

MEET VALERIE DREW the famous girl detective and FLASH her clever Alsatian dog INSIDE

# THE SCHOOLGIRL

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Incorporating  
"SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN"



## THE TOMBOY IN PERIL—

at the House of Mystery.

A dramatic incident from this week's superb story of Barbara Redfern & Co. of Cliff House School.

In this Grand Long Complete Story of Cliff House School, meet Barbara Redfern, Bessie Bunter & Co.—and those very unusual but delightful Fourth Formers, the Terraine Twins.



# The TRIUMPH of the TWINS!

## Did Ida Really Hurt Her Leg?



"**W**HOA, Priscilla, steady on!" Barbara Redfern cried, and

just in time caught the arm of Priscilla Terraine as a bicycle whizzed round the corner of Fallsweir Lane in Friardale. "Hallo!" she added, as the girl on the bicycle shot a penetrating stare at Priscilla as she passed. "She seems to know you."

"But, my dear Barbara, I do not know her," Priscilla Agatha Terraine said seriously, shaking her two thin plaits. "I have never, never seen the girl in my life before."

"Well, she certainly looked at you hard," Mabel Lynn noticed. "Perhaps she thought you were your twin sister Ermyntrude?"

But again Priscilla gravely shook her head.

"That also is unlikely," she said. "If Ermyntrude—my sister—knew the girl I should also know her. Ermyntrude and I have no friends or acquaintances apart from each other."

Barbara Redfern, captain of the Fourth Form at Cliff House School, winked at Mabel Lynn, who smiled a little feebly. Plump Bessie Bunter, the fourth member of the little Cliff House party, chuckled.

For of all the oddities at Cliff House there was no doubt that Priscilla Terraine, with her twin sister Ermyntrude,

took the biscuit. Very prim, very solemn were these Terraines. Rarely, if ever, did they laugh or smile, and to all outward appearances had no sense of humour whatever.

But what Priscilla said was true, as Babs, Mabs, and Bessie—the three chums of Study No. 4 in the Fourth corridor—well knew. Twins they were, and most devoted to each other. Alike in their tastes, in their dress, and so utterly alike in appearance that it was impossible to tell one from the other, it was rarely, indeed, they were ever seen apart. In that respect this afternoon was a red-letter occasion.

There was a big reason, of course—or, rather, two reasons. Both the twins were obsessed with the same deep sense of duty even in the smallest things, and while Ermyntrude had gone off to visit Martin's Nest, which was the home of wealthy, widowed Mrs. Silver, friend of the twins, Priscilla, who was taking the part of a Japanese girl in Mabel Lynn's new junior school play, had had to go down to the village with Babs & Co. to be fitted for the costume she would wear in the part.

That duty was satisfactorily accomplished now, however, and it was at Priscilla's suggestion they were making their way to Martin's Nest in the hope of intercepting Ermyntrude on her way home.

Apart from which, Martin's Nest possessed a most excellent orchard, and Mrs. Silver, who was at present on holiday, had given the chums permis-

sion to go along whenever they liked and pick fruit.

"That girl might, you know, have run me over," Priscilla said severely. "She was riding very carelessly."

"But you weren't altogether looking where you were going, were you?" golden-haired Mabs countered. "Hallo!" she added, with a start.

For suddenly, from round the corner, came a metallic crash followed by a faint cry.

"Oh kik-crums! That's her!" Bessie stuttered. "She's had an accident!"

The four broke into a sprint. They raced round the corner. And, true enough, there was the girl in question, no longer on the cycle, but sitting now on the grass verge which bordered the lane, an expression of agony on her face as she clutched at her right ankle. The bicycle itself lay on its side in the road.

"Oh, my goodness!" Babs cried as she rushed up. "What's happened?"

"I—I don't know." The girl closed her eyes as if in faintness. "I must have caught my wheel against a stone, I think. But my ankle!" she cried. "I—I think I've twisted it, or sprained it, or something! Oh dear!"

"No, sit down!" Babs said, as the girl made an effort to rise. "I know a bit of first-aid; perhaps I can do something. Will you take off that stocking, please?"

"Oh, please don't bother!" the girl said.

"No trouble," Babs said briefly. "Bessie, pick up the bicycle, there's a

dear. Now," she added; and, in spite of the other's movement to restrain her, she peeled down the stocking and caught the ankle in her hand. The girl gave a cry.

"Oh dear! It hurts!"

"There?" Babs asked, as she pressed lightly on the bone.

"No—yes! I don't know! Yes, just—just there!" the girl gasped.

Babs blinked. Mabs, who knew something about first-aid, frowned slightly. If the ankle was twisted or sprained it certainly did not betray the fact. There was no swelling or discoloration of the flesh in any way; and Babs noted, when she moved the toes, that the girl did not wince, as she would have been bound to do in the case of fracture or dislocation. Funny, that!

"You—you're sure it hurts?" she asked.

"Dreadfully!" the girl said. "What is it that—that's wrong?"

"Well, dashed if I know!" Babs said. "No swelling or anything; but it may be, of course, an internal sprain, in which case it might not show itself for a few minutes. Do you live far?" she added.

"Only about two hundred yards away," the girl said. "If you'd help me—" And she turned to Priscilla, who had stood aside, looking on with rather a nervous expression, and smiled. "Perhaps you?" she suggested.

"Oh, yes, of course! Pleased to do anything I can, I'm sure," Priscilla said in her precise way. "I most sincerely hope that nothing serious is wrong. Will you—you take my arm?" she added, with a blush.

"And mine," Babs offered.

"Thanks, I—I can get along with—your friend," the girl said; and Babs wondered at the meaning, significant look she flung at the confused Priscilla. "It—it doesn't hurt so much now, and if you wouldn't mind taking my bike— Oh, thank you!" she added, as the sheepish-looking Priscilla found her arm imprisoned. "It's so awfully nice of you! What did you do with that key?" she added in a sudden fierce undertone.

The undertone obviously was meant only for Priscilla, but it reached the ears of Babs. She paused, looking quickly at Priscilla, whose face was a picture of bewilderment.

"K-key?" Priscilla stuttered. "I do not understand."

"Don't be funny! You know, the key you picked up ten minutes ago. Oh dear!" the girl cried, as she saw Babs staring at her. "Shall—shall we get along, please? I'll direct you to the house. Dear friend," she simpered at Priscilla. "How awfully good of you! You must tell me your name, you know. Mine's Ida Biggins."

"And mine," Priscilla said, "is—"  
"Terraine," Babs put in quickly. She could not for the life of her have said why, but some flashing instinct told her that Ida Biggins was fishing; that everything was not as it seemed to be. That ankle—there was nothing the matter with that. And looking into the road, there was certainly no sign of a stone large enough to have caused the spill.

What, then, was this girl's game? What was the strange reference to a key? Back came the impression the girl had left as she had cycled round the corner—the impression that she had seen Priscilla before, and would probably have spoken to her. Had this accident, then, been faked as an excuse to get to know Priscilla?

In any case, Priscilla had been in Babs & Co's company for the last two

## By HILDA RICHARDS

Illustrated by T. LAIDLER

hours. Most certainly, during that time, she had picked up no key.

"Shall I take your other arm?" Babs asked swiftly. "You'll need two of us, you know—" And without waiting for assent or dissent, she caught at Ida's free arm. "There, now, that's better, isn't it? Straight ahead, you say?"

"That's right," Ida Biggins said. "Oh dear, I—I'm sorry to be such trouble to you!"

They shuffled along, Ida badly limping; Bessie, having picked up the bike, keeping pace with them, with Mabs on the other side. Now and again Ida stopped to bite her lip and hold her injured foot in the air for a moment; then, smiling bravely, moved on again. And presently, through the trees, rose the chimneys of Martin's Nest.

"We turn here," Ida said suddenly, indicating a gate.

Priscilla blinked.

"But—but this is Martin's Nest?"

"That's right," Ida said. "This is where I live, you see."

"You live?" Babs cried.

"With my father and mother," Ida replied. "Oh, and Ainsworth, of course! Ainsworth is our manservant, you see!"



**Babs, as ever, takes the lead, but success lies almost entirely in the hands of the inimitable Twins!**



"But this house belongs to Mrs. Silver?" Priscilla said.

"Eh?" Ida blinked. For a moment Babs saw that she was off her guard; that that information came as no little shock to her. She hesitated, as though swiftly digesting the information. "Oh, so you—you are friends of Mrs. Silver?"

"Yes, of course!" Priscilla nodded seriously. "We have been friends of Mrs. Silver a long, long time. Mrs. Silver is away on holiday now, is she not, and she has given us permission to visit the house whenever we like. But she did not say anything about other tenants occupying it while she was away."

"No?" said Ida. "Well, as—as a matter of fact, Mrs. Silver is a relation of ours."

"Really?" Priscilla inquired, in polite surprise. "I never knew Mrs. Silver had any relations. She never mentioned them."

"That was because father has—has been abroad, I expect," Ida said hesitantly. "We—we've just come back. And, anyway, the arrangement wasn't made until the last moment. But there it is! We've taken the house until Mrs. Silver returns."

Priscilla smiled. Her face betrayed no suspicion. But Babs looked more sharply and keenly at the limping girl, asking herself first if that story were true, and then flushing to feel that she might be entertaining suspicion that was unworthy. It was, of course, rather

surprising to discover another family in Mrs. Silver's house, but it was by no means astonishing, especially if that other family were relatives of the owners.

"And Amy?" Mabs put in. "Where is Amy—Mrs. Silver's maid, you know? I understood that Mrs. Silver was leaving her at the house to look after things?"

"Oh, yes, she did arrange that, of course!" Ida nodded. "But when we came—well, of course, there was no need for Amy, so she went off to Eastbourne to look after Mrs. Silver there. It's a lovely house, isn't it?" she asked, as they came into the drive.

A lovely house it was in all truth, looking almost a part of the great clump of magnificent oak-trees, out of whose midst it seemed to grow. Stately gables and mullioned windows confronted them, with, in the distance, a glimpse of the blue water of the River Fallsweir, part of which was enclosed in the grounds.

In a little body they went up the drive, Ida still limping. As they neared the door a tall, powerfully built man came out with a small woman. Ida gave a cry.

"Daddy—mummy!"

"Hallo, hallo!" Ephraim Biggins said; and then, to Babs' amazement, Ida, apparently completely recovered, broke away and rushed towards him. She saw her mutter something swiftly as she raced up, and he gave a little

**It is seldom that adventure comes the way of the prim and solemn Terraine Twins. But it comes with a vengeance when Ermytrude Terraine gains possession of a strange key. That key leads the Twins and Babs & Co. into thrilling and mysterious happenings.**

start as his eyes fastened upon Priscilla. Mabs blinked.

"I say, Babs, that sprain's gone pretty quickly!" she muttered.

"It has!" Babs' eyes were glimmering now. "And if you ask me, that sprain was just a stunt to kid us here! We're up against something—I don't know what—but the something is connected with you, Priscilla. What did she mean about a key?"

Priscilla shook her head bewilderedly. "I'm sure I don't know. Unless—" She paused. "Perhaps it's Ermytrude. Ermytrude might have picked up a key—"

"That's it!" Babs cried. "What fools not to have thought of it! Of course! She's mistaken you for Ermytrude—it's Ermytrude who's been here! She faked this accident to kid a key out of you you haven't got!"

Priscilla looked nervous. In one respect, at least, she was very different from her twin. While Ermytrude seemed to have, indeed, all the pluck and nerve of the Terraine family, Priscilla had all its timidity and shyness. For a moment her face expressed alarm.

"Oh, Barbara—"

"Priscilla, hush!" Babs said swiftly. "Don't let them suspect we think anything is wrong. If they don't know you've got a twin, they'll probably give the game away. Don't let on!"

Priscilla trembled.

"But supposing—"

"You mustn't get jumpy, Priscilla! Remember, there might be some peril for Ermy in this!"

Priscilla gulped. But those last words had their effect. If anything was ever required to make Priscilla pull herself together, it was the knowledge that she must stand by her sister. And now Mrs. Biggins was coming towards them, helping Ida, who had suddenly remembered her damaged foot. And behind them came Mrs. Biggins, short and elderly. From the doorway a stockily built man, with the face of a professional prizefighter, stared out at the party. He, Babs correctly guessed, was Ainsworth, the manservant.

"Tough-looking customer!"  
"Welcome!" Mr. Biggins said, coming up. "Welcome, girls! Ida has just been telling me in what circumstances she met you. But please come in—do—and have some tea." Mrs. Silver's friends are naturally our friends!"

"I sus-say, that's nun-nice of you!" stutted plump Bessie, to whom the mention of food made instant appeal.

"Ida, my dear, you'd better get your mother to look after that ankle of yours," Mr. Biggins went on. "And so you are Miss Terraine?"—his attention completely on nervous Priscilla. "Yes, of course; Mrs. Silver has mentioned you to me. But come in!"

The chums looked at each other, but Babs, ever the leader, firmly stepped forward and so they followed. As Mr. Biggins led the way into a pleasant lounge, he turned to the servant.

"Tea, Ainsworth, please," he said. "Ainsworth, girls, is our only servant at the moment." He smiled. "You see, we came here in rather a rush. Charming spot, isn't it?"

"Rather!" Babs said.  
"I suppose you know the house quite well?" he went on.

"Oh, yes!"  
"You know Mrs. Silver very, very well. I understand—Priscilla?"  
"Yes, thank you; very well indeed," Priscilla gulped.

The conversation was interrupted by the arrival of Ida, who came bursting into the room, remembering a little too late her injured foot and quickly feigning a limp for the occasion.

But Babs' wits were sharpened then. There was something wrong here—something decidedly wrong. Priscilla was the centre of the Bigginses family's attention. To question Priscilla—because they wanted a mysterious key—Ida had lured them to the house.

At tea, all their attention was for Priscilla, Babs noticed, and the very concentration of their interest upon that girl all went to verify her fears. Still, the Bigginses were pleasant enough people, and the tea was certainly excellent. Talk, of course, was almost entirely confined to the house and to Mrs. Silver, those being the common bonds of interest.

"And now, I suppose," Mr. Biggins suggested when it was over, "you'd like to be getting back to school? But before you go, Priscilla, there is something I should like to ask you. Will you please excuse us for a few moments?" he added to the chums.

Priscilla turned quite pale.  
"But—but—Oh dear, can't Barbara and her friends come with me?" she asked.

"Barbara and her friends would not be interested," Mr. Biggins said smoothly. "This is purely a private matter, my dear. We won't keep you long—got more than ten minutes. Perhaps your friends would like to look

round the garden?" he pointedly suggested.

Priscilla turned to Babs. Babs had stiffened now, scenting that a development was at hand. But swiftly she nodded at Priscilla.

"Go!" that nod said.  
Priscilla gulped. She had faith in Babs, however.

"Very well," she said in that precise way of hers. "Shall we retire, then, please?"

Mr. Biggins beamed. From Ida to her mother a swift, triumphant look was flashed. Bracing herself, Priscilla followed the Biggins family as they moved towards the door on the opposite side of the room.

"Help yourself to fruit, girls," Mr. Biggins said pointedly as they went out. The door closed behind them.

"Babs—" Mabs muttered.  
"Come on," Babs said. "Play their game for a moment. That game, whatever it is, they're going to give away to Priscilla now. Only hope to goodness she doesn't let anything slip," she added anxiously. "Come into the garden."

Mabs nodded. Together she and Bessie followed Babs as she strode into the garden. Babs, steering across the lawn, tried to find a point from which she could see what was going on inside the room in which the meeting with Priscilla Terraine was now taking place. But suddenly she stopped dead in her tracks.

"Mabs, look!" she whispered excitedly. "What's that?"

Mabs started. Babs was staring at one of the upper windows of Martin's Nest—a window heavily curtained. As she watched, a hand appeared through the curtains—a slim hand—waved once, twice, three times, and then disappeared.

"Mabs, suppose somebody's shut up in that room?" Babs whispered. "Somebody trying to attract our attention by signalling?"

"Oh, gosh!" Mabs breathed.  
Babs looked at Bessie.

"Bessie, stop here," she said. "If they see you strolling about they'll think we're with you. Come on, Mabs, we're going to look into this!"

Mabs nodded. She was thrilling now. Quietly the two of them padded back into the house, slipped into the hall, and trod cautiously up the stairs. At the head of the stairs was a long corridor.

"About the third door on the right," Babs whispered. "Mabs, you stop here while I go—Oh, my hat!" she added next moment; and, with a gasp of dismay: "We're caught!"

For at the back of her another door had suddenly swung open. As one, Mabs and Babs spun round, and then they gazed blankly at the figure which stood there, blinking at them almost as dazedly as they blinked back.

"Priscilla!" gasped Babs. "Gugolly, how did you get here? We thought you were downstairs!"

### A Tricky Time for the Twins!



"PRISCILLA?" The other girl looked at her. "Barbara, you are making a mistake," she said. "I am not Priscilla; I am Ermytrude."

"What?" gasped Babs.  
"Yes, indeed." And Ermytrude Ophelia Terraine nodded seriously. "But what do you mean—Priscilla is downstairs?"

For a moment Babs and Mabs were quite breathless. It was so utterly impossible to tell the twins apart—or even together for that matter—that they could hardly believe now that it was not Priscilla they were looking at. But then Babs noted the dark blue bows on the twin's plait; Priscilla always wore light blue.

"But what are you doing here? No, wait a minute! Ermy, do you know anything about a key?" she asked quickly.

"Indeed I do." Ermytrude nodded. "It is because of that key that I am still here. Barbara, there is something mysterious in this house, something strange. I do not like it. The key was flung out of a curtained window. But see," she added urgently, "do not let us talk here. Come into this room."

She held back the door again. Downstairs came a mutter of voices. Still a little bewildered, but with a quickening sense of urgency and danger, Babs and Mabs followed her in. Ermytrude, looking more serious, more determined than they had ever seen her before, faced them.

"I came," she said, "as you know, to see Amy, the maid here—Amy being a friend of mine and Priscilla's. As I was approaching the house a startling thing happened. An upstairs window was thrown open suddenly and a key fell at my feet."

"You—you have it?" Babs asked eagerly.

"Yes, indeed. The key is here," Ermytrude said, producing a rather curiously shaped key. "It still has the label which was attached to it when it was thrown from the window. See?"

Babs took the key. Tied to it was a slip of paper on which had been scribbled in pencil:

"Hide this key. On no account hand it to anyone except Mrs. Sil—"

Abruptly there, the message broke off.

"But—but who threw it out?" Mabs breathed.

"I believe Amy did!" came Ermytrude's startling reply.

"Amy? But she—"  
"That is her writing, I am sure," Ermytrude said firmly. "Later, at Cliff House, we will compare it with a card she wrote to dear Priscilla and myself on our joint birthday. Suppose Amy is a prisoner here?"

"My hat, that would account for the hand at the window!" Mabs breathed. "Phew! But, Ermy, what happened when you picked up the key?"

"I heard a shout," the twin replied. "Then, rushing out of the house, came a woman, a man and a girl. They saw the key in my hand, and shouted for it, but I—well, by that time, as you may guess, I was suspicious, so I took to my heels and ran. One doesn't think of everything on the spur of a single moment, I am afraid," she said seriously, "that I had run some distance before it occurred to me how very odd it was that Amy should have thrown Mrs. Silver's key out of the window, and how extremely unusual to find people living in the house which Mrs. Silver had vacated. I began," Ermytrude ponderously ended, "to suspect something wrong."

"Go hon!" murmured Mabs.  
"Indeed, yes. Not until I had run some distance, however, did it occur to me that poor Amy might be in some sort of trouble, and it was my duty, as a friend, to help her if possible. So," Ermytrude added simply, "I came back, you see, intending to do a little private investigation work."

"And you weren't spotted?" Babs asked.

"Indeed, no. I entered the house through a window with great caution. But, alas!" Ermytrude sighed, "I fear my investigations have met with no reward. Indeed, I am completely bewildered. Barbara, what is happening here?"

"I don't know," confessed Babs, "but it's something pretty shady, if you ask me! Ermy," she added urgently, "you've got to get out of here—before they spot you! Priscilla's downstairs. They think she is you and has got the key—"

"Babs, quick!" Mabs cried. "They're coming up the stairs! Ermy, run!"

"No, no!" Babs cried. She was in a flutter suddenly as she heard voices and footsteps on the stairs, and realised if any of them went to that door they would immediately be seen by the people on the stairs. "Stop here," she added. "Say nothing. Hallo, that's Priscilla's voice," she breathed, as Priscilla's precise tones floated to them in answer to some laughing remark of Biggins'. "Shush, now!"

With hearts beating fast, the three stood tense. Nearer, nearer the footsteps came.

"Oh, my hat!" Mabs muttered. "We're sunk, Ermy!"

"Ermy, quickly—in there!" Babs gasped. "Quickly!" she added frantically, and while the half-dazed twin stared at her she had bundled her through the door of an open wardrobe and had turned the key in the lock. And only just in time.

For as she pocketed the key the door swung wide, and into the room came Ida, accompanied by Priscilla.

They both blinked at the sight of the chums. For a moment a scowl of suspicious alarm crossed Ida's face.

"What are you doing here?"

"Just—just having a look round," Mabs said.

"But I thought you were picking fruit?"

"Yes," agreed Babs, "but—but—well, you see, we hadn't anything to put the fruit in, and—and, naturally, we didn't want to interrupt your conversation, so—so—"

"So we were just looking for something to put it in, you see," Mabs helped.

"Oh!" Ida's face cleared. "You ought to have asked first. Anyway, you won't find anything in here."

"Hallo, what's going on here?" came a voice at the door, and into the room strode Mr. Biggins himself. "Ida, I thought I told you that you were not to play about in this part of the house?"

"I wasn't," Ida said. "I—I was just going to show Priscilla something, that's all. Then we found these two girls in here, looking for a bag to put fruit in. I was just going to show Priscilla my new frock which I hung in the wardrobe there."

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Babs.

"What?"

"Nun—nothing!" Babs swallowed hard. "I—I was only just saying that—that we're sorry. We—we made a mistake, you see. But I'm sure," she added desperately, "Priscilla would rather pick fruit than look at frocks, wouldn't you, Priscilla?"—with a meaning glance at that girl.

"Well, yes," Priscilla obediently said. "Of course."

"But—" Ida objected.

"We—we can look at the frock later on—eh, Priscilla?" Babs eagerly asked.

"Yes, of course."

"Then—then shall we go and get the baskets?" Babs suggested feverishly. At whatever cost, Ida must not look into

that wardrobe. "It—it will be so much more fun if—if we all pick fruit."

"Much more fun," Mabs echoed.

She held the door open, setting the example herself by going through it. Mr. Biggins nodded. He, at least, seemed rather glad to have them all out of that room. Ida paused a little, then she shrugged.

"All right, then, let's go." But she looked at the wardrobe and Babs for a terrible moment, fancying she would seek the missing key, felt her heart turn over. But the moment passed. With Priscilla at her side, Ida turned and went out of the door. Down the stairs they went again, Babs and Mabs hanging back in the rear. Mabs looked at her chum.

"What about Ermy?" she whispered. "I'll slip back," Babs said. "First get Priscilla off the scene. If the twins are seen together, the game's up."

"Leave Priscilla to me," Mabs said. They turned into the kitchen, where the pugilistic-faced Ainsworth was in charge. At once, at Mr. Biggins' order, large baskets were produced, and each armed with one of these baskets they tramped out into the orchard where Bessie, already making the most of opportunities, was sampling large brown pears.

But Babs' mind, at least, was far away from that luscious fruit. She was thinking of imprisoned Ermytrude—how to get back to her without being detected.

The fruit-picking began. Actually, there was no need to pick from the trees at all. Windfalls, fresh and ripe, lay on the ground in all directions, and in a very few moments half the baskets were full. Mr. Biggins cheerily smiled.

"Good harvest, eh? Worth some money, all this fruit. Mind you don't make yourselves ill, girls!"

"No, we won't," Babs promised. "But—but—oh dear, I'd love some of those lovely red apples from the top of that tree!" she said longingly.

"Well, my dear, help yourself," Mr.

Biggins said. "There's a ladder. It's perfectly safe."

Babs, however, looked nervous.

"Oh dear! If—if I dared!" she said.

"Eh?" Bessie blinked in astonishment. To hear Babs, who was one of the best and the most daring climbers in Cliff House's junior school, say that surprised her into making comment. "Why, you know jolly well, when it comes to climbing—"

"That Babs is terribly afraid!" hurriedly Mabs chipped in.

"Oh, really, Mabs! I wasn't going to say—"

"Remember when she fell off that cherry-tree?" Mabs interrupted. "No, Babs couldn't do it. But Mr. Biggins could—or Ida," she added hopefully. "I'll bet you're a topping climber, Ida."

"Well, I am," Ida confessed. "But, daddy, shall I have a shot at it?"

"No, no!" He frowned. "If there's climbing to be done, that's my job! Hold the ladder—and you, Mabel. Now, which apple would you like?" he added jokingly, as, falling into Babs' little trap, he commenced to climb. "That one with the yellow spot on the side, eh? Whoa! Hold the ladder! Steady, there!"

Up he went, climbing carefully. Below, Ida craned her neck as she watched him; but Mabs, guessing Babs' little wheeze, nodded. Babs chuckled a little as she quickly touched Priscilla on the shoulder.

"Buck up—buzz!" she said. "Get out of it. Don't ask questions—scoot—now!"

She nodded quickly to the hedge, and, without more ado, sprinted for the house.

Quickly she reached it, was about to dart into the kitchen, when she fell back as the pugilistic-looking Ainsworth, carrying a trayful of glasses, came in. Heart thumping, she flattened herself against the wall until he had deposited the load on the table,



"SUPPOSING," Babs suggested, "you and Priscilla change hair ribbons?" The twins blinked. "And Priscilla," Babs went on, "reports for detention in your place, Ermy? That would leave you free. It's the only way to see this thing through, you know!"

and then went out again. This was her chance.

In a moment she was in the kitchen and up the stairs.

She reached the door of the spare room. She flung it open. As she did so there came a little gasp from the wardrobe, the sound of movement. Fervently Babs felt in her pocket, her heart beating like a sledgehammer when, in the first frantic search, she failed to find the small key. Oh, my hat! Supposing—

But no! Thank goodness, here was the key! Anxiously she slipped it into the wardrobe lock and turned. Ermytrude, with a face the colour of a beetroot, came reeling out.

"Ermy!" Babs gasped. "Poor old girl!"

"Oh dear, oh dear!" Ermytrude spluttered. "Really I—I feel quite faint. The atmosphere, you know," she added, with a faint smile of apology.

"Just sit and rest a moment," Babs counselled. "I'll see if I can get some water."

"The bath-room's next door," Ermytrude said. "Oh dear!"

She passed a shaking hand across her head. Babs gulped. Poor old Ermy! It must have been frightfully stuffy in that confined space.

Out of the room she darted, into the next. Now—oh goodness! Wasn't there a glass in this place?

And—had Priscilla taken the tip and got away? Would Mabs see to that?

Her mind was in a turmoil; her fingers almost shaking as she found a glass. She filled it, and then rushed back. But even as she pushed the door open she started.

For another girl was standing in front of the recovering Ermytrude—a girl whose face was sharp with suspicion. The girl was Ida Biggins herself.

"And how," she was wanting to know—"just how is it that, after leaving you in the garden, I find you here?"

### Ermytrude Plays a Lone Hand!



AT once, however, Babs' quick wit was at her command—more especially as at that moment she saw through the window Priscilla and

Mabs in the garden outside, Mabs in the act of leading the bewildered Priscilla to the hedge. If Ida happened to look out and see that—

"Priscilla lost something. Didn't you, Priscilla?" she said quickly. "A little brooch. We both came back to find it, you see, and—and—well, Priscilla was taken by a sudden attack of faintness. That's why," Babs added, drawing Ida's attention to the water, "I've brought this."

"I never saw you go," Ida objected puzzledly.

"Well, no. There wasn't much need to tell you, was there?" Babs asked. "Ida, old thing, be a sport and look around in this corner and see if you can find a little blue enamel and silver brooch. Priscilla, my dear, drink this."

Ermytrude stared at her. But Ermytrude understood. While she sipped the fluid Babs took another quick glance out of the window. Oh goodness! Why would Priscilla stand there talking with Mabs in full view of anybody looking out of the window? Ida looked up.

"I can't see any brooch—"

"No?" Babs said feverishly. "Then—then perhaps it's dropped here?" she suggested, leading her to the other side of the room.

"But Priscilla wasn't at this side of the room?" Ida objected.

"No, of—of course not!" Babs stammered. "But—but it must be somewhere, mustn't it? And—and we're sure it was lost in this room, you see. What's that?" she asked, pointing to a spot near the wardrobe.

Ida approached it. Babs took the opportunity to fling another flustered glance through the window.

Thank goodness! Mabs at last seemed to have triumphed. Babs breathed more freely as she saw Priscilla disappear through the hedge.

"This is only a feather," Ida said crossly, picking up the object Babs had indicated. "Bother me if I think you really lost a brooch! What I'd like to know—"

"Whoops! There it is!" Babs cried delightedly.

And she made a swift swoop near the door. Triumphant she scooped something up. Ida blinked as she saw the little blue and enamel brooch—Babs' own brooch, as a matter of fact, which Babs had had in her pocket all the time.

"There!" she said, with a shaky little laugh. "There you are, Priscilla—found at last!"

"Well, I looked there, and I didn't see it," Ida glowered. "Still, as you've found it—"

"Off we go and finish the fruit picking," Babs said happily. "Feel better, Er—I mean, Priscilla?"

Ermytrude did. Babs led the way back to the garden. She caught a sly wink from Mabs as she came up.

"Well, there we are," Mr. Biggins jovially said. "Baskets full, everything fine. Though how," he added, "you're going to get that stuff back to school I don't know."

"Oh, we can carry it!" Mabs said cheerily. "In any case," she added, with a grin at Bessie, who was biting into her fourth pear, "it looks as though there won't be all that much to carry by the time we reach school. We shall be carrying old Bess, instead."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And now," Babs said firmly, "we must go; otherwise, we'll be late for gates."

"I see." Mr. Biggins nodded, though he gazed at Ermytrude. "And you are sure, my dear, you will not change your mind?"

"Eh?" Ermytrude blinked. "I am afraid I do not understand."

"Still keeping it up, eh?" Mr. Biggins laughed. But it was a laugh which held a rather harsh note. "Perhaps," he suggested gently, "when we know each other better—eh? When we are friends? In the meantime, Priscilla, do remember that at all times you are a welcome guest at Martin's Nest."

"And us?" Babs asked.

"What applies to dear Priscilla also applies to Priscilla's friends," Mr. Biggins said softly.

Ermytrude smiled. Babs smiled, too. All round hands were shaken, and, carrying the loaded baskets, the chums moved off. Not until they were well out of range of the house did anyone speak. Then Ermytrude suddenly stopped.

"Barbara, wait! What about dear Priscilla?"

"Take it easy," Mabs chuckled. "Priscilla is back at school by this time. Had a job to get the chump

away, too," she added reflectively. "At first she refused to move when she heard that you were in the house. But come on. I'm rather anxious to see Priscilla, and hear what the Bigginses had to say to her."

"Yes, rather! And I'm jolly anxious to make a pear pie, you know!" Bessie beamed. "Pears make ripping pies!"

The chums grinned. Easy in mind again, they were all anxious now to see Priscilla. A comparison of notes, they felt, would clear up many of the details which were, at present, just mysteries to them. Apart from which, there was the question of Amy.

Had Amy thrown out that key? If so, there could only be one conclusion. Amy was a prisoner in the hands of the Bigginses.

But they had no proof of that fact—the hand they had seen, after all, might have belonged to anyone, and it was by no means certain that the writer of the note attached to the key was Amy until they had compared her writing with the specimen which the twins held.

One bright suggestion Mabs did make—that they should phone Mrs. Silver at Eastbourne and ask if Amy was with her. But that suggestion fell rather flat when Ermytrude told them that, not yet having heard from Mrs. Silver, she had not the foggiest idea at which hotel that good lady was staying.

Much puzzled, they reached the school. From Marjorie Hazeldene, who was just coming out of the tuckshop as they entered through Cliff House's bronze gates, they learned that Priscilla had just arrived and had gone up to her own study.

Eagerly, then, they hurried along to Study No. 5 in the Fourth Form corridor, which was shared by the priceless twins and Sylvia Sirrett. Fortunately, Sylvia Sirrett was not there at the moment, and Priscilla, just in the act of discarding her hat, turned with a little start as they came in.

"Oh, Ermytrude, my dear!"

"Priscilla, my dear!" Ermytrude said fondly.

"You—you got away from those horrible people?" Priscilla asked anxiously.

"I got away," Ermytrude replied, "and I am sorry, dear Priscilla, you should have had such a fright. But tell us now what happened at the interview which Barbara tells me you had with the Bigginses!"

And Priscilla told—not that there really was much to tell. Remembering Babs' warning, Priscilla, impressed by the thought that any slip of the tongue by her might have spelt danger for Ermytrude, had done her best to fob off the Bigginses. The Bigginses, of course, were after the key. They thought she had it. And seeing that her best refuge lay in telling the truth, she had protested that she had not got it.

"But—but," she said nervously, "they did not believe me. That I could see. But, Ermytrude, what is the key? Why are they so anxious about the key?"

"The key's jolly important, that's a cert," Babs said; and they told Priscilla what they knew. "The key obviously belongs, not to them, but to Mrs. Silver, and, if you ask me, the Biggins people are playing some frightfully crooked game. Ermy, let's have a look at that key. And can you find the card you said you had from Amy?"

Ermytrude could. Model of tidiness, orderliness, and neatness, she produced the card almost at once. Babs, detaching the label from the key, pored over the handwriting.

"Do you think, Barbara, they are identical?" Ermyntrude asked.

Babs shook her head doubtfully. At first sight, certainly, there was a similarity between the two writings. But the card was written very carefully; the unfinished note attached to the key had obviously been scrawled in great haste. An expert might have been able to make a decision right away, but they were no experts.

"They might be the same," Babs said slowly. "As a matter of fact, I really think they are. On the other hand, if we're not sure, we can't accept this as proof. The one thing that is certain is that we've got to look after this key!"

"Indeed, yes, that is our duty as Mrs. Silver's friends," Ermyntrude nodded quickly. "And," she added seriously, "we have also got to find out about Amy. If that poor girl is a prisoner in the hands of those horrible people, we have also got to do something about that!"

Priscilla blinked admiringly at her more courageous sister.

"But—but can't we tell the police?" she asked nervously. "Barbara—"

Babs shook her head. "How can we? We have no proof of anything. And you can bet your life that the Bigginses would be ready with a jolly plausible story. At the same time," she added, with a frown, "we can't desert Amy, and it is up to us, knowing Mrs. Silver, to protect this key. Time to call in the police when we're dead sure of our facts—not before!"

"Then—then what are we to do?" faltered Priscilla.

Babs eyed them all in turn, a calculating expression on her face now that told them she was taking this puzzling affair very seriously indeed.

"Go our own way to work," she said shrewdly. "Find out first what the game is. For all we know, the whole thing may be a hoax—though I don't think so; the Biggins people went to too much trouble to try to get back the key. One thing," she added, glancing at the twins, "we've one big card up our sleeve. They don't know there are two of you—"

"I should say not!" Ermyntrude agreed, with a nod.

Priscilla blinked.

"But—but—"

"It really would be best to keep such a fact secret from these people, my dear," her twin observed.

Priscilla looked a little alarmed.

"But, Barbara, you don't suggest—"

"I suggest," Babs said, "that as we've found that fact so valuable already, we go on playing it. There's just one thing, of course. You and Ermyntrude mustn't be seen together by the Bigginses!"

Priscilla blinked. Alarm immediately registered itself upon her features.

"And to-morrow," Mabs suggested, "we go again to Martin's Nest?"

"That's right," Babs nodded.

"Ermyntrude—"

"I'll come," Ermyntrude nodded quickly.

So that was agreed upon—only just in time, seeing that call-over bell was beginning to ring. With a sense of having accomplished something, Babs, Mabs, and Bessie went off to Big Hall, leaving the apprehensive Priscilla and the determined Ermyntrude alone.

Priscilla shook her head.

"Oh, Ermy, you—you won't run into any danger?"

"Priscilla, my dear, no!" Ermyntrude replied. "On the other hand," she

added, "we cannot desert either Amy or Mrs. Silver. They are our friends, Priscilla."

"Yes, Ermyntrude, of—of course!" Priscilla said hurriedly. "Shall we go to call-over now? Second bell is ringing."

And off, primly, to call-over they went.

Ermyntrude, unlike Priscilla, could be very determined when she liked, and once Ermyntrude had made up her mind to a certain line of action, she could also be as stubbornly persistent in carrying out that action as Tomboy Clara Trevlyn, the games captain of the Fourth Form and junior school, who was renowned for her obstinacy.

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While Priscilla was thinking with nervous apprehension of the part her sister had undertaken to play in the campaign against the Bigginses, Ermyntrude was thinking on altogether different lines. If loyalty to her sister came first, loyalty to her friends took a place not far behind it, and Ermyntrude was thinking of Amy, Mrs. Silver's maid. Amy was her friend. Amy was a girl she had liked, who had done a great many good turns for herself and Priscilla. If Amy was a prisoner at Martin's Nest, it was up to her, Ermyntrude, to do something about it.

And she was going to do something about it, without informing Babs or Mabs! To-night, she firmly resolved, she was going to find out, on her own account, exactly what was happening to Amy.

But, of course, she said nothing of that intention to Priscilla. Ermyntrude knew Priscilla's timidly nervous reactions only too well.

She said nothing, indeed, to anyone, but that night, an hour after lights out, the determined twin crept out of her bed in the Fourth Form dormitory. Quickly, silently she dressed; with quiet determination, crept from the dormitory and let herself out through the lobby window which adjoined Big Hall.

So far, so good. With quiet satisfaction, Ermyntrude picked her way towards the cloisters which led to the hedge that separated the school grounds from Lanc's Field.

But, alas, for Ermyntrude! She had forgotten one important thing.

That important thing was that every Tuesday evening Miss Primrose, Clif House's headmistress, played bridge with her friends, the Fields-Crofts. Even as she stepped out, there came the purr of Miss Primrose's car, and the sudden flash of sidelights as they glowed through the darkness which led to the headmistress' private house.

Those sidelights were dimmed in accordance with A.R.P. regulations, but they were quite bright enough to reveal Ermyntrude.

"Oh!" she gasped.

She stood still, dismayed. All was lost now. In consternation she watched the car approach. With a shudder, saw Miss Primrose step out of it. The headmistress' face was like a thundercloud as she approached.

"Girl!" she cried. "Girl, how dare you— Bless my soul, it is one of the twins! Priscilla, what on earth are you doing out of bed?"

"Ahem!" Miss Primrose, it is not Priscilla. It is Ermyntrude," the girl confessed. "I am sorry. I was merely going for a walk."

"Indeed! And with whose permission?"

"Please, Miss Primrose, I did not have permission."

"Oh!" Miss Primrose's lips came together. "A most amazing thing!" she said, staring at the girl. "Ermyntrude, you will go back this instant to bed, and for this offence you will be confined to close bounds to-morrow afternoon."

Ermyntrude sighed. Obviously her excursion for that night was ruined. And so, she thought worriedly, was her projected plan to accompany Babs on the morrow. Without another word she turned, and, returning by the same way she had come, reached the Fourth Form dormitory again. The door squeaked as she pushed it open, and Babs awoke.

Instantly her eyes had fastened on Ermyntrude, fully revealed in the bright moonbeam which filtered through the dormitory windows.

"Ermy!" she breathed. "Oh, my hat! Where have you been?"

"I have been out," Ermyntrude replied, with a sad shake of the head.

"I did not want to trouble you, Barbara, but I was anxious about Amy. Unfortunately, however, I was caught by Miss Primrose."

Babs whistled.

"Oh, my hat! And what did Primmy say?"

"She has detained me for to-morrow afternoon," Ermyntrude said simply. "Good-night, Barbara! Please do not wake the other girls."

"But—but—" Babs stuttered.  
"Good-night!" Ermytrude repeated, and walked to her own bed at the far end of the dormitory.

Babs watched her in dismay. Ermytrude detained! Ermytrude, the silly chump—caught in trying to carry off the campaign on her own account! Her heart knew a glow of admiration for the pluck which inspired that action, but she was thinking all at once—what of to-morrow's projected plan with Ermytrude, its principal actor, out of it?

Was that now doomed? It certainly seemed so.

But wait a minute, though—there was another course. Supposing Priscilla could be persuaded to take Ermytrude's place?

Would she?

After breakfast the next morning Babs called upon the twins, finding them alone in Study No. 5. Ermytrude was shaking her head, Priscilla looking almost overwhelmed, for it was weeks, almost months, since the twins had earned any form of punishment. They both turned, however, as Babs came in.

"Oh, Barbara, have you heard?" Priscilla faltered. "Poor dear Ermytrude—"

"I heard," Babs stated, with a brief nod. "That's what I'm here about. I think it was jolly plucky of her."

"And so," Priscilla breathed, "do I. Oh, Ermytrude dear—"

"At the same time," Babs practically went on, "it completely floors our little scheme for this afternoon. Unless—and she gazed significantly at Priscilla, who was recognisable because she wore Cambridge blue hair ribbons on her plaits, while Ermy wore Oxford blue—"unless," she added, "you take her place, Priscilla."

Priscilla shrank a little. She looked at her sister.

Ermytrude, however, shook her head.

"Barbara, no," she said. "I am sorry, but I couldn't agree to that. Priscilla, my dear, don't look worried," she added. "I will go."

"But—but your detention?" Priscilla faltered.

"I'll risk that," Ermytrude said.

"But, Ermytrude, my dear—"

"No, wait a minute," Babs said quickly. "No need to take the risk. Supposing you and Priscilla change hair ribbons?"

The twins blinked.

"And Priscilla," Babs went on, "reports for detention in your place, Ermy? That would leave us free. It's the only way to see this thing through, you know."

"But—but supposing it was found out?" Priscilla nervously asked.

"It won't," Babs said. "Both is! Blessed if I can tell either of you apart! In any case, we can't do much without one of you. You're the bait, as far as the Bigginses are concerned—Mabs and I just the small fry. If they're going to show their hands, it will be to you, because they think you've got that key. And Amy's fate depends on it," she pointed out meaningfully.

"And Amy," Ermytrude solemnly stated, "is our friend. Priscilla, Barbara is right. It is the best suggestion. I go. You take my place."

"But, Ermytrude, my dear," Priscilla faltered, "is it not rather daring?"

"I go," Ermytrude inflexibly stated. "For the time being, my dear, you become me, and I become you. Barbara, you may take that as settled."

Babs smiled. Ermytrude's word, she knew, was always as good as her bond, and gleefully she hurried off to tell Mabs. Bessie she did not tell, for Bessie, by common consent, was to be left out of the afternoon's escapade—that dear plump duffer, well-intentioned as she was, could always be relied upon to make some blunder.

But she did let Clara Trevlyn and Leila Carroll, the American Fourth Former, into her confidence. Clara and Leila were the right sort to have at one's side in a ticklish emergency such as this.

And so that anxious difficulty was overcome. Immediately after dinner that day the swapping of hair ribbons was affected between the twins, and Priscilla, not without trepidation, went off to report in her sister's name to Myra Brownlow, the duty prefect for the day. Myra, proverbially lazy and unobservant, never even asked a question.

"Right-ho! Sit down! Write an essay about—about something," she said vaguely. "And don't make a row."

About the last thing Priscilla would have ever thought of doing was to make a row—not even if Cliff House had been Hampstead Heath, and the occasion August Bank Holiday. Very quietly, very sedately, she sat down. With a sigh of thankfulness drew impot sheet and ink towards her, and then bit her lip as, gazing through the window, she saw her twin. Babs, Mabs, Clara and Leila, going off in a body.

Industriously she worked, while Myra, immersed in a paper-backed novel, never even looked at her. But once or twice Priscilla gazed at the clock; once or twice, very anxiously, through the window.

Oh dear! How was Ermytrude getting on? She did so hope she wouldn't come to any harm. Ermytrude was such a reckless girl in her own way. How often had Priscilla been filled with envy because of her pluck and daring.

The detention progressed. No sign of Ermytrude.

"O.K., finish now," Myra said casually, as she came to the end of her book. "You can chuck that essay in the wastepaper-basket and beat it"—and she yawned. "Mind you leave your desk tidy."

Priscilla tidied her pens and paper; with gladness in her heart, she scampered from the room.

"I must remember to change my bows back," she murmured, glancing down at her plaits, and then dashed off to her study, hoping with all her heart that Ermytrude had put in an unobserved appearance.

She opened the door of Study No. 5, and a glad cry welled to her lips as she saw the figure of a girl rising in the chair, her back towards her.

"Ermy—" she cried.

The figure turned, rose and straightened, resolving itself into—

Ida Biggins!

### Clara Comes a Cropper!



"W<sup>H</sup>O! Look at that!" breathed Barbara Redfern.

Five girls halted with sudden tenseness in the lane outside Martin's Nest.

The five were Barbara, Mabel Lynn, Ermytrude Terraine, Clara Trevlyn, and Leila Carroll. They had approached the house from the Cliff

House side. On that side was the heavily curtained window which had excited the interest of Babs and Mabs yesterday, and naturally, seeing that window was the focus point of their attention, they had paused to look at it before opening the garden gate. And as they paused, the curtain at one side was disturbed. A hand appeared.

The hand, plainly visible for a moment, held a small handbag mirror.

"She's signalling!" breathed Mabs.

Signalling the hand with the mirror was. The glass caught the rays of the sun, flashed, faded, flashed again.

"Babs, you know Morse code!" Clara whispered. "What's it say?"

Flash, flash, flash, the signal went on. Babs puckered her forehead as she tensely concentrated. Then suddenly the hand disappeared abruptly.

"Babs, what was it?" Leila cried.

"I don't know," Babs shook her head. "Somebody was signalling right enough—or trying to. But that somebody, whoever she was, knew nothing of any code. She was just flashing that mirror to attract attention."

Ermytrude looked serious.

"Undoubtedly Amy!" she said.

"It—it might have been just an accident, I guess," Leila Carroll muttered cautiously.

"It might—but it's funny. That's the second time we've seen the hand," Babs said. "If we could only make sure who it belonged to! If—"

and then she paused. "Wait a minute! I've got an idea."

"What?"

"See the ladder near the window?"

"Well?"

"Suppose we divert the Bigginses' attentions? While four of us go into the house and keep them engaged in conversation, what about the fifth sneaking up the ladder and getting into that room? Ermy, not you—of course. We shall want you as our decoy."

Clara Trevlyn chuckled.

"And not," she said, "you or Mabs. They already know you and will be expecting to see you. This is a little job for me."

"Or me," Leila said.

"Stuff! I spoke first. Babs it!

Babs—"

Babs grinned.

"O.K. You've asked for it," she said, and was taking into consideration the fact that Tomboy Clara was the best all-round athlete of Cliff House's junior school. "Yes, that would be the best plan, I think. Wait a minute, though. You stand outside here until we get into the house. Once we disappear—then's your chance. If I were you I'd make my way along the fence at the other side of the garden; you'll be screened from view of the house there."

Clara nodded again as she chuckled. This was a job after her own tomboyish heart.

"Meantime," Babs whispered, "we'll just behave as though we know nothing is happening. Clara, you'll be careful, won't you?"

"Trust me," Clara retorted.

At that they left her, starting up the drive which led to the entrance of Martin's Nest. The front door was closed, but immediately Babs rang Ainsworth appeared.

"Why, Miss Priscilla, come in," he said; but he paused as he looked at Babs & Co. "And you, too, I suppose?" he said less cordially. "I'll tell Mr. and Mrs. Biggins that you've called."

He held the door open. Together they stepped into the lounge hall. The stocky Ainsworth disappeared, while



the chums gazed at each other. Then suddenly the door was flung open and Mr. Biggins, his face one big, beaming smile, came striding forward.

"Well, well!" he said. "What a grand surprise. Sit down, Priscilla, sit down. And your friends," he added. "Mother's upstairs changing, but she won't be a minute."

"And Ida?" Babs asked.

"Ida's out—don't know where. Gone to post a letter to Mrs. Silver in Courtfield, I think. Well, get home all right with your fruit?" he asked genially. "Hallo, here's mother," he added, as Mrs. Biggins came down the staircase.

Mrs. Biggins greeted them very sweetly, and Babs was struck for a moment by misgivings. Was it possible, after all, that these people were playing the mysteriously unknown game she judged them of playing? They really did seem most extraordinarily nice.

"And, of course, you'll have tea, my dears?" Mrs. Biggins was saying. "I've got some special tarts which I know you'll adore. Priscilla, you like tarts, don't you?"

"Oh, thank you very much indeed!" Ermytrude murmured.

"And if you still don't feel ill after yesterday, you can pick more fruit," Mr. Biggins said genially. "I'm sure there must be a hundredweight or two of new windfalls. By the way, Priscilla, have you heard from Mrs. Silver yet?" he asked.

"No, indeed, I have not," Ermytrude answered seriously. "I would very much like to get in touch with her. Perhaps you will give me her address?"

He paused. Then, ruefully, he shrugged.

"I'm sorry, but I haven't got it," he said. "As soon as I hear I'll let you know. Nice day," he added, as if to avoid the subject. "Miss Redfern, you look worried about something."

"D-do I?" Babs stuttered, and she hastily collected herself and smiled. But at the same time all her suspicions flooded back. Gone at once were those little uneasy forebodings she had experienced, for Mr. Biggins, in that reply, had contradicted himself. He had said plainly that Ida had gone to Courtfield to post a letter to Mrs. Silver. How, then, could Ida post a letter to Mrs. Silver if they did not know Mrs. Silver's address?

Meantime, how was Clara getting on?

The question was answered with a suddenness that was sensational.

For as they paused, there came a crash from outside. It was a crash of breaking glass. In a moment Mr. Biggins was on his feet.

"My goodness, what's that?"

"Oh, my hat! Clara!" gasped Babs. "Mr. Biggins—"

But Mr. Biggins was already racing for the front door. Out from the kitchen came Ainsworth. Babs looked quickly at her chums.

"Oh, my hat, we might have expected something like this! Come on!" she muttered.

"But—but—" Mrs. Biggins objected.

Babs was already sprinting for the door. The rest followed her outside just as Mr. Biggins gave a furious cry.

"A Cliff House girl! What are you doing there?"

Babs halted, gasping.

For Clara, as she expected, it was—but Clara, in such a predicament! Reared against the curtained window was a ladder, but the ladder, old and rickety, had three of its wooden rungs missing, smashed beneath Clara's feet.

Beneath the curtained window was another window, one of its panes showing a huge hole. Desperately clinging to the sill of that window was tomboy Clara Trevlyn.

Easy to see what had happened. Clara, unaware of the rottenness of the ladder's rungs, had shot clean through them on her climb to the curtained window. In the fall her foot must have gone through the lower window. Now there she hung.

"Help!" she gasped.

"Ainsworth, you fool!" roared Mr. Biggins. "Don't stare like a dolt! Get her down!"

Ainsworth, however, was already approaching the rotten ladder. Before he could move it into position, Clara gave another yell.

"My fingers are slipping—"

Her chums' hearts stood still. Suddenly she fell, dropping the full fifteen feet which separated her from the ground. Lucky for Clara that she was such a fine athlete; lucky for her, in-

stinctively collected round their chum. "leave this house at once! If this is the manner in which you treat hospitality, never come back here again!"

"But, Mr. Biggins—" cried Ermytrude.

"Ahem! That—that really does not apply to you, Priscilla," he said hurriedly. "At the same time, even you cannot accept the disgraceful conduct of these friends of yours. I am sorry, I—I am very upset! Go!"

"But, please—" Babs pleaded.

"Will you go?"

The chums looked at each other hopelessly. Certainly, their host had some excuse for annoyance considering the damage that had been done, but the distinct impression they all received was that, for the time being, he was scared out of his wits.

"Come on!" Babs said.

"And please," Mr. Biggins rapped, "do not come back! Priscilla, you may, of course—as often as you wish."



**PRISCILLA** burst into her study with a glad cry. She thought her sister had returned. But when she saw the girl in the armchair, she halted in terror. It was Ida Biggins, the twins' enemy—and nervous Priscilla had to face her alone!

deed, that she knew exactly how to take a fall like the one in store for her then. As lightly as possible, she hit the ground and rolled over.

At once Babs was at her side.

"My hat, Clara! Are you hurt?"

"N-no, I don't think so!" Clara breathlessly scrambled up. "Babs, I'm sorry."

"A friend of yours, eh?" Mr. Biggins cried. A figure of quivering fury, he was towering over them now. But Babs noticed his anxious glance towards the curtained window. "What were you doing up that ladder, girl?"

Clara gulped.

"Oh crumbs, I'm sorry! I—I was only having a bit of fun!"

"Fun! You were spying!" Mr. Biggins accused.

Clara flushed.

"I tell you—"

"You tell me nothing!" Mr. Biggins quivered. "Ainsworth, you fool, put that ladder away! And, please," he added, glaring at Babs & Co., who had

But please—please do not bring these girls here again! Show them out, Ainsworth."

"And put a jerk in it," Ainsworth scowled.

Without more ado, Babs led the way across the lawn. The grim-faced Ainsworth slammed the gate behind them when they had passed out.

"That's the end of that," Leila murmured. "Clara, you idiot—"

"Oh, rats!" Clara snapped. "How was I to know the beastly ladder would give way?"

"You—you saw nothing?" Babs asked.

"No," Clara growled.

"But," Babs said, "old man Biggins was scared stiff in case you had. Gosh, what a rage that man was in! Question is—what do we do now?"

That wasn't much of a question really. Obviously, the one thing they couldn't do was to return to Martin's Nest. There, definitely, the gate had been closed against them—all except

the twins—but every suspicion they had ever entertained came rushing back with renewed force.

They proceeded into Friardale village. There, at Babs' suggestion, they popped in at the Hathaway Tea Rooms to discuss the situation over a cup of tea. Ermytrude forlornly shook her head.

"And to think," she said sadly, "that dear Priscilla took my detention task on to her own shoulders for this! Dear Priscilla! She will be most horribly disappointed that everything has ended so disastrously."

Babs paid the bill, and in a thoughtful body they set off towards Cliff House again. One thing, as Babs pointed out—they still had their trump card up their sleeve. Not yet had the Bigginses discovered the dual identity of the girl they believed to be Priscilla Terraine. And the twins, at least, still had an open sesame to Martin's Nest.

"Which means," Ermytrude said stiffly, "I am going to take full advantage of that loophole. But, Barbara, please do not worry Priscilla herself too much with what we do. You know that she is not a strong girl, and she is most frightfully worried about all

### In the Enemy's Hands!



**W**HILE Priscilla—  
The very last person she had ever expected to see at Cliff House was Ida Biggins. Confused, dismayed, frantically pulling herself

together, she stared at that girl as she entered her study after detention, realising with a sudden sick pang of dismay that she had already given the game away by inadvertently blurting Ermytrude's name. Ida's face, however, was radiant as she came towards her.

"Priscilla," she cooed, "Oh, I'm so glad to see you! Quite a surprise, isn't it? But as I had nothing else to do I thought I'd just pop along. As a matter of fact, I've only just this moment arrived. But who is Ermy?" she added curiously.

Priscilla gulped, fiercely pulling herself together, though she wished to goodness at that moment she was a thousand miles away.

But she'd got to be careful—careful for Ermy's sake, careful for Amy's sake.

suppose. But now you know us. We're friends. You know, too, that we're relatives of Mrs. Silver, and, of course, we're responsible for the key. Priscilla, won't you hand it over?"

Priscilla gulped. She felt hunted. "But—but I haven't got it!" she weakly protested.

"Now, old thing—" Ida objected, with a pout.

"I—I haven't!"

Ida frowned.

"Priscilla—"

"It's true!"

"Priscilla—please!" Ida looked impatient. "Anyone can see that you're fibbing!"—at which Priscilla went a deep scarlet. "Why not be honest?" Ida pleaded. "You know that Mrs. Silver will want that key when she comes back. You know that she's entrusted us with it, and—and—well, we don't want her to feel we've let her down by losing it. Come on, now!"

Priscilla stared wildly, longingly towards the door. What could she say? "I—I tell you I—I haven't got it!" she stammered.

Ida stared at her penetratingly. The wheedling look went from her face. She saw Priscilla's eyes on the door—on the desk near the door—and suddenly she had an idea.

"All right," she said. "Don't—don't look worried, my dear. Naturally I can't make you give up the key, but—but— Oh dear!" she added, suddenly wincing. "This—this awful foot of mine! It's started again!"

Priscilla looked alarmed.

"Oh, goodness! Can I do anything?"

"Oh, please!" Ida said. "Priscilla, if you have a piece of bandage and—and a little zinc ointment—that seems to do it most good! Perhaps the school matron has some?"

"Yes, of course I—I'll go now and ask her," Priscilla immediately and eagerly volunteered; and, glad at any price to escape from the situation, gratefully rose. "I won't be more than five minutes."

"Oh, don't hurry!"

And as Priscilla rapidly disappeared, Ida rose. She went to the desk.

"Awful lying little cat! I'll bet she's got it hidden in here!" she told herself.

She flung open the top drawer, fumbling among the tidy papers which were in it. Evidently it was not there. She drew open the next, feverishly rummaging through a neat pile of small books and oddments which the twins had collected. Bother it, not there, either! She dragged open the third drawer.

And then, with a gasp, she wheeled as the door came open. Another girl peered into the room. It was Muriel Bond.

"Oh, hallo!" Muriel said curiously. "Is Priscilla in? Who are you?" she added suspiciously.

"I—I'm a friend of Priscilla's!" Ida gulped. "Ida Biggins. I dare say Priscilla has mentioned me to you."

"Priscilla," Muriel said, "has not." Again she looked at the girl. "Did Priscilla give you permission to look through her drawers?"

Ida turned scarlet.

"Well, no—not exactly," she said. "You see, Priscilla has mislaid something. I—I'm trying to help her find it."

"Then don't you think it would be a good idea to wait until she comes in?" Ida bit her lip.

"Yes, perhaps so," she said. "I'm sorry, I—I didn't think of that!"

And while Muriel still watched her with obvious suspicion, she closed the drawer, and then, remembering that her foot was supposed to be hurting again,

## Every Reader Please Note!

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this already. But here are the gates," she beamed. "No doubt we shall find dear Priscilla waiting for us."

They turned in through the school gates. But no Priscilla was there. As they stepped in to the drive, however, Muriel Bond, of the Fourth Form, came strolling out of the tuckshop, a glass of lemonade in her hand. She stared at Ermytrude, looked at the bows on her plaits, and gave such a start that the glass slipped from her fingers.

"My hat! How on earth did you get back so quickly?" she cried.

"Quickly?" Ermytrude blinked. "I am afraid I do not understand."

"But I thought you'd just gone out—with that Ida Biggins girl? It was you, of course—I noticed your dark hair ribbons!"

Babs jumped.

"Ida? You—you don't mean to say she's been here?"

"She has," Muriel nodded. "They said something about going to Martin's Nest—"

"Oh, good gracious!" Ermytrude muttered faintly, and in sudden alarm the chums stared at each other.

What on earth were they to do now, with the nervous twin in the power of the enemy?

"Ermy?" she gulped. "She—she is one of the girls who shares this study." That, at least, was the truth, she reflected—for Priscilla shrank from telling even the tiniest of fibs. "I—I thought for a moment you were she."

"Oh!" Ida laughed. "I see. And instead it's little me? Pleased to see me, Priscilla?"

"I am very, very surprised," Priscilla stated truthfully. "I—I hope your ankle is better."

"Oh, yes, fine!" Ida smiled. "It gets weak now and again, you know, but it's not worrying me now. Priscilla, sit down," she added. "I'm dying to have just a little chat with you on my own. We're friends now, of course—"

"Oh, certainly!" Priscilla nervously admitted.

"Now, Priscilla, as a friend, I want to talk very seriously to you. About that key—"

Priscilla winced.

"You know, Priscilla, you have rather tried to pull the wool over our eyes," Ida reproachfully went on. "You did find that key, and, of course, you've got it now. Mind you, I don't blame you," she added cunningly. "After all, we might not even be the right people to hand the key back to, and—and—well, it was natural for you to be cautious, I

limped back to her seat. For a moment Muriel paused, then she went out.

Half a minute later Priscilla herself, all unaware of what had happened, and with ointment and bandages, came in, to find Ida sitting in the chair, her face screwed up with pain. At once she forgot all her own nervous fears. Even an enemy in pain had the effect of rousing every tiny compassion in Priscilla's tender heart.

But when she approached Ida, Ida waved her away.

"Please—no! Give me the bandages—and the ointment. I'll attend to it," she said; and twisting round from the twin so that Priscilla should not see her ankle as she peeled down her stocking, she dabbed ointment on her ankle and tied a portion of the bandage round it. "Oh dear, it—it's awful!" she whimpered. "I—I ought really to go home!" "Then why not go?" Priscilla hopefully asked.

"But supposing I—I collapsed—or something?" Ida asked. "Wait a minute, though! Priscilla, you wouldn't mind helping me home, would you?"

Priscilla drew back. She didn't relish that prospect.

"Ermy—oh, your study pal?" Ida said.

"Yes."

Muriel nodded. Together the pair went off, Ida limping, Priscilla nervously supporting her. In twenty minutes they had come to the door of Martin's Nest, which Mr. Biggins himself, having spotted them walking up the drive, came to open. Priscilla smiled nervously as a swift, significant look passed between daughter and father.

"Why, Priscilla!" Mr. Biggins cried. "Fancy seeing you so soon again! Come in!"

"Please, I—I have to get back—" Priscilla faltered.

"But not," Mr. Biggins said, "for a moment, surely? I've been longing to see you ever since I packed your friends off. Now, please, do come in," he added coaxingly, and before the alarmed Priscilla realised what was happening, he had caught her arm. "Just," he urged, "for a cup of tea and a chat. Please!"

And, whether the alarmed Priscilla willed it or not, she found herself stumbling over the threshold.

them it was pretty certain now that Ida had come to Cliff House with one idea in mind—to get that key.

Priscilla, of course, hadn't got the key; Ermytrude still retained possession of that. But it seemed pretty plain that the Biggins were getting desperate. They could only have one motive in decoying Priscilla back to the house.

No hesitation had any of them on that point. In a moment all plans were changed. At once they turned right about, hurrying back the way they had come. In ten minutes they had reached Martin's Nest again.

"Now, careful," Babs warned. "Don't show yourselves until we know what's going on. Can't see anything from the front," she added, peering through the hedge."

"Well, let's get round the back," Clara impatiently suggested. "Perhaps we can see something from the orchard."

Taking advantage of the hedge which bordered the ground of Martin's Nest, they crept into the orchard. And there Babs, peering through the trees, gave a start. Twenty yards away was a



"BUT I thought you'd just gone out!" gasped Muriel Bond in blank amazement. "With that Ida Biggins girl. It was you, of course. I noticed your dark hair ribbons!" Ermytrude and Babs & Co. stared in alarm at Muriel. This meant that Priscilla was in the hands of the enemy.

"Priscilla, please! You—you couldn't leave me to go back on my own like this?" Ida urged; and for a moment tears stood in her eyes. "Priscilla, for—for our friendship's sake!"

Priscilla gulped. She didn't want that friendship, but it was impossible, nervous and fearful as she was, to resist such an appeal. In any case, it would be one good way of getting rid of Ida. All she need do was to deposit her at the door of Martin's Nest and then firmly insist that she had to get back. Yes, that was it.

And having made up her mind, she felt more relieved and happy somehow. But she must first tell someone where she was going so that dear Ermytrude would know.

She fetched her hat and coat. With Ida leaning on her arm, she went out. In Big Hall she met Muriel Bond, who gazed at the pair curiously.

"Oh, Muriel!" she said. "I—I'm taking Ida home to Martin's Nest, you know. She's hurt her foot. If Ermy inquires after me, would you mind informing her I won't be long?"

The door shut behind her. Ida, without any trace of a limp, looked at her.

"And seeing, dear Priscilla," she said mockingly, "you are here, you can now hand over that key!"

### The Accusation Falls Flat!



"ONLY one thing we can do—and must do," Babs said determinedly.

"That is to rescue Priscilla before those rotters make her so frightened that she'll tell everything. And that means—"

"We go back at once to Martin's Nest," Ermytrude said determinedly. "Poor, poor dear Priscilla!" she added worriedly. "She will be frightened out of her life!"

On that point the whole party was agreed. Not for nothing had the cunning Ida decoyed Priscilla back to her house. From what Muriel had told

window, and in front of that window, with Mr. Biggins and Ida confronting her, sat white-faced Priscilla.

Mr. Biggins was shaking his fist. It was obvious that Priscilla was having a dreadful time.

"My hat!" Babs murmured. "I—" And then she gave back as Ermytrude, her face dead white, thrust up beside her. "Ermy—"

"Priscilla!" Ermytrude cried. "Barbara, I'm going!"

"No, no! Wait a minute!" Babs cried frantically. "If you barge in you'll spoil everything!"

"But I cannot wait here and see dear Priscilla bullied!" Ermytrude protested.

"No," Babs agreed, "but—hang on!" she cried. "I've an idea! If we can only get them out of the house, you can dash in and take Priscilla's place! Golly, I've got it! Ermy, work your way to the door and dodge behind that barrel there! Leave the rest to us."

Ermytrude looked once again to

(Continued on page 14)

# OUT OF SCHOOL HOURS

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



**W**HEN this Patricia of yours said that knitting was going to be hobby Number One again this winter, I little realised HOW popular it was going to be!

Everyone in our district is knitting away like fury. They're knitting socks and booties, pullovers and jumpers, caps and scarves, vests and panties. In fact, everything you can think of.

All this work is for the young "Evacuees" (isn't it a difficult word?) you see. Actually, our district is a Neutral Area, so there are no "evacuated" mothers or children here. But the Safety Zone is quite close to us, and, of course, we are all helping.

I'm knitting for a young family of three boys—the youngest of which is a baby, the next one about my young brother's age and height, and the eldest one about eight.

Already the baby is proudly wearing a bonnet I've made in rabbit wool, and a knicker-suit in emerald green. Now I'm engaged on a manly-looking pullover for the small boy in the middle—the one who is the same size and age as Heath. (Just in case you've forgotten, Heath is my brother, whose full name is Heatherington.)

These three boys are staying with a great friend of ours, as a matter of fact—Mrs. Blake. She and her husband have no children of their own, and they simply adore their three "adopted."

I must confess they were a bit anxious at first, before they knew just what sort of children would arrive. But now they all get on together famously.

They're coming over to tea with us to-morrow, so I must think up some high jinks to appeal to four high-spirited young urchins!

## ● A Neat Roll

Now I have a special tip for you all—that is actually from Miss Richards herself.

It concerns rolling of bandages—at which she says she is so expert now, she is quite sure she could roll them in her sleep.

Many people find that to roll the bandage round a pencil is one of the best ways of doing it quickly and neatly.

But—here's Miss Richards' tip—she says she's found that to use one of those "keys," such as you use for opening large tins of sardines, is even simpler to use.

Once you make a good start, you just

twirl away like anything, and a very neat, swiftly rolled bandage is the result.

It's worth remembering for home use, or to pass on to someone else, isn't it?

## ● Our New Feature

Oh, I must just draw your attention to the "Hobbies at Cliff House" feature, on the opposite page.

You remember I promised you another Cliff House idea—worked out by Miss Richards and myself—some time ago. Owing to all the many happenings lately, this has been rather delayed, I'm afraid.

But here it is, at last, and we both hope you'll like it—as you have the other ideas on the same lines, bless you!

## ● A New Look

Winter clothes—especially new ones—are always a big expense, aren't they? And this year, particularly, none of us wants to run up lots of expense for mothers or anyone.

So it certainly looks as if you'll have to "make-do" with last year's winter coat, for a start.

But this needn't be any hardship. It's surprising what a good brushing and pressing will do to a tired-looking coat. Buttons that are loose should be sewn on, and any splitting seams, or torn edges of pockets should be attended to. Don't forget the lining while you are about it, will you?

Perhaps after all that you'll decide that your coat could do with just a spot more cheering up. (For we can still be cheerful, as long as we're not extravagant, can't we?)

If it's after the style of the one in the picture, then I don't think you could perk it up more prettily than in the way shown there. A new collar has been made from velvet or velveteen (very cheap indeed to buy—if you haven't any around to spare) and the buttons covered to match.

Quite a "model" look it has now, hasn't it?

## ● Just Looking Round

Here are some things I've noticed around. I wonder if you have, too!

All the young—and older—womenfolk are springing into trousers. No amount of lecturing from husbands, big sons—or even daughters—will make them give up their "slacks" now.

Personally, I'm all for them. They really are comfy, there's no doubt about that. They're jolly warm—and they're trim.

I've also noticed that some people manage to sling their gas-mask cases around them so that they look quite snappy—and others do it any-old-how.

To look nice, your case shouldn't have too long a string, and if it cuts you across your "front," then do try wearing it over one shoulder only.

(This reminds me that I'm busy sketching out a cover for you to make yourselves for the winter. Look out for it.)

I've also noticed that lots of people, even out of London, have pasted strips of paper over their windows.

This is a job that the young folk have revelled in doing, I suspect. Some attempts are quite artistic—but others are distinctly not too hot.

So, if you should be given some pasting-up of windows to do, measure up carefully first, won't you? And at least get the paper strips straight and regular, even if you don't worry about elaborate patterns.

## ● Easily Made Collar and Cuffs

The collar and cuffs worn on the dress in the picture here, are some of the daintiest I have ever seen, and they're so easy to make and keep clean.

You'd require a perfectly straight piece of material—lawn, chiffon, or silk, which could be cut from an old scarf or frock, measuring about 24 inches by 8 inches. Hem all the raw edges lightly, then fold it in half, long-ways. Make pleats all round this folded edge, catch with a few stitches, and then sew into the neck of your dress. It'll look so sweet, and wash in a twinkling. Cuffs can be made to match, if you like, by using material that measures 12 inches by 8 inches before the pleating.

Bye-bye now, all, until next week.

Your friend,

*Patricia*



# KEEPING THE YOUNG PEOPLE AMUSED

*A helpful article for the girl who unexpectedly finds herself with some small folks to look after.*

IT'S easier, of course, in the summer months to entertain the youngsters. You all run out of doors with a ball, and goodness, you find yourselves playing for hours.

But it's a little more difficult in the indoor days. It's then that your helpful schoolgirls have to put on your thinking caps, and make plans and suggestions for the young ones' amusement.

## CUTTING OUT

I always think that "cutting out" is one of the most engrossing occupations for kiddies—both for boys and girls.

Give them a pair of scissors—with rounded tips, please—and some magazines, or old catalogues, and they'll amuse themselves for ages.

But don't let them just chop up things without any idea behind their activity.

For example, say you have two kiddies to amuse—tell one to cut out all the furniture she can find, because you're going to furnish a lovely big house.

Then the other small girl, or boy, could cut out all the people that are going to visit that house—complete with their cars and pets. Or perhaps he'd prefer to make a collection of "picture food" that will be eaten there. (There are always so many delectable pictures of goodies in the magazines.)

## A SCRAP ALBUM

A scrap album is also an engrossing hobby for the young folk, particularly

if it has a little system to it. You don't want to encourage them to stick in pictures any-old-how. Suggest instead that one page is kept for animals, one for flowers, one for people—like film stars—and so on.

Most young folk like "drawing"—even if it does look rather like scribbling to you. I think chalk is perhaps what they like using best. With this, though, it's up to you to see that it doesn't get trodden into carpets or sat into chairs.

Sheets of brown paper can be used for "drawing," time and time again, if they are wiped over with a duster after each artistic effort—when the kiddies are in bed, perhaps, to save tears at seeing any masterpieces destroyed!

## STORY-TIME

I don't think I know any children who don't like being read aloud to. The only thing is, you must choose suitable stories. Generally speaking, boys prefer exciting, adventure tales, and little girls the more gentle fairy or animal story.

This is a way of keeping them amused that's also very good for you! If you take pains to read clearly, to punctuate your sentences correctly, and to sound each word with care, it will improve your voice—and even help you against shyness (if you are inclined to be that way.)

## A WALK—WITH AN OBJECT

Once a day, it's a good plan for the kiddies to have a good, straight walk—



even if it is raining. But do try to make this interesting for them. Get away from the rows of houses and shops if you can, and into the parks or country.

Let them take some crumbs to feed the ducks or geese in the park, or some acorns for a pig you're going to pause to look at.

Encourage them to pick berries to bring home for a vase. (But be sure they are safe berries, won't you?) If they have wellingtons, don't be too fussy about their walking in puddles. It won't hurt.

## HELPING AT HOME

At home again, encourage them to help you. Small girls just love a piece of dough to play with—especially if it can be cooked for them.

A small boy, too, can be surprisingly helpful indoors. Give them some dresser-hooks to screw into the walls, some paper "spills" to make, or some brass or silver to clean—and he'll make an astonishingly good job of it.

Just see that children always have something to do. Don't take sides when there are any arguments; see that each has his own possessions and "tools," and they'll be as good as gold.

I can't promise there won't be any difficulties. But when they do come, they'll soon blow over, if you treat them understandingly and without making too much fuss.



## HOBBIES AT CLIFF HOUSE

MISS HILDA RICHARDS and PATRICIA have planned this new series of articles for you, to tell you about the hobbies of some of the best-known characters at Cliff House School.

### No. 1. BARBARA REDFERN.

I DON'T think there is anyone who doesn't know that the Fourth Form captain's hobby is Art, with a capital A.

Babs really does love all branches of Art, from drawing maps, to modelling animals. Not that she's good at "sculpting," mind you—for that's rather a separate sort of gift.

You must have noticed that many artistic people often have an ambition to do something just a little different from what they have already accomplished.

Babs is just like this, too.

She is really very good at pencil and crayon sketches, and also at water-colours. At design, too, she is one of the best at Cliff House.

## HER AMBITION

But oh, how Babs would like to paint portraits! She has managed several pencil sketches of Mabs' head—when Mabs hasn't been looking. She has even had a spot at painting her in colour. But somehow, Babs has given up, halfway through.

Really, she'd like Clara to pose for her. For though Clara's about the last one to be aware of it, she has a face that is full of character—one that is "difficult" enough to make an artist keen to capture it on paper or canvas. There are "lights" in her brown hair, too, that would be an artist's joy.

But imagine Clara sitting still to have her portrait painted!

"Oh, I can't be fagged, Babs," she says, when the subject's been broached. "I don't even like having my photo taken—let alone having a portrait made. Anyhow, why pick on me? There are tons of girls much prettier."

And, of course, it's no use Babs trying to explain that it isn't mere prettiness she wants to paint, but life, and character.

Lots of people who can "draw" can sketch a pretty "chocolate box" face. But there are few indeed who can capture that elusive "something"—that radiance which can make a picture live! Next week: Mabel Lynn.

## WE MUSTN'T WASTE—

—COAL. All cinders from the fire should be carefully sifted and used again the next day. A brick at the back of the fire will mean less coal is required to keep a cheery glow.

—WATER. Dripping taps mean a loss of many gallons of water. So turn all off carefully, and use rainwater as much as possible. (Remember, also, it's beautifying.)

—LIGHT. If leaving lights on is a habit of yours, do try to remember to switch off every time you leave a room. If it's gas that is used, keep it down to a mere flicker.

—MATCHES. Make paper "spills" for mother for use on the gas-stove, and for father's pipes and cigarettes.

—SHOE-POLISH. We must still clean our shoes, of course, but remember that a "little goes a long way," providing you warm the brush slightly, and use lots of "elbow grease."

—TEA. Remember always to heat the pot first. This makes the tea go further.

—SUGAR. None for the pets, of course. (It's not good for our dogs, anyway.) And just try your tea with half the usual amount once or twice. You'll be surprised how soon you'll probably be taking none at all.

(Continued from page 11)

wards the window, and then, as if taking a sudden fierce grip upon herself, nodded. She slipped away.

The chums watched as she skirted the hedge, and negotiating the ground on the blind side of the house, crouched behind the great water-butt which had been placed near the rear door.

"Come on!" Babs cried. "Now! Pretend we're chasing a dog or something—but for goodness' sake make as much noise as you can! The sight of us will be like a red rag to a bull to Mr. Biggins—especially after this afternoon. Ready—"

"Go!" grinned Clara. "Whoa! Tally-ho!"

"Come on!" shrieked Mabs. "There it is!"

"Stop it—stop it!"

As one, they burst through the hedge into the orchard. For an imaginary hunt of some imaginary animal the whole thing was certainly well done. And just to make things more realistic, Babs pounced at an imaginary animal in the grass and measured her length.

"Missed him!" she shrieked. "Mabs, he's coming towards you! My hat, they've swallowed the bait!" she cried, gazing up at the window again.

Swallowed the bait Ida and Mr. Biggins had. So had Ainsworth and Mrs. Biggins. Face purple with rage, Mr. Biggins came striding out, his wife and daughter and manservant on his heels. He stopped and yelled.

"Hi, you! What the dickens—"

Babs was watching Ermytrude then, fearfully anxious. She need not have worried herself. Ermytrude had a cool grip of the situation. In a flash she was up, and while the Bigginses and Ainsworth wrathfully advanced, she darted into the house. Priscilla, white, frightened, was standing in the hall.

"Ermy!" she gasped.

"Priscilla, get out—through the front door!" Ermytrude cried. "I'll see this through!"

"But, Ermytrude dearest, the danger?"

"Never mind—go! I'll see it through. I tell you—Babs & Co. are outside. Hurry, they may come back."

She gave her sister a push. Priscilla, with a gulp, turned. While Ermytrude kept an eye on the back door, Priscilla bolted through the front. Ermytrude saw her hurrying up the drive, saw her push the gate open and disappear into the lane. Then calmly she walked outside, just as Ida rushed in. She gave a hiss of relief as she saw the twin.

"Oh, so you're still here!" she said. "I had an idea you might have tried to beat it. Pretty clever of your friends to hunt you up!" she sneered bitterly.

"Yes, isn't it?" Ermytrude imperceptibly replied. "Such loyal girls, you know, Ida. And won't they," she added, "be interested to hear how you've been treating me!"

For a moment Ida looked uneasy.

"Oh, rats! We haven't done you any harm," she said. "Asking a few questions isn't ill-treating you, is it? Anyway, you seemed to have found confidence pretty suddenly! You were as white as a sheet just a moment ago."

Ermytrude nodded seriously, though perhaps she hid a smile behind that solemnly serious exterior she presented. She stepped outside, leaving Ida glaring.

The chums, their mission accomplished, stood sheepishly in front of Mr. Biggins and his wife. Ainsworth had retired. Mr. Biggins was almost choking with wrath.

"And so you were chasing a dog—a dog?" he spluttered. "That is your excuse for invading my privacy and trespassing on my property?"

"Your property?" Clara challenged.

"Yes! Who else?"

"Ahem! Mr. Biggins—dear Mr. Biggins," Ermytrude said. "Ahem! Pray excuse my intervention." And as he swooped round to glare at the girl who had been quivering under the lash of his tongue a few moments ago, Ermytrude gently smiled. "May I remind you," she said primly, "that this is really the property of Mrs. Silver? And may I," she added wincingly, "also remind you that these girls have Mrs. Silver's permission to enter this orchard whenever they like? As we have heard nothing to the contrary from Mrs. Silver, that permission still stands, doesn't it?"

Mr. Biggins' eyes goggled as he stared at her. Obviously, this sudden coolness on the part of the girl he supposed to be Priscilla simply staggered him.

"Doesn't it?" Ermytrude pressed seriously.

Babs grinned. The chums glowed their admiration. Impossible as it was in normal circumstances to visualise one of the owl twins facing up to a situation like this, there was no doubt that Ermytrude was doing her stuff splendidly.

"And—and if we can be friends," Ermytrude said, with a sigh, "I—I might forget all about the extremely unpleasant conversation we have just been having in the sitting-room."

Mr. Biggins blinked. Plainly that conversation was on his mind now that he found himself surrounded by Ermytrude's friends.

"Er! Ahem—ahem! Well," he stammered, "bother it! I do not want to be harsh with your friends, Priscilla. Tell them to go."

"And Priscilla?" asked Babs swiftly.

"Well, Priscilla will, of course, remain." He faced Ermytrude with a compelling eye; but, as it was Ermytrude, and not Priscilla, it had little or no effect. "I am just preparing tea for her."

"But Priscilla," Babs said, "is our friend. In any case—"

And then suddenly she stopped, and they all jumped as plainly from the house came a faint cry. It was a cry in a girl's voice:

"Help! I am being—"

It was followed by a thud.

"Please—please go at once!" Mr. Biggins exclaimed frantically.

"That was Amy," impetuous Clara Trevlyn cried fiercely—"Mrs. Silver's maid!"

"What! How dare you—"

"It was Amy!" Babs cried.

Mr. Biggins was almost quivering.

"You dare hint—"

"We're not hinting; we know!" Clara spoke up hotly. "Amy is a friend of ours, and that was her voice! And that cry came from the room with the curtained window!"

"Oh, my goodness!" Mrs. Biggins said faintly.

Mr. Biggins paused. He seemed to be making an effort. Then suddenly the bluster died out of his face; quite calmly he looked at the accusing Clara.

"You seem, young lady, to be under an unusual delusion that I am a kidnapper or something," he said. "I assure you you have not the slightest ground for such an absurd suspicion."

"No? Then why," Clara glared, "are you so keen to keep people away from that curtained window?"

"I have not observed," Mr. Biggins

said quietly, "that I have evinced any keenness to keep anyone away from the room with the curtained window. There's nothing there, I can assure you. If you like," he added blandly, "you may examine it for yourselves. Please come and do so."

"Thanks, we will!" Clara sniffed.

But the other chums gazed at each other, uncertain now, experiencing again a tremor of their old doubts. Could they be sure, after all, that was Amy's voice they had heard—that Amy was a prisoner in this house? Certainly Mr. Biggins had lost no time in taking up Clara's challenge.

"In any case, after your accusation I should insist!" he said stiffly. "Let us go."

Rather hesitantly they followed him as he led the way into the house and up the stairs. With firm step he passed along the corridor, and, pausing at the door of a room, flung it open. The room was in semi-darkness by reason of the thick curtains drawn over the window. Ida herself occupied the room, looking just a little nervous.

She turned as they came in.

"Oh, daddy," she gulped. "I—I hope I didn't disturb you by yelling out?"

"You?" cried Mabs.

"Yes. I—I saw a great, horrible mouse! It—it ran there!"

She pointed to the wainscoting. Certainly there was a hole there. It seemed to bear out her story.

Mr. Biggins confidently smiled.

"You did certainly scare us," he said—"so much so, in fact, that this girl here accused me of having kidnapped Mrs. Silver's maid, Amy." He eyed the chums. "I hope you are satisfied now?"

"Y—yes!" stammered Clara weakly.

"And I sincerely hope," he added, with a frown, "that you will apologise for that monstrous accusation!"

"I—I'm sorry!" the Tomboy muttered.

"And now," Mr. Biggins said stiffly, "if you will kindly go—Priscilla, my dear, I—I hope our little conversation will not deter you from remaining? I am sorry I began to lose my temper; but you will understand, I am sure, that I feel a great sense of responsibility concerning that key."

Ermytrude eyed him calmly.

"Quite. And so," she added, "do I."

"I sincerely trust," he said, "that in the near future we shall be able to come to an arrangement about that. Priscilla, surely you are not going to leave with your friends?" he added in a surprised voice.

"Which," Clara said, "just shows how wrong you are! She is! This way, Priscilla!"

And, catching Ermytrude by the arm, she led her to the door.

### The Twins' Next Bid!

**P**RICILLA!" cried Babs. "My hat, it's Priscilla herself!"

Priscilla Terraine it was, standing at the end of the lane which led down from Martin's Nest into Friar-dale village. She was trembling slightly as they came up.

"I—I had to wait!" she said nervously. "Oh, Ermytrude dear, I have been wretched with the anxiety!"

"And I, Priscilla dear, with worry because of you!" Ermytrude said tenderly. "But tell us—what happened in that house?"

"Could—could we have tea some-where?" Priscilla stammered. "Really, I



do not feel equal to the strain of even talking until I have fortified myself with some refreshment! Oh dear, Ermytrude, I—I had a dreadful time!"

The chums nodded sympathetically. "Priscilla, my dear, let us go back to Hathaway's," Ermytrude said gently. "Barbara, you do not object?" "Object? My hat, I should say not!" Babs said. "I could swallow a gallon of tea on my own after that little lot! And it does seem to me," she added thoughtfully, "we have quite a lot of chuntering to do."

They had. They were a little unsure now, all rather vaguely doubtful. Suspicion of the Bigginses remained, to be sure, but it was a suspicion now tinged by uneasiness and doubt. Very plausibly had Mr. Biggins accounted for the room with the curtain. And Ida's acting—if it had been acting in that room—had been convincing.

Yet— Babs shook her head. Things weren't right. It was unnatural, somehow, that the Bigginses should have made such frenzied attempts to get hold of a key which, after all, was in the safe keeping of Mrs. Silver's friends.

And Priscilla's story, when they were having tea, seemed to bear them out.

"I'm sure it was just a trap to get me there," she told them, "because I noticed, as soon as Ida got into the house, she could walk very well. And Mr. Biggins was horrid. He shouted and shook his fists. I was terrified," she added quiveringly.

"Wonder if we did make a mistake?" Clara muttered.

But Babs shook her head. "I still think they're crooks," she said. "Remember, Amy might have been whisked out of that contained room into another before we got up there.



Anyway, supposing we leave the matter until we've heard from Mrs. Silver?"

"Yes," Ermytrude agreed. They left it at that, pondering the problem on their way back to Cliff House, which they were lucky to reach just before "gates." In the morning, however, there was another development.

It arrived in the shape of a letter for the twins. In great excitement Priscilla and Ermytrude brought it in to Babs and Mabs after breakfast. "Barbara, it is—all right," Priscilla announced.

"We have heard from Amy," Ermytrude nodded, "and—and"—she looked a little ashamed—"it does seem, Barbara dear, that we have been doing the Bigginses a great injustice. Would you like to read the letter?"

Babs would. With Mabs peering over her shoulder, she took it. The writing, sure enough, appeared to be Amy's writing, and the letter itself was written on ordinary notepaper,

with the address of a well-known Eastbourne hotel written on the top. It was not, however, a letter which contained good news.

For Amy had written to say that Mrs. Silver was upset because she had received a complaint from the Bigginses about their treatment at the hands of Priscilla and Priscilla's friends, and would Priscilla hand back the key to Mr. Biggins at once?

"It—it does seem that we have made a mistake, doesn't it?" Ermytrude asked doubtfully.

But Babs was staring at the letter again, filled with the greatest of misgivings. Certainly that letter seemed genuine enough, but—was it? One thing she immediately noticed—the address on the notepaper was not embossed as hotel notepaper should have been, but simply written in the same hand as the remainder of the missive. She looked at Priscilla.

"Have you the envelope?" she asked. "Eh? No." Priscilla shook her head. "I am sorry; I burned that. But it was all right."



"COME on!" shrieked Mabs. "There it is!" "Tally-ho!" whooped Clara, and Babs made a wild dive for an imaginary animal. They were putting up a bogus chase to get the Bigginses out of the house—and it looked like succeeding!

"Did you notice if the postmark was Eastbourne?" Babs asked.

"No, I'm afraid I did not, Barbara." Babs was not satisfied. Something deep down within her seemed to tell her the letter was a fake, a forgery. "You—you do think we ought to give back the key, don't you, Barbara?" Priscilla timidly asked.

"No," Babs said calmly. "But the letter—" "The letter," Babs said, "is a fake—I'm sure of it. Yesterday, if you'll remember, Mr. Biggins didn't know the address of Mrs. Silver. Well, supposing he'd found out after we'd gone. Supposing he'd written to her immediately we'd gone! That means to say that Mrs. Silver couldn't possibly have received this letter until this morning—in which case Amy would be in the act of writing this now. Apart from that," she added, "what about the printed address of the hotel?"

"Then—then you mean—" Priscilla faltered.

"I mean we're being hoodwinked," Babs grimly declared. "This letter

was written simply in order to make you think Amy is perfectly safe and to worry you into handing over the key. Well, we can prove it," Babs said calmly, "and if we prove ourselves to be wrong, then we'll hand over the key."

Mabs eyed her keenly. "How can we prove it?"

"One way—one easy way," Babs said. She looked directly at the twins. "It depends upon you—both of you, perhaps, and I don't mind admitting there's a bit of risk attached to it. If we can prove that Amy is a prisoner in that house, then it's pretty plain that the Bigginses are up to no good, isn't it?"

Priscilla gulped, but she nodded. "Yes, of course." "Of course, dear Barbara," Ermytrude said. "But how are we to find that out?"

"First," Babs said tersely, "get the



Bigginses out of the place. That's where you come in, Ermy. If you go along to them and pretend to believe in this letter and say that you've lost the key and will they help you to find it—that should do the trick, I think. Meantime, as soon as you've got them out of the way," Babs added, "we nip in, see? Is it agreed?"

Priscilla still looked doubtful. But Ermytrude nodded at once.

"We take the risk," she decided. "Good for you!" Babs exclaimed eagerly. "Anyway, here's the idea. This afternoon—and thank goodness it's a half-holiday—we'll take a boat to the Fallsweir—you know, that little backwater in the grounds of the house. That's where we'll hide. As soon as we see you, Ermy, trot off with the Bigginses; then that's our cue to get into the house and search. O.K.?"

O.K. it was. Ermytrude nodded. Clara Trevlyn and Leila Carroll were then called in. They, too, were informed of the plot afoot, and, voting the idea a jolly good one, all preparations were made.

And that afternoon the four chums, accompanied by the twins—Priscilla looking white-faced and nervous, but Ermytrude, now that she had made up her mind to go through with it, calm and resolute—took one of the school boats and rowed into the little backwater in the grounds of Martin's Nest. There the boat was moored to a tree.

"Good luck, Ermy!" Babs breathed, as the twin climbed out.

"Do—do look after yourself!" Priscilla bade in a trembling voice.

Ermytrude nodded. Quickly she walked up to the house. Through the water-rushes the chums watched. They saw Ermytrude knock on the front door of Martin's Nest, then saw Mr. Biggins come out, and Ermytrude go in.

Plainly the scheme was working. For almost immediately Mr. Biggins, his wife, and Ida came stepping down the path, talking in excited tones to Ermytrude. They saw Ermytrude pause, saw her turning along the path that led in the opposite direction; and the Bigginses followed. Clara's eyes gleamed.

"O.K. Now's our chance!" she whispered softly. "Come on, girls!"

She made a movement. But suddenly there came an exclamation from Babs.

"Oh golly! Ainsworth!"

Ainsworth, of course, was still in the house. Most certainly that complicated matter. In dismay they stared at each other.

"Well, and what are we to do now?" Clara groaned. "No good us going along."

"No, but Priscilla can!" Babs said swiftly, and, while Priscilla's eyes widened in alarm, she turned to her. "Priscilla, it's for Ermy's sake," she said quietly. "Ainsworth doesn't know the difference between you. If you went back he'd think you were Ermy. You don't want to spoil everything Ermy's doing, do you?"

"N-no," Priscilla agreed in a half-fainting voice. "What—what do I do?"

"That's the ticket!" Babs said approvingly. "Go along to Ainsworth. Tell him that Mr. Biggins has sent you back for a spade. Then head him off in the opposite direction—don't want you meeting with your sister's party, of course. Once you've got him well away you can easily give him the slip."

Priscilla nodded, gulping down a lump in her dry throat. Very nervous, very pale, she looked, and it was obvious she obeyed Babs' orders only with a great effort of will. As if to get the thing over quickly, she almost desperately scrambled out of the boat and went running towards the house.

"Good old Priscilla!" Mabs breathed.

"Got pluck, if you like," Babs nodded.

They watched tensely. Again they saw Priscilla knock, Ainsworth this time appearing at the door. They saw the two talk; then Ainsworth nodded, and, disappearing for a moment, reappeared armed with a spade.

"Worked!" breathed Babs. "Oh, my hat! Priscilla deserves a medal for this! Look! She's leading him off in the opposite direction, too!"

"Come on!"

With a rush they were out of the boat; with an anxious glance to right and left, were plunging across the ground. Babs reached the door, breathlessly, flung it open, and upstairs they rushed.

"Amy!" Babs called.

From the door along the passage came a faint cry.

"She's there!" cried Babs. "Come on!"

In a body they hurled themselves along the corridor. Babs reached the door. The key was in the lock on the outside. She turned it and thrust open the door. And then they all let out a simultaneous cry.

For Amy, the maid, was there inside, her face white and strained. She turned with a jump as they came in.

"Miss Redfern!"

"Amy!" Babs said. "Oh, my goodness! What happened?"

"I—I don't know, but," Amy gasped, "some horrible people have taken possession of the house. They have been keeping me prisoner here. They wanted the key to Mrs. Silver's safe!"

"O.K. Now we know where we stand." Babs looked excited. "Clara—quickly! Slip downstairs and phone

## CLARA and the CASKET of PERIL!

by  
HILDA  
RICHARDS



### "BEWARE OF THE WHITE

### ELEPHANT!"

warned the mysterious Eastern girl whom Clara Trevlyn, Tomboy of the Fourth Form at Cliff House School, met in the most amazing circumstances half-way down the cliffs. She gave Clara a casket to guard with her life. Thrills, danger, mystery, it brought to the resolute Tomboy—but it was also the cause of a grave misunderstanding between Clara and Marjorie Hazeldene which threatened their age-old friendship. Don't miss this really dramatic complete story of your favourite schoolgirls.



for the police. Amy," she cried, "come with us and tell us all about it. Into this room. I think it'll give us a better view of the grounds. We can keep a look-out for the Bigginses."

They went into the room Ida had described as the spare room, and there, standing by the window, Amy told her simple story. Mrs. Silver had gone away, leaving her in charge of the house, and entrusting to her the key of her hidden safe, in which she left her jewellery.

Then the Bigginses had arrived, saying they had permission from Mrs. Silver to take over. They demanded the key of the safe. Amy had been suspicious, and said she would not hand over the key, or tell them where it was, until she had heard from Mrs. Silver herself.

"And so," she gulped, "they shut

me up in that room, telling me to make up my mind. They've kept me prisoner all the time, only once moving me from that room. They didn't know that I had the key on me. See? But I was desperate to save it. I saw one of the Misses Terraine, and threw the key out. But look!" she cried. "Here they come!"

"Phew!" whistled Mabs. "And by the looks of it they're not pleased."

They stared through the window. Stalking across the lawn came the Biggins family, with Ermytrude in tow, and Mr. Biggins was holding Ermytrude's wrist.

"And look!" shrieked Leila. "There's Priscilla!"

Priscilla it was, her face harassed with apprehension. From the opposite side of the wood she came, in the grip of the burly Ainsworth.

"Come on!" Babs said.

They flew down into the hall, just as the furious Biggins family came in at the door. Mr. Biggins jumped at sight of them.

"You!" he cried.

"Us," Babs said calmly. "And please leave our friend alone."

"Your friend?" He glared. "This double-crossing little minx! She's been trying to bluff us! But I see now!" he raved. "This was the idea, was it—to get us out of the house so that you could get in? And—and—" Then he saw Amy, and his jaw dropped. "How—how did you get out?" he blustered. "Where's Ainsworth?"

"Here I am, guv'nor," Ainsworth said, "and—" He stopped, staring dazedly at Ermytrude.

And then Mr. Biggins, swivelling round, saw Priscilla.

The whole family almost fainted as they stared at the twins.

"Tut-tut of them!" Mr. Biggins stammered.

"We've been fooled!" cried Ida furiously.

"You have!" said Babs, warily eyeing them. "And—" She gave a gasp of relief. "And you can't do anything about it!" she crowed.

Her gaze was directed down the drive towards where Inspector Winter and Sergeant Small, of the Courtfield Division of police, were coming up at the trot.

"Here they are, inspector!" cried Babs, and as the dazed and bewildered crooks wheeled the policemen arrived on the scene. "I think," she added, glancing at Amy, "we've done a good stroke of work!"

"With the twins as the giddy heroines!" chuckled Clara. "My hat! What a showdown! Now," she added, as the inspector grasped the arms of Mr. and Mrs. Biggins, "I think we might show Mr. Biggins his long-lost key, don't you? Ermytrude's got it. But which," Clara grinned, "is Ermytrude?"

"I'm Ermytrude," that girl smiled, and held up the key. "Inspector, I give you this for Mrs. Silver's safe keeping. I'm so glad," she added softly, "for your dear sake, Amy, and for Mrs. Silver's. And, Priscilla—my dear, dear Priscilla—what a heroine you have been!"

"No, indeed not, dear sister," Priscilla modestly returned. "It is you who have been the heroine. But I'm most sincerely thankful," she added, with a breath of heartfelt relief, "that everything has turned out for the best. Oh, Mr. Biggins, are you going?"

"Hang you!" hissed Mr. Biggins; and the chums chuckled triumphantly as he and his precious little gang were led away.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.



Thrilling adventure in the Romantic Eighteenth Century, with—



# JESS AND HIGHWAYMAN JACK

By  
IDA MELBOURNE

In a minute or two she was able to speak clearly.

"Oh, Jess, it's nice of you to—worry, but honest, unless you have money to lend, Jess, which I know you haven't, there's nothing you can do for me, 'cept say kind words as usual."

Jess smiled wryly at that, for she was by no means well supplied with money. Her stepmother doled out a coin at a time, and grumbled if Jess did not make a penny do the work of six.

"Alas, if it's money that's the trouble, then I'm but a poor prop in the hour of need," she confessed. "But, Nell, how comes it that you are needing money?"

Nell, mistress of herself now, dried her eyes, and explained in short, jerky sentences.

"It—it's the cottage. Mother's had a hard fight. She had to borrow money—from the squire. Mortgage they call it. She borrowed it on the cottage. And now—well, seems unless she can find five golden sovereigns by the morrow—"

Nell gulped, and could not continue. But she had said enough for Jess to guess the rest.

"Oh, and so—so if the money is not paid, the squire will seize the cottage!" Jess cried in ringing indignation. "My word, but isn't that just like him? Oh, the mean skinflint. I'll wager that cottage is worth more than you owe, Nell."

"Ah, yes, much more—but it is in the squire's power to sell us up, and he knows no mercy," faltered Nell.

Jess jumped up, her eyes flashing with indignation. For nothing rankled in her more than bullying—and that was all this really was. The squire was rich, and he was using his power of money to drive a very hard bargain with people who could not fight him at law.

"How grand 'twould be were I a highwayman, just for a minute, to hold up the squire—"

Her words died away, for another thought had crowded into her mind at the mention of highwayman. In her mind's eyes she saw the heath in the moonlight, saw the thundering coach, and then a gallant, cloaked and masked figure galloping up on a fine black horse—Highwayman Jack, Laughing Jack!

"A highwayman," murmured Nell. "You were held up on the heath the other night, weren't you, Jess?"

Jess nodded her head, but did not answer that question in words, for she had heard the unmistakable sounds of her stepmother's approach.

"LAUGHING JACK," they called him, as courteous and gallant a highwayman as ever lived. And Jess Reynolds liked him immensely; knew he was no ordinary robber at heart—even after he made the squire buy back his own watch in order to save a poor woman's home!

## Only He Could Help!

"TRA la, tra lee—oh merry would I be!"

Jess Reynolds sang light-heartedly as, with a kerchief about her hair to guard it from dust, she swept the broad staircase of her father's inn, the Rising Sun.

There were no vacuum cleaners in the eighteenth century, when the events of this narrative took place; but Jess did not mind a little hard work. She had plenty of spirit and plenty of energy.

Her cheeks had a rosy tinge of colour, and her eyes were the brightest blue—as bright as her working frock that reached down to her slender ankles.

But not everyone was bright this morning.

Below, in the hall of the inn, where sunlight streaked through latticed windows, stood a grumpy, fat-faced, glint-eyed man, the squire.

Squire Olding was not the merry kind—and he disliked even the merriest of others.

Jess heard him cough, and peeped over the banisters—just in time to catch his glittering eye as he looked up.

"Morning, squire," she said demurely.

Squire Olding took a grip on his silver-knobbed, ebony stick, and strode across the hall.

"Stop making that infernal dust!" he snarled. "You've covered my peruke, and my jacket, and my shoes!"

Jess, dropping a little curtsy, tried to suppress her high spirits just for a moment.

"Oh, beg pardon, squire!" she said.

Another door across the hall opened, and Jess saw her stepmother bob into sight.

"Jess! Are you annoying the squire?" that woman demanded in a

tone that showed she was not as fond of her stepdaughter as she should have been.

"Why, no, I trust not, stepmother," said Jess. "I did but—"

"Silence. Do not back-chat. If the squire is embarrassed by the dust, go elsewhere. There is plenty for you to do. Go and help Nell with the beds in the west corridor."

Jess gave one look back—just to confirm her guess that her stepmother was beaming amiably at the squire—and then went along to the west corridor.

Reaching it, she called softly for Nell, the maid who looked after the bed-chambers.

"Oo—ooo—Nell!" she called.

There was no reply, so knocking at the doors in turn, Jess went in search of her. Rooms Nos. 1, 2 and 3 proved to be empty, and ready for such guests as might arrive. But outside the door of Room No. 4 Jess halted.

Inside it someone was crying.

Jess' bright smile vanished, and she was solemn and concerned as she opened the door and tiptoed in.

On the bed, not yet made, sprawled Nell, weeping bitterly, her head buried in the crook of her left arm.

Tiptoeing to the bed, Jess halted a yard from it; then impulsively she dropped to her knees, and put her arms round the forlorn, weeping Nell.

"Nell, dear, what is it?" she whispered.

Nell started up, and her tear-dimmed eyes were for a moment wide with fright; but as she saw who it was, she relaxed.

"Oh, I—I thought it was your stepmother," she faltered.

"Only me," said Jess. "But, Nell, what ever's wrong, dear? Is it my dragon stepmother? Has she been bullying you again?"

Nell fought her sobs, trying to steady her breathing, and dabbed at her eyes.

"Quick, Nell, we'll talk of this later," she exclaimed. "Here comes the old dragon."

She got to work, and hauled at the bed-clothes. Nell helped her; and when the "old dragon" looked into the bed-room, they were both busy making the bed.

"Get on with it! Dear me, the time you take! I could have done two more rooms in this time!" exclaimed Jess' stepmother scornfully. "You, Jess, come down and get on with the stairs. The squire has gone now."

She went from the room; and Jess, grimacing sympathetically at Nell, followed. But in the doorway Jess paused.

She had been thinking busily while helping Nell with the bed, and now had come to a decision. Not for lack of five golden sovereigns should the cottage be lost. Jess had not them herself, and her father would not lend them without her stepmother's sanction—which would not be given—but there was someone else she could appeal to, a new friend.

Highwayman Jack, gallant of the road, had already proved his kindness of heart and readiness to help others. And, what was more, he had made it clear that Squire Olding was his enemy.

"Cheer you up, Nell!" she whispered, as she went from the room. "There's hope yet"

But how slender or how justified that hope, Jess herself would not know until she met once more that very gallant highwayman, Laughing Jack.

### It Seemed in Vain!

JESS REYNOLDS, once she had set her mind upon a certain course, did not draw back from it without some very good reason; so now, having decided to meet Highwayman Jack and ask his aid on Nell's behalf, the mere fact that there were difficulties ahead did not daunt her.

Yet the difficulties were many. In the first place, she did not know where he lived. No one knew that, or he would have been captured long before this.

But if Jess did not know where he lived, she knew his hunting ground.

A mile or so from the inn was a wild heath. A road ran over it, bumpy and winding, fringed here and there by bushes. It was along this road that Highwayman Jack did his work.

When first Jess had thought of meeting him she had not gone into the details; it had not occurred to her that it must mean a night jaunt to the heath.

Now, with the sun sinking in the west behind the forest, its dark red rays filtering through the leafless branches, Jess stood at the window on the gallery that ran round the inn hall, her heart-beats quicker than usual with excitement.

"I'll have nothing to fear, though," she told herself. "He is my friend."

But first she had to get to the heath without her escape from the inn being noticed by either her father or stepmother. And that might not be at all easy.

Jess set her plans carefully, however, got ahead with her work, and arranged that Nell should be on hand should anyone toll a bell.

Then, dressed in her warmest winter coat, with a cloak wrapped about her, she slipped out from the back of the house half an hour before the London coach was due.

It was inky black, and Jess had to pick her way carefully to the fringe of the heath.

There she halted. A keen wind whistled across it, and the lights of the distant town on the far side could be seen only as twinkling specks.

"But what need I fear?" she asked herself.

On her arm she carried a basket. There were cakes packed in it—cakes she had baked herself, which Highwayman Jack, at their last meeting, had proclaimed delicious.

Jess had not forgotten that, and she knew that he would be glad of such a treat as this, especially as the cakes were hot from the oven.

If Highwayman Jack had been an ordinary thief Jess would not have touched a penny of his money, not even to lend to Nell for so good a purpose

as saving the cottage; for it would have been almost the same thing as stealing it herself.

But Highwayman Jack was no ordinary robber. He had told her, and she believed him, that he had a special mission, that he did not steal people's money, but was seeking something that was really his, and which sooner or later would be brought in the London coach. What it was she did not know, but it was something that he could not claim in the ordinary course of events, even though it was rightly his.

Without the need to rob people, he had money of his own—and, having money and also a kind heart, she was sure he would help.

Presently, when she was on the hard road over the heath, Jess started to sing to herself to banish her fear and loneliness.

Ahead, dimly seen, was the clump of bush behind which he had hidden before, and she did not slow her steps until she reached it.

"Hallo, there!" she called.

Only the moan of the wind answered her, and Jess, heart in mouth, stepped forward.

"Hallo, there! Highwayman Jack!" she murmured.

She fancied she saw a movement in one of the bushes, and called more boldly.

"Highwayman Jack, see what I have brought you!"

The bush parted and a dark form stepped through. Above the wind's wail she heard the click of a pistol being cocked.

"Stand there!" snapped a voice. "Move at your peril!"

Jess stood quite rigid, and her heart went cold with fear. For the voice that addressed her in such threatening tones was not Highwayman Jack's.

Her mouth was dry; her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth as the dim figure stole forward towards her.

"Stand, friend of highwaymen!" went on the stern voice. "It's you we have been looking for, Highwayman Jack's helper! Don't run; my mate's behind you. In the king's name, stand steady! We are Bow Street Runners!"

Jess nearly swooned.

Bow Street Runners, agents of the London magistrates, men sent to the scene of crimes to chase criminals, gather evidence, and report, and arrest!

They had been lurking, as Jess needed no telling, to seize Highwayman Jack. Instead, they had caught her!

Clutching her basket, she groaned inwardly. Too late she knew that she had been foolish in coming here—more foolish still in calling his name so loudly. But there was nothing she could do about it now.

"I—I—" she stammered through quivering lips.

"Who are you, eh? A friend of the highwayman's for certain. You know who he is and where he lives, my gel. You are what we call an accomplice. And you know what that means, eh? You know what'll happen to you?"

The Bow Street Runner had his thick coat open, showing the red waistcoat that was his badge of office, but in the darkness that colour could not be seen. All that Jess saw clearly was the large-bore pistol a few inches from her face. She turned her head, and quailed as she saw another man just behind her as heavily armed as the first.

"I—I— It is a mistake!" she blurted out at last. "I am not a friend of robbers and thieves. You see, I—"

"Pah! You called his name. You knew he'd be here. You knew—"

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But the man broke off at a hissing warning from his comrade.

From the distance came the clatter of the coach. The sparks of the horses' hoofs could be seen and the glow of the side lanterns.

"Hold the coach," said the man who stood in front of Jess, "and put the girl aboard it. There's a magistrate in the town; we can charge her."

Jess clenched her hands and looked about her desperately. Shooting a look from one man to the other, she saw that they were off their guard. With a quick movement she hurled the basket at the pistol that pointed at her, ducked, and ran like the wind.

The pistol roared, and Jess dropped flat, her heart pumping as though it would burst.

Bang! went the other pistol, and she heard the bullet whistle a yard over her head.

"Stand, girl, or we'll shoot again!" yelled one of the Runners. "You are under arrest—"

But Jess, leaping up, ran, stumbling, on, knowing that they were in pursuit.

"Help!" she yelled.

From the darkness of the heath came the soft thud of horses' hoofs on the grass, nearer, nearer, and then a clear, cool voice shouted:

"Aho, there! Who calls?"

"Highwayman Jack!" shrilled Jess, in panic.

The Bow Street Runners were loading again. A pistol roared, spitting flame.

Then through the darkness rode a horseman at the gallop. His cloak trailed in the wind, his tricorne hat was jammed tightly on his wigged head.

Jess could see him but dimly, yet his outline was unmistakable. At the moment when the coach was due Highwayman Jack had arrived.

Straight for the spot where the pistol-flash had come he rode, and a rapier stabbed the darkness—and not only the darkness, as a howl of pain testified.

"Have at you, rascals!" he shouted. "Where's the other? There were two pistols fired, i' faith!"

He had ridden past the wounded man, whose arm he had pricked with the rapier, and now wheeled.

Jess, pelting back, stared into the darkness, to spot the outline of the other Bow Street Runner. He was kneeling, pointing his pistol up, in such a position that he was hard to strike but could strike surely himself.

"Here, highwayman!" he shouted, to draw Laughing Jack into his line of fire.

Jess sprang forward, and, hurling herself at the man even as Highwayman Jack cantered forward, pushed him forward on to his face.

His pistol fired, and the bullet whistled harmlessly into the soft ground.

By the light of the flame Jess saw the highwayman, and he her.

"Quick's the word, lass!" he said. "Mount behind me, for it seems that the King's highway is no longer safe for such honest folk as us."

His merry laugh rang out then, and Jess, throwing up her hands for him to help her mount, laughed herself in relief, albeit shakily and breathlessly.

"But wait," she demurred, as she saw her basket near by. "The cakes I brought you, and my basket. If they should find that they will know who I am!"

The London coach came thundering along not more than fifty yards away. The Bow Street Runners, yelling lustily, ran to stop it.

But all they received for their pains were lashings from the coachman's whip, for he took them for footpads.



SULLENLY the squire glared at the gold coins in his hand. Nell's cottage was saved. But—Jess was filled with horror as she saw the basket in which the money had been sent to Nell's mother. It was the basket she had given to Highwayman Jack. Then he was a robber, after all!

Snatching up the basket, Jess mounted the shiny black horse behind Laughing Jack.

"Cakes, eh?" he laughed. "Why, you are a true friend to bring me food while I lie in wait to trap the travellers! Up, Blackie!" he added to the horse.

He did not draw rein until the heath was well behind and they were at the edge of the wood, only a quarter-mile from the inn.

"Well, good young lady," he murmured. "I must indeed thank you most gratefully for saving my life. For had you not been there first I doubt not that the Bow Street Runners would have taken better aim at me. I pray that they did not see you clearly enough to know you again!"

Jess slipped from Blackie's back.

"Know me again? Have no fear of that in the inky darkness."

"Nevertheless, you did take the risk, and I thank you deeply."

"And I must thank you for coming so nobly to my rescue," she answered softly. "But it was not only to take you cakes that I went to the heath. I—I have a favour to ask."

The highwayman looked down at her and smiled.

"A favour? La, 'twill be a pleasure to me to grant any favour you may ask—a pearl necklet, a diamond bracelet, some share of the spoils?" he teased.

"No, no," said Jess quickly. "I want nothing for myself. But at the inn there is a maid, Nell. Her mother's cottage is mortgaged to the squire, and now, just because they cannot pay five sovereigns, he is going to seize the cottage!"

"The squire, eh?" said Highwayman Jack. "Rascal that he is! Just for five sovereigns. Why—"

His hand went to his jacket, but came away again at once, and he shook his head sadly.

"It is daring of me to ask such a favour," said Jess guiltily. "Perhaps I—"

"No, no, you do right," he assured her. "Quite right, my little friend. If I had the five sovereigns with me now I should give them to you gladly. But, alas, I have them not!"

Jess fell back a step, disappointed, but sorry for him because he had not the money.

"Then it cannot be helped," she said brightly. "Though I do thank you from my heart for wanting to help. Good-night, gallant highwayman!"

"But not good-bye, for we shall meet again," he said in gay tone. "If, that is, the Runners do not catch me meanwhile."

Jess turned; but she wheeled back instantly when he hailed her.

"One moment," he said. "Your friend's battle is not lost yet. Methinks I might persuade the squire to change his mind. 'Tis but a matter of argument."

Jess' fallen hopes leaped again.

"Oh, you know him, then, well enough to argue!"

"Well enough indeed. Have no fear. I shall persuade him. Go to your bed and sleep well, my dear. But let me know when he is likely to call at the inn, and I will have word with him. He will be there to-morrow?"

"Why, yes, although at what hour I cannot rightly say," murmured Jess.

"Let me know the hour and leave the rest to me. But how shall you tell me? Some signal must be arranged that I can see from the security of the wood behind your inn."

For a moment Jess pondered the problem before jumping to a solution.

"The washing!" she exclaimed. "By ten in the morning I shall know, and I will put out some clothes to dry—one for every hour, and one folded for the half."

"It will serve, clever lass," he said, and then laughed. "'Pon my honour, you have a ready wit!"

And with a soft good-night he rode away. Jess stood watching him until he was out of sight, then scampered for the

inn, not knowing who it might be—as likely as not someone whom she knew by sight. But he did not give her the chance of seeing him.

### His Own Property!

"JESS, you really think that he can do something?"

Nell asked Jess the question next morning. They had had a secret, whispered conversation in the kitchen while getting the early morning dishes of tea which fashionable guests from London always demanded.

Jess had told Nell all she thought she should know. She had not mentioned that the helper was Highwayman Jack. She had only said that he was a good friend who had influence with the squire and was eager to use it.

"Rely on him; he will not fail," said Jess confidently.

And with that Nell had to be content. "I hope you are right," she said softly. "For by midday the five sovereigns must be paid."

It was only half an hour later that Jess managed to ask her jovial landlord father at what hour the squire would be coming to the inn.

"Why, he will be here at noon precisely; he is to meet a friend from the coach that comes then," her father replied.

At the first moment possible Jess slipped out to the rear of the inn. The high clothes-line could be seen easily enough from the wood, and a signal of tea-cloths could not be mistaken.

But finding twelve dirty tea-cloths would not be at all easy.

At the most, Jess mustered eight, and even then she earned a rebuke for clumsiness by spilling tea on three that were clean.

"Four more! It must be four clean ones, and then more trouble!" she mused.

When the old grandfather-clock in the large hall struck ten, Jess put four new tea-cloths on the line with the dirty ones, and hoped for the best.

At a quarter past ten her stepmother noticed them.

"Jess—Jess, have you gone crazy?"

A dozen tea-cloths on the lines," she cried, "and four of them brand new!"

Jess looked out of the window in the kitchen.

"Why, yes!" she agreed meekly.

"'Tis so. I must indeed be crazy!"

"Bring them in at once, stupid girl!"

Jess could not disobey, and she hoped anxiously that the highwayman had had time to see them.

"But will he dare to come here at noon? Shall I see him in daylight?" she asked herself.

What manner of man was the gallant highwayman without his mask? Was he as handsome as he seemed likely to be?

Jess hardly knew how to pass the time until midday, and the moment the clock struck twelve she went to the door, looking out.

Ten minutes passed, but neither the squire came nor a handsome stranger who might be Highwayman Jack.

"The squire is late; the coach is late, too," frowned her father, coming out of the inn behind her.

But at that very moment the squire's post-chaise came into sight. With horses steaming, the chaise pulled up, and the squire scrambled out.

His wig was on one ear, and his ebony stick was broken in half. For all the world he looked as though he had been in a fight.

"Why, squire," cried Jess' father, "what ails—"

"What ails? Why—why, highwaymen in broad daylight now!" shouted the squire, his voice shrill with passion, his face working. "Highwayman Jack, that laughing, mocking rascal! He held me up and stole my diamond ring!"

Jess looked at his right hand, where the diamond ring usually flashed, and, to her amazement, she saw it flashing there still.

"But, squire, you have it now!" she cried.

"Ay, I have it now!" he frothed, in fury. "For the rascal sold it back to me—sold my own ring back for twenty pounds!"

Jess' brain at the moment was in a whirl, for she had not guessed that this was what Highwayman Jack meant by persuasion. He had persuaded the squire, not with words, but with a loaded pistol!

It was a horrible moment for Jess. Did this mean that all her trust and faith in Highwayman Jack had been in vain? Could he have deceived her all along when he said that he was no ordinary robber?

Jess clenched her hands. There seemed no answer to that disturbing question than "Yes." Laughing Jack must surely be just like any other footpad—out to steal for the sake of wealth.

From the house now Nell came running, and the squire wheeled upon her. He was in need of a victim for his wrath, and here she was.

"So there you are. 'Tis past noon, and you know the bargain! The cottage is now mine!" he snarled at her. "Five golden sovereigns by noon—"

Nell, breathless with excitement, her cheeks flushed, interrupted him.

"But you were not here at noon, sir—"

"And were the sovereigns here?" he sneered.

"Why, yes! See, here they are!" cried Nell.

Opening her hand, she showed five golden, shining sovereigns.

Jess blinked as though she had been dreaming. The squire, speechless with chagrin, glared at the coins, and then, muttering to himself, snatched them.

"Whom did you rob for these?" he quavered.

"No one at all, squire. My mother sent them in this basket," said Nell, "three minutes ago. And please may I have the deed returned?"

"It shall be done inside!" snapped the squire sullenly.

But Jess was first inside, and she took Nell's arm.

"Your mother sent the money?" she asked, amazed.

"Yes, in a basket covered with leaves and a cloth," said Nell—"or so the messenger said. A very handsome young man whom I have never seen before—"

"Let me see the basket!" Jess exclaimed.

But she knew before she saw it that it was hers—that it was the one in which she had packed the cakes for the highwayman.

It was he who had sent the basket back—and the coins, too; five of the twenty he had received for selling the squire his own ring!

The squire had been paid back in his own coin—literally! And, coins in his palm, he scowled at Nell and Jess, baffled, almost suspicious.

But Jess' heart was heavy, for this was nothing less than theft. Unwittingly Nell had been made a party to it, and she, because she had arranged it all, was an accomplice.

It was a thought that chilled her, and once again doubts of him seized her—doubts that he was what he pretended to be; fears that he was, after all, just an ordinary robber and thief.

But Nell, who had no such fears, went about the inn with sparkling eyes and happy smile, singing gaily. For the cottage was her mother's again, and the black cloud that had hung over their lives was banished.

Jess took the basket back to the kitchen and tossed the leaves into the fire. And only when they were in flames did she notice that amongst them was a sealed letter.

She snatched it from the flames just as it started to singe; and, realising who had sent it, fearful that it might be seen, she crumpled it in her hand and hurried away to a quiet place to read it.

The message was addressed to her, but was not signed; the handwriting was elegant and firm:

"I did but sell what was my own property, strange though this may seem—strange, but true."

Jess crumpled the note, and the worried look went from her eyes.

"His own property, that ring? Did the squire originally steal it, then?" she mused.

But they were mysteries that no puzzling could solve. If, indeed, it was the highwayman's own ring, he had not stolen it from the squire. It was not stolen money that had saved Nell.

There was only a highwayman's word for it that the ring was his; but the word of that particular gallant of the road was enough for Jess, and her heart was light again. For the rest of the day both the serving-maids of the Rising Sun had songs in their hearts, and on their lips, too.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

BE sure to share another thrilling exploit with Jess and Highwayman Jack next week—and do tell all your friends about this grand series, won't you?

## FUN in the HOME!

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# Valerie Drew's HOLIDAY MYSTERY

FOR NEW READERS.

VALERIE DREW, the famous girl-detective, and her clever Alsatian dog, FLASH, are on holiday at Sunnyslads Farm, which is run as an hotel by a hard-working, likeable young girl, DOROTHY DEAN, with the help of her UNCLE NATHAN, a well-meaning old muddler. 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 JEVSON, a boisterous young fellow who is a confirmed practical joker. Valerie completely clears him, however. 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. But this woman warns Valerie of an attempt to rob the safe, and Valerie calls on Johnny for help. While Johnny arranges a game, Valerie tricks the villain into taking a photo of himself. She is developing this when in comes CHARLIE DEEDS, an interfering guest, who thinks himself a detective. (Now read on.)

By

ISABEL NORTON

developing things, while we're all supposed to be playing a game?"

Valerie made no reply. She dare not give Charlie even a hint of the truth.

To make it possible for Dorothy to keep the farm running at all, it was essential to withhold something from the ordinary guests. They must never suspect the presence in their midst of such an enemy as the sinister foe who had destroyed the steps in the face of the cliff after setting fire to the dance-hall roof. And Charlie would soon tell them if he knew.

Charlie came farther into the room. "Hang it all!" he blurted out. "You might, at least, say something to a

thing at all!" he startlingly declared, his manner becoming more truculent. "You know there's something underhanded going on in this place, and you're just wild because you can't find out who's doing it. So you thought you'd pretend you'd caught someone! You try and make out that you'd got anything on that film and I've spoilt it, and I'll—I'll jolly well tell people what I know about you!"

And Charlie, turning on his heel, strode out of the dark-room, with every appearance of righteous indignation.

He had scarcely time to reach the end of the passage when lights began to spring up in various parts of the building, and Valerie guessed that, with Johnny having kept the game of "fugitive" going as long as possible, it was over at last.

Putting the development dishes to one side, she left the room. Close at hand, she heard a joyous whoop. With his boyish face alight with excitement, his eyes shining expectantly, Johnny Jevson joined her.

"Got what you wanted, old sleuth?" he inquired breathlessly. "Did it work as we expected—"

He broke off, lips still parted, his smile fading as he read the truth from Valerie's downcast manner.

"Charlie mucked everything up," Valerie confessed.

And while Johnny listened incredulously, she told him how the prize had been snatched away from her when it was actually within her grasp.

"I'll knock Charlie's block off for this!" threatened Johnny furiously.

Smilingly Valerie shook her head, and rested an affectionate hand on Johnny's shoulder. She was quite herself again now.

"Not the slightest use, old son," she soothingly disagreed. "I know just how you feel. I've been through it all myself. Unfortunately, little though I like Charlie, we've got to admit he's got us this time."

"Got us?" repeated Johnny, bewildered and still wrathful. "How?" Valerie explained. To broadcast the fact that Charlie had ruined the picture of a sinister, relentless enemy would be revealing the very thing she wished to avoid.

Johnny looked dumbstruck as he saw the force of Valerie's logic.

## NEW GUESTS AT THE FARM-HOUSE—BUT THE KIND WHO WOULD DRIVE AWAY ALL THE OTHERS!

### A Lesson for Charlie!

LET by the brilliant ray from Charlie Deeds' torch, Valerie Drew remained staring towards the doorway where he stood half-hidden in the shadows.

It was a crushing moment for Valerie. In the very instant of triumph she had been cheated of her prize! Thanks to Charlie, the photo of the farm's unknown enemy had been ruined.

"You crass young idiot!" breathed Valerie, unable to check that outburst. Charlie was astonished.

"What's the matter?" he demanded. "Why are you staring at me like that?" He giggled uncomfortably. "It wasn't hard to follow you. I simply stuck a bit of crinkly paper on your frock, and I could hear you rustling about all the time. But what were you doing in here?"

Making a supreme effort to control her feelings, Valerie turned deliberately back to the developing-dish.

"You've only ruined a negative I was particularly anxious to have," she told Charlie, over her shoulder. "I don't suppose you've ever heard of a dark-room—"

"Don't get peeved, Val. Of course, I have," Charlie broke in uncomfortably. "I say, what was on the negative? Why did you have to be in here

fellow when he's trying to talk to you!"

Valerie turned her head. She had recovered her poise again. The light reflected back from the white wall revealed Charlie's face with its immature brown moustache, his pointed, inquisitive nose, and his thickish upper lip raised in an uncertain grin. She looked at him keenly.

Had she been mistaken in believing that Charlie was nothing more formidable than a young fellow desperately anxious to be "in" on everything, and show how clever he could be?

"I can't see, Charlie," said Valerie, in a toneless voice, "what there is for us to talk about."

Charlie's hesitant grin faded. "What was on the negative?" he demanded, turning aggressive.

"Something entirely my own private affair, Charlie," Valerie frigidly answered.

Charlie showed his teeth. A streak of spite in his nature came suddenly to the surface. He was always easily affronted.

"I believe this is all simply a trick, and there was never anything on the

## BETWEEN OURSELVES



**M**Y DEAR READERS,—I don't know whether you have seen page 10 of this week's issue, but if you haven't you really ought to turn there as soon as you have read these notes. It contains a most important notice, as you'll realise the moment you have read it.

In these unusual times it is going to be extremely difficult for newsagents to satisfy casual purchasers—people who come to them without any warning and ask for such and such a paper.

Normally, most readers of papers and periodicals adopt this method, and the newsagent can generally lay his hands on what they want. But in war time things are very different.

Newsagents cannot afford to get into stock large numbers of a paper with the risk of not being able to sell them all. Many of them will stock only those copies which they are CERTAIN of selling.

That is where you, as readers of THE SCHOOLGIRL, can help your own particular newsagent—as well as help yourself, too. Let him know that you want THE SCHOOLGIRL every week. Then he will know exactly how many copies to take, and you—well, you will have done the only thing to make absolutely sure of your copy every week.

On page 10 I have printed a special order form. If you fill this in and give it to your newsagent you need never be worried by the fear of disappointment one of these week-ends. YOUR copy of THE SCHOOLGIRL will be perfectly safe—for you!

You won't delay, will you? It really is most important.

And now I want to tell you something about next Saturday's superb story-programme.

First on the list of good things is, of course, the magnificent Long Complete tale of Cliff House School, which bears the intriguing title:

### "CLARA AND THE CASKET OF PERIL!"

This, undoubtedly, is one of the most thrilling and unusual stories Hilda Richards has ever written. It begins with Tomboy Clara Trevlyn, out with the rest of the famous Co., descending a dangerous cliff in order to pick a pretty wild-flower for Marjorie Hazeldene.

But—Clara never even reaches that flower. She gets as far as a cave, and that's all. For hiding in that cave is an Eastern girl; an Eastern girl who, handing Clara a quaint casket, begs her to guard it with her life, and to beware of "the white elephant."

Amazed though she is, Clara agrees to guard the casket, convinced that the Eastern girl's story of being in danger is quite true. And that is the commencement of the most amazing adventure of Clara's career.

Other Eastern people are after the casket, and another Eastern girl actually comes to Cliff House, chumming up with Babs & Co. When Clara suspects the girl's real motives there is trouble between her and her own chums, who are completely deceived.

And finally, Clara is kidnapped! I won't tell you any more, but leave you to discover for yourselves all the exciting things which take place in this grand story.

Next Saturday's issue will also contain further dramatic developments in "Valerie Drew's Holiday Mystery," another delightful romantic story featuring Jess and Highwayman Jack, and more of Patricia's Bright and Interesting Pages, so be sure that you do give that standing order to your newsagent right away.

With best wishes!

Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.

"What do you think about it, Val?" he asked morosely. "Do you think Charlie's actually in co. with the brute we're after?"

Valerie did not reply immediately. "We'll watch him after this, Johnny," she decided. "Under certain circumstances, you may even have to pretend to be rather nice to him." "Gosh, you don't half expect a bloke to do things!" Johnny protested, with a humorous grimace.

Valerie laughed. There was something about Johnny's honest, wholesome disgust at the prospect which made her feel better already.

"Do your best, old scout!" she urged, her hand on his arm. "We're not beaten yet. At the very least, we've given our enemy a pretty nasty shock. Maybe he'll go a bit more carefully in the future."

Johnny sighed with resignation. "All right, Val—you're giving the orders now." He listened intently. "Gosh, they must be waiting for me to wind up the game. See you later."

He sped off, and Valerie was left alone. Turning at once, she made her way to the library. Replacing her burnt-out flash bulb with the proper one, she looked keenly around the room for any evidence her enemy might still have left behind. Finding none, she

drew the curtains back, opened the sash, and called to Flash, who was still on guard outside. He leapt nimbly through immediately.

"Search, boy!" she directed tensely. She pointed to the spot close to the switch where the unknown rascal had been standing when his flashlight photo was taken. "What can you find?"

Flash sniffed hard—and immediately sneezed prodigiously. With a deep sense of dismay Valerie realised what it meant. Her enemy, already aware of Flash's presence in the house, had taken the precaution to spray his shoes with some pungent essence which would irritate Flash's sensitive nostrils. Flash was beaten!

Turning at the sound of a light footfall in the corridor, Valerie saw Dorothy Dean in the doorway.

"Well?" asked Dorothy, as she stood with lively, expectant eyes, waiting for Valerie's report.

It was the most poignant moment Valerie had known since she arrived at the farm. What a blow it was going to be for Dorothy!

"I'm sorry, my dear," she said, with a gentle, compassionate smile. "I'm afraid the trap—failed."

The last word seemed to stick in her throat and she had to force it out.

Dorothy's smile fled in an instant. "Oh, Val!" she murmured, and for a moment seemed to sway steadily. "You mean," she said, licking her lips, "that there's no hope—"

Sympathetically Valerie put an arm around the other girl's shoulders. It was doubly hard to be a comforter when she herself felt so dispirited and beaten. But for Dorothy it meant so much more. She was worried about her mother's ill-health. