

Mayorie Wheeler

Meet VALERIE DREW, the Famous Girl Detective, Inside

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Incorporating
"SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN"



**" THAT'S WHAT I THINK
OF YOUR PAINTING! "**

Diana's Worst Deed !

(See this week's grand Cliff House
School story)

This delightful and unusual complete story stars that striking character, Diana Royston-Clarke, Firebrand of the Fourth Form. The other favourites of Cliff House School—Barbara Redfern, Bessie Bunter & Co.—are here, too.



All for the Glory of Diana!



"A SHADOW there, a stronger line there," Barbara Redfern murmured, and with a quick, critical look at the model in the art-room of Cliff

House School, bent again towards the oil-painting she had almost completed. "What do you think of it, girls?" she added eagerly.

Her two particular chums, Mabel Lynn and plump Bessie Bunter, answered immediately.

"It—it's ripping!" breathed Mabs. "Oh, Babs, it's your best!"

"Yes, ra-rather!" stammered plump Bessie excitedly.

There was a murmur of agreement from the other Fourth Formers present.

Barbara Redfern, captain of the Fourth Form at Cliff House, flushed happily. One more look she took at the graceful girl model standing on the dais in the Studio of Cliff House, and added a splash of red colour to her sandals, seeming to make those sandals stand out and live.

Fine it was. Topping it was. Babs herself, good painter for her years as she was, knew that she had never done a better thing.

But suddenly she paused, looking at the model—the model a girl of about fifteen years of age, dressed in the colourful costume of an Egyptian peasant, gracefully supporting a large

ewer upon one shoulder. Very sweet, very delicate the model looked, although she wore a somewhat tired expression on her olive-tinted face.

"Molly, do you mind?" Babs asked anxiously. "I'm so sorry to keep you waiting, and, of course, I do know it's long past your time, but could you give me—just another five minutes?"

"Why, of course, Miss Redfern!" Molly Knight said, with a ready smile. "Ten, if you like."

Babs dimpled. From the majority of the girls in the art-room a look of grateful approval was flung towards the model. For the last two days those girls had been engaged in painting Molly Knight, the idea of engaging her as model being that of Miss Ayre, the art mistress.

Art lesson for that day was at an end, but the Fourth Formers had lingered on to watch the finish of Babs' effort.

All of them had, with varying degrees of success or failure, attempted the picture which was now taking such shape under Babs' really clever hands; but all of them had had their efforts rejected by Miss Ayre, who was keen on saving the most promising effort for exhibition in the junior school section of the Amateur Art Exhibition, which was to be held in the Courtfield Town Hall in the very near future.

It was Babs' effort which Miss Ayre had finally selected, and Babs' effort, when finished, which was due to go in the school section of the exhibition. It would be a feather in the cap of Cliff House if Babs won the schools medal in that exhibition.

Only one girl, indeed, did not seem

to share the whole-hearted enthusiasm of the others.

That was the lordly, conceited Diana Royston-Clarke, well nicknamed the Firebrand of the Fourth. And she, while everybody else admired and enthused, only frowned and found fault.

For Diana was irked. Diana, always greedy for limelight, had rather fancied herself as an artist. With her usual confident conceit, indeed, Diana had set out to win the honour of painting the exhibition picture.

She had not, however, been inspired by the idea of wresting laurels for Cliff House. Diana, as usual, had worked with the idea of seeing herself chief heroine in the exhibition—of receiving the medal from the famous Thomas Quimble, the great portrait painter, who was to be the judge of the exhibition.

But now, thanks to the superiority of Babs' work, she, like the others, must be counted among the rejectionists. She stepped back now, eyeing jealously the picture on Babs' easel.

"Not bad," she sniffed—"not bad. Wants something—um!" She looked at the model. "Of course, the model isn't all it should be," she added off-handedly, and Molly Knight, catching those words, winced. "It wants more life."

"In fact," Mabs said, with a frown of anger at the jealous Firebrand, "it wants another model?"

"Exactly!" Diana nodded calmly. "Somebody more striking. A girl like—well, like me, for instance."

"Whoops! Listen to Miss Modesty!" Tomboy Clara Trevlyn scoffed.

"And pretty mean, Diana, to make a remark like that in front of the model," said Mabs angrily.

Diana turned a little pink. But Molly Knight forgivingly smiled.

"It—it's all right, Miss Royston-Clarke. I don't mind," she said. "Pretty sporting, what?" Jemima Carstairs remarked.

Sporting it was. With new admiration they all looked at Molly. Then from Babs came a laugh.

"Done!" she cried. "Molly, thanks—ever so! Well, how's it look, girls?"

"Oh, please may I see?" Molly asked, eagerly putting down her ewer and coming forward. And then she nodded slowly. "That's very good!" she murmured. "Miss Redfern, you ought to go in for art, you know."

"I hope," Babs replied, with a laugh. "I shall—some day. But now I must take this to Miss Ayre. Molly, thanks awfully for giving me so much of your time! Coming, girls—and you, too, Molly?"

"Thanks, Miss Redfern, no," Molly said. "At least, not yet. I've got to change, you see."

She stepped behind the screen. Outside rushed Babs and the rest. But Diana Royston-Clarke did not go. Diana, conscious that she had said something very hurtful to Molly, wanted to put things right with her before she left; but, being Diana, she could not bring herself to apologise in front of those other girls.

She lingered by the window, listening to the movement that went on behind the screen. Blow Babs and her silly painting! she thought, with a jealous scowl.

She turned as Molly, neatly if inexpensively dressed in a brown tweed suit, and carrying a small portfolio under her arm, stepped out.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "I—I thought everyone had gone!"

"No," Diana said. She regarded her closely. Certainly Molly looked a very, very different girl in her walking-out clothes from the Egyptian model. "I—I just wanted to speak to you," she said, a little awkwardly. "Just to—to—well, to tell you I'm sorry for what I said while Barbara Redfern was painting that picture."

The serious grey eyes of Molly Knight looked down into the pearly-blue ones of the most striking girl in Cliff House's junior school.

"Thank you! That's nice of you!" She eyed the Firebrand, marking that exquisitely lovely opal face, her rich cream-and-rose complexion, those haughtily curved red lips, and the brushed-back foam of platinum-blonde hair. And admiration suddenly shone in her face. "But you were right, of course," she said simply—"dead right. I couldn't hold a candle to you."

Diana glowed inwardly. As always, however, she had to be sure of the compliment.

"You mean—" she pressed. "I mean," Molly said, with unhesitating frankness, "I think you're the loveliest girl I've ever seen."

She said it because she meant and believed it. But if it had been her most urgent intention to flatter Diana, to bring out the most radiant best in Diana, she could not have made a more successful remark. Diana did so love flattery, praise, admiration.

"Well," she laughed, "you're not such a bad-looker yourself, either! But thanks for the compliment! I hope it's deserved. You know, I rather like you, Molly," she added, warming up, "and—and if I can I—I'd like to help you!"

Molly flushed.

By

HILDA RICHARDS

(Illustrated by T. LAIDLER)

"Thanks, Miss Royston-Clarke, but—but—well, I don't see how you can. Not," she added, with a touch of pride, "that I want help."

"You're not well off?" Diana questioned keenly.

Molly stared.

"If I were do you think I should be modelling here? Still, I manage to get along, you know. I—"

And then she gave an exclamation as her portfolio slipped, and, breaking open, shot on to the floor half a dozen small water-colour paintings.

"Oh, yoicks!" Diana cried, in dismay. "Here, let me help to pick them up!"

And she retrieved one which had gone under a desk, looking at it at the same time. Nice bit of work that was, Diana thought—jolly nice windmill and a really lovely sky. She glanced at the initials in the corner—"M. K."

And she stared.

"Molly!" she cried.

Molly straightened up.

"Oh, thanks, Miss Royston-Clarke! That's my—"

"Molly, is—is this your work—your very own?" Diana cried.

"Why, yes! You see, I'm fond of painting. Like Miss Redfern, I hope to

Clarke, why are you looking at me like that?"

"Come on!" Diana said, with suddenly eager enthusiasm. "I'm going to talk to you. Molly, I've got an idea—a really great and glorious idea! Come down to my study and have some tea."

"But—but I shall be late—"

"Blow being late!" Diana cried recklessly, and chummily tucked her arm in the girl's, and, taking up her portfolio, led her off. "This way!"

Molly shook her head. But she glowed. For a moment that admiration which so many new-found friends felt for the lordly Diana was in her eyes as, irresistibly in the Firebrand's tow, she was led through the doorway.

Diana's face was aflame. For once more all her enthusiasm and ambition concerning the great Courtfield Art Show had re-arisen. Diana fancied she saw a way, even though her own painting would not be exhibited in the great show, of scoring a stunning triumph for herself. If she could not do it through her own pictures, she would do it through Molly's!

Here was an artist, surprisingly and accidentally discovered, who could surely do as well as anyone else in the Courtfield show?

"Here we are!" she cried, as she led the way into luxurious Study No. 10. Diana shared that study with Margot Lantham, but Margot wasn't present. "Sit down, old thing, and take that



When a young girl artist thwarted Diana Royston-Clarke's ambitions, that stormy Fourth Former determined to strike back—ruthlessly. It was typical of Diana—strange mixture of good and bad—that her chance of revenge came because of her kindness to another artist, a down-and-out elderly man.

be an artist some day. That's the old mill near Lantham."

Diana gazed at it curiously. She was not a highly expert judge, but she had a quick eye for something good, and there was that about Molly's painting which suggested sureness of touch, a knowledge of colour that Babs, good though she was for her age, did not possess. The painting spoke of experience—yes, that was it, Diana decided. She looked at Molly with a new light in her eyes.

"I say, have you ever put any of your paintings in an exhibition?"

Molly shook her head a little sadly.

"No. I—I'd like to, but—but"—she bit her lip—"there are a lot of difficulties in the way. One is that I haven't really got the time. You see, the things I paint I try to sell as quickly as possible. It—it's a question of money. Again, I live at Kenmarsh, and by the time I get home the best of the light has gone, and—well, as you know, painting by artificial light is not too good."

"But—but, look here," Diana cried, gazing again at the painting, her cheeks flushing with the enthusiasm she felt, "this is so awfully good! Why on earth don't you try for the Courtfield gold medal?"

"I'm sorry, my job—"

"But you'd like to?" Diana asked quickly.

"Well, of course. And perhaps next year, if I'm a bit better off, I'll try," Molly promised. "But, Miss Royston-

coat off. Now, just wait till I get tea, then we'll talk."

Diana bustled round. She got tea, serving it on the small coffee table, which she placed near the settee. Molly looked a little uneasy.

"But, Miss Royston-Clarke—"

"Diana, please!" Diana countered quickly. "Diana to all my friends. This is the idea," she said. "Mind you, I'm doing it because I want to help you, and because I'm jolly sure it is going to help you. Molly, you are going to exhibit at the exhibition. You're going to paint a special picture."

"But—"

"Wait a ticklet! Let me do the talking," Diana rushed on. "I've got it all planned. No, you won't do the painting at home; you'll do it here in the studio, where you'll have all the light you want and where you can work every lunch-time and every night until the light fails. And this time," Diana said glowingly, "I'll be the model! You shall paint a picture of me, Molly!"

Molly gasped. Diana laughed. She laughed on a thrilled, pleased note. That was the idea. And what an idea! Superbly, Diana was sure, would Molly paint that picture. It would be the hit of the exhibition.

And being the hit of the exhibition so would she—Diana—its sitter, be the hit! How people would admire, first, her lovely picture; secondly, herself, its

subject! And how they would congratulate her when that picture won the gold medal in the "open" section of the show! How she'd boast that she had found Molly, that she had inspired the picture, that she was Molly's guiding light!

Oh, great, that idea, though, to be sure, she did not mention her own special motives to Molly, allowing Molly to believe that it was all to be done for her benefit. And Molly listened rapturously. What a chance for her!

For Molly secretly had always cherished ambitions to paint an exhibit. But Molly, unlike that famous Thomas Quimble, who was her artistic hero, was not a fast painter, but a slowish worker, and what time she had had to be spent earning more money for the support of herself and her mother back at Kenmarsh. But this—this—

"Molly, you'll do it?" Diana cried at last.

"Oh, Miss Royston—oh, Diana, I'd love to!" Molly breathed.

"Then," Diana whooped, "we'll start to-morrow, shall we? No, wait a minute! First decide what the picture's going to be. I don't want Babs' Egyptian thing to be clashing with mine, of course, even though one will be in the schools' section and the other in the Open. Something bright—something—something—"

"Glamorous?" Molly suggested.

"That's the word!" Diana laughed.

"Something glamorous—like—like Cleopatra or something Roman. No, dash it, I've got a better one than that! Something more natural. What about painting me in my new bathing suit and cap, just looking as if I'd come from a dip in the sea? Then we can call it something like 'Seaside Girl.'"

"There's something in that!" Molly cried.

"And—when do we start?"

"To-morrow," Diana said. "To-morrow morning. Be in the studio immediately after lessons and I'll come there right away. So that's fixed, eh?"

Fixed it was. Enthusiastic as Diana now, Molly left the room as if walking on air. To have such a glorious opportunity offered to her; to have such a model as Diana—

"Molly!" cried a voice as she stepped down the corridor.

Molly paused and smiled. It was Babs who stood before her, eyeing rather curiously that happiness in her face.

"Oh, Miss Redfern—"

"Molly, I—I've been looking for you," Babs said. "I've shown the picture to Miss Ayre, and she likes it—frightfully. But she made one or two tiny suggestions which I think will improve it quite a heap."

"Oh, yes, Miss Redfern?" willing Molly said, and banished her own interests to take interest in Babs again.

"What were they?"

"Mainly shadows, Molly. But it means, I'm afraid, that I can't do it without you," Babs confessed, "and I was wondering if you could spare me, say, half an hour sometime to-morrow? Just for another sitting, you know."

"Why, yes, of course!" Molly agreed.

"I shall be here to-morrow—practically all day—and I shall be in the studio a lot. You see—" she added shyly, and paused; and reflecting that Diana had not sworn her to secrecy, she plunged, with a laugh, into the news of the latest and most exciting project. "What do you think of that?"

"Well, I think it's ripping," Babs nodded. "Diana will make a topping model. But—well, just be careful," she added warningly. "Old Di likes to do her best, but she also likes to have

things all her own way. I say, though, I didn't know you were an artist. How was it you never told us that?"

Molly smiled a little diffidently.

"What need was there for me to tell you?" she asked. "I didn't tell Diana—she found it out by accident. You see—" she paused. "I had a course at an art school last year—that was when daddy was alive and we could afford it—and—and—well, I've been selling a few of the pictures I painted then to a shop in Courtfield."

"I brought along the rest to-day in the hope of selling them, and by accident Diana saw them. That's what started the whole thing. Like to see them?" she added, noticing Babs' curiously interested gaze upon the portfolio.

Babs would. Babs always liked seeing pictures. She at once invited Molly into Study No. 4, where Mabel Lynn, Barbara's chief chum and study-mate, was busy clearing the tea table. Bessie Bunter had gone off to empty the teapot. There the portfolio was once again opened and Molly's treasures re-inspected. Babs' eyes shone.

"Oh, but they're jolly, jolly good!" she said enthusiastically. "The freshness of colour is ripping. Golly, I wish I was as good. Why, Molly, I don't see why you shouldn't win the 'Open.' They're beautiful, aren't they, Mabel?"

"Just glorious!" Mabs agreed, with a heavy breath of admiration. "Congrats, Molly. And I do wish you the very best of luck."

"And don't forget," Babs added as Molly, glowing with more enthusiasm than ever, took her departure, "that if you want any help you can rely upon us."

Left to themselves, Babs and Mabs eyed each other curiously.

"Jolly sporting of Di," Mabs said.

"Yes, isn't it?" Babs smiled a little.

"Funny Di, after almost insulting the girl in the studio, to take her up like this. I suppose Di means to be in that exhibition at any cost—that would be just like her! Still, it is a chance for Molly. If Diana only behaves herself she ought to make a wonderful study."

Mabs felt that way, too. So did everybody else when they heard. The news, as a matter of fact, was not long in going round. Diana, fond of creating surprises, was not slow to discuss the project. Everybody liked Molly and everybody was undoubtedly pleased that the lordly Firebrand was going to give her this excellent chance. A jubilant Diana, in the Common-room that evening, found herself bombarded with questions.

But Diana, arrogantly on top of the world, merely waved a lordly hand.

"Oh, she'll win the Open!" she shrugged with confidence. "Absolutely sure to. That girl's got genius, I tell you. One day she'll be a famous R.A. That picture," Diana added impressively, "is going to be the sensation of the exhibition."

"Because, I suppose," Lydia Crossendale sneered jealously, "you're its model?"

"More because of that than because of anything," Diana answered calmly. "Wait and see."

Molly is not to be Ordered About!



"WELL, shall we go and have a look and see how they're getting on?" Babs asked doubtfully. "I would like, if it's possible, for Molly to give me that sitting."

"Well, she did promise, didn't she?" Mabel Lynn asked. "Let's go now."

It was after tea on the following day at Cliff House.

Babs had not seen Molly Knight that day, though she knew Molly was in the school. Immediately after morning lessons Diana had "bagged" her, and immediately after dinner again. Ever since afternoon lessons, too, Diana had been with Molly, and Babs, hesitating to interfere, had purposely delayed her own work, hoping that she would hear from Molly.

But it was obvious now, if she was to have Molly as model before the light entirely went, that she would have to overcome that diffidence.

"All the same," Bessie Bunter observed, "it's not like Molly to forget, you know."

"Oh, I don't think she has forgotten," Babs said at once. "She's not the sort. It's Di who's keeping her at it, of course. Still, this will give us an excuse to butt in, because I'm jolly keen to see how she's getting on."

Mabs and Bessie nodded. They were, too.

"Well, then, let's go," Bessie said impatiently. "Bring your painting, Babs."

Babs gathered up the painting. Together the three chums went off. Up the stairs which led to the studio they hurried, and pausing at the door, Babs looked significantly at her two chums as Molly's pleading voice reached their ears. Molly was saying:

"Oh, Diana, would you mind—just keeping your face like that? That's the third time you've moved it."

"Oh, well," Diana's voice came back—sounded faintly irritated—"I'm more comfortable like this."

"But you said you were more comfortable the other way when I gave you the first pose!" Molly objected.

"Oh, stuff! Get on with it!"

"Hum!" Babs muttered. "Not too happy eh?" And rather anxiously she pushed open the door, at which Molly turned round with a quick smile and Diana, dressed in her bathing suit as she sat on the platform, scowled. She glared at Babs.

"What do you want?"

"Just Molly," Babs replied.

"Molly's engaged," Diana snapped.

