If I don't it means letting Mabel Lynn down. You wouldn't like me to do that, would you, Charles—because you said yourself you were so fond of Miss Lynn and Miss Redfern. I was just thinking, perhaps you might like to lend me the money—just till pay-day, you know? It'll only cost half-a-crown."

Boker stared at him.

"I'm sorry, I haven't got any money!" he said gruffly.

"But, Charles, you have! I saw ever such a fist full of it in your hand, you know! Please, Charles! You know I'm your pal; and you do get a bit more than I do, don't you?" he added whiningly. "Just half-a-crown, old chap! Only till pay-day! I wouldn't ask you if I wasn't dead broke!"

"I haven't got any money," Boker obstinately repeated. "Leastways, what I have got I want badly. Anyway, there's no need for you to let Miss Lynn down. Miss Charmant will give you some on account if you go and ask her."

Cecil paused. He scowled at Boker, but the latter, too pre-occupied with his own worries, had already turned back to his letter. For a moment Cecil remained, glaring at his back; then, with a sudden shrug, went out. But he did not go to Miss Charmant, as Boker had advised. Cecil knew better than to ask favours of the mistress who was sponsoring him, who believed in him, who had promised to report all his doings to his father. He went instead to Study No. 4.

And there his crafty little heart gave a bound of delight when he found it tenanted by the one girl he had come to seek out—Mabel Lynn.

He smiled as he stood meekly outside the door.

"Oh, Miss Lynn, may I speak to you a moment, please?"

"Eh? Yes, of course," Mabs smiled. "Anythin' wrong, Cecil?"

"Well, yes. It—it's Boker—" Cecil hesitated, sorrowfully shaking his head. "He doesn't know I've come to see you, but—I know you like him. I—I do, too, and I don't like to see him in trouble."

Mabs gazed at him, quick anxiety in her eyes.

"What sort of trouble?" she questioned. "You don't mean he is still worrying about the music-room business?"

"No, Miss Lynn; it—it's news he had from home. His mother's written to him, and Charles has got to send her some money. Poor Charles is dead broke, you know, and—and he wanted me to lend him half-a-crown. Of course, I'd have lent it to him like a shot, but the only money I had was the ukelele money. I thought perhaps—"

"Why, yes, of course!" Mabs said, and, being in funds, she at once opened her bag, and to Cecil's secret delight, took out a half-crown. She felt a little guilty, for, knowing something about Boker's domestic troubles, it suddenly struck her that she had not inquired about them recently. "There you are, give him that, will you?"

"Yes, Miss Lynn," Cecil hesitated. "But—but don't you think it would be better if I didn't say it came from you? You know what Charles is. He's awfully proud, and—and he might think you were giving this to him just

because you felt sorry for him. I'll pretend I've borrowed it, shall I?"

Mabs dimpled. "I don't mind," she said. "In any case, I wasn't going to let you tell Boker where it came from. And thanks, Cecil, for—for being such a sport."

"Yes, Miss Lynn," Cecil answered. "I like doing my best for Boker. He will be awfully pleased to have this little worry off his mind, don't you think?"

And the artful little schemer, hugging himself with glee, dropped the half-crown into his pocket and departed.

But as soon as he had gone, Mabs frowned.

Her conscience was pricking her then. She was thinking of Boker—hard-working, honest Boker, who had a large place in Mabel Lynn's regard, and she knew for a long time that things had not been very well in Boker's tiny family circle. Apart from that, old Boker must be feeling a bit sick and worried by the upset in the music-room. Presently she'd have a little chat with Boker—try to cheer him up. Wouldn't do to go immediately, of course—let Cecil hand over the half-crown first. She'd pop along after prep.

And after prep, which was completed an hour later, Mabs went off to find Boker, eventually running him to earth in the small room near the kitchen. Rather worried and wrathful Boker looked as she went in. He was seated in front of an enormous pile of silver, rubbing away at it with fearful industry. She blinked.

"Hallo, Boker! Didn't know that was one of your jobs," she said brightly. "Sure Cecil shouldn't be doing that?"

Boker looked up and flushed. "And so," he said bitterly. "he sh— He checked himself. "I mean I—I can't find Cecil," he said lamely, "but somebody's got to do it, and Mrs. Carey, the housekeeper, says it's got to be done before bed-time. Did—did you want anything, Miss Lynn?"

"Er! No! Just a little talk with you, that's all," Mabs said; but her heart melted with sudden pity as she saw the tired look on his face. "Look here, let me help you!"

"Oh, but, Miss Lynn, it's not your job!"

"Well, it isn't your job to do the scenery, is it?" Mabs asked. "One good turn deserves another, doesn't it? Give me that rag, please!"

"But, Miss Lynn—"

"Stuff!" Mabs laughed. And she seized the rag. Industriously she polished, while Boker beamed gratefully.

But she was wondering where Cecil was, why he wasn't doing his job. She was wondering why sturdy Boker, who normally could get through a hard day's work with the energy of any man, should be looking so utterly done up at the end of a day when he was supposed to have an assistant.

From that instant Mabs sensed something was wrong. It was not only Boker's domestic worries which were preying on his mind.

send her at once to me. Unless she has a most excellent excuse to offer, I shall deal with her severely."

And Miss Bullivant, very annoyed, rustled away.

Barbara grimaced. Clara Trevlyn, to whom she looked, shook her head. Call-over had just been dismissed, and Mabel Lynn, to everybody's astonishment, had been marked down as an absentee.

"Now where," Babs asked, "can she have got to? She must be somewhere in the school, because her things are in the cloak-room. I wonder if— And then she jumped. "Hallo, there she

"She does," Babs said, but still stared a little vexedly. As Mabs' biggest chum she did not like to see Mabs in a scrape, and perhaps she still shared with the others some faint resentment that Boker really had let the rehearsal down. "Anyway, you'd better buck up," she said anxiously, "and for goodness' sake don't get a detention. You know we've got a dress rehearsal to-morrow."

Mabs nodded. She felt just a little annoyed with herself at having missed hearing the bell and failing to notice that her watch had stopped. But having started in with Boker on the

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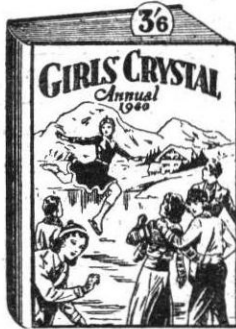
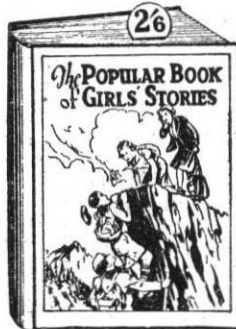
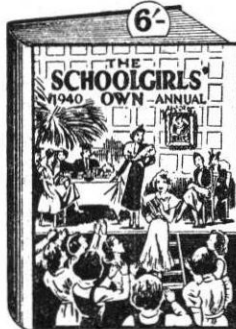


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is!" she cried, as a figure appeared at the head of the stairs. "Mabs, where have you been?"

"Hallo!" Mabs said. "Been? Oh, talking to Boker!"

"Boker? But, you chump, don't you know you've missed call-over?"

"Eh?" Mabs stared. Then she gave a look at her wrist-watch. "Oh, my hat! I never heard the bell," she cried. "One can't hear it in the kitchen, and my watch has stopped."

Babs stared. "You mean you've missed call-over because you were talking to Boker?"

"That's it," Mabs said. "I suppose the Bull wants to see me now?"

silver-cleaning job she could not very well leave him until the job was finished.

She trotted off. Rather anxious was the look on her face as she tapped on Miss Bullivant's door. A rasping voice bade her enter. Bracing herself, she went in.

"Miss Bullivant, I—I'm sorry I didn't turn up at call-over—"

"No doubt you are now," Miss Bullivant snapped. "That hardly constitutes an excuse, however. Why were you absent?"

"I—I didn't hear the bell." "The bell is loud enough. Where were you?"

"You've Let Us Down, Mabs!"



"AND you've no idea, Barbara, where Mabel Lynn is?"

Miss Bullivant demanded.

"No, Miss Bullivant!" Babs said.

"Very well. When she comes in,

"In the kitchen."

"And what, pray, were you doing in the kitchen?" Miss Bullivant asked freecingly.

"Well, I—I was talking to the— the page-boy," Mabs stammered.

She just dared not tell Miss Bullivant that she had been helping him.

"Indeed! And so engrossed in the page-boy's company, apparently, that you failed to remember school discipline!" Miss Bullivant said tartly. "Apart from disobeying the school rules, you were encouraging that boy, whose work has been far from satisfactory to-day, to fritter his time away. Mabel, you will be detained to-morrow for an hour after lessons. Meantime, I will speak to Boker about wasting his time. That boy thinks that now he has an assistant there is no need for him to work at all!"

Mabs looked indignant.

"But Boker was working!" she protested. "He was cleaning silver."

"Nobody can talk and keep their mind on their work at the same time," Miss Bullivant said. "Please go, Mabel."

Mabs swallowed hard. But she knew better than to try to argue with the Bull when the mathematics mistress was in that mood.

Poor old Boker! So far from helping him, it seemed, she had only made matters worse for him, and got herself detained into the bargain, as well! Tough luck, that, especially in view of the arrival of the costumes and the rehearsal, which had been arranged for the morrow.

She went out, to come face to face with Mabs, Clara, Leila Carroll and Janet Jordan.

And one and all of them were looking distinctly peeved.

"Well!" Mabs asked.

"Detained!" Mabs said.

"Oh, my hat! What about the rehearsal?" Clara cried.

"I—I'm sorry!" Mabs faltered.

There was an exchange of looks among the others.

"Sorry!" Janet glared. "You've let us down, Mabs!" she cried. "You know jolly well that we want to cram in as much time as we possibly can! You might have jolly well guessed that this would mean detention. But, of course, if Boker's of more interest to you than we are—"

Mabs turned crimson.

"It's not that—"

"Well, what is it?" Leila countered.

"That's what we want to know!" Clara said grimly.

"Yes, what's the excuse?" demanded Janet.

"It's—it's— Oh, blow! Give a girl a chance!" Mabs cried, clapping her hands over her ears protestingly. "I tell you I didn't hear the bell! I didn't know the time!"

"But the rehearsal—what about that?" Mabs cried. "Mabs, we can't do it without you! The—the only thing to do is to cancel it."

"Because," Clara Trevelyn growled, "of Boker, who's already let us down once. I must say, Mabs, that you've got a fat sense of duty to your pals! Oh, rats! Come on, everybody! As there's no rehearsal we'll fix up a hockey practice."

And leaving Mabs standing crimson-faced, she turned on her heel. The others turned with her, except Mabs, who loyally remained. But her eyes held a question, and her expression, in spite of her affection for Mabs, held a hint of reproval. It did seem, really, as if Mabs' sudden interest in Boker was putting a penalty on the Form's chances in the Talent Competition.

Boker Loses His Patience!



MEANWHILE, what of Cecil?

Cecil was doing very well.

HAVING successfully evaded cleaning the silver,

Cecil, always cunningly

careful to keep in Miss Charmant's good books, had visited that mistress in her study. Very captivating could Cecil be, and there was no doubt that Miss Charmant was utterly taken in by his manner, thus ensuring a good report to his father.

He did not see Boker again that night, but when he went to his room he found a note in Boker's rather scrawling hand propped against the vase on the table outlining his early duties for to-morrow morning. Cecil regarded it with a sneer.

He had his own lazy idea of what he was going to do to-morrow morning. Unfortunately for Boker, that idea did not coincide with the page-boys' one bit.

First thing in the morning Cecil meant to collect his ukelele string, and now that he had the money, that telescope from Richardson's. There had, unfortunately, been no time to do that this evening, for both shops would have been closed by the time he reached them.

And early next morning Cecil Hargrove sneaked away. He was on the music shop's doorstep when they opened, and to his glee secured his ukelele string at the price of ninpence. A disappointment awaited him at Richardson's, however. To his utter dismay, he learned that his cherished telescope had been sold an hour before closing-time yesterday.

"Blow!" Cecil said.

That, for a time, put him in a sullen mood. He had wanted that telescope. Rather sulkily he began his march back to school, and, with his spirits damped, began to think rather apprehensively of Boker.

Boker, of course, would have been looking for him. Boker again would have had all his work to do—not, of course, that that mattered—but Cecil had the sense to realise that he was straining the page-boy's patience to breaking point. Supposing Boker, in desperation, did report him?

Alarm filled him at that reflection. He began to seek excuses for his absence if called upon, and not until he was nearly out of Courtfield, passing Williams, the florists, did that excuse leap to his mind. Then he beamed as he gazed in at the window. Supposing he bought flowers for Miss Charmant?

That would please her immensely, and Boker, seeing the regard he had for the Charmer, could hardly reprove him for that.

Into the shop Cecil stepped, jingling the money in his pockets. But flowers, he discovered, were more expensive than he had anticipated, and half-a-crown of his cunningly won gains went on one bunch of sweet peas. Still, it was worth it, he decided.

Flowers in hand, confidence in himself once again, he rushed on to the school, and inside the servants' gate Boker was waiting for him. On Boker's face was promise of trouble to come.

"Oh, so you've arrived, have you?" he said grimly. "And I'd like to know who gave you permission to dodge the boot-cleaning and the staff breakfast? Where have you been?"

Cecil looked hurt.

"Oh, Charles, I've only been to buy flowers for Miss Charmant. Last

night she told me how she loved flowers, and how sorry she was that she hadn't got any, so I thought, you see, I'd go and get her some."

Boker looked at him sharply. "Where did you get the money?" he asked.

"The—the money?" For a moment Cecil looked flustered. "Well, I—I had it, you know."

"Did you? Last night you told me you were broke—dead broke. You tried to borrow half-a-crown from me. Who did you borrow it from?"

"I—I didn't borrow it from anybody," Cecil protested.

"Then," Boker said, "where did you get it?"

"Oh rats! Why should you question me?" Cecil blurted sulkily.

"Because," Boker said, "I happen to have been put in charge of you. You're not broke one night and flush the next morning without getting money from somewhere, and it seems to me, me lad, there's something fishy about it. Now, come on, where did you get it?"

"Well, you don't think I stole it, do you?"

"If you didn't there's no reason why you shouldn't say where it came from," Boker retorted.

Cecil almost panted.

"Well, I didn't. If you want to know," he added desperately, "Miss Lynn gave it to me."

Boker stared.

"Miss Lynn? What for?"

"Oh rats, never mind!" Cecil sulkily retorted.

A step nearer Boker approached. His face was sharp with suspicion then.

"Cecil, why did Miss Lynn give you that money?"

"Mind your own business!" Cecil blurted.

"All right," Boker nodded. "It is my business. And seeing you won't answer we'll jolly well go along together and ask Miss Lynn herself."

"I—I won't!" Cecil cried, white to the lips.

Boker gave a cluck of impatience. Another step he advanced. Too late Cecil tried to dart away. In a moment the strong hand of Boker had seized him. Cecil stumbled, and as he stumbled there came a musical jingle from his trousers pocket.

"Hallo, got more, have you?"

"Let me go!" shrieked Cecil.

"I'll let you go, right enough, when we've seen Miss Lynn!" Boker promised grimly. "I don't trust you. There's something suspicious about this. I—" And then he gave a cry that was half a gasp and half a howl, as suddenly Cecil viciously lunged out and kicked him hard on the shin.

At that, all Boker's patience gave out. Instinctive the blow—sorry for it as soon as he had made it, was Boker—but his arm swung round even as he recoiled away, and, connecting with Cecil's jaw, flattened that youth against the fence. Cecil gave a howl and slithered to the floor.

"You—you beastly bully!" he sniffed.

And then, glancing up, he smothered the sly grin of satisfaction which rushed to his lips. Standing at the gate, looking in at the scene with horror in her eyes, was Miss Bullivant, with Mabel Lynn behind her.

Clever Cecil!



IT was by pure accident that Mabs and Miss Bullivant had arrived at the servants' gate at the same moment.

Mabs, in fact, had been on the look-out for Cecil. Miss Bullivant, in accordance with her



"YOU might have guessed that this would mean detention!" Janet Jordan accused. "But of course, if Boker's of more interest to you than we are—" Mabs turned crimson. "It's not that." "Well, what is it?" Leila countered. "Yes, what is the excuse?" demanded Janet. "It—it's—oh, blow! Give a girl a chance!" Mabs cried, clapping her hands over her ears.

duties, had come to inspect the servants' quarters. In Mabs' hand was a catalogue she had found that morning, and which contained a list of the goods sold by Johns, the one music shop in Courtfield where it was possible for Cecil to get his new ukelele string.

That faint doubt in Mabs' mind which she had expressed yesterday on learning the proposed price of the new ukelele string had become a suspicion when she had found, running through the catalogue, that the uke string such as Cecil would require for his instrument was priced at one shilling or ninepence. If Cecil hadn't already bought that string, she was going to point that out to him. If he had—

Well, Mabs would be more than interested to know how much Cecil would say he had given for the string.

She, like Miss Bullivant, however, was just in time to see Cecil reel against the fence, and she gave a cry.

Dismayed, Boker looked round. He started violently as he saw the two.

"Boker!" cried Miss Bullivant angrily. "What does this mean?"

Boker, perhaps more embarrassed by Mabs' presence than by Miss Bullivant's, swallowed nervously.

"I—I—I—" he stammered. "Oh crumbs!"

"Cecil, get up," Miss Bullivant said, and as that youth staggered to his feet she gave him a hand; while Boker, alternating between crimson and pallor, stood aside, looking dumbly at Mabel Lynn.

"I—I'm sorry!" he blurted.

"Your regret," Miss Bullivant said acidly, "comes rather late, Boker. I saw what happened. Cecil is a smaller boy than yourself—Cecil also is your subordinate. Deliberately and brutally you struck him!"

"Well, I—I didn't mean to," Boker said.

"What you meant to do is beside the point," Miss Bullivant said, while Cecil looked woeful. "Bullying at all times is deplorable. Why did you do it?"

Boker paused. Once again he had been put in the wrong.

"We—we had a row," he said defensively.

"Indeed! On what score?"

"We had a row," Boker had not intended to blurt the words in Mabs' presence, but somehow they just came. "We had a row because I found out that Cecil had been wangling money from Miss Lynn."

"Oh, Charles!" Cecil cried in assumed horror, while Mabs started.

"It's true," Boker asserted. He had to go on now. "Cecil said that Miss Lynn had given him the money, but he wouldn't say why, so I didn't believe him. When he refused to come to Miss Lynn I grabbed him to make him come, and—and then—"

"And then you hit him!" Miss Bullivant contemptuously finished. "A most deplorable display of childish temper, Boker! However, as Miss Lynn herself is here we can clear the matter. Mabel, did you give Cecil Hargrove money?"

Mabs looked at Cecil. She had not missed the wild alarm which had leapt into Cecil's features at Boker's blurted confession, and all at once she seemed to understand, and, understanding, found herself entrenched firmly on Boker's side. Decidedly there was more in this than met the eye.

"Well, yes, I did give Cecil money. I gave him half-a-crown last night," she confessed. "But—but I understood that Cecil was going to give that to Boker himself."

Boker blinked.

"But—but why?" he asked. "Anyway, he's not given me any money."

"Well"—Mabs flushed—"Cecil said you were in difficulties—"

"Me?" Boker stared again.

"But that's right," Cecil put in swiftly. "That's dead right, Miss Lynn. Oh, Charles, why don't you try to understand, please?" he added reproachfully. "You—you see, we were saving that money up for a surprise. I knew you were hard up, and—and had to send money to your mother and all that, and I just wanted to help, that's all. And—and, of course," Cecil went on virtuously, "neither Miss Lynn nor I wanted you to know the money was a present, and I was just waiting for an opportunity to leave it in your room or something, so that you wouldn't know where it came from."

"Then where," Boker demanded, "did you get the money to buy the flowers?"

"Well, that was my own, you know."

"But I thought last night you told me you were broke. Why, you know, you tried to borrow half-a-crown from me."

Mabs started. Cecil, however, with his nerves fully recovered and smooth, lies rushing to his tongue, reproachfully shook his head.

"Oh, Charlie, you know I didn't try to borrow half-a-crown from you! I do think that's mean, trying to twist the story against me when all the time I was only wanting to do you a good turn. But, still, never mind!" he added forgivingly. "Miss Bullivant, I'm sure Charles really didn't mean to hit me, and—and I do hate him to get into trouble. So—so let's forget it, shall we?"

Boker clenched his hands. Mabs looked at the little hypocrite sharply. She was putting two and two together now. She believed Boker.

"Miss Bullivant—" she cried.

"Mabel, please! That will do!" Miss Bullivant said. "Cecil, much as I admire your forgiveness of spirit, this cannot be overlooked. Boker has behaved in a way that I can only describe as caddish and ruffianly. Boker, you will come with me to Miss Primrose!"

Boker stood stunned.

"But—but—"

"Miss Bullivant, please!" Mabs gasped. "Don't you think we ought to hear Boker's side of the case?"

"Boker's side, Mabel, has already been stated."

"But, Miss Bullivant, I'm sure that Boker—"

"Mabel, another word and I shall give you lines!" Miss Bullivant interrupted.

Boker shook his head.

"Miss Lynn, don't—don't get yourself into a row because of me," he pleaded. "I suppose I'm wrong. I ought not to have hit him like that, especially after I promised Miss Charmant—"

He paused. "Miss Bullivant, I'm ready."

And, turning rapidly away, he stepped after the mathematics mistress.

Her Chums Didn't Understand!



"POOR old Charles!" Cecil Hargrove sighed. "Oh dear! I—I do hope the headmistress isn't too hard on him, Miss Lynn. What will she do, do you think?"

Mabs swung upon him. "Cecil, you're sure you told the truth?"

"Why, yes, of course, Miss Lynn! As if I would tell a lie! I'm frightfully sorry. Aren't you?"

"I am," Mabs said. Her look was still hard and penetrating. "And I'm not altogether satisfied, Cecil. You told me yourself last night that you had no money, except the ukelele money. How is it that you can afford to buy flowers this morning?"

"Well, I—I had a postal order, you see," Cecil lied.

"And the uke string—have you bought it?"

"Why, yes, Miss Lynn, I bought it this morning. I— Oh, I say, here's Miss Redfern and Miss Trevlyn!"

"Hallo! Hallo!" Clara said, coming along with Babs at that moment. "I say, what's happened to Boker? Just met him and the Bull—the Bull looking like a thundercloud, and poor Boker looking as if he were going to a flogging. What's been a-doing around here?"

"Never mind," Mabs said.

She turned back to Cecil again, sure now that Cecil had lied; sure now that Cecil was a sharp-witted little schemer, and was secretly pleased because Boker was in trouble. She was, if possible, going to bowl him out. By false pretences Cecil had wangled that half-a-crown off her. By false pretences, she was sure, he had secured four shillings for a shilling or ninepenny ukelele string. She'd trap him in that.

"Where is the string?" she asked.

"Here, Miss Lynn," Cecil said obediently, and produced it. "It's an awfully nice one, isn't it?"

"Quite," Mabs said, and her eyes flickered. For she knew the price of that string as soon as she saw it. "Let me see—you collected four shillings for this, didn't you?" she added casually.

Cecil paused. Babs and Clara looked at their chum rather curiously. Perhaps Cecil sensed then that Mabs was suspicious. He nodded.

"Yes, that's right."

"And how much did you say it cost?" Mabs asked.

"But, Mabs, I say—" Babs protested.

"How much?" Mabs pressed.

"Well—" Again Cecil paused. Instinct warned him that he was on dangerous ground. Instinct told him that, for once, he had better tell the truth. He said: "I managed to get a cheaper one, after all. It cost ninepence."

"Oh!" Mabs said, and looked at him, faintly disappointed, somehow, because she was sure in her innermost mind that if that amount had not been queried Cecil would most certainly have grabbed the whole four shillings.

"Then that means you've got some change?"

Reluctantly Cecil nodded his head.

"Where is it?" Mabs asked.

"But, Mabs, dash it—" Clara half-angrily protested.

"Where is it?" Mabs repeated.

Slowly Cecil fished it out.

"Thanks!" Mabs said sharply.

"I'll hand this money back to the girls who gave it to you. And now,

please, you can let me have back that half-crown which I gave you for Boker and which you didn't give to Boker!"

Almost with tears in his eyes, Cecil's reluctant hand went into his pocket again. The look of utter wounded dejection on his face touched Clara as he fished it out and silently handed it to Mabs.

"Here you are, Miss Lynn."

"Thanks," Mabs said. She felt her colour heighten a little. She knew she must appear rather a cat in the eyes of Babs and Clara, but the knowledge of what Boker was going through steeled her to that. "Then that's settled. Do you want me, Babs?"

"Well, we—we were just wondering where you were," Babs mumbled.

"The band's got an idea that we ought to have that rehearsal in spite of your detention. But, Mabs, what's the matter with you?" she added as Mabs turned away and they fell in step beside her. "Why are you picking on Cecil like that?"

Mabs compressed her lips very firmly at that.

"Because," she said, "he tried to swindle me, and in trying to swindle me landed Boker into another row."

"Oh, stuff!" Clara scoffed. "How did he try to swindle you?"

"In the first place by borrowing half-a-crown," Mabs said. "In the second, by trying to stick to the change from the ukelele string."

"That's a pretty rotten accusation," Clara said, "and you can't prove it! Sure you haven't made a mistake about young Clive, Mabs?"

"No, it's true!"

Babs gazed at her oddly. Clara could hardly conceal her disgust. That was utterly unlike the generous, forgiving Mabs they usually knew, and they both did like Cecil. Mabs sensed their thoughts, and realising how unreasonable her conduct must look in their eyes, turned red.

"Pretty rotten thing to say, isn't it?" Clara asked gruffly. "We all know you like Boker. We all know that you don't like to see him in rows—and neither do we, for that matter—but that's no earthly reason why you should try to take it out of a nice chap like Cecil."

"Oh, for goodness' sake don't let's argue about it!" Mabs cried, with a petulance quite foreign to her. "I—I— What were you saying about rehearsal, Babs?" she switched off abruptly.

"Yes; but Cecil—"

"Oh, never mind Cecil!" Mabs said impatiently. "What about the rehearsal?"

Babs looked a little hurt. It was rarely indeed that Mabs spoke so impatiently to her as that.

"Well, the band is saying that it's a pity to waste the time. There's a suggestion on foot that somebody else should take the rehearsal as you're in detention. But naturally we had to see you about it first."

"Yes, naturally," Mabs said; but her heart knew a pang. "Well, I—I'm agreeable. Who's going to take it?"

"We left that for you to decide," Clara put in.

"Then," Mabs said, "I suggest Babs. And if you want my advice—Hallo! There's Boker," she added eagerly, as that crestfallen youth appeared on the school steps.

"Excuse me a moment."

At once she flew off, leaving Babs and Clara rather resentful.

A Protest—But Too Late!



JUST a little constrained were the relations between the chums that morning. Unfortunately, nobody could understand Mabs—and Mabs, in truth, hardly understood herself. All she knew was that Boker was going through the mill—that Boker, at the moment, had not a champion except herself in the whole school. She believed in Boker, and she was going to help him.

But Boker was in the bad books of the school when it became known that he had received a stern reprimand and warning from Miss Primrose for hitting Cecil Hargrove.

Everybody liked Cecil, and among Mabel Lynn's own chums Cecil had his greatest admirers. Everybody agreed that it was a dashed shame to take advantage of such a decent little chap as Cecil Hargrove.

So while Boker's stock went down, Cecil's went up—and Cecil was easily the hero of the afternoon when the rehearsal in the music-room took place.

Although the costumes had arrived by that time, Babs, feeling that Mabs would rather have had the first handling of those, refrained from making it the dress rehearsal they had planned, and carried on in just the ordinary way.

There was no doubt the rehearsal was a success—and no doubt that the biggest success among the instrumentalists was ukelele-playing Cecil Hargrove.

While poor Mabs, in the confinement of the detention-room, ground away at an essay under the eyes of that ill-natured prefect, Connie Jackson!

Detention at long last finished, Mabs, with a sigh, put down her pen, and at Connie's nod left the room. And almost the first person she ran into was Boker himself—Boker looking most dreadfully harassed and worried.

Mabs eyed him in dismay. "Boker, you've been getting into more trouble?"

"No, Miss Lynn, I haven't—not—not that sort of trouble," Boker said.

"Then what sort of trouble?"

Boker hesitated.

"Oh, Miss Lynn, you wouldn't understand—"

"Of course I would," she said swiftly. "I'm your friend. What is it? Your—your mother?"

Dumbly he nodded.

"She's ill again?"

"Well, no, Miss Lynn—not exactly that. You see— And then Boker, reddening, seeing that it would be impossible to fob Mabs off without an explanation, blurted out the truth. "It—it's money."

And then he told her, while Mabs, her heart swelling with sympathy, listened. That afternoon Boker had received another letter from his mother in which she had explained that the landlord, after negotiation, had promised if she would pay off a pound of her rent arrears by Saturday, that he would wait for the rest of the money until the end of the month.

"And that's where I'm stranded, you see," Boker said miserably, "because I don't get paid till the end of the month."

"Boker," Mabs said, "come with me."

"But, miss—"

"Come on!"

She gently took his arm. Along to Study No. 4 she went.

There she unlocked the drawer of her

bureau, and from among the money she had been saving all the year for a super, new make-up box, she took out a pound. Boker turned scarlet as she offered it to him.

"But, Miss Lynn, I—I couldn't!" "Boker, you must!" Mabs said. "I'm only lending it, and as I shan't be using it for some time, why shouldn't you take it? You know very well that if one of your boy friends offered to lend it you wouldn't object, would you?"

"Well, no, miss, but—" "Then," Mabs pressed, "take it." "Oh, Miss Lynn, you—you're too kind!" Boker gulped. "But—but I couldn't! You might get into a fearful row! Supposing Miss Primrose found out? You know there's a strict rule against lending money to servants."

"Well," Mabs countered, "what of that? Who's going to find out, unless you or I tell them? Do take it, there's a dear. Besides," she added, "think of your mother. Now trot off and get that postal order and send it right away."

"I—I don't know how to thank—" "Then," Mabs laughed, "don't try. Now go on. You'll just have time to get a postal order before the post office closes."

And gently she pushed him away. Boker went, rather red about the ears, but with a new buoyancy in his step. He went at once to his own room, there to get his hat in preparation for the trip to the village.

A surprise awaited him at his room, however. Sarah Harrigan of the Sixth, accompanied by Grace Camperhill, prefect, also of that Form, was there.

Sarah swung round as he came in. Her face was fierce.

"Boker, what about my new walking shoes?" she cried sharply.

"And mine," Grace said. Boker blinked.

"But aren't they in your study, miss? They were cleaned this morning. At least," he said, remembering. "I told Cecil to clean them and take them back to you. I remember distinctly. Hallo, here is Cecil!" he added, as his mask-faced assistant appeared at the door, ukelele tucked under his arm. "Here, Cecil, what about those shoes I told you to clean this morning?"

"The what?" Cecil asked, smiling respectfully at Sarah and Grace.

"Oh, I don't know. I haven't seen them."

"I told you to clean them!" Boker cried.

"Yes, I know!" Cecil serenely nodded. "But I never saw them, so I couldn't very well clean shoes that weren't there, could I? You told me they were beside the pile of rubbish outside the kitchen door, but when I went to look, they weren't—only the rubbish was there."

Boker glared. "The shoes were there!" he insisted.

"But they weren't—really!" Cecil looked quite distressed. "Oh dear! Charles, please don't glare at me like that! Per—perhaps you made a mistake. I say, you're sure you didn't shoot the rubbish over the shoes?"

Grace and Sarah started.

"Thanks; I'm not in the habit of doing things like that!" Boker retorted.

"Well, it's funny they weren't there!"

"Very funny," Sarah snorted. "Oh, screamingly funny! Those shoes cost two guineas, and I've only worn them once! In any case," she added angrily, "we'll soon see. Let's go and look."

"But the rubbish has been cleared away, hasn't it, Charles?" Cecil said.

"It's on the dump now."

"Let's go and look at the dump," Grace said grimly.

Boker glared at Cecil—just in time to see the grin Cecil was smothering behind his hand. No doubt now that the two prefects were alarmed—and no doubt either that the missing shoes had to be accounted for. As Grace settled the matter by whisking out of the room, Boker, Sarah, and Cecil followed her. Into the yard outside Grace went. The rubbish tip was a walled enclosure at the far end of the yard.

But before they reached it, Grace gave a shriek.

"Oh, my goodness, look!"

She darted forward. From Cecil came something suspiciously like a laugh. While Boker stared, Grace furiously plunged her hand into a mass of tea-leaves and potato-peelings, and produced—in a very dilapidated condition—one shoe. She held it up. "Mine!" she shrieked.

fists. "You little worm! You hid those shoes under the rubbish to dodge cleaning them!"

"Oh, rats! I—I didn't! It—it was an accident!"

"An accident—eh? An accident?" Bitterly Boker gazed at him. "Funny sort of an accident—and another little row for me! But this time, my lad, you're not getting away with it!"

Cecil stared. "What do you mean?"

"I mean," Boker said grimly, "you're going along to Miss Camperhill and Miss Harrigan now, and you're jolly well going to tell them what really happened!"

Cecil's eyes showed wild alarm. "I won't!"

"Yes, you will! If you don't—"

"What?"

"I'm going along to Miss Charmant! I'm fed-up with taking the blame for your monkey tricks! I'm sick of doing



"THANKS," Mabs said sharply. "I'll hand this money back to the girls who gave it to you. And now, please, you can let me have back that half-crown I gave you for Boker." Cecil's reluctant hand went into his pocket again. Babs and Clara stared half angrily at Mabs. They could not understand her attitude towards the boy they liked so well.

"And this," Sarah cried furiously, "is mine!" And into the sticky mass went her own hand; with fingers that were shaking she held up a wet shoe. "Ruined—absolutely ruined! Boker, you careless, lazy, good-for-nothing!"

"But, Miss Harrigan—"

"Don't Miss Harrigan me!" Sarah stormed. "You—you— Look at them! Just look at them! Two guineas!"

"What about these?" Grace snorted.

"Boker, I'm going to report you for this!"

"And I!" Sarah said.

"But—but—but—" stammered the dismayed Boker. "I tell you—"

But Sarah and Grace went storming away. From Cecil came a sudden burst of laughter as they disappeared.

"Oh dear! Ha, ha, ha! I say, Charles—"

Boker swung round on him. "You did it!" he accused.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Cecil. "You—you—" Boker clenched his

your work! I promised Miss Charmant that I'd look after you and help you, but I didn't promise her that I'd take the blame for all your tricks, and I didn't promise her that I'd do all your rotten work, and p'r'aps get myself the sack! Well, are you going to see Miss Harrigan?"

"No!"

Boker breathed hard. It was occurring to him all at once that, despite his desire to save Miss Charmant unnecessary distress, he was doing neither her, himself, nor Cecil a good turn by smothering up all his mistakes.

He turned on his heel. For a moment Cecil's eyes flickered in alarm. Then, as the page-boy stepped back towards the house, he grinned.

That was bluff, of course. Boker didn't mean it.

But for once Cecil Hargrove had misjudged Boker. This morning Miss Primrose had given Boker a severe

(Continued on page 14)

OUT OF SCHOOL HOURS



Week by week your friend PATRICIA writes to you. She tells you all her own news, about things to talk about and things to make—all in that cheery, chummy way so typical of her. No wonder all schoolgirls have taken PATRICIA to their hearts and wouldn't miss her weekly pages for anything.

It was terribly uncomfortable, and I had to keep lifting that foot like a duck, so that I shouldn't trip over the silly thing.

When I got home I glued the sole on again with some sticky stuff, but I'm afraid that didn't work. The sole is now right off again. So that rather looks as if your Patricia is to have some new walking shoes, doesn't it?

● Introductions

I have been discovering that schoolgirls are just as puzzled on occasion as older people are by the "right thing to do."

"How to introduce" is one of these little problems, so we might as well settle it.

The first thing schoolgirls must remember is that introductions are necessary. Say you were out with a school chum, and you met your cousin. Well, naturally, you'd stop and talk. Possibly your chum would walk on—which is quite correct, if you intend staying only for a moment.

But if your chum doesn't walk on, but stands with you, then you must say to her: "Jean, this is my cousin, Winnie," and to Winnie: "This is my friend, Jean Bray."

After that, you'll all know each other, and the "right thing" has been done.

Just one other point about this, though. If it's a boy cousin you should meet, remember that the boy should always be introduced to the girl.

Like this: "Jean," you say, "this is my cousin, Tom Clarke." And then you may say: "And, Tom, this is my chum, Jean Bray."

In the same way, if it is an adult person you meet, like an aunty, then your chum should be introduced to her: "Aunty, this is my friend, Jean Bray."

You see the idea? Always introduce a gentleman to a lady, and a young person to an older one.

But among chums of your own age—well, the less formal the introductions are, the better, and the quicker you'll all be friends together.

● Cord Loops

You must have noticed how bright and colourful gloves are these days. When

my mother was young, only black cotton gloves were worn—or white cotton ones if you were rather "swish."

But to-day, you simply can't tell the dustman's daughter from the duchess' daughter by any of her clothes, let alone gloves.

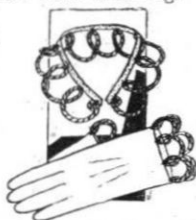
If you've a plain pair, made of fabric, here is quite a bright way of adding that fashionable spot of colour.

You buy a yard—for a penny—of coloured cord from the drapery counter of our favourite shop—that-sells-everything, and make loops of this all round the top of the gloves. It'll take you about two ticks to do, for you only have to catch the cord at intervals.

And if you're tired of plain Peter Pan collars on a dress, you could use the same idea for making a new neck trimming.

Get a piece of tape or strong ribbon long enough to fit round the inside of the neck of your dress, and loop the cord on to this. The collar can then be sewn into the dress, and only the loops of cord will show.

I think white or pale pink cord would look nice on a blue dress, and yellow, blue or green on a brownish one.



● Economy Notion

Now here's a save-a-penny notion for this week.

I haven't actually tried it myself yet, but am most certainly going to.

Two or three slices of white soap—thin slices, of course—can be added to the water in which flowers are arranged. And 'tis said that this helps them to last longer.

I must try this the very next time I "do" the flowers.

● Wavy Braid

Now I have a very simple and yet pretty way for you to trim one of those useful little bolero jackets that are such a boon, whatever the weather. (I know lots of you have one of these jackets, for I've seen you wearing them.)

You can buy braid for twopence a yard from any draper, or perhaps mother has some hidden away in her workbox. Two rows of this, sewn with fairly big hemming stitches, all round the edges and sleeves of the jacket would give it a "good-as-new" look.

Eye-bye now, all, until next week.

Your friend, PATRICIA.

I SUPPOSE, strictly speaking, autumn comes along next week—on the 23rd. (So do the bills, say the grown-ups!)

Isn't it positively astounding how quickly this year has flown by? Of course, older people always think that time goes quickly. But this year seems to be vanishing with a zip even to your Patricia.

Has it done the same to you busy young schoolgirls, too?

Sorry as I am to think of the end of summer—even if there are a good many fine days to come—I think autumn has lots of compensations, don't you?

I remember while we were away on holiday this year, in July, it was a perishingly cold day, and raining as if it had never rained before, in addition.

So we went into a quaint little tea-room for tea. This Patricia of yours promptly said she'd have raspberries and cream, please. (I'd eat those on Christmas Day if they were available.)

Mother doesn't eat cream; it's bad for her digestion, she says. So when the waitress came up to us: "I'll have some hot, buttered toast, please," said mother. "I'm positively frozen."

"I'm sorry, madam," said the waitress, "but toast is out of season. We don't serve it in the summer."

Mother just looked blank, and I confess I was a bit surprised. The idea of toast being "out of season" during the summer—just like Christmas pudding and turkey and things! Anyone would think it was difficult to come by, and had to be specially bought, or something.

So mother finished up by having merely bread-and-butter.

But the point is, that now toast will soon be "in season" again, and that makes me think of roaring fires, and even of roast chestnuts—though perhaps I'm running on too quickly.

● No Sole!

I hope you're planning some hikes for these September week-ends. Last week-end my rich friend Esme, my not-so-well-off friend Joan, and I, all went trotting down to Kent.

It was perfectly glorious. We took sandwiches with us, and ate them on a common that was simply thick with blackberries.

Only one tragedy marred the day. The rubber sole of one of my hiking shoes started to flap.



HAIR QUESTIONS

There are always so many little—and big—questions that come to worry the school-girl who wants her hair to be a real "crowning glory" that Patricia has decided to tackle some of them in a concise form of question and answer.

First Schoolgirl: *My hair is dead straight, Patricia, and I'm too young to have a perm. Do curlers spoil the hair?*

Patricia: No, my dear, curlers don't spoil the hair. But I advise you to use rubber ones, or those that look rather like bootlaces. These are easy to use, make very soft, natural-looking curls, and are quite comfy to sleep on.

First Schoolgirl: *Where can I buy them, please? And how much?*

Patricia: From any chemist or the beauty counter of a bazaar. They cost three-halfpence for six, in a bundle.

First Schoolgirl: *But what about wispy ends on my neck? They just won't go into a curler at all.*

Patricia: How well I know this! The solution is to use pipe-cleaners folded over. They take even the tiniest end of hair and make the dearest little curls—which can be combed out separately or combed in with the bigger ones.

First Schoolgirl: *Just one more question, please—about curls. How often should I "do up" my hair?*

Patricia: As you say it's dead straight, I think three times a week would be necessary. Wavy hair would only require curling at the ends about once a week—or on highdays, holidays and bonfire nights!

Second Schoolgirl: *My problem is scurf, Pat—may I call you Pat? It always looks as if I've been raking out ashes.*

Patricia: I'm sorry to hear that, and yes, you may most certainly call me Pat—most people do! You must remember about scurf, or dandruff, that this is not a condition of the hair itself, but of the scalp. And whatever happens, you must always keep the scalp scrupulously clean.

Second Schoolgirl: *But I wash my hair every fortnight—*

Patricia: Then I think I should try doing it every ten days for the present. Use a soapless shampoo for preference, or one containing oil. But, above all, remember to give your hair at least three rinsings in clear water—getting someone else to do it for you, for preference.

Second Schoolgirl: *Thanks, Pat, and is there anything else I can do?*

Patricia: Yes—brush and brush your hair—even if it is a bit greasy. Also give the scalp a good massage with the tips of your fingers every night before you pop into bed. Nothing half-hearted, mind—you should actually feel the skin move under your fingers.

Third Schoolgirl: *Now it's my turn. I hope you won't think this is rather feeble, but actually I have quite a lot of pocket-money and would like to go to the hairdresser to have my hair "set." Do you think I'm too young, or that it would make me—sort of artificial?*

Patricia: An occasional shampoo and "set" by a professional hairdresser is a real tonic for the hair—and there's nothing artificial about it.



The hairdresser will simply wash your hair, then she'll press in the waves with her fingers—just as you might at home, only she'll do it more expertly—and then you're popped under the "drier" until your hair is quite dry again. When the waves are combed out and prettily arranged they'll look sweet—grand for a special occasion!

Third Schoolgirl: *Thank you, Pat. It sounds so simple when you put it like that.*

Fourth Schoolgirl: *You'll probably laugh at my problem, Pat. But my hair's too curly. In fact, it's frizzy. How can I give it that sleek, well-groomed look?*

Patricia: First you should have it well and truly "thinned" by a hairdresser. That will take away the bushiness and keep it lying flatter to your head. Secondly, you should brush it well, using a little oil—or brilliantine—on your brush. This will keep it smooth and shining.



IT'S BLACKBERRY TIME

You'll enjoy blackberrying even more if you go prepared.

berries are emptied out as soon as you get home; so that no "tinny" flavour is imparted to the fruit.

OLDISH CLOTHES

It's a good plan not to wear any stockings on a blackberrying expedition—if you value your stockings! On the other hand, you may value your legs more, and decide that you'd like to protect them from scratches a bit. In this case, wear an old pair of stockings and a fairly-sturdy pair at that.

Wear at least a third-best dress—or even a fourth-best. Choose one that'll wash easily, too, for blackberries can stain so.

THE USEFUL STICK

And you mustn't forget to take a walking-stick with a handle. It's so tantalising to see a luscious collection of blackberries just out of reach. A stick will certainly help in hooking them towards you—even though you will probably decide that the best blackberries are always right in the middle of the bush!

KEEPING PESTS AWAY

Midges and other insects can be a frightful pest on your blackberrying jaunt, so it's as well to prepare for these beforehand.

There are lots of anti-midge lotions on sale, and one of the best is Oil of Lavender, which smells quite sweet. A dab of this should be placed behind each ear, on the backs of the hands, in the hollows of the elbows—and behind the knees and on the ankles if you're stockinged.

If you should get stung by nettles, remember that a dock-leaf rubbed on the spots immediately will "take out the sting."

And it's quite a good idea to carry a tiny phial of iodine, just in case you fall down or walk into a mass of brambles. (The phial of iodine, by the way, costs sixpence. It is a very tiny bottle enclosed in a metal holder, and is a perfect boon on all sorts of occasions.)

You'll soon have your basket filled with blackberries if you've chosen your spot well, and in spite of scratches, stings, and what-not, you'll go home well pleased with your booty—thinking affectionately of Bramble Jelly to come and Blackberry and Apple pie for Sunday dinner!

MAKING up a party—whether a big one or a little one—to go blackberrying, is always fun.

You mustn't include any of your over-fussy friends on a trip like this; it's definitely a jaunt for the "tough" ones, who won't bother about scratches, stained dresses, and untidy hair.

Don't forget to take a suitable container with you for the blackberries. (I once forgot this and had to use my hat!)

Any old basket will do, though you should place a piece of greaseproof paper on the bottom of it first, so that the blackberries won't stain it too badly. A tin is also quite suitable, providing the black-

(Continued from page 11)

warning. Yesterday he had been up to his ears in work and trouble because of Cecil's laziness. More of this, and he'd find himself getting the sack. What of his mother then? He must put his mother first. Straight to Miss Charmant's study he marched, and, tapping on the door, entered.

Then he paused. Miss Charmant was not there.

But something else was, and that something else was lying on the floor. It was Miss Charmant's handbag which, apparently having been placed insecurely on the window-sill, had been caught by the breeze that blew in the window and dropped on the floor. In striking the floor, the bag had obviously broken open, for half its contents were on the floor. Boker's face showed alarm as he noticed that.

"Oh! crumbs! I hope nothing's broke!" he muttered.

Instantly he went to the bag. Picking it up, he gathered the contents, carefully replacing them. He closed the bag, and, looking for a more secure place in which to stand it, approached the desk. As he did so, Miss Charmant came in.

Almost guiltily, Boker dropped the bag on the desk, swinging round. Miss Charmant looked at him sharply. She looked at the bag.

"Why, Boker—"

"I—I— It dropped!" Boker said, in confusion.

"Oh!" Miss Charmant smiled. "Thank you, Boker! You wanted to see me about something?"

Boker turned the colour of a beetroot. "Well, yes," he mumbled. "I—I think you—you ought to know. I—I'm sorry, Miss Charmant, to have to complain, but—but—well, things just can't go on like this! I've been doing my best, but sooner or later you were bound to find out, and when you do find out you might want to know why I hadn't told you before."

Miss Charmant frowned.

"I'm afraid I do not understand. About whom are you complaining?"

"Well, I'm sorry, Miss Charmant, but—but it's Cecil."

"Cecil?" Her eyes showed interest. "Yes." And while Miss Charmant gazed at him, her face turning a little pale, he blurted out the story—not all of it by a long way, but enough to give Miss Charmant a good idea of what had been going on. "I—I don't want to complain," he said, "but—but I thought perhaps if you talked to him he might be different. I—I can't afford to lose my job."

"I see!" Miss Charmant said faintly. "I—I see!" She stood for a long moment looking over his head. "Boker, please send Cecil to me—at once!"

"Yes, Miss Charmant!" Boker mumbled, and, feeling as if he had hit the mistress, stumbled out of the room, to come face to face with Mabs, who was on her way to the letter-rack, to see if any mail had arrived for her during detention.

"Why, Boker, I thought you'd gone to the post office!"

Boker gulped. "It—it's about Cecil—"

"Cecil?"

"Yes. You—see—" Boker said; and then somehow he found himself telling Mabs about it, too, and Mabs, understanding at last, looked sharply alert. "It had to come to it," he said. "I'm sorry, but I just can't afford to risk the sack just at this moment. You

—you think I did right?" he added hopefully.

"I should say you did!" Mabs said indignantly. "By golly, I'd like to have seen anybody put up with half as much as you've done! That little rascal! But, look here," she added urgently, "you get off to the post office before it closes. I'll go and fetch Cecil."

"Oh, miss—"

"Hurry!" Mabs urged.

And she herself darted away, giving Boker no alternative. The strains of the ukelele led her to Cecil's room, and, glaring in, she found that young hypocrite lying on the sofa playing the ukelele. He stopped, however, as she came in.

"Come on!" Mabs said grimly. "Miss Charmant-wants you!"

Immediately alarm registered itself in Cecil's shiny features.

"What for?"

"You'll know when you get there!" Mabs said. "But you're coming—at once!"

"You—you don't mean Boker's reported me?" Cecil panted.

"Just come along and find out!"

In some consternation, Cecil rose. Mabs grabbed his arm. Despite the fact—that he was still clasping the ukelele, she dragged him to the door.

"Look here—"

"Come on!" Mabs said.

Along the corridor she led him, down in the mistresses' quarters. With Cecil almost palpitating now, they reached Miss Charmant's study: Mabs bundled him in. Cecil gave a gasp of relief as he saw that it was unattended.

"She's not here!" he said.

"Then she can't be far away," Mabs said. "Anyway, you can jolly well stop here until I find her!"

She flew out, and went into Big Hall. Fortunately, she had not very far to look, for Miss Charmant was in the act of emerging from Miss Bullivant's study across the passage. She stared rather sharply at Mabs.

"Well, Mabel?"

"I just came to tell you that—that I've brought Cecil along, and he's in your room," Mabs said. "He's waiting."

"Thank you!" Miss Charmant said.

"You brought him along, you say, Mabel? I understood I gave Boker the order to do that."

Mabs flushed.

"Yes; but I offered to do it for Boker, because he's gone off on a rather urgent errand." She held the door of Miss Charmant's study open as she said the words, and then for a moment was arrested at the sight of Cecil, who was standing by the mistress's desk, swiftly taking his fingers from the vent in his ukelele. Mabs was struck by the look of alarm and guilt that immediately registered itself on his features. "Here we are," she said.

"Thank you, Mabel, you may go," Miss Charmant nodded, and went in. "Cecil, sit down, please!"

"Yes, Miss Charmant," the boy said demurely. He sighed. "Oh, Miss Charmant, you—you look so worried. I—I suppose there's nothing wrong?"

"I'm afraid there is, Cecil." She paused, thinking of the conversation she had just had with Miss Bullivant—of what Miss Bullivant had told her about Boker punching this younger lad on the jaw only yesterday—an item of information which had not come to Miss Charmant's ears until that moment. "Cecil, I have received a rather serious complaint about you from Boker."

Cecil looked incredulous.

"Complaint, Miss Charmant?"

"Yes." Oh, it was impossible to believe the lad was the rotter Boker professed him to be. "This is what Boker said."

She told him. Cecil sat still, sorrowfully shaking his head.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but—but Boker's got it all wrong, you know. I never even guessed he thought such things about me, and—and—well, Miss Charmant, I don't want to complain, because I like Charles, as you know. But I—I don't think he likes me. You see, he is a wee bit jealous because I'm in the girls' band, and he is a wee bit jealous because he knows you're trying to help me, and—and believe in me. And as for the shoes, Miss Charmant—well, honestly and truly, they weren't there. And, apart from that, you know," Cecil went on confidentially, "poor Charles is worried about his home affairs—money, and all that. It—it's bound to make him a bit bad-tempered, isn't it?"

Miss Charmant's face cleared a little. Well, of course, that was reasonable; but her heart glowed for the appreciation Cecil had of her colleague's difficulties. At the same time, she felt faintly annoyed with Boker, had rather more than a sense of having been let down by Boker, who had promised so faithfully to help Cecil in his new career.

She said:

"I see. Thank you, Cecil. I believe I understand—just a little. I'm sorry. I will have a talk with Boker when he comes back. You may tell him I want to see him."

"Yes, Miss Charmant."

And Cecil went out, to smile in cheerful triumph at Mabs, who was standing outside. Somehow Mabs did not like that smile.

The Final Blow!



BUT she understood the smile next morning when she saw Charles Boker again—good old Boker, who had spent every minute of his spare time during the previous evening erecting the stage set in the music-room.

The erection of that set, at least, did much to restore Boker's prestige in the eyes of the Fourth, because it was a magnificent piece of work. But Boker himself was rather down in the mouth.

For Miss Charmant, last night, had given him a good talking to that both wounded and hurt. And Miss Primrose had hauled him over the coals concerning the prefects' shoes, and had told him very plainly that if she had any more reports she would think of asking him to go home.

Mabs burned when he told her, of that, and because she felt bitter against Cecil she did not treat him too kindly during the dress rehearsal which followed in the afternoon. To be sure, there was just a wee bit of ill-feeling regarding that.

"I must say," Clara Trevlyn said, "that for the boy who's making a star turn of our band you treat him as if you'd like to horsewhip him. Play the game, Mabs!"

Mabs did not reply. If she had she was sure she would have said something which might have provoked a quarrel. Still, as far as the Form was concerned, Boker was once again in its good books, and as it happened there were no complaints from the domestic side of the school which employed Boker that day. But in the morning—

The morning was the morning of the concert, and just for a last run through. Mabs had her band in the music-room immediately after breakfast.

Cecil was among them, looking smart and triumphant, ukelele in hand. Then the bubble burst.

It was Bessie Bunter who burst it. As usual, Bessie had lingered rather longer than the rest at breakfast-table, but she came into the music-room her face fiery red with excitement.

"Oh crumbs! I sus-say, have you heard?" she gasped. "Boker! He's sacked!"

"Sacked?" cried Mabs.

"Sacked?" Bessie nodded. "Miss Primrose has sacked him!"

"Oh! But, I say, what for?" Cecil cried in consternation.

"For stealing!"

"Oh, rot!" Babs said at once.

"But it's not rot, you know!" Bessie said. "At least, I think it is, but it's been proved. Boker stole a pound note out of Miss Charmant's bag the day before yesterday, you know, and Miss

Mabs threw her a look. Though the show really mattered a great deal to Mabel Lynn, it was Boker who occupied her thoughts now. Boker, who had never stolen a penny piece from anyone in his life, Boker, who was to be sacked at the very moment he could least afford to be sacked!

She dashed off to the servants' quarters, but when she reached Boker's room it was to find Mr. Merryweather, the gardener, sternly on duty outside Boker's locked door. He barred her way.

"I'm sorry, Miss Lynn, but if it's Boker you want—"

"Merryweather, it is!" Mabs cried.

"Please let me see him—just for a moment!"

"Sorry!" Merryweather repeated.

"Strict orders, Miss Lynn. It's more'n I dare do, even for you."

Desperately Mabs stared at him. Just for a moment she had a hopeless sense of defeat, then her eyes flashed as another idea occurred to her. With a brief nod to the gardener, she walked back down the corridor.

day, you know, I was in Miss Charmant's study alone for a few seconds. Her handbag had fallen down, and I picked it up and put the things back in it, and Miss Charmant came in just as I was putting it on the desk. And then—then yesterday," Boker added miserably, "she found the pound note missing, and that young twister Cecil told her that he had seen me with a pound after coming out of her room."

Mabs' lips became thin.

"I might have guessed he had something to do with it!"

"And—and then Miss Charmant came along to see me, and—and when she was in the room she found the counter-foil of the one pound postal order I'd bought with the pound you lent me. Of course, she knew I had no money, and she thought that—that I'd spent her money on the postal order. Of course, I couldn't tell her then where I'd got the pound from, because that would have given you away—"

"Oh, Boker, you idiot!" Mabs cried.

"As if that mattered!"

"Then—then I was taken to Miss



THE prefects stared at their shoes in fury. "Ruined!" Sarah Harrigan cried. "Boker, you careless, lazy, good-for-nothing!" Boker gulped. He wasn't to blame, but he could not prove that. Cecil Hargrove sniggered. As far as he was concerned things had turned out very nicely indeed.

Charmant has traced it to him, and now Boker's got to go!"

"Oh, poor Charles!" cried Cecil. "But, I say, what a silly thing to do, you know!"

Mabs turned on him.

"Boker didn't do it!" she cried.

"But if it's been proved—" Cecil rejoined. "I mean to say! Of course, poor Charles didn't mean to steal it. Of course! But he is hard up, isn't he, and—and I suppose he saw it in the handbag, and just—just grabbed it without thinking!"

"It's rot—rot!" Mabs flamed. "There's a mistake somewhere. They can't sack him! They shan't sack him! In any case, I happen to know Boker had no reason to steal. Babs, look here, I'm going to see Boker!"

"But you can't, you know. He's locked in his room," Bessie said.

"All the same, I'm going to see him," Mabs said. "Babs, look after things here, will you?"

"But, Mabs, the concert?"

"Never mind. I'm going to see Boker!"

"The show starts in half an hour," Diana Royston-Clarke pointed out.

This time, however, she went out of the school, hurrying through the yard towards the kitchen garden, which was overlooked by the window of Boker's room.

Mrs. Carey, the housekeeper, was in the garden at the moment with one of the maids. With a cautious eye on them, Mabs crept up to Boker's window.

"Boker, quickly—let me in!" she called softly.

The white, desperately wretched face of the page-boy looked out at her in consternation and astonishment.

But he opened the window, and Mabs, with a breathless look round, climbed in. Boker gaped at her.

"Miss Lynn, you shouldn't do this! You know—"

"Boker, shush!" Mabs said fiercely.

"And don't speak too loud. Merryweather's on guard outside. Don't do anything but answer my questions. Boker, I want to know what happened—what really happened. I don't believe it, of course—not for a moment. But how did they trace that pound to you?"

"Well, miss, they—they didn't really trace it," Boker said. "But on Wednes-

day, you know, I was in Miss Charmant's study alone for a few seconds. Her handbag had fallen down, and I picked it up and put the things back in it, and Miss Charmant came in just as I was putting it on the desk. And then—then yesterday," Boker added miserably, "she found the pound note missing, and that young twister Cecil told her that he had seen me with a pound after coming out of her room."

Mabs' lips became thin. "I might have guessed he had something to do with it!"

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"Oh, Boker, you idiot!" Mabs cried. "As if that mattered!"

"Then—then I was taken to Miss

day the pound note had been stolen. My goodness, yes! And Miss Charmant's handbag had also been on the table. She had noted it when she had found Cecil doing something with his ukelele.

And odd, now she came to think of it, how Cecil had trailed that ukelele about with him ever since yesterday!

Oh, my hat! Had she got a clue? Had she?

"Boker, I'm coming back," she said rapidly, "after the concert. I've got an idea—never mind what. It may be a wash-out. But if the idea doesn't work, then I'm going to tell Primmy about the pound I lent you. Good-bye now."

She clambered out of the window. Face flushed with excitement, she dashed back. She had her scheme cut and dried.

"Oh, Mabs," Babs cried, as soon as she entered the music-room again, "we were wondering what had happened. Don't you know it's time to dress?"

"I know," Mabs said, "and I've got a new scheme. Where's Cecil?"

"Here, Miss Lynn!"

"This is important, Cecil," Mabs said, "so don't let me down. It's a stunt I've invented. I'm going to do a tambourine dance, and I want you on the stage playing the ukelele as a background. O.K.?"

"Oh, yes, Miss Lynn!" Cecil glowed. To have the stage practically to himself was a prospect calculated to bring the uttermost delight. "When do we do it?"

"Immediately after the first item," Mabs said. "Now, buck up and get dressed."

Clara grinned; Babs glowed. Well, that was nice of Mabs, they thought. Mabs obviously was trying to be a bit decent to Cecil for a change.

But now the music-room was filling up—mistresses in the front row, prefects in the second, and so on. Now all was eagerness and excitement in the business of dressing and making-up, and for the time being even Boker was forgotten as they got into black tights and darkened their faces, and put on fuzzy wigs. At last all was ready, and Cecil, as a native boy, certainly looked well. Behind the curtain, Mabs assembled them on the stage.

"Right-ho!" she said to Peggy Preston. "Lights up, please!"

The piano tinkled out. As the lights flashed out, Mabs gave the sign for the curtain, and the curtain slowly rose. From the audience came an immediate ripple of applause and laughter as they regarded the Hawaiian band.

Mabs gave the signal to begin. Excellently she handled the band, and the band put out its manful best.

It was a good show, and what the musicians lacked in polish was more than atoned for by their original appearance, and the originality of their setting. A burst of handclapping acknowledged the effort.

"Now, Cecil, are you ready?" Mabs asked, as they drew back into the wings. "Babs, will you go on and announce the next item?"

Babs went on. Cecil, his blackened face one big smile, had his ukelele slung by a ribbon on his shoulder. Mabs indicated it.

"Keep it loose, will you?" she asked. "I shall be grabbing that for a moment in my dance. Now come on."

They went on, Cecil taking his seat. He looked at Mabs, and Mabs nodded, and while the audience settled down to watch the ukelele twanged. At once Mabs began to dance. From the wings Babs & Co. watched.

Now the dance quickened up. Now

Mabs was leaping round in giddy circles. Now she turned and tripped across the stage; came speeding gracefully towards Cecil.

Then suddenly Mabs had plucked the ukelele out of his hand, and, swooping back to the centre of the stage, gave a laugh as she flung it up in the air, made as if to catch it, and then allowed it to fall. Cecil gave a cry.

"Mabs!" Babs gasped, from the wings.

"I say, she did that on purpose!" Janet Jordan glowered. "And—Oh, goodness, look at the uke!"

The ukelele had shattered.

"My ukelele!" Cecil cried, and pounced to retrieve it. But before he could reach it, Mabs swooped forward; she had caught the broken instrument up, holding it behind her. And then, to everybody's astonishment, she pushed Cecil away.

"Wait a minute!" Mabs shouted. "Miss Charmant, will you come up here?"

Miss Charmant, angry, was already stepping on to the stage. Cecil looked apprehensive.

"Make her give it to me!" he yelled.

"I will—in a minute," Mabs said.

"But before I give it back, I want Miss Charmant to examine it. Miss Charmant, look!" she cried, and she swept the broken instrument from behind her. She held it towards the mistress who, pausing, saw that there was a piece of paper inside it. "Miss Charmant, would you know your pound note if you saw it again?"

"Why, yes! It was an old one, and had a red ink mark in one corner. But I fail to understand—"

"Look at that!" Mabs cried.

She fished the slip of paper out. Cecil gave a moan. On to the stage now Babs & Co. had crowded, and while Miss Charmant examined that pound note they stared questioningly at their chum. Then Miss Charmant jumped.

"Mabel, this—is this my stolen one pound note!"

"And found," Mabs said, "in Cecil's ukelele—where he hid it the other day in your study. Can't you see? Don't you see? Cecil took that one pound note. We almost caught him as he came into your study, and he stuffed it into the hole of his ukelele. Then he allowed Boker to be blamed—as he always allowed Boker to be blamed."

"Cecil!" Miss Charmant exclaimed. Cecil was openly whimpering.

"I—I never meant to steal!"

"You—you took this note?" Miss Charmant said faintly.

"No—yes! I don't know! But I never meant to!" Cecil howled. "I just opened the bag, and I saw it—I mean, I didn't open the bag! I—I—" And then, realising where his panic-stricken bluster had got him, he broke down. "It—it was only a joke!" he wailed. "I only meant to buy you a present with it, Miss Charmant!"

Miss Charmant looked startled. But she also looked grim.

"I see! And you suspected that, Mabel? You staged this—this accident in order to prove it?"

"In order to prevent Boker from getting the sack, Miss Charmant. Which," she added scornfully, "this little wretch would have been pleased to see happen."

"And which," Miss Primrose said, arriving on the stage, "certainly will not happen now—at least, not to Boker," she added angrily. "Cecil, I think you had better go and pack your bag. Mabel, you may go and tell Mr. Merryweather that Boker is to come along at once. It is apparent now who has been at fault all along."

And eagerly Mabs flew, while Cecil, sobbing, was led away by an utterly disillusioned and contemptuous Miss Charmant. Five minutes later Mabs returned in triumph with Boker, who was given a seat of honour among the audience, who sat there in a dazed sort of trance while the show went on.

But after the show it was Boker who was the hero of the hour, and Mabs who was the heroine. At last Cecil had been shown up in his true colours, and Miss Charmant was the first to thank Boker for all he had done, and express her regret for not fully trusting and believing in him.

Boker's cup of happiness that day was full. And so was Mabs'. She was happy because Boker was once again firmly entrenched in the favour of the school, and because it was her Hawaiian band which was awarded the musical talent prize.

That night there were great celebrations in the Fourth Form at Cliff House, and for once a school servant was boisterously mixed up in them. Whatever prestige Boker might have lost during the reign of Cecil Hargrove he had regained a thousandfold through Mabs' championship of his cause.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.



Who Stole the TOMBOYS MEDAL?

On the eve of an important hockey match between Cliff House School and their keen but friendly rivals of Whitechester School, Clara Trevlyn makes an enemy of a newcomer to Whitechester. This girl, through sheer treachery, nearly robs Clara of a race—and Clara can't forget it. Then the Tomboy's prize for that race, a treasured medal, disappears. Who has taken it. Babs & Co. can't guess, but—Clara can. And because of the action she takes against the suspect a bitter feud breaks out between the rival schools. Don't miss this superb Hilda Richard's story, which appears next Saturday.

Don't miss a single word of this thrilling Girl Detective story.



Valerie Drew's HOLIDAY MYSTERY

FOR NEW READERS.

VALERIE DREW, the famous girl detective and her clever Alsatian dog.

FLASH, are on holiday at Sunnyslands Farm, which is run as an hotel by a hard-working, likeable young girl,

DOROTHY DEAN. Dorothy seems to have a secret enemy, who is trying to drive guests from the farm. Mysterious things happen and suspicion falls upon one of the guests.

JOHNNY JEVONS, a boisterous young fellow who is a confirmed practical joker. Valerie, though puzzled by him, likes him, nevertheless, and after one of the guests leaves because of damage done to her property she proves Johnny's innocence by exposing one of the maids. This girl leaves, and Valerie is sure she has an accomplice. She suspects a mysterious gipsy woman, and one night, when a barn catches fire during a dance, it is the gipsy woman whom Valerie sees stealing away from the barn.

(Now read on.)

Charred Evidence!

AS the yellow glare from the blazing roof of the dance barn temporarily died down, Valerie stared after the fleeing figure of the gipsy woman.

Though still feeling slightly numb with shock, Valerie realised there was nothing to be gained by attempting to follow the fugitive now. Sick at heart, she turned and ran on in quest of the hose.

The other dancers were already pouring out through the open doors of the doomed barn. In a tragic semicircle, weirdly lit by the flickering light from the roof, they gathered to watch this appalling end to the evening's festivities.

"Come on—all of you!" Johnny Jevons suddenly rallied them. "There's still a chance to save something. Volunteers—quickly! Get the furniture out before the roof falls in!"

Instantly the men followed him inside again. Tables, chairs, and everything else transportable came tumbling out through the doors, to be snatched instantly by other willing hands, and carried out of the danger zone.

Valerie, in the meanwhile, had found the hose. There was a strong metal joint in it, which she directed Flash to seize with his teeth. They were dragging it across the grass when Johnny joined them.

"Good!" he approved breathlessly.

"This'll help."

Valerie nodded.

"Yes. The danger's coming if the

wind turns and blows sparks towards the farmhouse," she answered, as Johnny gave a hand in hauling the hose towards the pump. "You'll want someone to help you, Johnny," she added, as they sought to screw the end of the hose tightly in position.

"Volunteers!" yelled Johnny, his tone stentorian. "Man the pump!"

The sheets of flame sweeping the roof had reached the ridge. The blaze was at its height, its roar filling the air, its light making the farmyard like day. The flames revealed one crumb of consolation. The dancers, working like madmen, had saved all the furniture, even the piano.

Several of the guests ran across to the pump at once. Valerie, grasping

A CHARRED ENVELOPE left near the fired barn gave Valerie Drew a DRAMATIC NEW CLUE

the nozzle, showed Flash once more where to grip the hose, and they dragged it on towards the doomed barn. The pump creaked as its handle sawed up and down faster than it had ever moved before, and spurts of water leapt from the nozzle.

Alas! it was little enough to cope with what had already become a mighty conflagration.

Where the sweeping yellow flames had passed a fierce red glow remained. The water seemed to blacken that glow only momentarily, before becoming a billowing cloud of steam.

"It's almost hopeless, Val," sighed a voice, as a pair of hands joined hers to hold the unsteady nozzle.

Valerie turned to see freckled Marjorie at her side. The girl who usually seemed to be smiling was nearly in tears. Her distress moved Valerie deeply.

"Maybe something will still happen," she answered, trying to hearten her. And even as she spoke she glanced up sharply at the sky.

She was sure she had felt a heavy spot of rain on her hand. And, so she had, for now heavy spots fell thickly on her upturned face.

"Marjorie, it's starting to rain!" Valerie cried joyously.

Help had come to them in the nick

of time. From heavy spots the rain rapidly increased to a torrent which sent even the hardiest of the amateur fire-fighters scampering for cover to the farmhouse.

Valerie, so exalted by the unexpected break in the weather that it was a positive joy to feel drenched to the skin, was one of the last to go. And there, in the doorway, her face twisted with grief, stood Dorothy Dean.

"My lovely barn!" she whispered brokenly.

Valerie stopped, facing her, utterly at a loss for the moment to know what to say.

The danger of the fire spreading to other buildings had, while it lasted, given her no time to think of anything else. And the timely torrent which was now drenching the fire to extinction before their eyes had seemed a wonderful stroke of luck.

"Poor old Dorothy!" Valerie murmured, her hand moving compassionately to Dorothy's shoulder. "It's cruel bad luck! But thank goodness it's nearly out now!"

Some of the others murmured agreement, although they were naturally all inclined to be on edge after the alarming incident.

"Well, how about bed?" asked Valerie presently. "The rain's coming down harder than ever, so we can safely leave it to see to what's left of the fire. Let's all get some sleep. We need it."

"Good idea, Val. I'm wet to the skin," agreed Marjorie, with a shiver. "See you all at brekker."

Her departure was a general signal for the others to follow suit, and Valerie eventually found herself alone with Dorothy.

The girl hostess looked at her with a half-ashamed smile.

"I—I'm sorry I seemed so peeved just now, Val, when you've all done so much to save the loss from being any more," she said apologetically. "But I—"

"Oh, that's all right, dear!" Valerie assured her, as they walked upstairs

By

ISABEL NORTON

together. She gave Dorothy an affectionate smile. "Go to bed and don't worry about anything more until the morning."

In her own room, Valerie quickly removed her sodden dance frock, towelled vigorously in the darkness, and then, pulling on her pyjamas, dived into bed.

She had made comparatively light of the fire even to Dorothy, for a reason. At all costs, Valerie did not want anybody else to guess what she suspected until she had discovered more.

If the other guests believed the roof had been deliberately set on fire by a mysterious enemy, there might be a panic which would nearly empty Sunnylands Farm.

What was she to think about it all?

For two or three sleepless hours Valerie tossed in her bed, haunted by the unforgettable memory of the gipsy woman running away into the darkness just after the fire had started.

Mocking Valerie from the background of all her thoughts was the conviction that, though she had unmasked Emily, the treacherous maid, she had still failed to reveal the master-mind which had been directing her. And even Emily had escaped, in the end, without making any kind of confession.

Was the gipsy woman the master-mind—the shadowy person determined to bring about the ruin of Sunnylands Farm?

Valerie dropped off at last into a fitful sleep; but she was awake again soon after dawn. Dressing at once, she ran down the stairs, softly opened the door, and stepped out into the farmyard.

The rain had stopped in the night, and, though puddles lay everywhere, the sun was just beginning to shine across a watery sky. The dance-hall barn raised its blackened roof pitifully in the growing light.

Tight-lipped, Valerie stepped past the piled tables and chairs which had been moved beyond reach of the hungry flames. Sadly she stood inside the building, contemplating the ruin which had overtaken it so swiftly.

There were holes in the roof where

the thatch had been burned clean through, and blackened rafters, which would have collapsed if the providential storm had been only a few minutes later in breaking. The floral decorations on the walls hung scorched and wilted; the polished floor looked spoilt for ever, with pools of black water all over it.

Outside again, Valerie stood gazing keenly from side to side. Just here, she judged, was the spot where the fire had started. She was despondently reflecting that there was very little likelihood of finding any clue to its origin when, with a sudden, keen narrowing of her eyes, she stared at something lying a short distance away.

It was the charred remains of an envelope, which had drifted to rest against the wheel of a farm barrow, and, in consequence, had escaped the torrential rain.

For a moment Valerie stood quite still reflecting deeply. Had this charred envelope been used to set fire to the thatched roof?

Crossing to the barrow, Valerie lifted it carefully to one side and stooped to examine the envelope.

Though completely burnt, its shape was intact. A charred stamp still adhered precariously to one corner. The writing which had originally been on the envelope was still visible as a faint sheen on the dull black of the burnt paper.

Stooping closer until she was within a few inches of it, Valerie clearly read what was on it.

"To be called for," it was marked in the top left-hand corner; and in the centre appeared the significant address:

"Mrs. Paizi Logan,
c.o. Post Office,
Little Sunworthy."

Turning her head, Valerie looked across to the slumbering farmhouse, beneath whose friendly thatched roof were her fellow guests, blissfully unaware of any such sensational evidence lying in the farmyard. For several moments she stood quite still, thinking intensely. Then, moving her foot, she deliberately crushed the charred paper to black powder on the grass, called Flash to her side, and hurried away.

Valerie Makes Progress!

"VALERIE, by all that's wonderful!"

"Dick Godfrey!" exclaimed the girl detective, with a surprised and happy smile, as she came face to face with the good-looking young man in the lane. "What on earth has happened to bring a star reporter to Little Sunworthy?"

Valerie and Dick were old friends, who had even collaborated in certain of Valerie's cases. Each looked equally astonished to find the other strolling on the outskirts of this pretty, unimportant village.

For Valerie the unexpected encounter proved a very welcome break to the course of her perplexed thoughts after more than an hour of wrestling with her problem. And Dick seemed equally glad to see her, too.

"What, may I ask," he retorted, with a twinkle in his eyes, "is the major crime which brings such a renowned sleuth here?"

"Holiday," said Valerie, with her sweetest smile. "And you, Dick? Come clean! If it's a dead, dark secret—"

"I'll tell you, Val," promised Dick, with a laugh. "You wouldn't have to trail me long to find out what I'm up to. I'm a guide."

"A what?" ejaculated Valerie in amazement.

"A guide—to fifty brilliant readers of our paper who came top in a competition and won a fortnight's holiday seeing Britain," Dick explained. "This afternoon they've all got to go somewhere else, and I haven't got a single idea left in my nut. That's why I'm out for an early morning think."

Valerie's violet eyes were shining as she listened, for she had thought already.

Last night Sunnylands Farm had suffered a sad financial blow. To repair the dance-barn roof and put the damage right would need money Dorothy Dean could ill afford to spend at the moment. But the repairs must be tackled soon if the farm was to go on as before. Was this a solution to the difficulty?

"Dick, ever heard of Norman Priory?" she asked quickly.

"I think so," Dick answered, scratching his head perplexedly. "It's stuck away on some decrepit farm around here—"

"I'm living right on top of it, my boy," Valerie informed him. "It's Britain's Ruin No. 1. And would you call a farm where they serve peaches picked warm from the sun, lashings of cream, gorgeous home-made cakes, eggs galore, crumpets swimming in butter, strawberry jam, and their own honey decrepit?"

"I'd say it just didn't exist," said Dick frankly.

Valerie grasped his hand excitedly. "Brave guide, you're about to lead your flock to paradise!" she told him. "The address is Sunnylands Farm. Listen to me!"

Ten minutes later Valerie was joyfully retracing her steps to the farm, knowing that Dick Godfrey and his fifty tourists would be along to inspect the ruins and enjoy a real farmhouse tea that very afternoon.

Sounds of merry laughter greeted her ears as she reached the farmyard.

Johnny Jevons, with his genius for getting a laugh out of almost anything, had turned the serious subject of last night's fire into his morning jest.

To improve the shining hour before breakfast he had decided to form his own corps of fire-fighters to deal with

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No. 696.

any future outbreaks. To make the joke as big as possible he had evidently appointed Dorothy's Uncle Nathan as its head.

"Come on, nunky, play the game!" Johnny was urging the clumsy, inefficient relative who was supposed to be helping Dorothy during her mother's illness.

Spectacled Uncle Nathan, clasp- ing a large axe in one hand and the nozzle of an ancient hose in the other, fidgeted under the upturned brass coal vase which Johnny had planted on his head in place of a real helmet.

"My boy, it's this fearfully uncom- fortable," he lamented uneasily. "And really I'm not very experienced—"

Laughingly Valerie passed on into the house. She couldn't feel sorry for Uncle Nathan. He was so frightfully inefficient, such a muddling old dunder- head, that he was really only useful when he was being employed by Johnny to keep the guests amused.

Dorothy's eyes lit with amazement and delight as Valerie told her of her arrangement with Dick Godfrey.

"Why, Val, how marvellous!" she cried, giving Valerie an excited hug. "The peaches are just perfect at present, and, of course, they'll cost nothing for picking. I know all the maids will be delighted to help."

"Well, I'll give a hand, and I know Johnny and quite a lot of others will, too," Valerie vowed, her hands resting lightly on Dorothy's shoulders, her violet eyes bright with enthusiasm. "I've looked at the barn, and even that's not too bad. A thatcher can soon put the roof to rights again, while a bit of paint inside will make a world of difference."

Dorothy swallowed hard, her eyes misty with emotion.

"Thanks, Val!" she said, a catch in her voice. "To have friends like you and Johnny makes such a difference. I feel so keen again to-day. Why, I was such a misery last night—"

"Nothing of the kind!" declared Valerie, laughing. "I'd better see how Johnny's getting on, and warn him off for a spot of work."

But not even to Johnny did Valerie intend, as yet, to mention her dramatic discovery of the burnt envelope near the dance barn.

Johnny, as she fully expected, was immediately enthusiastic.

As soon as breakfast was over Valerie left the farmhouse unobtrusively and, with Flash, walked quickly over to Little Sunworthy. The post office, forming part of the little general shop, which had been shut earlier on, was now open, and Valerie found the girl behind the counter friendly and quite ready to talk.

"Why, certainly Mrs. Paizi Logan's called here several times for letters," she admitted without hesitation. "Funny name, isn't it? But that's probably because she's a gipsy."

Valerie momentarily caught her breath.

"Does she live alone in a small, brightly painted caravan?" she asked.

"That's her," the girl agreed, with a smile. "I expect you've seen her around. She's been in the district, on and off, for some time now. Are you a friend of hers? If so, you might tell her that another letter came for her this morning."

"I'm not exactly a friend, though we've met," Valerie answered. "I'm rather anxious to see Mrs. Logan again, but I want it to be a surprise. Would you do me a favour?"

"Certainly! What is it?" asked the willing girl.



THERE was only one way to get rid of the destructive bull. Thrusting some red bunting into Flash's jaws, Valerie pointed to the open gate. "Take it, Flash! Run, as hard as you can!" she ordered. At once Flash tore towards the gate.

Valerie wrote swiftly on a piece of paper.

"When she comes for her letter," she said, "telephone this number and just say that Miss Valentine's parcel has arrived. I shall understand and come along here as soon as I can. Will you keep her talking until I get here?"

"I'll try to," the girl promised.

Thanking her, Valerie left the post office.

The case seemed almost proved. The mysterious gipsy woman was Mrs. Paizi Logan, and it was an envelope addressed to her which had almost certainly been used to set the thatch roof of the dance barn alight last night!

Deep in thought, Valerie pressed on, trying all likely spots where she might hope to come upon the woman un- aware. Giving Flash the scrap of scarf she had found after Emily's escape, she urged him to try to locate the woman's scent, but Flash seemed equally baffled.

After a morning of seemingly fruit- less inquiry, Valerie returned to Sun- nylands Farm to find a scene of unex- pected but highly pleasing activity.

Tables had already been erected in the little orchard which separated them from Farmer Jackson's fields, and extra crockery, hired from a store in the nearest town, had already arrived.

Johnny Jevons, who had decided to play the part of head waiter when the fifty guests arrived, had dressed for the part in a dress-suit he had bor- rowed from someone considerably larger than himself. Seeing Valerie approach, he grinned.

"Morning, ma'am!" he greeted her. "What for, you?"

"Sense, just for a moment, if you keep it here!" Valerie responded, with a laugh. Looking more serious, she added in a lower tone: "I once came across you having a chat with a gip- sy woman, Johnny. You've never told me how much you knew about her."

Johnny grinned reminiscently.

"Sure! We weren't so pally then, were we?" he reflected. "She got into conversation first, and seemed mighty interested about what was going on at the farm, so I pitched her no end of a

cock-and-bull story about armed men patrolling the passages at night." His cheerful grin relaxed into a more serious expression. "Got a hunch about her, Val? Think she's after bigger fish, hanging round here so often?"

Valerie shrugged her shoulders. She still felt she knew too little to take Johnny fully into her confidence.

"Couldn't say, old son," she answered. "But keep an eye on her."

"I will, Miss Dark Horse! And there's something else I'm keeping an eye on," Johnny answered, glancing towards the gate in the hedge of Farmer Jackson's field. "See a big black face and a pair of horns that would go through a slab of concrete? That's Mr. Sin, the farmer's pet bull, watching us. I may be the waiter, but I shouldn't be waiting long if he got loose around here."

The dinner-gong went a few minutes later. At the cheery meal which fol- lowed Valerie was delighted to note that scarcely any mention at all of last night's alarming fire came from any of the guests. Bathing parties had been down to the cove under Battleby Cliffs, which was all the rage at the moment. Golfers had enjoyed their morning on the links, and were full of the glory of their achievements, or else plausible explanations.

As soon as the meal was over Valerie insisted on lending a hand in the kitchen to prepare the food for the big party expected for tea. And less than an hour later two large coaches drove into the farmyard, and the tourists descended. Dick Godfrey urgently beckoned Valerie to one side.

"I don't know the first thing about your precious Norman Priory, so please stand around and prompt me if I'm not too eloquent!" he entreated, in an anxious whisper.

Valerie smilingly agreed to act as co- guide, for she naturally wanted the tourists to have a really enjoyable outing.

Moving discreetly ahead of the main party in the ruins, she kept an eye open for traps like the one she had discovered to her cost so recently, but all was well. The ruins were quite safe this time for anybody to wander where they chose.

It was a delightfully fresh day after the storm in the night, and the visitors listened to all Valerie had to tell them, then went off in parties on their own to explore further. After exchanging a few final words with Dick, Valerie turned to make her way back to the farmhouse to see that all was ready for tea.

Scarcely had she started off than she stopped, alarmed by what she heard.

Something close at hand had fallen with a crash. Immediately after it came the jingle and clatter of falling crockery.

Racing out of the ruins, Valerie pulled up again, appalled at the sight which met her gaze.

Farmer Jackson's fierce black bull was loose in the orchard where the tourists were to have their tea, and Johnny, the head waiter, was up a tree!

The fierce brute, turning its massive head slowly from side to side, stood pawing the ground. One table was already over, its hired crockery thrown in all directions. The bull, pleased with the mischief it had caused, was obviously on the point of charging the other tables.

Valerie clenched her hands.

Unless the bull could be quickly decoyed back to the safety of its own field, Dorothy Dean's loss would be infinitely greater than if Valerie had never tried to help her!

Resourceful Flash!

"FLASH—come back!" Valerie ordered sharply, as her pet began to trot, bristling with indignant inquiry, towards the huge black stranger which had invaded the orchard.

"Look out, Val!" Johnny called anxiously. "They've gone to fetch the cowmen to rope him up. Better not come any nearer. He'll be after you if he sees you!"

Valerie stood still, biting her lip.

It was a dilemma which called for an instant decision if the situation was to be saved, and Johnny's words had given her a startling idea.

With luck there might be just time to divert the bull's attention before he became too thoroughly occupied with the destruction of the tables.

Turning immediately, she darted into a near-by outbuilding, where she knew Dorothy kept flags and other articles of decoration. Picking up a large piece of red bunting, she ran back to Flash.

From the orchard came a crunching of china as the bull, moving restlessly about, ground some of the fallen crockery to pieces under his massive hoofs.

Giving Flash the brilliant piece of bunting to hold between his teeth, Valerie pointed to the gate at the far side of the orchard.

"Take it, Flash! Run!" she cried. "Run as hard as you can!"

Flash obeyed without a second's hesitation. The bull, head lowered, had just overturned another table when the flying streak of red passed almost underneath his nose.

Startled, he turned his head to see what was happening. Flash, near the gate, had stopped obediently, the bunting fluttering lightly in the wind.

Turning with a quiver of rage, the bull charged Flash instead, and the Alsatian sprinted through the gate.

Almost before Valerie could realise the comparative ease with which the angry creature had been decoyed, it was back in its own pasture.

But he was also, to Valerie's horror,

gaining on her pet. With a chill of dread she saw that in a few moments Flash might be overtaken.

"Drop it, Flash!" she cried, at the top of her voice.

Flash obeyed at once. The trailing red flag fluttered to the grass right in the charging animal's path. Lowering his head, the bull caught it with his wicked-looking horns and tossed it high in the air.

"Here, boy, come back!" Valerie called, her voice breaking with suspense. "Oh, quickly—to me!"

The bull turned, realising how he had been fooled, and as Flash raced back towards the open gateway pounded along in fresh pursuit.

But Valerie had reached the gate. With Johnny at her side a moment later, she thrust desperately to push it shut. Flash came over the top with a mighty leap just as they fastened two huge bolts in position. The bull thudded against the timbers a moment later, but nothing broke.

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"Come here, you old marvel!" exclaimed Johnny, giving Flash a hug of delight. "As for you, Val—"

She looked into his shining, boyish face, and smiled breathlessly.

"Touch and go—thanks to some silly idiot forgetting to fasten the gate!" Valerie commented. "But, Johnny, you'd better nip back and help get the table to rights before the visitors come along. There'll be broken china—"

"Not a lot, luckily. You got him away in the nick of time!" Johnny declared admiringly. "By a stroke of good fortune the food's still inside. Golly, though, I'd like to meet the prize chump who forgot to fasten the gate!"

Valerie watched him turn and hasten back towards the orchard; then, with a sudden change of expression, she stooped to pick up something from the ground close to the gate.

It was a mere scrap of what had once been white rag, now soiled all over with dabs of many different colours. Johnny had failed to observe it in the excitement of seeing the bull safe again.

It was just the sort of rag a painter

would keep for wiping brushes when changing from one colour to another.

The mysterious gipsy woman, now known to Valerie as Paizi Logan, painted pictures in her spare time!

With her lips compressed, her eyes narrowed, Valerie looked in vain for any other clue to the perpetrator of this latest outrage. For she was convinced of one thing—it was no accident. Whoever had left the gate open for the bull to make its escape had done so deliberately in an endeavour to cripple Dorothy Dean's fortunes still further.

Did this scrap of rag prove it was Paizi Logan?

Slipping it into her handbag, Valerie skirted the orchard on her way back to the farmhouse. The fallen table had been quickly righted by willing hands. By a seeming miracle, very little crockery had been actually broken.

Entering the farmhouse, Valerie found a quiet seat in an alcove, and sat down to think out her problem alone.

From the orchard she heard peals of merry laughter, and guessed that Dick Goffrey's party had come along for tea, and were already being treated to the cheerful antics of irrepressible "Waiter" Johnny. That was all to the good. But Valerie herself, weighed down by such serious thoughts, had no heart to join in the fun, or even watch it.

How, she asked herself, was she to fight this elusive enemy? The foe had the advantage every time.

Hearing the telephone ring at that moment, Valerie sprang to her feet and answered it. With a thrill she immediately recognised the voice at the other end.

"Miss Valentine?" asked the post office girl, with a touch of excitement. "Your parcel's here now!"

"I'll be along immediately," promised Valerie, quickly replacing the receiver.

It was the code she had arranged. It meant that the mysterious gipsy woman was in Little Sunworthy post office.

Calling Flash, Valerie left the farmhouse immediately. Trotting across the fields, she took to a path through the woods, and made her way at top speed to the village.

She reached the end of the winding street in record time, and, turning the bend, thrilled momentarily to see a brightly painted van standing outside the general shop. Almost as soon as she saw it, however, there was a clatter of hoofs, a sudden rumble of wheels, and the van began to move away.

"Mrs. Logan, I want you!" Valerie called, starting to run in pursuit.

For answer a whip cracked sharply in the air; the little van commenced to rattle at top speed along the village street.

"After it, Flash!" gasped Valerie. "The horse, Flash—get his bridle—"

She broke off in dismay, for this time Flash had started off before realising all she meant him to do. The last words of her order were drowned by the clatter of the racing wheels.

At the back of the van a door swung open, testifying to the speed at which the gipsy woman had made up her mind to bolt. Flash, seeing it, and at a loss to know exactly what Valerie required of him, took one prodigious leap. He vanished clean inside the van, just as it turned the farther bend of the village street and was lost to view.

FLASH has certainly taken things on his own shoulders now. There are many exciting and unexpected happenings in next week's instalment of this enthralling detective story.

COMPLETE this week. Another delightful story featuring—

KIT of RED RANCH



By
Elizabeth Chester

Who Was the Culprit?

"HERE she comes, boys! Here's Redwing with the stuff from the stores!"

Kit Hartley cupped her hands to form a megaphone as she shouted to the cowpunchers in the compound of her father's ranch. They had just ridden in from the plain, and were unsaddling their horses; but at Kit's call they left the horses and ran forward to where she stood at the gate that gave on to the lane.

Kit pointed down the dusty road. A one-horse shay could be seen, with a small Redskin girl on the driving-seat, and a cheer went up from the cowpunchers.

"Good for her!" said Bill, the foreman. "I could do with my 'baccy!"

"Yeah. But for Redwing you'd all have had to wait, with everyone here too busy to ride into town," nodded Kit. "I reckon she deserves a cheer!"

"And she shall have it, too!" nodded Bill. "I don't often cheer Redskins, but this'll be one time."

"Then—hip, hip!" called Kit.

Redwing, reining up Daisy, the mare, smiled shyly as the cheers rang out, and then waved to Kit, who ran forward to greet her.

Kit gave Redwing her hand, and the little Redskin jumped down, then stood aside as Bill took the wooden crate from the shay.

"Nothing exciting on the way, Redwing?" asked Kit. "No bandits? They say Owl Face is lurking around."

"No bandits," said Redwing. "Saw no one all way."

Bill dumped the case down, and Jem, who had fetched a small crowbar, got busy on the lid. His powerful hands made light work of the job, and, with a creak of nails, up came the three fastening slats.

Then the whole group dived at the contents until Bill told them to stand back.

"Now, then," said Bill, "all in turn! Here we—"

He broke off, and something in his manner so startled Kit that she stepped forward to his side. Bill was staring at the box as though it contained a snake instead of 'baccy.

Then Kit's manner also changed. Bill had hauled back the packing at the top, and the contents were revealed. Rubbish! Stones, earth, and scraps of wood!

Kit pulled it out, thinking that the tobacco might be hidden underneath, while the cowpunchers murmured in dismay and wonder. It took but a minute to clear out the rubbish, and when it was cleared, only the empty box remained.

When her Redskin chum was accused of stealing the cowboys' supplies, Kit proved her innocent by spilling some pepper on the floor!

"Hey!" said Bill, his brow darkening. "What's the idea?"

Kit shot a look at Redwing, who had not noticed that anything was amiss.

"Redwing, you've brought the wrong box!" she said.

Redwing stepped forward, and the cowpunchers regarded her fixedly.

"Wrong box?" asked Redwing, in surprise. "Not so. Mr. Tubby, he gave me box."

Tubby Jones was the storekeeper, and he was not the careless kind that makes mistakes. Then Kit saw that Bill was staring at Redwing with suspicion in his eyes.

"Say, get this, Redskin!" he snapped. "Where's all that baccy? And who put this rubbish in—hey?"

He gripped Redwing's arm, and Kit saw her friend's eyes widen in fright. Her copper-tinted, pretty face was paler.

"That's enough, Bill!" said Kit sharply. "Let go her arm!" She

turned to her frightened friend. "What happened, dear?"

Redwing shook her head, and her eyes were blank with surprise that was unmistakably genuine.

"Nothing happen," she said softly. "Redwing go store. Tubby give box. Drive back."

But the cowpunchers murmured angrily.

"That Redskin emptied it on the way!"

For reply, Kit climbed into the shay. "Come on, Redwing!" she said.

"Let's get back to the store, and get this settled!"

Redwing scrambled up beside her, looking worried and more frightened than ever, for the cowpunchers were in angry mood, and not concealing the fact that they blamed her. But with Kit she felt safe, and snuggled up close.

"O.K.! Take it easy," said Kit, patting her knee. "They're just barking about nothing."

Bill scrambled into the trap, taking the box with him.

"I'll come along, too!" he said grimly. "We've paid for this stuff in cash, and I'll see we get it all right!"

Kit drove the shay, and did not speak all the way to the village. To her it seemed obvious that the fault was the storekeeper's. On arrival at the store, she swung down from the seat, and, going to the door, hammered on it.

The rumour that Owl Face, a gunman, was at large had decided Tubby to keep his doors closed. And now, hearing the knocking, he peered out cautiously. Recognising Kit, however, he made no further delay.

"Anything wrong?" he asked, in surprise.

"Yes, Tubby. The 'baccy," said Kit. "Did you open the box before you gave it to Redwing here?"

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

BETWEEN OURSELVES



MY DEAR READERS,—A week or two ago, you will recall, I told you something about this year's issues of our wonderful Annuals—those really superb books which are reproduced on page 7. At the time I tried to give you some idea of what their contents were like. Naturally, I couldn't conjure up a really complete picture, or anything like it, of the magnificent feast of reading each of those volumes contains. I'm afraid space wouldn't run to it even if I were skilled enough in the use of descriptive words.

But this week I want to tell you more about one Annual in particular—
"The School Friend Annual"—

YOUR ANNUAL.

So, without more delay, let me give you thorough particulars of some of its enthralling features. Here they are:—

"BACKED UP BY BABS!" No one to understand her; no one to sympathise. That was Gladys Norman's unhappy position until Barbara Redfern went to her aid.

"DOLORES' GOOD TURN!"—featuring the youngest girl in the school, winsome Dolores Essendon of the Second Form.

"HER CAPTAIN AND FRIEND!" A most dramatic story, this, telling of the struggle that takes place between popular Dulcia Fairbrother, head girl of Cliff House, and spiteful, jealous Rona Fox, the prefect, when Dulcia tries to help one of the girls belonging to the Lower Fifth.

"WHEN BESSIE'S CAKE WAS CUT!"—another story of the fat girl of the Fourth, of course! Screamingly funny from beginning to end.

"JEMIMA PLAYS A LONE HAND!" A real thrill for all who like the most puzzling girl at Cliff House—and that means every single one of you!

All these stories have been specially written by Hilda Richards, of course. The following are by other favourite authors of yours.

"MY LADY'S FROCK!" by Ida Melbourne, featuring Lady Fayre and Robin Hood.

"JUST LIKE THE IMP!" also by Ida Melbourne, and reintroducing another very popular SCHOOLGIRL character.

"ON MYSTERY BEACH!" A really thrilling adventure story by Pauline Stewart.

And also—

But I'm afraid there just isn't time to tell you any more, except that this superb book costs 3s. 6d. at all news-agents.

And now I must very briefly deal with next week's programme.

"WHO STOLE THE TOMBOY'S MEDAL?"

is the title of the Cliff House story, which, as you will guess, "stars" popular Clara Trevlyn, of the Fourth. And a most unusual and enthralling story it is.

It deals with athletics and hockey, between Cliff House and Whitechester College, their deadly yet friendly rivals. Owing to treachery, which almost makes her lose a race—and subsequently leads to the disappearance of the medal she has won in that event—Clara becomes an enemy of a new girl at Whitechester.

Unfortunately, it seems that Clara is in the wrong, and on the eve of a most important hockey match between the two schools, the Whitechester team tell Babs & Co. that if Clara plays, then they won't!

What can Clara's chums do? What can Clara do? She's been made the victim of another girl's unscrupulousness, but she cannot prove it.

I'll leave you to discover what Clara does for yourselves. Needless to say, it's characteristic of the hot-headed Tomboy!

Our next number will also contain more exciting developments in Isabel Norton's gripping Girl Detective story, another delightful COMPLETE Kit and Redwing story, and more of Patricia's Useful and Interesting Pages, so do order your copy well in advance, won't you?

With best wishes,

Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.

"Look at that! Just the kind of stuff we found in the box! Reckon you're trapped, you crook! You took out the 'baccy and put in the earth here!"

Redwing, having examined the earth, looked up with gleaming eyes.

"Bad man!" she said. "You get me blamed for it!"

Kit said nothing, but watched Tubby's face. And his expression puzzled her. Unless he was a mighty fine actor, he was stupefied with surprise.

"Why, that's queer!" he muttered. "Mighty queer!"

Angrily Bill took him by the shoulder.

"You're trapped, you crook! Hand over that baccy!"

Tubby went white with fright.

"I ain't got it, Bill—truth and honour!"

"Hand over that baccy, or—"

Releasing the storekeeper, Bill whipped out his gun. But quick as a flash Kit jumped forward and pressed it down with both hands.

"Quit that, Bill!" she snapped. "Can't you see Tubby's telling the truth?"

Bill gave the startled storekeeper an ominous look.

"This can be left to the boys to settle," he said.

He stamped from the shop, climbed into the shay and drove off.

"My gosh, he's gone and left us!" cried Kit, amazed.

Redwing looked at Tubby, her eyes gleaming; for she had quaked with fear when she had been accused of tampering with the goods, and that fear still lingered.

"Bad man! Now the cowpunchers will come," she said.

"My gosh they will! They'll come and beat up your store, Tubby," said Kit, in deep dismay. "For goodness' sake let's have the truth! Did you change the stuff or not?"

Tubby faced her. The mention of cowboys had left his face ghastly pale; for he knew what this meant. The cowboys would come and play havoc with the store.

"Miss Kit," he said huskily, "I'm telling the truth. Don't let them shoot up my store! I'll pay for the baccy myself, though it means near on a week's profit gone. Better than that have the place shot up. Miss Kit, you've always been a right nice gal. Don't let them shoot up my store. Do something, Miss Kit, for mercy's sake!"

"You're Not Arresting Redwing!"

KIT HARTLEY had never refused an appeal of that kind in her life. The last thing she wanted was to have injustice done. And as she looked at the storekeeper's white, strained face she felt deeply sorry for him.

Was he guilty? If he wasn't, then who was? Redwing?

Kit looked from Redwing to Tubby, and made up her mind. There was only one way out.

"O.K.! Listen!" she said crisply. "Fetch the sheriff—one of you!"

It was a remark shot out as a test. The guilty one would certainly not want the sheriff brought into it to investigate matters. Whoever, if either was guilty, would hesitate.

But neither of them hesitated. Both jumped for the door, though Tubby hesitated there.

"But you won't leave the store, Miss Kit?" he asked anxiously.

"I did, and it was all k'rect!" said the storeman in a challenging tone.

"Well, it's not correct now," said Kit. "Anything but! It was chock-full of rubbish and nothing else!"

Tubby left his shop, and, with Bill glowering at him, looked at the box. When he saw the contents, which Bill had packed into it again, he gave a violent start.

"Say, what's the idea?" he asked, amazed. "Someone's filched all the stuff out and put this junk in!"

"Not me," said Redwing. "Not stop all the way home, Mr. Tubby."

Kit looked from one to the other. Redwing was as honest as the day, and Kit did not suspect her for one moment. But, on the other hand, she was impressed by Tubby's manner.

Bill, without a word, walked into the store.

"Where goin', Bill?" asked Kit.

"I'm going to see if there's any stray 'baccy lying around!" answered Bill grimly.

Kit followed him in, and looked about her at the untidy little general store, where everything was sold from buckets to clothes, 'baccy, and sweets. But the kind of 'baccy and cigarettes the boys liked had to be specially ordered in, and there was none of it in stock.

Scrutinising the shop, Kit gave a sudden start as she looked at the floor. She had noticed something quite strange, and now she crossed to make a closer inspection.

On the floor lay a few stones, a trace of earth and grass.

"Hallo! What's this?" she exclaimed.

Bill, wheeling, stared down. Then he roared for Tubby, and pointed to the stones and earth.

"You bet I won't!" said Kit. "But one of you is enough. Redwing, you stay here and keep me company."

Redwing turned back, smiling, and looked shyly at Kit.

"Not think Redskin girl to blame?" she asked.

"Why, of course not!" smiled Kit. "But then I don't think Tubby is to blame. But it's certainly a mystery."

Kit crossed to the doors to close them, but before she could do so Abe Parson halted outside.

"Hallo! Tubby here?" he asked. "I wanner bucket."

"Tubby's out, but I'm in charge," Kit said. "A bucket? Certainly! We can do a nice line in buckets. How's this one?"

She unhooked a bucket, and showed it to Abe, who nodded. Then, as change was needed, Kit opened the till.

"Gee, plenty of cash here!" she exclaimed.

She gave Abe his change, and he stumped out of the shop. There were one or two other customers, and then, all at once, came the unmistakable thunder of horses' hoofs, and the vicious report of revolvers.

Redwing rushed to the door to escape, but Kit grabbed her.

"Behind the counter!" she said sharply. "If you go out you may get hit."

Kit fastened the door, and they scrambled behind the counter, only a second before a dozen horsemen arrived outside.

There was a terrific crashing as two cowboys hurled their weight at the doors. At their third mighty charge the door flew open, and they tumbled in, to be followed by a shouting, angry crowd, who instantly started firing at tins, boxes, and sacks.

But as soon as she could, Kit hurled a biscuit-tin on to the floor.

"Hold it, you maniacs!" she shouted.

The cowpunchers stared in astonishment as Kit scrambled over the counter, glaring.

"Gee, Miss Kit!" gasped Bill. "I didn't aim to find you locked in here. Where's Tubby?"

"Gone to fetch the sheriff, and about time, too! I reckon he'll want to be paid for the damage to the door, and mebbe the sheriff will have something to say about it, you mutts!"

Bill looked at his men, frowning.

"Gone for the sheriff! What's he want to bring the sheriff into this for? We can settle it."

"You can't!" said Kit. "Scram before the sheriff gets here and collects a few names. Get going, you idiots!"

Bill frowned darkly, and then saw the wisdom of Kit's words.

"O.K.!" he said slowly. "But we haven't settled the account with Tubby. If the sheriff's coming, we'll leave it to you, Miss Kit. It's money back or the baccy, or else—"

He gave a meaning nod, and then stalked out of the store. After him went the rest, only Jem pausing to take a pot-shot at a shirt on the line.

Kit closed the broken doors, and then returned to the counter. It was an odd creaking sound from the back room that made her look up.

Then she stood stockstill, staring at the muzzle of a loaded revolver. Behind that revolver was a man in a red shirt. The lower part of his face was hidden by a large handkerchief, but it was no disguise at all. Above the hanky gleamed a pair of large glasses that gave him an owl-like appearance.

"Gee!" gasped Kit. "Owl Face!"

It was the wanted outlaw, whom the Mounties were after.

"What do you want?" Kit said huskily.

"Give you a guess," said Owl Face's thick voice. "The till. Hand it over."

Kit knew the till was well loaded with takings, for she had noticed that when giving Abe his change for the bucket.

"The till?" she asked to gain time.

"I'm counting three," said Owl Face jerkily. "Come on! One—"

Kit stood motionless.

"Two—"

She turned to the till and pulled out the loaded drawer.

"That's the girl," said Owl Face, and reached out to take it.

But just before his fingers clutched, Kit let it drop.

Down crashed the till on Owl Face's feet, the coins scattering.

With a muttered gasp, Owl Face staggered back, and, collapsing into a box of potatoes, let go of his gun as he got wedged.

Kit, diving forward, snatched the gun. But she did not aim it at him. Firearms to Kit were things of dread. All she did was to dodge out of Owl Face's sight, press the catch, break it open, and eject the cartridges.

Meanwhile, Owl Face, under the urgency of desperate need, recovered, hurled the bucket from him, and then with a lightning snatch wrested the gun from Kit, pushing her aside.

A moment later he hurled himself through the smashed doors, without waiting even to pick up one coin.

The reason for his haste was next moment evident; for the clomp of a horse's hoofs was heard. Before Kit could reach the door the sheriff dismounted outside.

Kit yelled to him.

"Owl Face! He's just bolted from here! Don't let him get away!"

The sheriff paused, staring at her.

"Owl Face? He's thirty miles away. I've just had word."

"I tell you he was here!" snapped Kit.

The sheriff walked into the store, looked at the coins on the floor, and whistled. Tubby, following him in, dropped to his hands and knees and gathered the money up.

He counted it, and then looked up at Kit.

"There's a five-dollar gold piece missing!" he said.

"Well, it's here somewhere; he didn't get away with it," said Kit.

The sheriff looked at Redwing.

"Mebbe you've seen it?" he asked.

"Some of you Redskins are quick on the pick-up. And you're the one who had charge of the baccy, huh?"

Redskin tossed her head.

"Had charge of stones and earth in box," she answered.

The sheriff looked keenly at Kit, and from her again to Redwing.

"Looks like you've been having games with the till and dropped it," he said. "And mebbe Owl Face was a name that came quick to mind. Only he happens to be thirty miles away."

Kit eyed him angrily.

"I'm telling you the truth, sheriff," she said. "As for that five-dollar gold coin, it could have rolled anywhere."

"One thing at a time," said the sheriff. "Tubby's charged this Redskin girl with stealing baccy."

It was the last thing Kit had expected.

"Charged her!" she cried in dismay.

"Sure!" said Tubby, frowning. "The baccy was in the box all right here. I fixed down the box and watched the Redskin girl take it."

Kit stepped between the sheriff and Redwing, and her eyes flashed.

"You're not arresting Redwing!" she said fiercely. "If any phoney business was done—how about Owl Face? He's been in the offing."



AS Redwing scrambled on to the sheriff's horse and made to escape, the sheriff himself lumbered forward, handcuffs ready. But Kit was too quick. Springing to the door, she barred his way. No one should arrest her chum for nothing!

The sheriff walked to Kit and took her shoulder, his manner stern. "Stand aside, girl!" he said. "Run, Redwing!" snapped Kit. Kit's word was law to Redwing. She dodged and ran to the door.

Owl Face's Hide-out!

OUTSIDE the store the sheriff's horse was tethered, and with amazingly quick fingers Redwing unhitched the reins, slapped the horse so that it started at a trot, and then ran beside it.

The sheriff tore after her; but Redwing, with wonderful agility, mounted the cantering horse and swerved it behind the store even as the sheriff drew his gun.

"Right!" he snapped grimly. "We'll get her! That's a double charge. Stealing the baccy—and stealing my horse. And you—interfering with the course of justice!"

Sudden anger filled Kit, and she wheeled on Tubby.

"You cheat—what made you charge poor Redwing?" she cried. "She didn't steal the stuff. Gee! I'd willingly pay for the baccy twice over myself out of my own allowance—"

Tubby did not reply; he was crawling all over the floor, looking for his gold coin.

Kit folded her arms and faced the sheriff.

"Go on—arrest me!" she challenged him. "You might as well—"

But her voice died; for she had suddenly seen, on the top of a sack by the counter, the cartridges she had ejected from Owl Face's gun.

"Hey—look!" she cried, grabbing them up.

At that same moment Tubby came into view from behind the counter, spluttering with rage and holding up a shirt and a biscuit-tin riddled with bullet holes.

"Hey! What's this?" he demanded. "Who's bin shooting up my store, huh?"

"And bullets in the gel's hand!" cried the sheriff. "What's bin going on here? If there's bin shooting up, I'm going to get some roughnecks in gaol!"

Kit looked at the bullets in her hand and bit her lip in vexation. There was no proof whose gun they had come from—and the fact that there had been shooting would make it seem likely that they had been left by the Red Ranch boys.

"Shooting?" said Kit to gain time.

"Well, the mice didn't do all this," sneered Tubby.

Kit thought quickly and to the point.

"As you know, Tubby, I took charge of the store while you were out," she said evenly. "And those goods are booked to the boys at Red Ranch—that shirt, three tins of biscuits, a sack of flour, a bucket, some tinned peas and beans—"

Tubby changed his tone; he even grinned.

"O.K.! What they do with their own stuff's their business, I reckon. I'll book it down right now."

And he wasted no time, while the sheriff, opening and shutting his mouth, scowled; for another good case had been lost to him.

Kit's quick wits had saved the boys; for so long as the stuff was theirs there was no need for the sheriff's interference.

But the other problem still baffled Kit.

"Gee, I'm stumped!" she mused dimly. "If Tubby didn't take the stuff, and if Redwing didn't—"

"She's got my five-dollar piece all right!" snapped Tubby, rising from the floor. "I've hunted everywhere! We should have searched her right away, the little thief!"

Kit did not reply, for a sudden thought had struck her.

"Say, sheriff, you're sure you didn't see Owl Face leave the store a second before you came?"

"Quite sure! And he couldn't have melted!"

Kit stood still in thoughtful silence. Then, without a word, she left the store and walked along the side of it, looking at the ground, her eyes keenly alert for what she sought. She sought footprints, and there were footprints in plenty.

She followed them, watched in amusement by the sheriff. Then, after a dozen paces, she halted.

At the foot of the shack the boards were rotten and in a state of disrepair; there was even a gap a few feet wide.

Kit stared at it, whistling softly. Next moment, although the sheriff was at the door of the store, she spoke as though he stood beside herself.

"You stay right here, sheriff," she said. "I've an idea Owl Face hid somewhere near here."

She had more than an idea; she was certain. Owl Face had disappeared in a moment. How? How else but through that gap under the store? And, if so, he was as likely as not there now.

Kit returned to the store, crossed the floor softly, and looked down at it near the spot where the earth and stones had been.

The thought that Owl Face was even now under this very floor thrilled her. Owl Face, wanted by the Mounties! Owl Face, stealer of the 'baccy!

For that was Kit's conviction now.

But a hint of it to the sheriff would put the man on his guard. He was dangerous, and would fight to save himself from capture.

He had to be trapped—if, indeed, he was there.

Kit looked down at the floor, and gave a start as she saw a slight gap between the boards at the side of four short planks.

Walking to the counter, watched by Tubby and the sheriff, Kit looked for a screw of pepper. She unfolded it and crossed the floor.

"What's the idea?" asked Tubby.

"I've a hunch that gold piece of yours may have slipped through a crack in the floor," said Kit. "And here is one right here."

She stopped and listened. There came a soft, muffled sound as of someone creeping warily. Then, with the screw of paper unfolded, she dropped the pepper through the crack in the floor.

A moment later a violent sound broke the stillness in the shop.

"Atichoo! Atichoo!"

Kit dropped to the floor, slipped two fingers through that gap, and hauled at the board. Four short boards lifted into the air with a suddenness that took her off her guard and sent her back on her haunches.

Instantly into view came a man, who sneezed violently. He wore large, round

glasses, and the lower part of his face was partly concealed by a large blue handkerchief.

"Owl Face!" snapped the sheriff.

Owl Face levelled a gun.

"Stick 'em up!" he rasped.

The sheriff shot up his hands. Tubby's went in the air, too.

"You, gel, get with those two!" ordered Owl Face, stepping into the store.

"Take care, Kit Hartley!" hissed the sheriff. "He's dangerous! He'll shoot!"

Kit walked to the sheriff, but she did not put up her hands. She whipped the sheriff's gun from his holster, and at that moment Owl Face, with his gun pointed at her, pressed the trigger.

Click, click!

Kit handed the sheriff his gun.

"All right! His gun's not loaded," she said coolly. "You don't think I'd have taken that chance if it had been."

Owl Face stared at his gun and hurled it down; his hand went to his shirt. But the sheriff's gun barked. Owl Face's right arm dropped, and his left hand clasped the upper part in agony.

"Stand still!" snarled the sheriff.

"Tubby, rope him up! There's a hundred-dollar reward on your head, Owl Face, and it's ours!"

"Mine!" said Kit.

She walked past Owl Face and dropped down into his hiding-place, lighting a match. A minute later she stepped up. In one hand she held the five-dollar piece; in the other some packets of tobacco.

"And the rest of the 'baccy is down there," she said. "Owl Face emptied the box, Tubby, and put in the stones."

"Waal," said Tubby, in wonder, "so that's how my foodstuff'd been disappearing! It wasn't mice at all!"

"HEY, WHAT'S this, Miss Kit?"

It was an hour later. Kit had fetched the shay, and now, with Redwing—who had been hiding near by, and pardoned by the sheriff—had returned with it to the ranch, where Bill and the rest gathered in surprise.

First, Kit handed them the 'baccy; but now came her surprise. There was a sack of wheat, battered biscuit-tins and buckets, and a host of other bullet-damaged stores.

"All yours, boys! You won it by fair shooting!" she said.

"Ours? You don't mean Tubby's given us it?" said Jem, as he took the shirt.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came roars of mirth.

"Ha, ha, ha!" echoed Kit. "Give it—nothing! It's booked to your accounts! I can't exactly remember who shot what, so it's gone to a pool account, and you can share it as you like. The total's thirty dollars."

"Thirty dollars!" came a howl.

"Yes; and it's all yours, boys!" smiled Kit. "All you shoot you have! Take my tip and shoot something cheaper next time!"

She got down from the trap, and the cowpunchers gaped at their trophies in fury; but when Kit had explained that it had been the only way of keeping them out of trouble with the sheriff they had to be content.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

BE sure to meet these two lovable characters in another delightful Complete story next week.