"Thanks, I can see," Babs retorted.

"Molly, about that sitting—"

"Oh, yes!" Molly bit her lip.

"Diana, perhaps we'll stop now?" she said. "I did tell you, didn't I, that I promised Miss Redfern I'd sit for her?"

"You're doing this," Diana said.

"Never mind Babs or any other silly girl's silly picture."

"But—"

"Oh, stuff! Come on; let's get on with it."

"Cat!" said Mabel Lynn.

Diana glared. It was obvious, despite her enthusiasm for her great idea, that she was not in a good temper. It was obvious, too, that Molly was not so enthusiastic as she had been, though to be sure she had made an excellent job of that portion of the portrait she had already painted. Diana it was to the life—but a slightly haughty, slightly pouting, slightly supercilious Diana.

The truth, as Babs soon saw, was that Diana was not giving Molly a chance. Diana, being the restless, fuming Firebrand they all knew, was by no means a good sitter. Apart from that, although Diana was only the model, Diana had already constituted herself supervisor of Molly's work, and insisted, every so often, in getting up and coming down, criticising and giving advice. And that, from the painter's

point of view, was, of course, just hopeless.

And perhaps it was the subconscious knowledge that the fault lay more with herself than with Molly which made Diana so irritated.

"All right, then," Babs said, "we'll wait. Carry on, Molly."

"No, wait a minute!" said Diana. "Let's have a look how it's going on." And she came forward, jealous of the gaze of Babs and Mabs and Bessie. She stood before the picture, critically scrutinising it. "Not much like me," she considered, with a scowl.

"Well, dash it, wait till it's finished!" Mabs said. "You're not giving Molly a fair chance!"

"No, rather not, you know!" Bessie said warmly. "And you're not giving old Babs a fair chance, either, keeping Molly like this!"

"You talking to me, Owl?" Diana demanded.

"Well—"
"Diana, please don't row!" Molly begged anxiously. "Look here, I really do think we ought to chuck this for to-day! You're tired sitting so long, and—and, after all, I did promise Miss Redfern half an hour. Let's call it a day, shall we?"

"So that you can do Babs' thing?" Diana fumed.

"That's right."

"Then, supposing I don't want to leave it?"

Molly gazed at her steadily.
"Diana, I'm sorry. I can't and won't go on with any more to-night. Tomorrow, if you like—then we'll work as long as we like. But just now—Miss Redfern," she firmly added.

Babs blinked, Bessie beamed, Mabs grinned. They liked to see that spirit. It was the sort which Diana, so fond of having all her own way, ought to bump up against occasionally.

Diana paused, choking back some bitter retort which was on her tongue. Then she looked at the picture. Perhaps it dawned upon her all at once that Molly was a perfectly free agent in what she was doing; that Molly, despite the glorious chance she had opened up for her, might, in the same mood as herself, abandon the whole thing. She shrugged.

"All right," she said, with ill grace, "go on! But, for goodness' sake, don't

make any more arrangements. We shall never get it finished at this rate. And please"—she turned to bark at Babs—"don't come sticking your nose in again!"

"Bow-wow!" Mabel Lynn said.
Diana glared. With a sniff she quitted the room, banging the door after her. Molly shrugged.

"Poor Diana! She does find it such a task to sit still. I'll get dressed now, Miss Redfern."

"Thanks!" Babs said.
Molly disappeared behind the screen. Babs propped her painting on the easel. In a few minutes, Molly, attired once again as the Egyptian peasant girl, reappeared, and falling with perfect naturalness into her pose, smiled at Babs as a signal to get on.

Babs was in the middle of her slight alterations when Miss Ayre, the art mistress, came in.

"Oh, Barbara!" she said, and smiled and looked at the work. "I say, that really is good. No, my dear, not another stroke in that. It's just perfect as it is. Barbara, I congratulate you."

"And Molly," Babs laughed. "It's thanks to Molly's good nature, Miss Ayre, that it's finished."

"That, I am sure, we all appreciate," Miss Ayre said, with a smile at Molly. "Molly, thank you—so much. Barbara, may I have this now, please? I'll get it framed before I enter it for the exhibition. Molly, you're something of an artist, too, aren't you? Tell me what you think of this."

Molly nodded.
"I think it's excellent," she said quickly. "If that doesn't win the school prize, Miss Ayre—"

Miss Ayre laughed.
"Well, I hope it does. Meantime, no counting chickens, eh, girls?" She gave a swift glance at Molly's unfinished canvas, and nodded. "Going on nicely," she said appreciatively. "You must show me that when it's done, Molly. Barbara, I'll take this painting right away."

With a friendly nod, she passed out, obviously pleased. Babs flushed, and Mabs and Bessie chuckled.

"I do so hope it will win the medal," said Molly sincerely. "I—I only wish with a regretful glance at her own

effort—"that I could say the same about that!"

Babs looked at her quickly.
"Why, Molly, aren't you satisfied with it?"

"No, not very," Molly said. "I still think Diana's a lovely subject, but—but— Oh, I don't know. Somehow I can't get under her skin, if you know what I mean? There's something wanting—something missing. I can't just get the portrait I hoped. And, of course," she added regretfully, "Diana, if she is charming, is—is rather difficult. You understand?"

Babs did. So did Mabs and Bessie. No doubt Molly was clever, and no doubt Diana, if she would only toe the line, would have been a superb subject. But would Diana toe the line? Could Diana be content to be a model only, and not insist upon having a hand in the picture itself?

Inner knowledge of Diana told them that she couldn't. Secretly they were all sorry for the uphill task which faced the young artist.

The Firebrand Goes Too Far!



"WELL, Diana," Molly asked, with a note of anxiety in her voice, "how do you like it?"

Diana did not reply. Long, earnestly, she was staring at the canvas on Molly's easel.

It was the next day—the end of a long afternoon's sitting, during which Molly had been concentrating entirely on Diana's face.

The Firebrand of the Fourth was not in a good mood. She had a sense of irritation and frustration—irritation because she had discovered that she had not been able to impose her own will upon Molly; frustration because Molly, instead of acting upon her advice, had steadily gone her own way to work. And now the portrait was in front of her. It wasn't finished, of course—but it had taken sudden shape to show exactly what it was going to be.

But Diana frowned. It was a good picture, she knew. It was a characterful picture, and there was no doubt that it would be one of the high-lights of the exhibition.



"DIANA, I'm through!" Spiritedly Molly faced the Firebrand. "I'm going to do a new picture—yes, but not with you as the model!" Diana's eyes flashed. "Oh! Who then?" "Barbara!" answered Molly quietly.

But it was not Diana as Diana conceived herself to be. It wasn't the lovely, radiant, breath-taking portrait she had visualised. Diana it was—no doubt about that—but a Diana a trifle hard, a Diana a trifle petulant.

"You—you like it?" Molly asked hesitantly.

"No!" Diana said flatly.

"Diana—"

"I don't! It—it's not me!" Diana cried, and, suddenly flaring, suddenly overcome by that sense of disappointment, by the knowledge that she had spent seven or eight irritating hours sitting for this picture, she bitterly boiled up. "If you want to know what I think, I think it's rotten!" she added callously. "I thought you were an artist!"

Molly's face went deathly white.

"Diana—"

"And don't," Diana said violently, "Diana me! Royston-Clarke's my name—spelt with a hyphen and final 'e.' If that's the best you can do—"

Molly's eyes gleamed.

"It is," she retorted, "for you!"

"And don't be cheeky!" Diana rapped.

"I'm not being cheeky!" Molly's own cheeks were red then. "But I don't see why, Miss Royston-Clarke, you should imagine you're the only one who has a right to say what you think! I painted that picture in good faith. I painted it without much assistance from you. It's my picture! Well, thanks for the sitting—such as it was!" she added, her chest heaving. "But now, if you don't mind, I'll finish it—but I'll finish it without your assistance!"

Diana glared.

"And then what will you do with it?"

"What we agreed to do, of course—exhibit it," Molly said stoutly.

"You—you'll what?" Diana glared at her. "You—you mean to say you'd put that—that wreck in the exhibition? Yoicks! You won't! You dare!"

"I do dare! And," Molly blazed, "I will! That picture's mine! You sat for it, and if it's not what you expected to see, it's my impression of what you look like, and into the exhibition it goes. Why, Miss Ayre says it's an excellent portrait of you!"

Diana choked. She glared at the picture again. Yes, it was good, but as an advertisement for the beauty of Diana it was far from being that sensational portrait Diana had visualised. People would never look at the subject of that picture. People would never admire that because she was the sitter. They'd admire it simply and solely for its artistic skill.

"Hang Miss Ayre!" she raved. "Hang you and the picture! To think I've given myself cramp to sit for that! To think"—bitterly—"that I thought you were good enough to paint me! I tell you it's rotten, and if you dare to think of entering it—"

"I do dare, and I shall enter it!" Molly said firmly. "And," she added challengingly, "you can't stop me!"

"No?" Diana cried. There was a queer gleam in her eyes all at once. And then, utterly beside herself, she grabbed at Molly's palette knife. "We'll see!"

"Diana!" Molly shrieked.

But Diana was acting then. Fury, provoked by her thwarted ambition, her sick disappointment, had her in its grip. In that moment she was the old tempestuous Firebrand. In that moment she was hardly responsible for her actions, and knew, even as she committed the deed to which her rage inspired her, that she was acting in a

way her better self would never allow her to forget.

But in a flash it was done. While the cry of that horror-stricken "Diana!" was still ringing in her ears, she had plunged the palette knife into the canvas, and with one ferocious slash had torn it from corner to corner. Then, with blazing eyes, she flung the canvas into the corner of the room.

"There!" she panted.

With eyes wide Molly stared in horror at her.

"Diana!" she almost shrieked.

"There!" Diana panted again; and then, looking at the canvas, she knew a sweeping reaction of horror at herself. That—that picture! That work on which Molly had laboured. That work which, at one violent stroke, she had brought to naught! Had she done that?

"Di-Diana!" Molly choked.

"I—I—I—" Diana stuttered. "I—I—" How could she have done this dreadful thing? Utter disgust with herself swept over her, but racing swiftly to take the place of that disgust came her own fierce pride, the angry memory of her wrongs. "Well, I'm sorry," she said defiantly, "but you asked for it. Perhaps in future that will teach you not to defy me? Here, let me get out of this!"

"Diana, you dare—"

"Out of my way!" Diana cried.

Bang! went the door as she whirled it open. Blindly she rushed into the corridor—straight into the arms of Babs and Mabs, who were on their way to the studio. Almost without seeing them she rushed on.

"My—my giddy aunt!" Babs stut-

tered. "That was Di, wasn't it?"

"It was," Mabs said. "Wonder what—Hallo! What's this?" she added in quick concern.

For from the interior of the studio came the sound of a stifled sob.

"Molly!" Babs cried.

She stepped into the studio, Mabs on her heels. And then they both stopped, stunned, as they saw the damage which had been done—the slashed picture, with Molly staring at it, tears of despair dropping down her cheeks. Babs felt a surge of anger shake her as she guessed what had happened.

"Diana?" she asked quickly.

"Y—yes," Molly whispered. "She—she didn't like it."

They all stared at the slashed canvas. Babs' face turned red with anger.

"That cat! That Firebrand cat!" she muttered thickly. "That—Oh, my hat! Molly, I'm going to see her about this!"

"Miss Redfern—no!" Molly placed a quivering hand on her arm. "Don't, please! It—it will only mean trouble, and I don't want any on my account. It wouldn't bring my picture back, anyway," she added despairingly, "and—and I was so hopeful of it."

"Poor Molly!" Babs gulped.

"I—I thought it was too good to be true," Molly said, and drifted forlornly towards her sketch-book. "But—but, oh, I wouldn't mind if I hadn't told mother about it last night," she added. "You see, she's so full of excitement, and so hopeful that I'll win the medal, that I daren't face her and tell her everything has gone up in smoke. I—I think I'll go home now."

"Molly—no!" Babs said, and stepped into her path. "Molly, you can't go home—like that. Look here, come along to Study No. 4—we came up to invite you to tea, anyway. Let's talk things over and see if we can find some way out of the mess."

Molly moved her shoulders hopelessly. It was obvious she did not care where

she went or what she did at that moment. Numbed with her own misery, she allowed herself to be led downstairs and into Study No. 4, where plump Bessie Bunter was busy preparing tea. Babs smiled brightly.

"Now, Molly, just sit there and take it easy. Once you've had a cup of tea you'll feel better. Mabs, cut the bread-and-butter, please. Bessie, don't forget the radishes. I'll make some toast."

She plumped Molly in the armchair, putting her sketch-book on her knees, while Bessie, with a blink at them, bustled round. Babs caught up the toasting fork, and, spearing a piece of bread on the end of it, knelt in front of the fire. Almost as if she did not realise what she was doing, Molly caught up her sketch-book and idly, as if as a distraction against other worries, began to sketch.

"There we are!" Babs said cheerfully. "Another slice, please, Mabs. Think we want the light on yet?"

"Oh, not yet—please!" Molly begged, with a sudden breathless note in her voice. "Barbara, can you hold that pose for just a minute?"

"Why, of course. But why—"

"Just a minute!" Molly cried.

Like clockwork her fingers were going as her pencil sketched an outline on the pad. Mabs peered over her shoulder.

"Molly, why—" she began, and then stood still. "Oh, my hat! Babs, don't move! Molly's got something here."

Molly had. Molly, her artistic soul banishing despair, had been roused by new inspirations. Slow worker with the brush though Molly might be, there was no doubt that she was very swift when it came to pencil drawing. A few deft lines, a few roughed-in shadows, and then, with a laugh, she held the drawing away from her.

"Babs, come and look!" Mabs cried, her eyes sparkling.

Babs, fork and toast still in hand, rose. She took the pad from Molly's fingers. She looked, and admiration welled up within her. There was a master's touch about that sketch, in the tilt of Babs' head, the firelight shadows which played about her face, her serious, intent expression as she regarded the piece of toast browning before the bars of the study fire.

"Phoo-poo!" Her breath escaped in a low hiss of wonder. "You know, Molly, I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen you do it. This— And then she jumped. "My hat, I've got it!"

"Yes, rather! But don't drop it," Bessie Bunter advised anxiously. "It's coming off the end of the fork, you know."

"Chump! I don't mean the toast," Babs laughed. Her cheeks were rosy suddenly; her eyes shining. "Molly, this study!" she almost gabbled out. "What about doing it for the exhibition in place of Diana's picture?"

"Whoo-pee!" cried Mabs.

"You mean?" Molly cried.

"I mean," Babs said, "here's your chance—a new chance! A perfectly simple study this time. And I will model for you."

Molly gave a cry:

"You wouldn't?"

"I would, and will! And," Babs laughed, "you needn't be afraid to order me about. We've got the studio. I can find as much time for you as Diana can. Molly, how do you like the idea?"

How did Molly like it? Her sparkling eyes, her radiant face provided the answer. Burningly she wanted to

compete in the exhibition, yet how impossible, even without the cruel showdown of the afternoon, to have gone on with Diana as her model! But Babs—Babs was different. Babs was a girl after Molly's own heart—a girl she could trust, a girl without conceit, and a girl, furthermore, who understood art. She could work with Babs. She could be inspired by Babs. And that simple study—why, wasn't it one of those pictures which every artist dreams of painting?

"Oh, I'd love to have a shot at it!" she breathed.

"Then," Mabs laughed, "you shall. We'll start after lessons to-morrow, shall we? But come on now; tea's ready, so let's talk it over."

"And—and Diana?" Molly asked, with faint hesitancy.

"Blow Diana!" Mabel Lynn put in. "Why worry about Diana? Don't think Diana is worrying about you, do you?"

But, had Mabs only known it, Diana was. Diana had been worrying about Molly for a considerable time. A seething mass of bad temper, she had reached her study after the upset in the studio, telling herself in one breath that Molly had deserved what she had got; in the next, that she was a callous, cruel cat.

Diana's violent storms were often followed by a period of intense remorse, and it was that mood which was on Diana now. Hang it, she'd been caddish, cattish. Molly had done her best, and according to Molly's lights that had been a jolly good picture. An apology, at least, was due to Molly.

Diana, however, loathed making apologies, yet she knew that better side of her nature would give her no rest until she had patched up her quarrel with Molly.

Added to that—and perhaps more important—was the reflection that it was only through Molly she could still hope to make a sensation in the exhibition. Yoicks! She'd just got to make it up with Molly.

Suppose she gave Molly a couple of pounds for ruining her picture? Diana, well supplied with money by an extremely wealthy father, saw that as her way out. For once she had just got to eat humble pie.

A smile on her face, she went to the studio.

But Molly was not there; only the wreck of Molly's picture. Diana vividly coloured as she surveyed it. Then hurriedly she bundled it into the cupboard reserved for easels, and went downstairs. It was from Sally, the maid, that she gleaned a clue to Molly's whereabouts.

She marched along to Study No. 4.

Outside the door, which was slightly ajar, she paused. Diana had expected to find Molly downcast, saddened, perhaps reproachful, even a little angry. But the laughing voice which reached her ears from the other side of that door suggested none of those things. It was, in fact, exultantly happy.

"Oh, Barbara, it—it's wonderful of you!" Molly was saying. "And I promise you I will put my best work into it. It's one of those things I feel I can get hold of. I can see the picture dangling in front of my eyes now. And Diana—well, Diana's a striking girl, of course, but I'm sure I never, never could paint her as I can paint you."

"Trouble with Diana," Babs said. "is that she wants to be the artist as well as the model."

The white showed on the knuckles

of Diana's hands as she clutched the knob of the door. Those cats talking about her. Those cats running her down! For a moment the Firebrand temper flashed out again, and in that moment Diana almost stormed into the room. But in time she remembered. In time she controlled herself. No, no. No argument now. She knocked. Babs' voice said,

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"Come in!" Diana went in, rather curtly nodding at the happy little party gathered about the study table. And on that table, near Mabs, was propped up the quick sketch which Molly had made.

"Oh!" Mabs exclaimed. "We were talking about you, Diana. I hope"—with a frown—"you've come to apologise."

Molly looked rather uncomfortable. "I came," Diana said, "to—to speak to Molly."

Molly looked at her. There was no worship, admiration, or even friendliness in her eyes now.

"About," Diana went on temptingly, "a new picture."

"Thanks!" Molly said, rather shortly.

"I'm going," Diana went on, "to pay for the wreck of that last one."

"Thanks again!" Molly said, and her tone implied: "for nothing."

"I've got an idea for a better one," Diana resumed encouragingly.

"And so," Molly said, "have I. Or rather, Barbara and I have. Thanks, Diana, but I'm through. I'm finished. I'm going to do a new picture—yes, but not with you as my model."

Diana's eyes flashed.

"Oh! Who then?"

"Barbara."

"Barbara!" Diana stared. Then she looked at the sketch again, understanding. She snatched it up.

"This?"

"That," Molly affirmed. "And please give it to me!" She jerked it out of the Firebrand's hand, and Diana glared, every good intention forgotten now. "I'm sorry," she said; "but after the way you treated me, you can hardly expect me to be enthusiastic about any new picture. In any case, I've fixed it up now."

"And what about me?" Diana cried furiously.

"Well, what about you?" countered Mabs.

"Where do I come in?" Diana's chest heaved. "It was my idea, wasn't it, to give Molly her chance?"

"Diana, will you get out?"

"No, I won't! Not till I've said all—"

Babs compressed her lips. She looked at Mabs, and Mabs, understanding, rose. To the door she went, invitingly holding it open, and while Diana stared, Babs rose, also. She caught the Firebrand's arm.

"Diana, this way out, please!"

"Hang you, let me go!"

"This way!" Babs insisted.

Diana choked. With a sudden flame in her eyes she swung her hand at Babs' face.

But Babs, in the nick of time, saw the blow coming. She ducked, and Diana, carried round by the impetus of her own blow, staggered, off her balance. Babs acted. She caught Diana, giving her one shove in the back. In a spinning heap, Diana whisked through the door, while Mabs, with a grin, quickly closed it.

Fuming, shaking, Diana blazed round again. She threw herself at the door, banging on the panels.

"Hang you, let me in! Let me in!"

"Not to-night, sweetheart!" Babs chuckled.

"I'll kick the door down!" Diana threatened.

"Will you?" a voice cried behind her. "Diana, how dare you?"

And Diana, wheeling, gaped with dismay as she came face to face with Miss Primrose, the headmistress of the school.

"Really, Diana, is this what you call good manners?" she asked severely. "Go to your study!"

"I—I—I—" stammered Diana.

"And while you are there, write out a hundred times 'I must improve my conduct.' Now go—at once!"

And Mabs, Babs, and Bessie, looking at each other, chuckled as they heard Diana's footsteps stamping off down the corridor.

"Methinks," Babs murmured, "our worthy Di is not too pleased with her conceited self, what? And serves her jolly well right!"

A New Artist—A New Portrait!



"Oh, hang them all!" gritted Diana Royston-Clarke.

Diana was savage. It was the following day and she had just come from the studio,

where, to her chagrin, she had found Molly making excellent progress with Babs as model for her.

Diana had started to sneer at the painting—and had promptly been bundled out of the studio by Clara Trevlyn and Mabel Lynn. Now, savagely, she was tramping along the Fourth Form corridor.

"Dash it, I'll beat them yet," she muttered furiously. "If Molly won't paint me, she's jolly well not going to get a portrait of Babs in the exhibition!"

At that moment she was abreast of Study No. 4. That study was empty, and suddenly she stopped, peering in. Her eyes lit up.

On the table were Molly's portfolio and the little case in which Molly kept her paints. Diana knew all about those paints. They were of excellent quality—Grey's & Greave's—and that variety could only be bought at one shop in Courtfield.

With a soft chuckle, Diana stepped towards the case. Calmly she scooped every tube out of the case and walked off to the kitchens, which were empty for the moment.

Mean, cattish, the thing she did then—especially knowing how hard-up Molly was. But Diana did not think of that. Diana, who could be so wonderfully generous and warm-hearted when her own interests were being served, could be just as contrarily callous when those interests were being adversely affected. A large fire was burning in the kitchen grate. Quickly Diana lifted the tubes, rammed them in, and then, as quickly, walked out again.

Now, she thought, let Molly bite on that!

She chuckled as she went back to her study. A good bit of work, that. To get more of Grey's & Greave's paints Molly would have to make a special journey to Courtfield—which meant, of course, no painting work could be embarked upon to-day.

Only at Wren's could she procure that particular brand, too. But wait a minute! Here was another idea!

Supposing she went to Wren's first? Supposing she bought up all the Grey's & Greave's Wren's had? If she cleared out the shop—

Diana flushed as that idea was born in her brain. What a chance of getting even with Molly! If Wren's hadn't the paints, then Molly would have to order them from London—and that meant a further delay! She could never hope to finish her picture then.

That idea born, Diana at once put it into operation. On went her hat and coat. Out of the school she hurried. Her brand new cycle, fitted with every latest gadget, took her to Wren's in record time, and Mr. Wren himself smiled at her eager, pretty face as she bent over the counter. He expressed astonishment, however, when she told him what she wanted.

"All Grey's & Greave's, Miss Royston-Clarke? Well, as it so happens I'm very short stocked at the moment,

but even so, I've got two pounds' worth."

Diana looked into her purse. "Never mind; I want them," she said. "I'll take the lot."

"It clears me completely out," Mr. Wren demurred.

"Well, isn't that what you've got a shop for?" Diana glared. "Dash it, don't you want to do business? I'm not asking you to give me the paints."

Mr. Wren turned pink.

"No, of course not!" he agreed shortly. "Except that there's a man—a little man with a beard. A Mr. Thomas—rather poor, I fancy—who's taken the Edgehill Cottage for a time. He, too, uses Grey's & Greave's, and is always popping in to ask for them—"

"Well," Diana fumed, "bother Mr. Thomas! I don't know Mr. Thomas, and I don't care a hoot for Mr. Thomas—or his Edgehill Cottage! I want those paints! And please," she added impatiently, "buck up and let me have them. I've got to get back to school. Here's the cash."

She flung two pound notes on the counter. Mr. Wren shrugged and turned away. In a few minutes he returned with a parcel.

"Here you are, Miss Royston-Clarke."

"Thanks," Diana said, and her heart knowing an inward bound of exultation, left the shop, hugging her parcel to her. Emerging into the road outside, she paused.

"Oh, voicks!" she cried.

Impulsive Diana's action then—the action of that good-mooded Diana which had made her so many admirers. For outside the shop a little man, dressed in a faded old jacket with badly frayed cuffs and a pair of decidedly unelegant flannel trousers was in the act of making a grab at the pavement. On the pavement, rolling towards the drain, was a revolving penny, travelling to its doom.

Something seemed to tell Diana that the recovery of that penny meant an awful lot to the man. Without thinking, she plunged towards it as his groping fingers clutched empty air. On the very brink of the kerb she caught up the penny and triumphantly whirled.

"Got it!" she cried.

"Thank you. That was very kind of you." The bearded little man smiled. "That was my last," he added ruefully, and shook his head as he plunged a hand into his pocket. "You see, I always forget, when I wear these trousers, there's a hole in the pocket."

Diana's lips parted. "You mean, you've only got this one penny?"

"That's right," he agreed. "I—I must have lost the rest of the money on my way here."

"Oh!" said Diana. That strangely turbulent heart of hers, so fierce to strike back in revenge, was meltingly softened at once. Really, he did look such a poor, such a shabby old man, but so frightfully clean and appealing.

"You—you wanted to buy things—food?" she questioned.

"Food—yes." Amiably he nodded again, though he eyed her curiously. "But paint first. Food can come afterwards. You see," he explained almost with apology in his voice. "I'm an artist, and this is the only shop for miles around which stocks the sort of paints I work with—Greave's & Grey's."

Diana clutched the parcel in her hand. She remembered something. "And your name—is it Thomas?" she asked quickly.

"Why, yes!" He looked mildly surprised. "But how did you know that?"

"Mr. Wren has just been telling me," Diana explained. She had been rather wondering what to do with the paints she had got. Now, rejoicing in the thought that her bad turn for Molly could be turned into an extremely good one for this appealing old man, she held up the parcel. "I've just bought up every tube of Greave's & Grey's he has in the shop. You want the paints—very badly?"

"Very badly indeed," he agreed. "Then," Diana gleed, and while he stared, astonished, she triumphantly plumped the parcel into his arms, "there they are! Take them—every tube of them. Diana Royston-Clarke is jolly glad to give them to you, and may they bring you such luck that you'll paint a masterpiece."

"But really—really, my dear—the old man demurred. "I—hum!—you must allow me to pay for them."

"What, with no money?" Diana laughed.

"Well—er—hum! But I can't take a gift like—"

"But you can," Diana swiftly cried. "Of course you can! Fairy Godmother Diana—that's me!" she laughed. "And I don't want them really. I only bought them because—well, never mind," she mumbled, flushing. "You see, I—I'm rather mixed up in art—or have been"—with a flash of bitterness. Then, struck by another thought, she penetratingly stared at him. "And so you're an artist?" she added, as if receiving that information for the first time.

"That's right," he agreed. "I'm working at Edgehill Cottage. If—if—diffidently—"you'd like to come along?"

"Oh, may I?" Diana asked eagerly. "Please!"

She fell into step beside him, a queer thrill possessing her now. She liked him. Nice old chap, despite his poverty-stricken appearance.

She knew Edgehill Cottage, of course—rather a dilapidated old villa situated on top of the hill, its only recommendation the glorious view of the South Downs which was to be seen from its rear windows. Just the sort of place one would have expected this Mr. Thomas to occupy, she reflected.

Together they reached the cottage, approaching the door through an utterly neglected garden. Mr. Thomas pushed the door open.

"There you are, my dear," he said. Diana stepped into a room. At once her wonderfully pretty face wrinkled in disgust. The room obviously was Mr. Thomas' living-room, and Mr. Thomas had obviously neglected to keep it even reasonably clean and tidy.

The carpet was rumpled, the grate littered with spent matches and spent cigarette ends, the remains of a meal still on the soiled cloth which covered the table, and odds-and-ends of masculine attire strewn everywhere. Diana turned as he followed her in.

"Goodness gracious, what a mess! Haven't you anybody to keep the place tidy?"

"Nobody," he gravely asserted—"nobody. You see, I rather like working alone, and people bustling about clearing up things rather upsets me. I'm sorry," he added apologetically. "If I'd guessed I should be returning with a visitor I should have cleared up, of course."

"But when," Diana asked, staring at the table, "did you last eat? Those are the remains of your breakfast, aren't they?"

"That's right."

"But your lunch?"
 "Lunch?" He stared at her. "Why, do you know, I haven't had any lunch," he confessed, as though suddenly surprised into remembrance. "I often forget food when I'm working."

Diana stared at him. She knew better than that, or thought she did, and again her heart smote her as she jumped to the reason. This poor old man, of course, hadn't had food because he couldn't afford it.

"I'm really not hungry," he added. "Perhaps it's because I smoke too much."

"Perhaps," Diana snorted, "it's because you're too proud to own up to the fact, Mr. Thomas, that you've no money. Now, look here," she said severely, and he mildly blinked at her again as she shook one admonishing finger under his beard, "you can't go on like this, and you're not going on like this. Which reminds me," Diana said, "that I haven't had tea."

"No tea?"
 "Not even a cup!" Diana cried, with mock concern. "But we'll change all that. You're not working now, so you won't mind a girl busying around doing things, and—well, I don't know why, Mr. Thomas, but I like you, and I'm not going to see you starving in this style. Would you mind," she added, with mock loftiness, "trying to find brooms and things while I'm away? I'm off to buy some food."

"But—but—"
 "See you later!" Diana laughed, and was gone.

The Firebrand was thrilled. Mr. Thomas had immediately become her new hobby. She, whose good nature revelled in good turns as her stormier nature revelled in bad, had taken Mr. Thomas to her heart.

Back into Courtfield she flew, and there, producing the few shillings she had left, spent them all recklessly at different shops. She returned laden with parcels, to find Mr. Thomas, looking rather like a shipwrecked mariner, standing in the midst of his own debris, sheepishly supporting a large broom.

"I—I've found this!"
 "Thanks! Give it to me," Diana said. "Clear that stuff off the table, please. Now we're going to get this place spick-and-span," she decided, "and just for once, Mr. Thomas, you've got to obey orders and have a meal. No slacking, now," she added boisterously.

No slacking there was. Mr. Thomas, for once in his life, hustled about. He seemed mildly amazed by Diana, mildly astonished at himself; but willingly he carried out her orders, and Diana, who had a real sense of what was required to be done, got through the work, with his rather feeble assistance, in record time.

In ten minutes the living-room was cleared, a new tablecloth found and laid, crockery washed, and a meal attractively laid out.

Together they had the meal, Diana gleeing in all this. After the meal, upon her insistence, they washed up together, Diana really liking him more and more with every moment. And after that—

"Perhaps," Mr. Thomas suggested, "you'd like to see my studio—ahem!—the room I work in?"

"Oh yoiicks! Yes, of course!" Diana laughed. "I'd almost forgotten you painted."

Actually she hadn't much hope, knowing Mr. Thomas now, of finding a great deal of interest in his studio. But Diana was in for an agreeable surprise. The studio, unlike the living-room, was a model of neatness, and Diana was



DIANA'S lips parted as she held out the penny she had saved from going down the drain. "You mean," she asked incredulously, "you've only got this penny?" The shabby artist nodded. "I—I must have lost the rest of the money on my way here."

frankly astonished at the amount of equipment he seemed to have got into it.

In front of the little window, which gave a magnificent view of the rolling downs, his easel had been erected. On the easel was resting a half-finished picture which depicted the view and also the framework of the window.

She stared at it, catching her breath. She stared at it as if mesmerised, for the moment experiencing a strange feeling of awe for Mr. Thomas. For that picture—or what there was of it—absolutely lived! It was different from other paintings she had seen. The way the paint had been put on looked a little odd somehow, especially when standing close to it. But a few steps back, and the little scene simply jumped at her—vivid, living!

"You—you painted this?"
 "Oh, yes!" He nodded.
 "I—I say!" Diana breathed.
 "I'm glad you like it."
 "And—and what will you do with it when it's finished? Sell it?"

He nodded.
 "Well, yes. If I can find a buyer, of course."

Diana stared at it again. There was much about that little painting she could not understand, but the vivid life and sparkle of it could not be denied. Her thoughts flashed to Molly Knight. What a puny thing her artistic efforts were compared with this, she spitefully thought. And Babs—she almost laughed until, seized with new inspiration, the colour mounted to her cheeks and she flung round.

"Mr. Thomas!" she cried breathlessly. "Mr. Thomas, tell me—do you paint figures—people?"

"Why, I have done so—yes!"
 "Then—oh yoiicks!" Diana whooped. Oh, what an idea she had hold of now—what a glorious, wonderful idea! Supposing Mr. Thomas painted her? Suppose she got him to paint a special picture—a picture of herself—the glamorous, radiant Diana! And suppose, when it was done, she put it in

the open class of the exhibition—oh yoiicks, what chance would Molly's painting of Babs stand then! But she wouldn't tell him that, of course. She wouldn't tell him until she had won him the gold medal and made him famous without his knowledge. What a lovely surprise for him!

"Then—" she breathed. "Oh yoiicks, Mr. Thomas, you shall have a commission to paint a picture! You shall! My father will stump up for it when you tell him the price, but mind, you'll have to put a move on. Supposing you paint—me?" she breathlessly suggested.

"Well, this is a surprise!" he murmured. "Yes, you would make a very beautiful subject, Miss Royston-Clarke."

"Thank you!" Diana gave a delightful laugh. "But you'll have to do it quickly—in three or four days. Could you?"

"Oh, yes!" he agreed. "Once I get started I'm rather a quick worker."

"Then we'll start?" Diana eagerly asked. "Look here, we'll start tomorrow. It's half-holiday at school, and I can let you have the whole afternoon. How's that?"

"Splendid."
 "And you'll make it the very best thing you've ever done?"

"The very best," he assured her. "The very, very best—really! It shall be a picture which friendship shall inspire. To-morrow, then, Miss Royston-Clarke?"

"To-morrow," Diana gleed, and left him almost light-headed with delirious joy. What a score for her!

Diana Has Her Doubts!



"IT'S funny. Dashed funny," Barbara Redfern said, with darkening brow. "Who on earth could have taken the paints? You're sure, Molly, you did leave them in the case?"

"Absolutely!" Molly replied. "Oh dear, I—I hope Wren's is not shut! Let's hurry, shall we?"

Her face was quite distressed as she pressed on the pedals of her bicycle. The faces of Babs and Mabs, who were accompanying her, were equally distressed—and a little grim.

A quarter of an hour ago, back at Cliff House, Molly had finished her sketching in, and Molly, seeing that broad daylight was not such a vital requirement for the new study upon which she had embarked, had decided to start the painting at once. It was then, to everybody's flabbergasted dismay, that the loss of Molly's paints had been discovered.

Consternation then. Almost distraction on Molly's part. Who had taken the paints?

Babs had thought of Diana. A trick typical of Diana's spite, that. She was suspicious of Diana, but, having no proof against that girl, had refrained from voicing her suspicion. But, jolly, they'd have to hurry if they were to get to Wren's before the shop closed.

Hard pedalling got them at the shop just as Mr. Wren came out to put up his shutters for the night. He stared when they named their requirements.

Significantly, Babs nodded to her two companions, and they spread themselves across the pavement.

Diana paused.

"Hallo!" she said.

"Diana," Babs attacked directly, "what have you done with Molly's paints?"

"I?" Diana's brows lifted. "Who says I've taken Molly's paints?"

"You know jolly well you've taken them!" Babs angrily retorted. "And you know jolly well that to prevent Molly getting any others you've bought the whole stock in that shop! Diana, we want those paints!"

"Really?"

"Please, Diana!" Molly begged.

Diana scowled.

"I'm Diana to my friends," she said pointedly: "Miss Royston-Clarke to you. Hang your beastly paints. Why should I worry about your beastly paints? Let me go!"

"Wait a minute!" Babs snapped angrily. "Di, you're not getting out of it like that! You know what those paints mean to Molly—you know jolly well she can't start work without them. Either you give Molly back her own paints, or you replace them with the ones you've bought from Wren's."

for to-morrow. We've just got to let Diana see that she's got going to have it all her own way! Come on! The station for us!"

And they darted for their bicycles.

Diana, meantime, was gaily progressing on her way. Having suddenly discovered a puncture in her own machine, she had left it at Mr. Thomas' and elected to journey back by bus.

In a gay mood she arrived at Cliff House. At once she went up to the studio. Molly's canvas was there, and in front of it Miss Ayre was standing, thoughtfully scrutinising it. Diana blinked as she saw it; for a moment her self-complacency knew a quail of uncertainty. Certainly, that roughing in was extremely effective.

"You—you like it, Miss Ayre?" she questioned, hoping the art mistress would find fault.

"I think it is excellent," Miss Ayre replied enthusiastically. "Molly has all the right ideas. If the finished picture fulfils the promise of the outline, then I should say she has a first-class chance of carrying off the open medal!"

Diana felt a little dashed. Good the work was—exceptionally. But not so good as Thomas'.

Or was it?

A disturbing doubt began to irk Diana. Was she depending too much on Mr. Thomas? After all, she had formed her opinion of his work only upon one unfinished picture, and there had been parts of that she could not quite understand.

Although he had assured her that he could paint life she had no definite proof of that, and it did strike her suddenly that for a man who should have been a successful artist he was outrageously poor. Supposing, after all, she had put her money on the wrong horse?

Some of the elation faded from Diana as she pondered those problems. Triumph turned to doubt. Doubt turned to furious alarm when, next morning, Molly came to school armed with a brand new set of Greave's & Grey's. How she had got them Diana did not know; but the realisation that her plot, after all, had failed filled her with renewed rage.

It was with frantic haste she gulped down her meal that lunch-time; with those doubts still weighing on her that she presented herself at Mr. Thomas' cottage. The gentle, shiny-faced little man beamed at her as he opened the door to her.

"Why, Miss Royston-Clarke, here you are!" he jovially greeted. "Come in; everything is ready."

And obviously glad to see her, he flung the door open, and Diana, despite her doubts, felt her heart melting again as she saw that he had donned a clean shirt and a new tie, and that in place of his frayed-cuffed old coat he now wore a more imposing, if rather ancient-looking, velvet jacket. He had even made some attempt to clear up, too, she observed.

"We start?" he asked.

"Yes. But—" Diana eyed him. "What about lunch? Have you had lunch?"

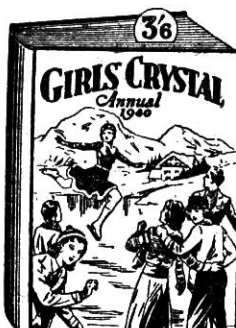
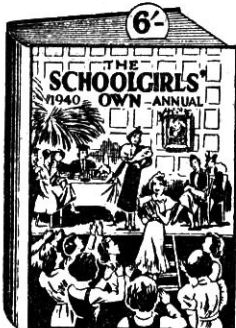
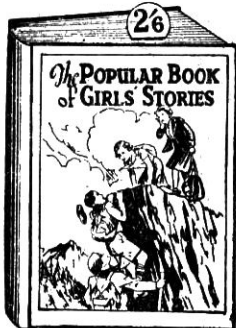
"Hum! Well—" he sheepishly fenced.

"Meaning," Diana said sternly, "you haven't? Look here, Mr. Thomas, you must eat, you know. Now, before we start I'm going to get you something. What about the remains of that ham and tongue we had together last night?"

Mr. Thomas smiled. Really, he was

YOU CAN MAKE THESE YOUR ANNUALS, TOO

Here are pictures of the three Annuals briefly mentioned on page 7. Perhaps your newspaper would let you have a peep inside them. You'd never want to give them back, if he did!



"Well!" he said. "Well, isn't this funny? You know, I had a feeling I shouldn't have let all my Greave's & Grey's stock go, but Miss Royston-Clarke was so insistent—"

"Royston-Clarke?" Babs quickly interjected.

"Why, yes! She bought the whole stock—let me see—an hour ago, I should say."

"And so," Babs gritted, turning to her chums, "that's who we've got to thank, is it? I half guessed it, though I wouldn't say anything. Diana, of course, knew that you used those paints, Molly. Diana took yours—and, to make certain you shouldn't start work on that picture, came along here and bought up the only stock in Courtfield. But, come on!" Babs said fiercely. "She must still have the stock—or your paints. We'll make her give them up!"

"Hold on!" Mabs cried. "Here she is!"

They all wheeled and stared. There was Diana, tripping down the road from the direction of Edgehill, eyes sparkling, her whole being expressing jaunty confidence. But Babs noticed that she carried no parcel in her hands, and rather wondered at that buoyancy of step, at that exultantly self-satisfied look in her face. She saw them, and she laughed.

"And either," Diana said, with sudden fury, "you get out of my way, or I push you into the gutter!"

"You dare—"

But Diana had barged her way through them, pushing the white-faced Molly aside as that girl desperately tried to intercept her. Mabs took an angry pace after her, then paused as Babs' arm went out.

"No," Babs said, "we don't want a row here in the street."

"But, Barbara," Molly distractedly burst out, "what am I to do? The nearest place I can get the paints is in Eastbourne!"

Babs thought desperately.

"And that means a delay of at least three days!" Molly added.

"Does it?" Babs looked up quickly. "Not if you collect them yourself from Eastbourne now—to-night! Wait a minute!" she cried, and she feverishly fumbled in her purse. "I've got an idea! We'll beat Diana yet. Molly, there's a train to Eastbourne at seven o'clock."

"But—but the fare!" Molly faltered. "I've got the fare here," Babs said swiftly. "Daddy sent me a postal order to get more paints if I needed them. You take it, Molly—please! You can pay me back some other time. But we've just got to have those paints

so lovably easy to handle. Quite apologetic and humble he looked as he bustled about under her orders, and Diana, laying out a really tempting repast for him, tidied up while he consumed it. After that they had a cup of tea together.

"And now," Mr. Thomas said, "we get to work."

Diana nodded. Off she went into the studio. There, shining in the sunlight, was a new canvas on the easel which yesterday had been occupied by the landscape. Rather to her surprise, too, a screen had been erected and on the screen had been placed a mirror, and in front of the screen was a small table on which were various toilet articles. She blinked.

"But what's this, Mr. Thomas?"

"That," he informed her, "is the setting. I'm going to paint you brushing your hair as you smile into that mirror. The title of the picture, you see, is going to be 'Schoolgirl Beauty.'"

Diana frowned. The title sounded all right, but the subject, to her vainglorious mind, was by no means glamorous. She pouted a little.

"But won't that look like an advertisement for somebody's hair tonic or something?"

He shook his head.

"It will look," he said, with an unexpected firmness, "exactly what I intend to make it look. Miss Royston-Clarke, please, you must let me have my own way in this."

And have his own way he did, much to Diana's bewildered surprise. She soon discovered that in dealing with Mr. Thomas, the artist, she was dealing with a far, far different being from the frayed-cuffed little dreamer with the large hole in his pocket.

Again she knew that slight feeling of awe. In his studio Mr. Thomas seemed to find some power, some firmness with which it was impossible to associate him elsewhere. Diana, who had found him as wax in her hands in the living-room, now found herself most amazingly under a spell. And, astonishing as it was, she found herself obeying his words without caring or arguing, without even complaining.

"Good?" he said at the end of an hour. "That's got the masses in, I think." She stepped down to have a look at it. And back in that moment he was to the little man trying to rescue his penny from disappearing down the drain. "Perhaps it doesn't convey much to you, Miss Royston-Clarke."

Diana stared at the canvas. Again she knew a pang of anxious disappointment. On the canvas was a vague outline, with no definite features, but many shadows, and pinned down the edge of the canvas were various bits of drawing paper which contained eyes and nose and hands, all apparently sketched without rhyme or reason. She bit her lip.

"You—you're sure it's going to be good?" she asked.

"It's going," Mr. Thomas said, "to be as good as I can make it. I don't think you're going to have any cause to complain with the finished painting."

Diana had to take his word. But at the end of the afternoon's sitting those doubts which had assailed her this morning were becoming alarmingly intensified. A chaotic smear of various-coloured paints obscuring her outline was the scene which presented itself to her scrutiny.

"Like it?" Mr. Thomas asked.

Diana felt sick with disappointment. But somehow she couldn't hurt his feelings. On the other hand, she couldn't admit it was good. She said, rather feebly:

"I—I suppose it will come out all right."

"Wait," he said cheerfully, "till to-morrow."

Not with relish did Diana visualise to-morrow. She was glad, somehow, to leave the cottage. She felt numbed, hurt. What a fool she had been, she told herself with a burst of inward fury, to trust her portrait to a down-at-heel, shabby, starving artist like that! Why, the man just couldn't paint!

And, meantime, Molly—

Rage came back to Diana as she thought of Molly; envy swept her as she thought of that picture.

She hurried back to the school and at once made her way to the studio. And there she had to clench her hands

It Seemed Like a Miracle!



DIANA ROYSTON-CLARKE thought of nothing that night except the

daub at Mr. Thomas' cottage and the really excellent painting which was coming to life in the studio. Jealous envy tore at her heart—if only she could get hold of that picture—if only she could, in some way, prevent it from going to the exhibition!

But even there she found no satisfaction; for Babs & Co., now they knew Diana was on the warpath, were taking no chances, and when Molly had finished work that night the painting was taken to Miss Ayre's room and placed in that lady's personal custody. Diana, it seemed, was foiled at every point.

On the following day Diana seriously debated in her mind whether she



GRIMLY, Babs & Co. barred the way. "Diana," Babs attacked directly, "what have you done with Molly's paints?" "I?" Diana's eyebrows lifted. "Who says I've taken Molly's paints?" "You know jolly well you've taken them!" Babs angrily retorted. "And you know jolly well that to prevent Molly getting any others you've bought up the whole stock in that shop!"

to control the raging fit of anger which consumed her.

For Molly's picture—oh, yoicks! It was coming on brilliantly.

Babs, looking up from her position at the electric fire, saw the Firebrand, and perhaps guessed something of the thwarted fury she felt as she stared at the picture. She smiled.

"How's it doing, Di?"

"Rotten!" Diana said furiously.

"Meaning," Clara Trevlyn grinned—Clara was keeping a watchful eye upon Diana—"that you're so jolly green with jealousy you'd like to burn it! Don't kid, Di; we can see what you're feeling."

Diana gulped down her rage and flew out.

Oh, goodness, what a fool she had been!

Never had she been so humiliated in all her life.

should go along to Mr. Thomas. Wasn't it just a sheer waste of time? But she had promised, and was attracted to that little man somehow—Oh yoicks!

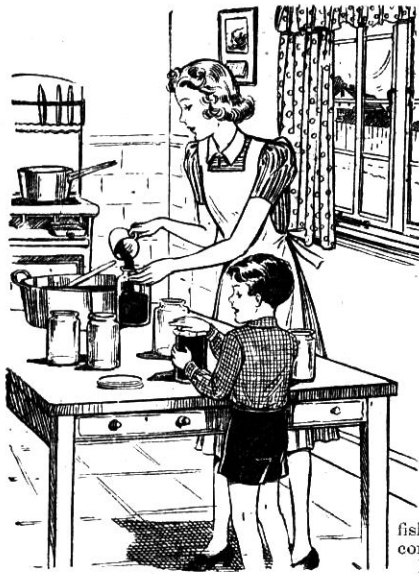
Well, she would go, and she'd have to tell him somehow that she had decided she didn't want his masterpiece, after all. She went without enthusiasm.

"Ah!" he bubbled at her when she presented herself at the door, and his pink, bearded face was alight. "Miss Royston-Clarke, come and see!"

"But—" Diana objected. "Mr. Thomas, I want to tell you—"

"Come!" he said jovially. "That can wait till later. Half the night, all this morning, I have worked on your picture. Did I not tell you that friendship should inspire it?"

Friendship, Diana thought, had



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.

NOW that we're thinking, quite seriously, about the long evenings indoors again, our thoughts also turn to "something to do," during our spare time.

Knitting seems to be hobby Number One this year again—just as it was last year, and the year before, for that matter. "It's so restful"—that's what most people say about knitting, though I don't think young schoolgirls worry much about restful occupations, do you?

Just between ourselves, I might tell you, that this 'Patricia of yours isn't terribly keen on knitting. You'll probably smile when I tell you why: I find it too soothing and prefer a hobby that makes me think and concentrate. So that's why I tend to try to do two things at once—knit and read. No wonder then, that I sometimes drop stitches.

All the same, I still think it's a jolly fine occupation—this knitting craze.

● It Looks Like Fur

And I want to tell you about that new wool which can be bought. It isn't cheap, mind you—but then, you don't have to buy tons of it at a time. It's a knobbly sort of wool, and when knitted, it looks rather like fur. Most expensive and luxurious.

You might mention it to a big sister who's been dying for a fur jacket or cape, but can't afford a real fur one this year. She'll probably hug you for the brainwave, and might even give you something of hers that you've always envied.

By the way, tell her to ask for "astrakhan" wool, in the shop. They'll know what she means.

Sewing, of course, is another favourite long-evening hobby. I confess I really do enjoy a spot of stitchery. Just one rule I make. I simply will not work on black material in the evening, by artificial light. (I save "dark work" for the daytime.)

When I helped mother with our black A.R.P. curtains, we stitched away like mad one evening, and I had a most horrible headache as a result. I couldn't think what had caused it at first—but now that I've realised, I've resolved to be wiser in future. For eyes are such precious things, aren't they?

Crocheting, too, seems to be coming into its own again. Not the lace-for-afternoon-tea-cloth variety, nor edgings of d'oyleys. I see lots of girls making collars and cuffs for their dresses, and even

fishnet bandeaus for their hair, merely by a combination of chain and double crochet.

It's all so easy, once you can hold a crochet hook correctly, and know the simple stitches. It's fascinating, too, now that there are so many varieties and colours in crochet cotton.

● Made With Conkers

Have you lucky young country-dwellers noticed what a lot of nuts there are around this year?

Conkers also, have been more plentiful than usual. I've never been a "conker-queen," I'm afraid, but I just can't resist picking the smooth, shiny things up when I see them newly-dropped from a tree.

If you're the same—or if you have a young brother who's a proud "conker king"—perhaps you have a few that you'd like to make into an attractive little brooch and bracelet to match.

The tricky part is to make the hole first through each nut. A knitting needle will do this, or a metal skewer, or one of those jabby tools from father's tool-box, if he allows you to use them.

To make the bracelet, you now thread cord elastic through the holes. (This elastic costs a penny for a card of a yard or more and is almost as fine as cotton.) You can then paint a little flower pattern on to the rough part of the nut—or the letters of your name. You'll be delighted with the novel bracelet thus made, I assure you.

For the "fob-style" brooch, you'll require two or three nuts. Bore holes through them, and thread a piece of coloured cord through, knotting at the bottom and tying in a bow at the top. Attach a safety pin to this—a goldy one—and you can pin your "fob" to your dress your coat lapel, or where you like.

● Fame For The Family

Have you ever helped your father mix cement? I think this is great fun.

Last week-end, my father decided he'd make a step leading up to our garden "hut"—which is really a sort of summer house and toolshed combined.

We had some old bricks to make the top layer of the step, but a concrete foundation had to be made first. So we spent quite a time mixing sand and cement together.

It was soon done and we smoothed it gently into position and left it to dry.

It was then that I had an idea.

"Let's imprint our hands and write our names in the cement," I suggested.

Father thought the notion rather batchy I suspect, but anyhow, he didn't mind.

So we all, one at a time, plonked our hands into the nearly dry cement and then wrote our names underneath with a stick.

Your Patricia must have banged rather hard, I'm thinking, for my imprint looked rather like a bunch of bananas, but having been done, was unalterable.

Small brother Heath—or Heatherington in full—had to join in, of course. Then mother pressed her hand in to the cement, while Heath went off to find his beloved puss-cat.

The result was that our step looked most intriguing—when the cement was quite set—even Minkie's tiny paw-print had come out well.

"Just like the film stars," said mother.

But I can't help wondering what people in a hundred years or so will say when they remove our bricks and find the imprinted cement beneath.

"A relic of a fine civilisation—even earlier than the Romans"—the excavators will probably murmur into their wise old beards.

● A Useful "Pinny"

Don't you think this overall in the picture is jolly useful?

It was actually a summer dress once. But it wore out in the sleeve part and became too short for the owner. So she wisely snipped out the sleeves and bound the edges—leaving a really useful "pinny," that covers her autumn dress perfectly.

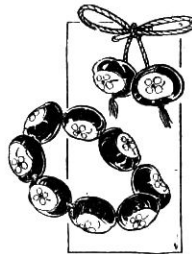
She looks very business-like with that duster, doesn't she?

So I'll give you a tip, in case you feel like a spot of housework. When polishing a table, or any furniture for that matter, it's ever so much easier, and you get a much higher polish if you slightly warm the duster first.

That's an economy notion, too—for furniture cream or polish goes much further this way, also.

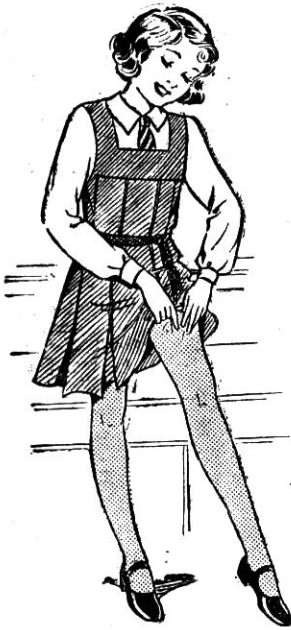
Bye-bye now until next week, pets—when I hope to tell you more about that Babs & Co. idea Miss Richard and I are planning for you.

Your friend,
PATRICIA.



FUNNY LITTLE HABITS

Give yourself a check-up to see how many of these little tricks are yours—and then see if you can't break yourself of them.



AT SCHOOL, Do You—

- Bite the end of your pencil ?
- Nibble your finger-nails ? (Dread thought.)
- Stand on one leg and clutch your ankle when being "ticked off" ?
- Pull at your hankie ?
- Fiddle with your hair ?
- Drag at your stockings ?
- Hitch at your bloomers ?

OUT-OF-DOORS, Do You—

- Go arm in arm, regardless of the room you occupy on the pavement ?
- Pause at EVERY sweetshop ?
- Comment on EVERY passer-by ?
- Push your way on to the bus ?
- Hang on to your seat there like grim death, regardless of who stands ?
- Tear up your bus ticket ?

AT HOME, Do You—

- Leave doors to bang ?
- Forget to turn off lights ?
- Whistle loudly and constantly ?
- Wind legs round chairs ?
- Turn down corners of pages in books ?
- Stick stamps on letters at intriguing angles ?

- Clutch clean wall-paper up stairs instead of bannisters ?
- Walk on the stair "treads" instead of in the middle, on the carpet or lino ?
- Leave bath-room towels unfolded and soap unriused ?
- Dump used cup on draining-board instead of washing it up at once ?

AT TABLE, Do You—

- Stir tea violently so that it spills into saucer ?
- Leave spoon in cup ?
- Crook little finger—oh, so daintily—when drinking tea ?
- Hold knife like a pencil ?
- Place fork with prongs downwards when you have finished eating ?
- Leave your serviette unfolded ?
- Jump down from table without saying "may I ?"

AT THE CINEMA, Do You—

- Rustle sweet papers ?
- Guess what's going to happen—and say so ?
- Put your feet on seat in front ?
- Drop hat and gloves, and have to search ?
- Make complaining noises when you have to stand for later-comers ?

WHEN VISITING, Do You—

- Arrive too early ?
- Say how tired you are after your walk ?
- Forget to open doors for your hostess ?
- Look bored when you're not enjoying yourself and the grown-ups are talking ?
- Bring out your comb in the sitting-room ?
- Or, worse still, in the dining-room ?
- Say you'd "rather not" when asked to join in games or sing-song ?
- Yawn noticeably—even if you are a bit tired ?

IN THE COUNTRY, Do You—

- Cross fields by the gap in the hedge, rather than by the stile ?
- Forget to shut gates, so that cattle can get through ?
- Allow your dog to get near to goats and other animals that might be grazing ?

- Fail to reply when a kindly countryman smiles "good-day" ?
- Cross railways lines without first looking carefully both ways—especially if there are youngsters with you ?

WHEN SHOPPING, Do You—

- Forget your shopping list, and have to stand for a "good think" ?
- Take a shopping basket that's too small—or none at all ?
- Try to get served before others who have been waiting longer than you ?
- Become tongue-tied and worried if the assistant says he hasn't a particular brand you've asked for ?

There are over 50 questions here. If you answer "Yes" to 45 or more of them, that's pretty grim, and you'll have to take yourself seriously in hand.

If you answer "yes" to over 30 there's room for improvement.

Between 30 and 20 you're fairly average. Under 20 you're a well-behaved young person.

If you answer "No" to all questions, you're a miracle—or else you've not been quite honest with yourself and had better check up again.



PRESERVING AUTUMN LEAVES

Colourful leaves make such a charming decoration for the home, and you can preserve them yourself.

To take a few sprays of beech leaves back with you is a good idea, for they remain fresh for quite a while, and with the addition of a few chrysanthemums, make a really luxurious flower decoration for the home.

But, of course, even the freshest beech leaves will droop and fade after a week or two, and then perhaps it will be too late to gather more.

So you wonder if you can preserve them—or if it is very difficult.

Yes, you can preserve them, and it isn't a bit difficult.

Gather the leaves while they still have a faint tinge of green on them, if possible.

Avoid any that are shrivelled and dead-looking.

Bring them home and buy from your chemist some "trade glycerine." This is cheaper than the variety most of us know, and costs only a few pence.

Place equal quantities of this glycerine and warm water in a tall jar, and then stand the stems of the leaves in it. Leave them without changing the mixture for about three weeks.

After that, remove the leaves, wipe off any excess moisture, smooth out crumpled leaves, and arrange them in a tall vase. They will then retain their lovely shades until spring comes again.

AS you take a walk or drive through the countryside on a Saturday or Sunday with the family, I expect you often pause to admire the trees in their colourful autumn dresses.

(Continued from page 11)

inspired just a bad dream so far. But somehow he was so enthusiastic, so almost childishly glad to see her that she bit back the objections which flooded to her lips. Without hope, expectation, or even willingness she followed him into the studio, her eyes going lethargically towards the canvas. And then she almost leapt.

Yoicks! What was this? Was she dreaming?

It was like a dream—a dream come true. Diana blinked; Diana stared. In a swift change from sulky despair to sudden, overpowering excitement, she stood and gaped. What was this she saw?

Herself!

Herself—yes—but more glamorous, more radiant and lovely than even Diana's own conception of herself. Vividly alive her portrait stood before her. It was as if she saw a mirror jerked suddenly under her eyes. Face, features, expression were perfect. The artist, indeed, had visualised her with a greater, more shining beauty than ever she possessed. Every hair of her head was waving, glittering, shining. That lovely smile, that delicate little turn of her face—

"Well?" Mr. Thomas beamed.

"But—but I don't understand!" Diana stuttered, and she turned and nearly surrendered to an impulse to hug the breath out of him. "You—you—"

"I've been working," he mildly announced, "for you. It is not finished, as you observe. The features I have; yes, but there are details yet to be worked in—the costume, the setting. I told you, didn't I, that when I worked under inspiration I worked fast? And I worked, you see from notes and my memory of you—"

"Notes?" Diana asked. "You mean those noses and eyes and things you pencilled on scraps of paper?"

"Exactly!" He smiled. "That is my method. Now, if you will give me another sitting—for half an hour?"

Diana would have given him a sitting for a year then! Her heart was singing. This—this—Oh yoicks! And to think—even for a moment—she had felt Mr. Thomas couldn't paint!

She felt ashamed of herself.

A jubilant shame it was, however—a gleeful shame. Why, this picture was too good for the Courtfield Art Exhibition! It should be entered in the Royal Academy! It was wonderful, superb, just too utterly breath-taking—and to think Mr. Thomas had painted it!

Diana, that afternoon, was as obedient to the wishes of the painter as any slave.

"Thank you," he said after half an hour, "that will do, I think. I have all the extra notes and details now; and to-morrow, if you like, you may take it with you. And now," he added, "what about a cup of tea?"

"To-morrow I can have it?" Diana eagerly asked. "Really? But—Oh yoicks! I'd almost forgotten! Mr. Thomas, what about payment?"

Mr. Thomas gravely smiled.

"Let us not consider that for the moment."

Insistent he was about that, and Diana said no more. But she had her own ideas. Her father, she knew, would just fall over himself when he saw the picture. Ten pounds at least he'd send the artist—perhaps fifteen. Even more.

But that, like the medal he was destined to win, was going to come as a surprise—for Diana meant to put the picture into the exhibition without his

knowledge. Mr. Royston-Clarke should present that cheque to him when he had received the prize.

After they had had tea Diana went back to Cliff House walking on air. What a shock for hopeful Molly! What a set-back for stick-in-the-mud Babs!

Babs was not sitting as model when she went up to the art-room; that part of the picture was nearly over. But Molly, glowing with enthusiasm over her effort, was putting to it the finishing touches.

"Hallo!" Diana said haughtily. "How's the daub?"

Babs looked at her.

"If you mean Molly's picture—"

"Oh, does she call it a picture?" Diana sneered. "What fancy names you get for these things! Picture!" She looked at it and burst out laughing. "And that" she said, "is what you hope will win the exhibition, eh?"

"Diana, don't be a cat!" Mabel Lynn angrily cried.

"I'm not being a cat. Why should I?" Diana laughed. "I'm just sorry for your poor sakes, that's all! If you only knew what I know. If you only knew what a smack in the face you're saving up for yourselves! But, still, carry on," she added agreeably. "Get on with it. Perhaps you might sell it—as a firescreen or something."

Babs eyed her. Molly eyed her, too. Rather uneasy that scrutiny was.

"Diana," Babs said when she had gone, and looked at her chums, "is plotting some fresh mischief. She's up to something. Molly, supposing you take that picture home—and finish it there? Just in case Diana has an idea of getting at it."

Molly immediately looked happier.

"And—and then take it straight to the exhibition?" she asked.

"Yes."

It was a good idea. And that night Molly did take it home; but Diana, though she knew all about that, only laughed.

And the following day came, and still Diana had taken no action, except to get two hours' leave of absence from school. Next day came, and with it Molly.

"Molly, you've taken the picture?" Babs asked eagerly.

"Yes," Molly was quite pale with excitement. "And—and the selection committee will let me know whether it's going to be passed for exhibition to-morrow. Oh, Babs, I—I do hope we stand a chance!"

Babs laughed. She was confident. Molly's effort was good—extremely good. It compared with anything she had ever seen in the exhibition in past years.

"Don't worry, Molly."

But Molly did worry. She was a bag of nerves all that day. Next day she was even worse, and her most eagerly hopeful question when she saw Babs was whether any communication had been received from the art exhibition. Her face fell when she was told that it had not.

"They—they've rejected it!" she cried tremblingly.

"Oh stuff!" Babs said.

But she was a little anxious herself as the morning wore on. She knew just the faintest tremor of doubt, and she felt also sorry for Molly. When lessons dismissed she joined that troubled and apprehensive girl in the quad.

"Babs," Molly almost choked, "it—it's not come!"

"Hey, what's not come?" a voice put in, and they both turned to see Diana. "Perhaps," she said, "this is what you're looking for? A boy at the gates

just gave it to me." And she held out an official-looking envelope.

"Diana, you've been keeping it!" Babs cried.

"No. Why should I—?" Diana shrugged. "Look, there's the boy just getting on his bicycle. It's from the town hall, isn't it?" she asked, as Molly tremblingly ripped open the envelope.

Then she gave a cry.

"Babs, it—it's all right! It's accepted! It—oh, my goodness!"

"Jolly good!" Diana enthused.

"You mean you're glad?" Molly cried, anxious in that moment that everybody should share her joy.

"I'm glad—yes," Diana said; and, hating herself for the hurtfulness of the remark, she could not resist what she said next: "I'm glad," she added, "because it's going to mean such a smack in the eye for you!"

Babs turned red.

"What do you mean?"

"The exhibition," Diana said calmly. "is to-morrow, isn't it? Right! Then wait till then. I think," she taunted. "I can promise you all a most stunning surprise!"

And she walked away.

Diana's Triumph!



SOUR grapes, that's what it was, of course. Diana was only trying to make them feel that she still had something up her sleeve. So Babs told Molly Knight, and Molly, cheered when she re-read the contents of the acceptance, agreed with her. What mattered Diana now? What mattered anything?

"And—and if it only wins!" she breathed.

"It will," Babs said comfortingly. "Just wait and see."

Full of hope, Molly turned up at the school next morning, to find Babs, Bessie, Clara, and half a dozen others of the chums all ready to accompany her to the town hall.

As they stood in the quad Diana's father's Rolls-Royce swept into the quad, its uniformed chauffeur at the wheel, and at that moment Diana herself swept down the school steps.

Dazzling Diana looked in her new fur-trimmed coat, her expensive hat, her lace gloves, and new high-heeled shoes. Out of school hours, the Cliff House girls could change out of school uniform, and the Firebrand always took full advantage of that concession. Up she sauntered.

"My hat! Where are you going?" Clara Trevlyn demanded.

"To the same place," Diana smiled, "as you are. See you later," she added, as she climbed into the car.

"Oh dear! You—you know, I still don't trust that girl!" Molly said to Babs.

But Babs only laughed. There was no damage Diana could do now. Blow Diana! Here was the bus, and at the other end of it was the Exhibition. Eagerly they bundled into it.

Chattering excitedly, they were carried into Courtfield.

A steady crowd was pouring into the town hall when they reached it. They surrendered their tickets at the entrance. The section which was to be given over to school efforts was in the left wing of the building, and there they eagerly joined the crowd. And almost at once a cry burst from Clara's lips.

"Babs, here's the school section! And look, there's your picture!"

Eagerly they hurried towards it. Babs' eyes shone. There it was, and a

quick survey of its rivals told them at once that it was in the first flight. Mabs gleed.

"Babs, you'll win!"
 "Chickens!" Babs laughed, but flushed happily. "Don't let's count them, you know. Come on; let's find Molly's effort. Where's the open section?"

The open, of course, was the biggest section. No less than five big rooms were given up to it. In the first they found no trace of Molly's picture, but in the second—there it was! And, like Babs' effort, it was hanging on eye level.

"Which means," Clara crowed, "they think it's good enough to catch the judge's eye. My hat, it looks fine, doesn't it? Beats anything else here to a frazzle! Molly, you're going to win!"

"Oh, do—do you think so?" Molly stuttered.

"Sure!" Babs beamed.
 She cast an eye over the others. She felt confident that Molly's was the best

Incredulously they stared at it. Diana Royston-Clarke, their own radiant Firebrand, it was; but a more startling, a more dazzling Diana than even the girl they knew. A work of art that, if ever there was one. Certainly one of the most brilliant things Babs had ever seen. Beneath it was a small card.

"Artist anonymous. Exhibited by Miss Diana Royston-Clarke."

"So—so that," Babs breathed, "is why Diana has been so cockahoop! Who—who on earth painted it?"

Nobody heard. They were all still staring. And with equal admiration the crowd around them were staring, too. Babs caught murmurs:

"Isn't it wonderful? What a marvellous-looking girl! Who ever is the man? Ought to be an R.A. And the model—remarkable girl!"

"No, really!" put in a pleased voice, and Babs & Co. jumped. "Well, here's the model in person. Tell me what you think of her beside the picture. Oh, Babs! I say, Babs!"

A Bolt from the Blue!



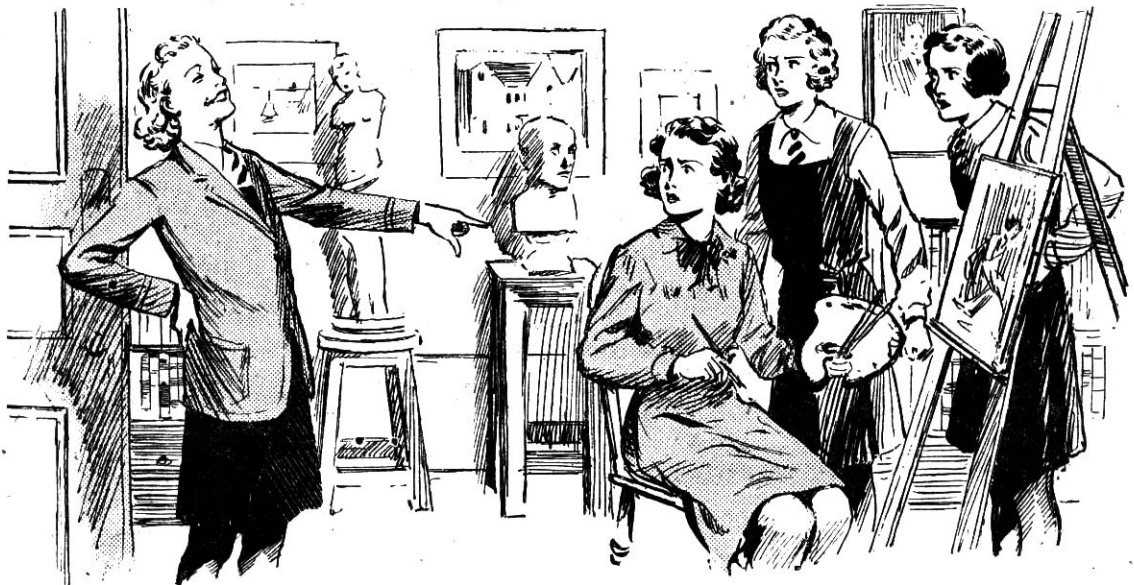
UTTERLY heart-broken was Molly. Diana, in the end, despite all Babs' precautions, despite every confident hope, had beaten her.

But Diana herself. Surely Diana had never been more triumphant!

This was her hour. This was her triumph! No doubt her picture more than outshone anything in the exhibition; no doubt she was receiving all that attention and admiration which she had expected. People were staring at her, murmuring about her; from the picture to her they looked.

Then up came a Press photographer. Diana posed for him beside the picture. Flash! went the light, and Diana laughed. Then a Pressman—

"It's a sensation!" he cried. "I know something about art, and this—"



"PICTURE!" Diana looked at it and burst out laughing. "And that is what you hope will win the Exhibition, eh?" The chums looked at her angrily. The picture was good, and Diana knew it. But she went on mockingly: "If you only knew what I know! If you only knew what a smack in the face you're saving up for yourselves!"

there—and better, too, than anything they had so far observed in the first room. Hopes rose high within them, and Molly, who perhaps realised that ambition's goal was within her reach at last, trembled. Then all at once Bessie Bunter started.

"I sus-say, what's going on in the third room, you know? There seems to be an awful crowd there!"

"Come and look," Janet Jordan advised.

They went through into the third room. Certainly there was a crowd. Like a magnet one picture was attracting them. And standing round that picture, as they all were, it was a few moments before Babs, Molly & Co. could edge their way near enough to see the picture.

Eventually, however, they found themselves in the forefront of the crowd.

And then they stared.
 For this—this smiling, radiant-faced, dazzling girl! They caught their breath.

"Dud-D-Diana, you know!" Bessie stuttered.

"Diana!" Clara said faintly.
 "Diana!" repeated Molly. "Oh!"

And Diana Royston-Clarke, seeming to exude radiance, came bursting bright-faced through the crowd.

"And how," she added, "do you like my picture?"

"Your picture?" Clara stared.

"The one I got specially painted by an unknown artist," Diana said. "Isn't it glorious? And don't you think," she added sweetly, "that it's going to win the gold medal? So sorry, Molly, for your poor little effort!"

Molly, her face white, wretched, had drawn away.

"You—you did that to—to spite me!" she muttered.

"I did not," Diana loftily explained, "because I wanted to give another artist a chance. And a jolly good chance he's made of it! I did it," she added, gazing round and beaming at the looks of admiration which were fastened upon her, "because I wanted to show you that you and Babs couldn't have it all your own way."

But Molly was pushing her way through the crowd. It was the end of her hopes, of her ambitions. For how could she even dream that her picture stood a chance against the masterpiece?

well, it's laughable to find this in a local exhibition, Miss Royston-Clarke. Who is the artist? Why haven't you brought him along here?"

"Because," Diana confessed, "he doesn't know yet his picture is being exhibited. You see, he's a poor man, and I'm saving it up for him as a stunning surprise. When Mr. Quimble, the judge, arrives, and I know he's got first prize; then I'm going to fetch him. I— Oh, yoicks, excuse me!" she added, with a sudden bubble of excitement. "There is the artist, and when— Oh, my goodness! Mr. Thomas!" she shrieked.

And excitedly she rushed forward.

"Mr. Thomas!" Diana repeated.

Mr. Thomas it was. But what a different Mr. Thomas was this from the down-at-heel artist Diana knew! He was wearing a well-fitting morning suit, hair and beard carefully groomed, his pink face glowing, his good-humoured little eyes twinkling.

"Oh, yoicks!" Diana laughed. "Where did you borrow those clothes? But—well, never mind, you can tell me about that later. Mr. Thomas, I've got the most lovely surprise for you!"

"My dear—" he protested.

But Diana had caught his arm. Radiant, laughing, she was tugging him back through the crowd. They made way for her, and she pushed him through it, and then halted him in front of his own picture. She beamed. "There!" she cried. "Now, what do you think of it?"

She felt faintly dashed, faintly disappointed by Mr. Thomas' reaction to the surprise. He stared at the picture; he stared at her, and then slowly he shook his head.

And when he spoke his voice held quite a hurt, reproachful note.

"Miss Royston-Clarke, you had no right to exhibit this picture without permission. I had no idea you would do so."

"Hallo!" Babs murmured, staring up.

Diana blinked.

"It was not painted," Mr. Thomas reminded her, "with any idea of being publicly exhibited."

"Well, I know," Diana said, flushing.

"You gave me no hint that was your intention," Mr. Thomas accused.

"No," Diana agreed, but she was looking annoyed now. "I didn't tell you, because I wanted to give you a surprise!" she broke out. "That is the best picture in the exhibition. Can't you see it's going to make you famous? Can't you see you'll win the medal, hands down?"

Very queerly he looked at her.

"Diana, my dear, I appreciate your kindly motive, but— Well, I am a professional—not eligible for this exhibition—"

"Oh, my hat!" breathed Babs, and, with shining eyes turned to Molly as Diana, her face suddenly black, stepped back. "Molly—"

Diana choked.

"Mr. Thomas, look here—" she commenced to blaze out.

And then again she paused as there came a rustle, a voice from the rear of the crowd, as she saw Lady Courtfield, with a smile, brushing her way forward. She reached Mr. Thomas. She smiled.

"Oh, so you have arrived then? I've been looking everywhere for you, Mr. Quimble!"

Diana started.

"Mum-Mr. Quimble!"

"Why— Oh, Diana!" Lady Courtfield said pleasantly. "I didn't see you. Let me introduce you. Mr. Quimble, this is Diana Royston-Clarke, daughter of the Mayor of Lantham. Diana, this is Mr. Thomas Quimble, the famous painter, who is going to judge the exhibition."

Thomas Quimble gently smiled. But Diana, after a dazed stare at her little man, almost swooned. And Babs & Co., looking joyfully at each other, broke into a sudden, wholehearted cheer.

"**WINNER** of the silver medal in the Junior School section of the exhibition," Mr. Thomas Quimble announced, and there was a breathless hush in the body of the town hall—"Miss Barbara Redfern of Cliff House."

"Hurrah!" shrieked Mabel Lynn.

"Winner of the silver medal in the School Senior section—Miss Joan Vaughan of Courtfield School."

"Good old Joan!" came a delirious cry from the Courtfield section of the hall.

"And now the great prize—the winner of the open. A work, I must say," Mr. Quimble commented mildly, "which has impressed me enormously.

I may say that I was absolutely astounded to find that it was painted by a girl of fifteen years, and I want to say to that girl now, in public, that if she would like to put herself at my disposal, I will give her a year's training at my special school in London. But, dear me," he cried, "I am forgetting her name! It is Miss Molly Knight. Miss Knight, will you step out here, please?"

Thunderous, deafening the applause. Blushing with embarrassment, Molly came forward to receive her gold medal. The hall was filled with echoing cheers.

For it was the afternoon of the big show, and the judging had been made, the prizes were now being awarded. Everybody, except the disappointed ones, was in high good humour.

But not Diana Royston-Clarke.

Diana sat at the back of the hall, brooding bitterly.

This day, which had opened for her in such a blaze of triumph, had ended in crushing humiliation and defeat. Her great picture, so far from being the sensation, had been rejected at once from the exhibition. She had lost everything. In the end she had been thwarted by Babs & Co., foiled by this little man for whom she had done so much. She was forced now to witness the great prize go to the girl she regarded as her enemy.

She glowered as Molly took the prize. Oh, she couldn't stick this, she couldn't!

She made a restless movement. But the next words of the famous painter arrested her.

"And now," he said, "I have a special gift to make that is not on the prize-giving agenda. It is to Miss Diana Royston-Clarke. Miss Diana Royston-Clarke, will you step this way, please?"

A mutter; a rustle. For a moment Diana sat mutinously silent. Then, as eyes turned towards her, she half-rose.

What was this?

"Diana," Babs cried, "go on!"

Diana went. Thomas Quimble greeted her with a smile.

"Miss Royston-Clarke, I want first of all to apologise for a little deception," he said. "You discovered that deception to-day—that I am not, as you imagined, the poverty-stricken Mr. Thomas. Perhaps I am a foolish old man; perhaps I am what is known as eccentric; but I do so hate fuss, I do so hate being a public celebrity, that whenever I get an opportunity to retire simply into the country and pose as plain Mr. Thomas, I do so. You understand?"

Diana did.

"I would like to tell the audience, Miss Royston-Clarke, with your permission, exactly what has happened," he went on.

"Well?" Diana breathed.

"I may?" Thomas Quimble asked, and he beamed. "Ladies and gentlemen, I want to tell you a story—the story of a very beautiful fairy godmother and a shocking old tramp."

And while the audience fastened eyes on Diana, and Diana flushed, he did, telling of his meeting with Diana, Diana's gift of paints, of his inward amusement at her acceptance of him—everything.

"So, you see, now," he added, "why I describe her as my fairy godmother—this golden-haired girl who took pity on a poor starving artist—who, in exhibiting my picture here this morning, only did so, inspired by the idea that she could bring me fame! I am sorry to have deceived her.

"But," he went on gently, "as some slight recompense, I am going to present to Miss Royston-Clarke, in public, the painting I made of her. I hope," he added, "she will accept it as a memento of one of the very happiest little interludes of my life. Will you, Miss Royston-Clarke?"

Her dreams at last come true! She was the heroine of the hour—but in what a different manner from that she had contemplated!

She stumbled back down the steps into the audience. And there she stopped, Babs and Molly confronting her.

"Diana, you—you brick!" Babs breathed. "We didn't guess what you were doing!"

"Diana!" Molly said wistfully. "Oh, Diana! I—I'm so happy and so proud for your sake. And I—I'm sorry we got up against each other like that—"

"And so," Diana said sincerely, "am I. I was a beast, but—but— Oh, well, you know what I am! But everything's all right now, eh? Molly, I'm glad you've got your chance!"

"And the medal?" Babs asked slyly.

"And the medal," Diana laughed. "Because"—she indicated the picture of herself—"I've got this. And now, just to celebrate—"

"Just to celebrate," Thomas Quimble beamed, joining them, "will you all be my guests to dinner at the Royal Hotel? I do feel, Diana, that I still owe you more than ever that picture will repay."

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

IT IS BARBARA REDFERN, SO OFTEN A VICTIM OF HELEN HUNTER'S SPITEFULNESS, WHO NOW CRIES:



Give Helen Hunter a Chance!

Amazing? Amazing indeed! But—there is an excellent reason for Babs' startling defence of her old enemy, for she is convinced that the ill-natured Sixth-Former has changed her ways. No one else does, not even Babs' own chums, and some girls set out to take their revenge on the prefect. But through it all, despite the unpleasantness it means for Babs herself, she loyally stands by the girl who in the past has done so much to hurt her and her chums. Don't miss this magnificent Hilda Richards story. It appears next Saturday.

Further gripping chapters of our 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 Sunnylands 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. One of the guests leaves because of damage done to her property, and Valerie bowls out a maid, who leaves. Later, when a barn is fired and part of the cliff is blown up, she suspects a gipsy woman, **MRS. LOGAN**, a newcomer to Sunnylands; a young fellow finds dynamite on the cliff—proof of Valerie's suspicions about the explosion, which she is anxious not to broadcast in case guests leave the farm in panic.

(Now read on.)

Shock for Charlie!

VALERIE DREW'S suspense was almost unendurable as she watched Charlie Deeds turning the little cylinders over and over in his hands.

To think of revealing her presence now was quite out of the question. Charlie was apparently bent on revenge.

If he was given any opportunity to boast that he had been smarter than Valerie she knew he would certainly take it.

Lying very still indeed behind the bushes, watching his expression intently through a tiny gap in the leaves, Valerie gradually began to hope again.

Charlie was still obviously puzzled. He evidently had no idea he was holding two sticks of dynamite.

Valerie's head rested cautiously on Flash's head as she felt him stirring uneasily at her side.

Everyone else in the bathing party had believed the fall of cliff to be an ordinary landslide. Only Valerie knew it had been deliberately blown up.

Clearly flummoxed, Charlie stood brooding and undecided. Then suddenly thrusting the two sticks into his side pocket, he turned on his heel and headed, in a determined manner for Sunnylands Farm.

Bitterly disappointed, Valerie knew what his action meant.

By

ISABEL NORTON

Charlie intended to try some other way of finding out what they were.

She rose silently from her hiding-place. Whispering to Flash to keep close at her side, she followed Charlie stealthily through the trees.

At all costs she must get those two incriminating little sticks away from him before he could reveal his sensational discovery to anyone else at the farm.

Seeing him enter the farmhouse by a little-used side door, Valerie crept up. What she saw told her there was no immediate danger of Charlie revealing the truth.

It was the library he had entered, and now, having laid the two sticks of explosive carefully on a chair beside

"VALERIE DREW—BEWARE!" said the mysterious message left in Valerie's room. But the strange thing was it was signed—

"A FRIEND."

him, he was busily hunting through the pages of an encyclopedia he had just taken from one of the bookcases.

Valerie's eyes brightened as a daring thought flashed into her mind.

Tiptoeing away, she went to the children's play-room. There, in a cupboard wherein Dorothy always kept a useful supply of sweets, she found a long stick of rock, which she was able to break into two sections the very same size as Charlie's find on the cliffs.

Wrapping each neatly in brown paper to make the resemblance complete, she laid them on a chair.

"Fetch them, boy—carefully!" she whispered tensely to her intelligent pet. "Don't let anyone see you do it. Fetch them, and bring them to me!"

Flash watched her, with ears cocked, his eyes intent, his head held on one side. It was a new trick, but Flash was always eager to learn. Trotting almost furtively across the room, he took the two sticks of covered rock carefully between his teeth; then, with proudly waving tail, brought them back to Valerie.

"Very good, boy; but not so much

tail-wagging next time!" Valerie decided, giving that member a warning tap to make her meaning clearer. "You must creep all the time—like this! See, Flash? Charlie mustn't know you're anywhere around. Now take them back!"

Flash accepted the two sticks, crept back across the room, and restored them to the chair exactly as he had found them.

Warm with suppressed excitement, Valerie retrieved the sticks and crept back to the library.

To her inexpressible relief, Charlie was still perusing the book.

Glancing down at her eager pet, Valerie gave him a cautious hand signal, and Flash stole into the room.

He saw the chair standing beside Charlie, the two little wrapped sticks lying upon it, and understood instantly what was expected of him.

Soundlessly he went across the carpet, edging nearer and nearer like some grey ghost to the spot where Charlie sat with his eyes still glued to the encyclopedia. Valerie held her breath as she watched.

Inch by inch, Flash crept on until, reaching delicately forward, he was just able to take the two sticks in his mouth.

At that moment Charlie turned slightly away. Valerie breathed unsteadily. She knew how much depended on Flash. His success or failure might mean everything in the world to Dorothy, for the whole future of Sunnylands Farm was involved.

Luckily, Flash was equal to the test.

Step by step, he came creeping back across the room until, sidling around the edge of the door, he held his mouth close to Valerie's hand, and she was able to take the vital sticks in her own grasp at last.

For a moment she had a sensation of overwhelming relief. At least they were safe—could no longer be produced in evidence of Charlie's sensational suspicion about the cliff accident. But if he turned his head now he would soon guess what had happened. Could Flash complete his brilliant trick?

Giving him the sticks of rock to hold between his teeth, Valerie signed for her pet to return to the room.

Suddenly, when Flash was still two or three feet away from the chair, Charlie

BETWEEN OURSELVES



MY DEAR READERS.—Grand news for you! In other words, full exciting details of the wonderful new series of stories which I mentioned last week. They are by Ida Melbourne, author of "Cousin George and the Imp," but very, very different, as I hinted, and the first of them will appear **Next Saturday.**

"JESS AND HIGHWAYMAN JACK!"

the series is to be called. For—yes! The setting is the romantic eighteenth century, when "Stand and Deliver" was a familiar and dreaded command to travellers on the lonely coaching roads. But the highwayman whom Jess Reynolds meets is a charming, gallant, laughing young man. Jess likes him, He is not like other highwaymen, she is sure.

And because Jess likes this intrepid fellow—who is known as "Laughing Jack"—she experiences the most thrilling and dramatic adventures. YOU can share those adventures with Jess and the Highwayman—if you make certain of reading Ida Melbourne's most wonderful series.

First let me tell you about next Saturday's superb programme. Next on the bill is the magnificent long complete Cliff House School story:

"GIVE HELEN HUNTER A CHANCE!"

Astonishing, isn't it, that anyone should make such an appeal on behalf of that treacherous, unpopular Sixth Form prefect. But even more astonishing is the fact that the person to make the appeal is none other than—

Barbara Redfern!

Yes, Babs; the leader of the Fourth Form who, with her chums, has had to endure so much from Helen in the past.

But Helen has reformed; genuinely, sincerely reformed. No one believes it except Barbara, and some girls set out to get their revenge on the once vindictive

prefect. Indeed, Connie Jackson of the Sixth, one of Helen's former cronies, becomes a serious menace.

Thus it is that Babs rallies to the side of her former enemy in one of the grandest, most dramatic stories Hilda Richards has ever written. You simply must not miss it.

As usual, our next issue will contain more thrilling developments in Isabel Norton's great girl detective story, and further Bright and Useful pages by Patricia. Order your copy without delay, won't you?

And now I come to

LITTLE LETTERS.

Frances Weaver (Glasgow).—Cliff House is situated on the Kentish coast, Frances—actually on the cliffs, overlooking the sea, as its name suggests. If you went there you would be in the Lower Third Form. Best wishes.

"Jemima Fans" (Norfolk).—Delighted to know that you are so fond of Jemima. Her peculiar little mannerisms make her very attractive, don't they? Yes, there will be another story "starring" your favourite in the near future. And there is one in this year's "School Friend Annual," you know.

Nancy and Freda (Norfolk).—I've an idea, from your handwriting, that you're the "Jemima Fans" answered above. Anyway, many thanks for your suggestion, which I may be able to use at some later date.

Joan Salter (Torquay).—Only too glad to answer your enthusiastic little letter in print, Joan. Be sure to write again, telling me something about yourself, won't you?

Millicent Collingford (Cardiff).—Yes, Doris Redfern is Babs' younger sister, a very likeable girl although rather more headstrong than the Fourth Form captain. The sisters are very fond of one another. Write again whenever you like, Millicent.

Prunella Thurles (Brighton).—Babs shares Study No. 4 with Bessie Bunter and, of course, Mabel Lynn, her dearest chum. Clara is in Study No. 7 with two other members of the Co.—Marjorie Hazeldene and Janet Jordan.

Well, bye-bye, everybody, for another week. Very best wishes.

Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.

slammed the encyclopedia shut and leant forward to thrust it back into the bookcase.

In another second or so he was bound to turn and discover his loss.

Flash realised the very same thing.

Risking everything, he forged silently forward, to drop the two sticks exactly where he had taken the others from the chair.

Charlie began to turn back.

Instinct told Flash there was no chance to get away unseen this time. He did the only thing possible. Even as Charlie spun round, Flash, with his tail now tucked in well between his legs, dived under the table. Then, when Charlie leant forward to pick up the sticks, Flash crept stealthily out at the other side and vanished behind a screen in the corner.

Flash had performed his new trick brilliantly.

Valerie, assured her clever pet would not show himself again until the coast was clear, crept delightedly away with the vital sticks of explosive, to hide them in a safe place in her own room.

Little more than a quarter of an hour later, the dinner-gong sounded.

By then Valerie had changed. Leaving her room, she descended the staircase to come upon an astonishing, but by no means unexpected, scene taking place in the hall below.

Charlie Deeds, with his cheeks pinkly

flushed, and his eyes glittering, clasped a big cardboard box in both hands as he stood in the middle of a wondering crowd of fellow guests.

"Honestly, I feel a bit awkward about this business," he was saying somewhat squeakily in his excitement, "especially when a real detective's supposed to be looking after things. But if she hasn't told you you're all in terrible danger, it's jolly well time someone did!"

"Then speak up, Charlie," invited Valerie, her cool voice unexpectedly breaking the startled silence which followed Charlie's sensational words.

Every eye turned to her as she stood on the staircase.

Valerie had dressed carefully in one of her prettiest evening frocks. Her red-gold hair mantled her face in a sleek, becoming coiffure; her smooth-textured skin was pleasantly sun-tanned; her smile appeared to be merely one of innocent interest. She looked unusually attractive to-night by contrast with the red-faced boy clutching the big cardboard box.

"You don't know what I've got here, Valerie!" boasted Charlie, in a tone of mingled triumph and defiance.

Valerie looked more politely intrigued than ever.

"You're never going to tell me, Charlie," she protested, "that you've bought me a present already?"

"I'll bet Charlie's decided to come clean, after all!" predicted irrepressible Johnny Jevons, his eyes twinkling. "Val, it's most likely a box of bogus jewels Charlie diddle the half-witted countess out of in Paris!"

The laugh which greeted that unexpected forecast of the contents of his precious box stung Charlie to fury.

"You'll laugh on the other side of your face in a minute!" he retorted, turning on Johnny with glittering eyes. "You didn't twig anything this afternoon. You thought it was an ordinary cliff fall which happened when I lost my bags. Well, I wasn't satisfied it was. For that matter, I don't think Valerie was, either. But she didn't find what I've found—what I've got here!"

Faces were serious again immediately.

Valerie sensed the almost electric change in the atmosphere. For odd, mysterious, unnerving things had been happening at Sunnylands. The guests were always half-prepared, these days, for fresh thrills. It was easy enough to make their flesh creep.

"Then what, Charlie," Valerie asked, giving Johnny a swift, warning glance to leave things to her, "have you got there?"

"Dynamite!" blurted out Charlie triumphantly. "Two sticks of dynamite! Left by someone who blew up the cliff!"

There was a flutter amongst the crowd. Startled eyes turned on the cardboard box. Instinctively, quite a number of people moved away. Even Johnny looked distinctly taken aback. Only Valerie remained as cool and self-possessed as ever.

"Can I see this remarkable find, Charlie?" she asked pleasantly.

Charlie, smirking, cautiously removed the lid. Inside were masses of cottonwool. Picking it over with great respect, he revealed two little paper-wrapped cylinders.

"Be careful!" he warned uncomfortably. "If you drop 'em you may jolly well blow us all up!"

Amid an utter silence, Valerie took one of the sticks from the box.

She smelt it carefully, tore some of the paper from it, then held it up to the light. Finally, with a sweet, bewildering smile, she deliberately broke the stick in half.

"You idiot!" panted Charlie, in terror. "If you want to blow up the whole place—my only aunt!"

Words failed him utterly. For a moment the rest of the assembled guests gazed at Valerie dumbfounded. For the girl detective, biting a small piece from the broken stick, was eating it with every sign of relish!

"Rock—nothing I like better!" she retorted.

Astounded gasps came from the others. Then Johnny, roaring with merriment, gave Charlie's back a congratulatory slap which nearly sent him flying.

"You glorious old spoofer!" he cried delightedly, as the hall began to ring with relieved laughter. "Took us in beautifully! The loveliest touch of all was to wrap 'em up in cottonwool. Charlie, old son, I'll start taking lessons from you to-night!"

Charlie gulped and spluttered helplessly.

"But I say—really, you know—I didn't—I mean—"

With a twisted, uneasy grin, he crushed the cardboard box under his arm, muttered indistinctly, and bolted upstairs to his room.

The excitement over, the other guests were moving on into the dining-room,

and Valerie had turned to follow them when she felt a hand softly touch her arm. Turning, she found herself face to face with Dorothy.

The girl hostess' cheeks were pale, her smile was strangely fixed. Valerie read a strained, urgent light of inquiry in her eyes.

"Val," she whispered, "was it dynamite that Charlie found?"

Still serenely smiling, Valerie took her arm and walked with her into the dining-room.

"I'll see you for a minute or two," she promised softly, "as soon as dinner's over!"

More Mystery in the Ruins!

EXACTLY what she was to say to Dorothy Dean was a problem which secretly disturbed Valerie considerably as the meal progressed, though, luckily, there was too much merry chatter to-night for her preoccupation to attract any attention.

The unknown enemy of Sunnylands had struck the hardest, most vindictive blow of all, and Valerie's only clue was a gleaming little brass detonator, the one thing necessary to turn dynamite into a violent explosive, which she had seen clasped in a monkey's paw!

Was that chance glimpse the vital link she still needed to forge her chain of evidence together? Did it mean that Mrs. Paizi Logan, the mysterious gipsy woman always haunting the locality, was the ruthless foe who seemed to have sworn to bring Sunnylands to ruin?

Rising as soon as the meal was over, Valerie made her way to Dorothy's office. The pretty fair-haired girl, who carried the weight of running the farm on her young shoulders, was already waiting for her.

"Sit down, please, Val," she nervously invited, moving a chair forward immediately.

Valerie noticed, with secret compassion, how tired she was looking. She realised that the strain of so much worry, on top of all the organising work Dorothy had to take in her stride, was beginning to tell at last.

"Thanks, my dear," she said softly, and her hand, reaching across, rested sympathetically on Dorothy's as it lay in her lap. "You asked me that question a little while ago because you're worried about something else, my dear. Charlie wanted to take a rise out of me because we've had a private dust-up of our own. But don't worry about Charlie—he's only anxious to blow his own rather bent trumpet as much as he can. What's on your mind now, my dear?"

Dorothy's lip trembled.

"I've got a most awful fit of the blues, Val," she confessed, looking away. "I know you'll think me just a fidget, but it's the whistling, Val. I've never mentioned it before. I hear it at night—every night it seems to me now. Maybe I dream it sometimes. I dare say I'm getting it on my mind—"

"But what sort of whistling, Dorothy?" Valerie cried, her eyes alight with concern. "You've never mentioned anything of this before!"

Dorothy nodded.

"I didn't like to, Val. I thought I was imagining things. I sleep at the back, nearest the ruins—"

"And you hear the whistling coming from there?" Valerie ejaculated. "When?"

"Any time after midnight it starts. Two or three minutes pass, then I hear it again."

"I wish you'd told me this before," Valerie said. "I've always been puzzled about the ruins myself. There's something about them I don't like at all. Tell me," she added, her manner tense and keen, "would you say it's always the same sort of sound you hear?"

"Yes; that's what's so eerie, Val. It's one low note."

Valerie opened the door and called to Flash, who was sitting on guard outside. She closed it again as he trotted obediently to her.

"Imitate it now, Dorothy," she suggested. "Listen carefully, Flash!"

Head on one side, ears cocked, Flash sat listening as Dorothy did her best to imitate the sound.

It was some three or four hours later when Valerie sought her bed-room, knowing that the place would soon be wrapped in slumber.

A walk in the vicinity of where she had last seen Mrs. Paizi Logan with her caravan had proved a fruitless trip, for the woman had vanished as though into thin air.

Now she had had time to think everything over, Valerie was intrigued and thrilled by what Dorothy had told her earlier on. For, from the start of her present strange case, she had connected the gipsified woman with the ruins, though she still had not the slightest idea what interest they could hold for her.

Would the mysterious whistling be repeated to-night?

"Listen carefully, Flash!" Valerie instructed her pet, as she slipped into bed. "That whistle Dorothy gave—tell me the moment you hear it, Flash!"

She nestled down contentedly, knowing she could place the utmost reliance in her pet and he would not fail to arouse her if the strange sound disturbed the stillness to-night.

More than a couple of hours had passed when Valerie suddenly stirred. Opening her eyes, she was awake in a moment. There was a tiny whimpering beside the bed; a warm head pressed itself eagerly across the coverlet.

"Coming, old boy!" Valerie murmured. And in a moment she was up and dressing at lightning speed, whilst Flash, running to the open window, gave tiny whimpers of suppressed ex-

citement as he stared towards the dark ruins in the distance.

He had heard the sound for which he had been listening!

Silently opening the door, Valerie tiptoed downstairs and left the farmhouse by a side entrance. There was no moon visible, and only the faintest starlight served to relieve the utter darkness. With Flash trotting at her side, she made her way stealthily towards the gaunt ruins standing, vague and black, against the dim sky.

Utter silence reigned now, for nothing appeared to be stirring anywhere. There did not seem to be even a solitary owl around to-night.

Passing through the dark, broken arch in the crumbling black wall, Valerie stood within the ruins at last.

Flash, pressing closely against her as though to offer protection in this weird environment, suddenly gave a tiny growl deep in his throat.

Valerie stooped to touch his head warningly, hoping she might hear the whistle close at hand and be able to locate where it came from without giving her own presence away.

At almost the same moment the sound came to her ears—a low, purposeful whistle which appeared to emanate from somewhere not fifty yards distant.

Immediately, as there was a rustle of movement close at hand, Flash gave one excited bark and went plunging after it through the darkness.

Thrusting her hand into her pocket, Valerie snatched out her electric torch and sent its powerful ray shining ahead of her pet.

It fell full on the tiny, scampering figure of a grey Capuchin monkey, racing towards the opposite wall!

Whoof! bayed Flash, tearing at top speed in an endeavour to head the little creature off.

But the monkey was just too clever for him. Leaping safely to a long broken ledge of brickwork, it scuttled along it at an amazing speed and reached the boundary wall at the end. There, giving a tremendous leap, it clutched the brickwork and scrambled to the top. Something which had been clutched in its tiny paw fell as it did so, and tinkled against the stones beneath.

"Fetch it, Flash!" Valerie cried.



WHILE Charlie puzzled over the book, and Valerie watched anxiously from the doorway, Flash stole towards the chair and silently gripped the sticks of dynamite in his jaws. But if Charlie turned, Valerie's clever plan to suppress the truth that those sticks were dynamite would be ruined!

And running to the opening nearest the spot where the monkey had vanished, she shone her torch in sweeping circles around her.

She had heard the whistle again, louder and more insistent, while she was still running. Now a fresh sound caused her to turn the light of her torch close to the boundary wall. It came to rest on a horse—and on a woman who, with a monkey clinging to her shoulder, was in the very act of mounting to the saddle.

"Stop!" cried Valerie, running forward. "Mrs. Logan—"

If Paizi Logan heard her, she took no notice whatever. Giving the horse a sharp order, she galloped away at top speed, and in a few moments was right beyond reach of Valerie's torch.

Pursuit under such conditions was obviously impossible.

A soft whimper at her side recalled Valerie's thoughts to her pet. Turning, she saw that he held in his mouth the object the monkey had dropped. Taking it from him, she stared in amazement.

It was just an ordinary key, grimed with dust and rusty from long exposure to the elements!

In growing bewilderment Valerie stood studying her amazing find. Where the monkey had found the key, and what lock it belonged to, were problems entirely beyond her at the moment.

But what, Valerie blankly asked herself, could an old, rusty key hidden in the ruins have to do with the mystery at Sunnylands Farm?

The Warning!

"I BEG your pardon!" Valerie apologised. "I had no intention—"

"Really, Miss Drew, it's quite all right," Uncle Nathan hastily assured her. He smiled uncertainly as he stood in the kitchen, polishing his glasses and blinking hazily at Valerie. "Dorothy never takes any notice of anything I say to her, anyway, and I didn't mean it seriously. I'll just go and see the farmhands are all at work. They ought to be by now."

It was an hour before breakfast-time the following morning.

Valerie, following her exploit in the ruins, had slept a trifle more heavily than usual. She had been coming down in some haste to have a few words with Dorothy when, entering the kitchen, she unexpectedly found her in conversation with the inefficient relative helping her to run the place in her mother's absence.

"Don't you think, my dear," Uncle Nathan had been saying, "that it might be advisable, after all, to find someone to buy the farm and get out before anything else happens?"

Uncle Nathan, flustering with a notebook and pencil, quickly left the kitchen. Dorothy, wearing a confused and rather uneasy smile, remained facing Valerie.

"I'm not really thinking of quitting yet, Val," she assured the girl detective, looking rather shame-faced in spite of her declaration.

Valerie smiled as she perched herself lightly on the kitchen table; she swung her legs thoughtfully for two or three moments while her warm regard rested on Dorothy.

"I'm positive about that—especially when we both know what it means for your mother, Dorothy," Valerie answered sincerely. "We're also quite used to hearing your dear, muddle-

headed old uncle saying the wrong thing always at the wrong moment. But I've got one bit of news for you. I don't think we shall hear the whistling in the ruins again."

And while Dorothy listened, open-eyed, Valerie told of the finding of the mysterious key and the precipitate flight of Mrs. Logan and her monkey on the horse.

"I've had no time yet to try to find out anything from the key itself," Valerie concluded. "Actually I came downstairs to talk to you about something quite different."

Dorothy, still excited by Valerie's story, waited somewhat breathlessly for her to go on.

"I've had an idea," Valerie declared. "It's simple, but it means you coming to a rather important decision. You told me once, my dear, that you had a reserve of money for emergencies."

Dorothy nodded. "Fifteen pounds," she agreed. "It's kept in the little safe in the wall at the end of the library. But go on, Val. You know how I value your advice—always."

"Thanks," said Valerie, with a smile. "Well, I am in earnest this time. We've just suffered two bad set-backs. The dance hall barn can't be used until the roof's repaired, and we can't use Battleby cove while there's no way down the cliffs. But a thatcher can soon repair the roof, while the right men wouldn't be long in cutting fresh steps in the cliff face. Now you'll see what I'm driving at. What do you say, Dorothy?"

Dorothy caught her breath. "What do I say?" she repeated, her eyes bright. "Why, you're dead right—I ought to spend the money at once. If only you'll help me—"

"I will," Valerie readily promised, overjoyed to find Dorothy so willing to fight back against her unknown enemy. "I've been making a lot of inquiries lately, and I know the very men for the job. I'll fix everything up this morning."

Always as good as her word, she was off as soon as breakfast was over. Charlie Deeds, despite his obvious determination to detain her with a lot of brilliant talk, was unlucky. Politely explaining that even his delightful company was unnecessary, Valerie set off to carry out her promises to Dorothy.

And, incidentally, to discover whether anybody had again seen Mrs. Paizi Logan in the vicinity since her dramatic escape last night.

Following Valerie's glimpse of the monkey clutching a brass detonator, the cliff path had been badly damaged by explosion. At night Mrs. Logan had paid a secret visit to the ruins and fled with every appearance of terror. It would not be at all easy for her to sit again with calmly folded arms, and, watching Valerie with defiant eyes, declare that she was completely innocent.

Valerie was successful enough in finding and commissioning the workmen she sought. Where Mrs. Logan was concerned, she was right out of luck to-day.

Despite all her inquiries, she drew blank everywhere. Once more, it seemed, the mystery woman had vanished into the blue.

Baffled and distinctly uneasy, Valerie went straight up to her room on reaching the farmhouse. She had locked the door on leaving, in case anyone should find the dynamite.

Slipping the key into the lock, she entered the room and closed the door behind her. There, with her hand still resting on the door-knob, she stood gazing in amazement at the table near the window.

Lying on it was a sealed envelope! "What ever is it, Flash?" Valerie murmured, in even greater surprise, as her pet began sniffing eagerly all around the room as if recognising a familiar scent.

Crossing to the table, Valerie took the envelope by its edges. It was addressed, in boldly printed capitals, to herself, and was quite clean. Finding no trace of finger-prints, she tore the flap open at last, and carefully extracted a slip of folded paper. It bore the following message:

"Valerie Drew—beware! If you want to catch a determined enemy, watch the library safe. Someone is after the money in it.—A FRIEND."

Incredulous, Valerie turned her eyes slowly from the amazing missive. Flash, evidently still intrigued by the scent, now seemed to find it strongest on the window-sill.

In silent wonderment Valerie crossed to his side. Suddenly seeing something reposing in a tiny crack in the paint-work, she took a pair of tweezers and extracted it. It was a single short hair. Under a magnifying-glass she saw that it was—grey!

The little grey Capuchin monkey, owned by Mrs. Paizi Logan, had hair exactly like this.

"A message—from her?" Valerie breathed dumbfounded. "But it's impossible! In any case, I'm quite certain she's no friend!"

There, at that very point, Valerie broke off. For experience had taught her that nothing was impossible, and no clue could ever be ignored.

Slipping the letter into her handbag, she turned abruptly and left the room. Running downstairs to the library, she closed the door behind her. Then, walking across to the safe close to the window, she looked at it with narrowed eyes.

Startled by something on the carpet, Valerie dropped to one knee, and, taking out her powerful magnifying-glass, began to go carefully over the carpet's surface. Scarcely able to credit her own vision, she discovered microscopical traces of steel filings.

At last she rose to her feet. The note might be genuine, for someone had crouched here recently and filed something! A key, in order to make it fit the safe's lock!

Hastening out of the room, Valerie nearly collided with Johnny Jevons in the passage outside.

"Hallo, old sleuth!" he greeted her, in his usual bright way.

"Johnny, don't joke at the moment!" Valerie softly cut in. "I want your help badly!"

"Mine?" ejaculated Johnny. "Yes," Valerie assured him; and Johnny fell silent. "I'll tell you a secret, because I know I can trust you. There's a criminal in this house. That criminal's been very cunning indeed, so far, but a blunder's been made at last."

For once even cool Valerie found it hard to hide her excitement as she added:

"With your help, Johnny, we'll catch that criminal this very evening!"

IS Valerie actually on the verge of triumph, or is the mysterious message a trick? Next Saturday's thrilling chapters of this grand detective story will tell you.

Another fascinating COMPLETE Canadian story featuring—

KIT OF RED RANCH



THE other cowboys taunted Bob Evans because he wrote a poem about the girl he liked. But Kit soon proved to them all—and to the girl as well—that if Bob wasn't a great poet, he was a real man!

It Wasn't Kit's Fault!

TELL me a secret? Why, sure you can, Judith!" said Kit Hartley. "And I'll be glad to hear it."

And she settled herself down in the chair near the window of Judith Cairns' pretty little sitting-room.

Kit, having just said au-revoir to Redwing, her Redskin friend, had dropped in to see the young school-mistress.

And Judith had been glad to see her, too.

But as Kit had noticed, Judith looked thoughtful. There had been such a queer smile on her pretty face that Kit had said playfully: "What's wrong? Is it indigestion, or are you in love?"

Then Judith had made her remark, wheeling, a touch of colour in her cheeks:

"Can I tell you a secret, Kit?"

"Tell on," Kit added, after her first remark. "Who's the lucky man? You are in love, after all?"

Judith coloured prettily.

"Oh, I don't know about that!" she said slowly. "No, I don't think I can say that, although—well," she ended, "I do think he has fallen in love with me."

Kit sat up, and instantly names ran through her head. She guessed that the lover was one of the cowpunchers on her dad's ranch.

"Handsome!" she exclaimed. "The gink, Frank Downing. He's about the only one I'd call a lady-killer."

Judith stiffened.

"Handsome! You mean the dark, sleek-looking one? Goodness, no! I'm not interested in lady-killers. Not at all. This boy's different. He's shy, but a real man. He— Well, his name is Bob Evans."

Kit jumped. She liked Bob; she admired him. But his was the last name that would have jumped to her mind.

"Bob, my golly!" she murmured.

"Why, 'my golly'?" asked Judith sharply.

"Oh, only that I hadn't thought of him!" said Kit soothingly. "I think he's a dear. Dead straight and honest. Dad reckons him one of the best men he's got."

"And he's right," said Judith. "Bob's a grand chap, Kit, only—only he's got one small fault. And that's why I thought I'd have a word with you. But first, promise it won't go any farther?"

Kit promised readily.

"Honour bright!" she said.

"Good!" said Judith satisfied. "Now this is it. Bob's too sensitive, and the last thing I want to do is to hurt his feelings; but I do wish he could smarten up, with polished boots, and well brushed hair, and—and—well, you know what I mean."

Kit nodded agreement.

"Those boys! I'm always ticking them off for it," she said.

"Ah, that's what I hoped!" said Judith eagerly. "I know he won't mind it if it comes from you. Could you please give him a hint without letting him know that you know—that I've spoken to you?"

Nothing seemed easier to Kit, and she readily agreed.

"Leave it to me, Judith," she said confidently. For a few minutes longer they chatted, and then a look at the clock showed Kit that it was time for her to be going.

"And I can't stay much longer, either," said Judith. "I've a date—an appointment, I should say."

Her mysterious smile told Kit whom that date was with.

Kit wished her good-bye, and rode back to the ranch in gay mood, intrigued by the romance that had come to the young schoolmistress.

Dismounting in the compound, she looked about her for Bob.

Several punchers were to be seen, but Bob was not amongst them. Intending to go in search of him, she turned toward the shacks, but after only a

step or two halted. For away to the right a rough-house was in progress.

A small knot of cowpunchers had come into view, and there was laughter, angry protests, struggling and scrambling.

"Hallo! What's this?" Kit demanded.

No one answered, but as she stepped forward she saw that there was a dishevelled cowpuncher in the middle of the group. His scarf had been wrenched from his neck; his shirt was torn, his hair tousled, his hat covered his face—in fact, his whole appearance was suggestive of his having been dragged in the mud. Nor were the others looking spruce.

But the one in the middle was—"My gosh, Bob!" she cried, in horror.

Bob Evans shook away the nearest aggressors and coloured in confusion.

"Sall right, Miss Kit," he said.

"Jes'—jes' our fun!"

At that moment a tall, good-looking fellow came walking into sight, sprucely clad, carrying a sheet of paper in his hand—Handsome Frank Downing.

Handsome walked in the manner of an actor, strutting a little, one hand on his chest, while he read from the sheet of paper:

"Her eyes are like the stars;
Her hair like waving corn.
I'm in love with her becars
She's the sweetest gel e'er born—"

A roar of mirth came from the cowpunchers—all, that is, except Bob, whose face was red and furious.

"Pack it up!" he roared. "Gimme my poem—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the cowpunchers.

Kit stepped into the breach. It was pretty obvious that the cowpunchers thought that poem funny, whereas Bob, on the contrary, thought it deadly serious. But only he and Kit knew to whom it was addressed—Judith Cairns.

"That's enough, chaps," said Kit quietly. "The joke's over. Give him back his poem."

She went up to Handsome, holding out her hand, but he did not seem to notice it; he was turning the poem over.

"My gosh, boys!" he shouted in triumph. "I know the lady's name!"

With a cry of fury, Bob hurled himself forward.

"You keep Judith's name out of this!" he shouted.

Kit gave a gasp of dismay; the cowpunchers yelled in chorus.

"Judith—"

"The school marm!"

By

Elizabeth Chester

"Jehoshaphat! He's in love with the school marm!"

Her eyes blazing, Kit snatched the piece of paper from Handsome.

"You sneaking cad!" she said. "How dare you make fun of a girl! And that goes for all of you!"

Her angry words stilled the laughter, and several of the cowpunchers had the grace to look ashamed. They were good fellows at heart, but the temptation to rag Bob about the poem which the wind had blown from his hand had proved too great.

"Here's the poem, Bob," she said. "And I reckon you had better go and tidy up."

Bob gave her a rather sheepish smile, scowled at the other cowpunchers, and turned away.

When he had gone Kit faced Handsome.

"I hope you're not going to spread this gossip?" she said.

Handsome winked.

"Miss Cairns wouldn't have any time for a mug like that, that's why we're laughing!" he said. "I could cut him out any time I chose!"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"Shut up!" snapped Kit.

She would have said more, but Bob was signalling her frantically.

Running to him, she asked what was wrong.

"Miss Kit," he said nervously, "I—I just wanted to ask your advice. Now you must kinder guess who the poem's to, I—well, you see, I've got a date, an—an—"

"Um!" said Kit, frowning. "And you can't go in that state, Bob?"

"Well, that's what I was a-wondering," he replied uneasily. "If I stay and tidy, I'll be late."

Kit did not hesitate.

"O.K.!" she said. "Tell me where she'll be, and I'll ride there and explain what's happened."

Bob's face cleared.

"That's mighty kind of you, Miss Kit!" he said. "We're meeting at the crossroads. Gee! But you're swell!"

Ten minutes later Kit came in sight of the crossroads; but there was no need for her to go right to them, for Judith Cairns was riding to meet her.

It was only when the young school marm was a few yards away that Kit saw her expression. Judith's face was dark with anger.

"Hey, what's wrong?" began Kit, amazed.

Judith reined up, and her eyes flashed in scorn.

"So you broke your word! I thought you were my friend, Kit; I thought you had a sense of honour—"

"Hey!" cut in Kit. "What's all this? Broke my word—"

"You know what I mean!" cried Judith. "I'm the gossip of Red Ranch now; a laughing-stock, thanks to you and that fool Bob Evans! And don't pretend I'm not, because I know the truth. I've just seen the man you call Handsome!"

"But, Judith," protested Kit. "You don't understand—"

"I do understand!" cried the young schoolmistress, tears sparkling in her eyes. "You've broken your word! That's what I understand! And Bob has made me a laughing-stock with a silly poem. I never want to speak to you again—to either of you!"

With that Judith wheeled her horse, and, head in air, rode off.

Worse Than Ever, But—

Kit, amazed, astounded, stared after her. For a moment she thought of going in pursuit, but Judith was in no mood to argue reasonably. She was in a furious temper, quite beside herself with rage, and argument now might lead to a quarrel.

"Well, my gosh!" murmured Kit. And then her jaw hardened and her eyes glittered with rage at the thought that she was being blamed for something Handsome, that conceited fellow, had done. Moreover, Bob must suffer, too.

Kit wheeled her horse and rode back to Red Ranch, but two hundred yards before she reached it Bob came into view.

Bob's face glowed with recent scrubbing, his boots shone, his shirt was new, his kerchief was new, and his hat was new.

"How do I look?" asked Bob, with a beam. "Tidy?" He whipped off his hat and showed his hair. "Reckon I got that plastered down all right!" he chuckled.

Kit smiled wanly and sadly, for all his effort was to have been in vain.

"Yes, you look swell, Bob," she said slowly. "But 'tain't much use a-going to the crossroads; she won't be there."

Bob's joy vanished; his rugged face clouded.

"How so? Nothin' wrong?" he asked sharply. "No accident?"

"No, not an accident," said Kit gently. "It's just—waal, at the moment she's just kind of mad. She's got an idea that all the boys know that you've got a soft spot in your heart for her. Seems like some gink with a big mouth has been squealing—"

Bob's face hardened.

"Is that so?" he said. "Waal, I'd like to know—"

He looked across the uneven ground, and his expression changed suddenly. Kit, wondering what he had seen, turned her head, and then gave a start of dismay.

Just in sight rode Judith, but she was not alone. A cowpuncher rode with her—a smart, sleek-looking fellow; Handsome.

Bob uttered a strangled sound, and his right hand went to his gun. Then, before Kit could intervene, he rode forward, spurring his horse.

Kit did not waste a second. She went in pursuit.

"Stop, Bob! Hold your fire! Bob!"

But Bob's mad was up. Furiously he rode on.

Handsome, suddenly aware of the other rider, had reined up, and now Judith Cairns turned, too.

"Bob!" yelled Kit.

She saw Handsome rein his horse and back it so that he was covered by Judith, for Bob's gun was half out of the holster.

"Move aside, Miss Judith!" said Bob thickly.

"Don't move! He'll shoot!" cried Kit.

Riding up, she wheeled her horse in front of Bob.

"Put that gun down!" she snapped. "Are you crazy?"

"Come out from behind Miss Cairns, you yaller skunk!" called Bob to Handsome.

Judith Cairns, her face pale, pushed out her arm to shield Handsome.

"Don't move!" she said.

"Bob, you fool!" hissed Kit. "D'ye think this'll make Judith like you any the more?"

Bob looked at Judith, and then took his hand off his gun, for there was scorn in her eyes.

"Bob Evans, after this I'll never speak to you as long as I live!" Judith said, in ringing tones. "You are just a thick-headed cowpuncher, and I was a fool ever to think otherwise."

"I'm not the kind of coward who hides behind a woman!" growled Bob.

"I'd admire you more if you didn't think gun-firing was argument," retorted Judith. "Come on, Frank," she added. "Even he won't shoot you in the back."

She rode on, and Handsome, with a leering smile, went with her.

Bob's face was heavy as he met Kit's eyes.

"Reckon I acted kinder hasty!" he muttered.

"Reckon you did," agreed Kit, with a sigh. "You've blotted the old copy-book now, I guess."

"Yeah, looks like—looks like she's done with me for keeps. But I never

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No. 698.



FURIOUS at the mean trick his rival had played on him, stung by Judith's scorn, Bob Evans reached for his gun. Instantly, Kit intervened. "Bob—stop! Have you gone crazy? Put back that gun!" she commanded—but her heart was cold with alarm.

figured out she liked Handsome," he added, puzzled. "Never knew she'd even spoken to him."

Kit looked after the retreating figures thoughtfully, and then shook her head. "And I'll say she doesn't like him now," she murmured. "If you ask me, Bob, it's a case of pique, just to show you where you get off. But cheer up! Mebbe you—"

Kit's voice died away, for in that moment an idea had come—a startling, amazing plan to put things right for Bob. She gripped his arm.

"Bob, you don't feel sore about Judith?" she asked. "What I mean is, if she were in need, you'd help her?"

"Me? Why, my gosh, Miss Kit," said Bob earnestly. "I only wish she were! I mean, I only wish I could have a chance of doing something for her—saving her life, making her realise that with a guy like me around there'd be nothing to fear, and— Hey! Where are you going?"

But Kit had gone. The idea she had thought of struck her as being just dandy, and right now was the time to put it into effect.

Thanks to Kit and Redwing!

THEN I'm sorry—I'm real sorry, Kit!" said Judith Cairns. "If you didn't break my confidence—and naturally I take your word—I acted hastily. But I still say Bob was a fool to behave like that!"

Kit had called on Judith, who was now in calmer mood. Because she had been unfair in jumping to a conclusion hastily, Judith was apologetic, and Kit seized the opportunity of this chastened mood to broach her idea.

"Foolish he may be, but worth a thousand of Handsome."

"Frank, you mean? I'm not discussing Frank!" returned Judith.

"He's a coward!" exclaimed Kit. "He's not. How dare you say that!" cried Judith. "He's more polished, more polite, and refined."

Kit shrugged her shoulders, but thrilled inside, for her chance to broach her plan had come.

"You're acting crazy. You're doing this to spite poor old Bob, because he wrote that poem, which he only wrote because he's mutt enough to think you

have eyes like stars, when really they're a bit blurry—"

Kit was deliberately working on Judith's feelings, but the schoolmistress thought she meant it.

"Kit!" Judith protested.

"Well, so they are," said Kit, acting well. "Through too much book reading. Bob's a mutt if he thinks they're like stars, and as to your hair—well, that poem is just guff, as you say."

Kit turned her horse, but Judith caught the bridle.

"Kit, why are you ranting on at me like this?" she faltered. "You know my eyes aren't—aren't blurred!"

Kit winked at the trees and shrugged. "Well, you can't have it both ways. Either the poem's right or it's wrong. If it's right, why get mad about it? If it's wrong, why get mad with me?"

She turned her horse again. "Just a minute!" said Judith. "I don't like your running down Handsome. You like Bob better, but Handsome's no coward."

Kit eyed her shrewdly.

"Um! Can you swim?"

"Of course I can."

"Suppose you couldn't—suppose you fell into the crevasse? Who do you think would jump in first—Handsome or Bob?"

"Why, Handsome. Bob wouldn't realise I'd fallen in until I was drowned. He's so dumb."

Kit nodded.

"All right; let's put it to the proof. At six o'clock you'll fall into the crevasse, and Bob and Handsome will both be there!"

"What nonsense—"

"Ah, you know I'm right then," laughed Kit.

"I don't know anything of the sort. And—oh, all right. I'll do it," said Judith, with a toss of the head.

"Good for you!" said Kit in delight.

And off she rode before Judith could change her mind.

KIT DID NOT return immediately to Red Ranch. Instead, she went into the hills, where she knew she would find her Redskin friend, loyal, devoted little Redwing, at her secret retreat.

At sight of her chum, Redwing came capering down the hillside, radiant-faced and excited.

"Lo, Miss Kit!" she said, her eyes

shining. "So happy to see you. You want me?"

"Want you badly, Redwing," Kit smiled. Dismounting, she put an arm about Redwing's waist and went with her up the hillside. "You're the finest little person I know for doing things without being seen or heard."

"Redwing try."

"Well," Kit chuckled, "first let's have some of those lovely cookies of yours. And then I'll explain."

The cookies were delicious, prepared as only a Redskin could prepare them. Then Kit, in a low, guarded voice, outlined her plan to Redwing.

Redwing nodded.

"Me can do easily, Miss Kit," she declared. "Redwing not be seen or heard."

Kit, hugging her, got busy with paper and pencil, and a few moments later, with Redwing mounted on her own speedy pony, they rode off—soon to separate, Kit to return to Red Ranch; Redwing to go on her mysterious mission.

Not long afterwards Bob received an exciting note from Judith—so did Handsome.

Had they but known it, Redwing had delivered them—for that had been Kit's plan. And each note was to the same effect.

Judith wanted to meet them at the old bridge over the crevasse at six o'clock, not to say a word to anyone, and to remain hidden in case school kids were spying. In fact, to hide until she whistled.

At six o'clock they were both there—in hiding—and both had crept there secretly like Redskins, unknown to the other.

But Kit and Redwing were also there; they had been there since five o'clock, with a rope in case of accidents, and a lifebelt.

At five past six Judith arrived, wearing her oldest clothes. She walked to the bridge, and then slowly went down the jagged path—very slowly.

It was her intention to walk to within a yard of the water, then drop in and scream. But things did not go as she had planned. Suddenly she slipped.

The scream that came was no pretence.

(Continued in column 2, next page.)

HILDA RICHARDS



Replies to just a few of her many correspondents

EVELYN GALLAGHER (Dundrum, Eire).—I've answered most of your queries by post, I believe, Evelyn. The Fourth Former whose singing voice is usually considered to be the best is Lucy Morgan, the Welsh member of the Form. Sylvia Sirrett, a very brilliant scholar, is first in Form in the Fourth. Good-bye for now, my dear.

"ADMIRER OF CLARA AND MARJORIE" (Co. Cork, Eire).—So sweet of you to tell me what you think of Cliff House! Clara's hair is bobbed—and invariably wind-blown! She takes no trouble with it—she never has a parting—but simply brushes it back from her forehead and leaves it at that. Marjorie, though, has been wearing a page-boy bob. Thank you so much for your story suggestion.

"ADMIRER OF DIANA" (Wrexham, Denbighshire).—Many thanks for another delightful letter. I expect you were very pleased to find that this week's story featured your favourite. I shall certainly be featuring Diana again in the future, for I know how popular she is with all my readers.

JEANNE HARTNALL (Plymouth, Devon).—Such a nice little note from you, Jeanne—but how short it was! You would be one of the Second Formers if you went to Cliff House, and I'm certain you'd like being in that cheery Form. Bye-bye for the present.

RUTH BERNSTEIN (Cliftonville, Kent).—Thank you very much for the charming postcard, my dear. I do hope you've had a lovely holiday at Cliftonville—with some good weather. You would be in the Second Form if you were at Cliff House, you know. Yes, ever-popular Bessie will be appearing again in future stories, you may be sure.

S. and J. (Staffs).—Thank you so much for writing. Yes, Dick Fairbrother, Dulcia's brother, is a great friend of Jack Trevlyn. Lady Pat is, as you thought, Dulcia's greatest friend at Cliff House. I'm hoping to feature Dulcia, Jack and Clara together again—though I cannot make any promises at present, you know!

JOYCE PEARSON (Oldham).—I hope you received my letter, in which I answered your Cliff House questions. By the way, I'm hoping to feature your favourite at C.H., Jemima, in more stories before long. Tell me all your latest news next time you write, won't you, Joyce?

MAMIE DOHERTY (Co. Antrim, Northern Ireland).—Thank you for your nice little letter and the very charming postcard of Portrush, my dear. It was sweet of you to remember me while on holiday, and I do hope you had a good time. How is your sweet pet, Rover?

PADDY DAWSON (Croydon).—As I've mislaid your address, I couldn't reply to your last letter by post—so here's a printed reply. I was so glad to hear you are getting on so well, and I hope you'll keep up the progress. Give my love to Smoky, won't you?

Hearing it, Bob jumped up. Handsome heard it, too, and sprang forward. "My gosh—it's Judith!" yelled Handsome. "Hey, Judith—can you swim?" Bob said nothing. He rushed across the bridge and sprang over the side.

Kit and Redwing, creeping out, peeped down and softly clapped their hands, as Bob plunged into the water, bobbed up, and struck out for Judith.

By the time he reached the shore with her, Handsome was down the bank, and Kit and Redwing watched with interest, surprised to see that Judith lay there with her eyes closed.

"She's fainted—half-drowned!" snapped Handsome. "Quick, man—run for the doctor. I'll stand by."

Bob gaped down at Judith, and then rushed madly up the path, his face white and strained, while Handsome knelt beside her.

But Judith stirred a little now. Quick as a flash, unaware that he was watched, Handsome swung over into the water up to his neck, and climbed out.

Judith opened her eyes. "Frank!" she gasped. "Oh!" "All right, my dear," he said gently. "You're safe now. I'll carry you up." Kit sprang to the path and went rushing down, Redwing following.

"Stand back, you cheat!" she snapped.

"Cheat?" said Handsome. "Cheat! Judith—were you in a faint, or unconscious, or just swanking. Do you think Handsome dived in—"

Judith looked puzzled, staring at him.

"By the look of his clothes, I'd say 'yes,'" she murmured.

"And by the look of his bone-dry hair I'd say no," retorted Kit; at which Redwing, as impassive as ever, nodded slowly.

Handsome, colouring deeply, stepped back.

"It—it was Bob dived in and swam ashore with me," murmured Judith. "But didn't Handsome go in, too—"

"He flopped in just to get wet and kid you, the cheat! He sent Bob for the doctor."

"That right, Miss Judith," Redwing murmured. "He one big fraud!"

Judith struggled up. She looked at Handsome's dry hair, at his red face,

and then her eyes blazed like stars. She swung her open palm at his face. "You coward and cheat! Bob's worth a thousand of you," she cried angrily. "A million!"

With that, helped by Kit, she reached the top of the path just as Bob came thundering back and leaped off his horse before it could stop.

"The doc. was out and—gee! Judith," he exclaimed, his haggard face clearing like magic.

Judith said nothing. She fell into his arms, crying

Kit and Redwing had not stayed, but an hour later Bob looked them up in the ranch-house.

"Miss Kit," he said. "I—I wonder if you could give me a spot of advice." Kit smiled.

"Why, surely," she said. "I cut out an advertisement—"

"Advertisement?" said Bob, puzzled.

"For engagement rings—cheap, but good, and easy to buy," said Kit. "Was that what you wanted advice about?"

Bob grinned and went red.

"Waal—yes, but how did you guess?" "Just sorter came to me," said Kit.

"Congratulations, Bob."

"And thanks a lot, Miss Kit, and—I say!"

"Yeah?"

"Judith asked me if her eyes were blurry? Gee! I told her they were like stars—and—"

"Can it!" implored Kit with a chuckle. "And her hair's like—like a mouse's fur—"

"What! Her hair's like—"

Kit put her hands to her ears and ran laughing from the room. But she guessed right when she guessed that Judith had been inclined to agree with Bob that on the whole her hair was like waving corn.

And next time a village kid chanted the poem she did not flare up; she blushed modestly, to hear her praises sung in public.

As for Handsome, the slightly swollen state of his nose and the discolouration of an eye earned him the name of Uggerly—and it stuck even after his wounds had healed, and Bob and Judy were happily married—thanks to Kit of Red Ranch!

THE END.

A moonlit night—a lonely heath—the rumbling coach swaying on its way. Then—a rider races up, pistols drawn, and there comes that dreaded order "Stand and Deliver—Your Money or Your Lives!"

And yet somehow Jess Reynolds did not dread it. Highwayman Jack, who had stopped the coach, was a laughing, gallant young man. He was not an ordinary highwayman, Jess felt sure. She liked him at once; felt he had a secret reason for his lawlessness. Little did Jess realise how that startling encounter with Highwayman Jack was to lead her into the most thrilling adventures of her life.

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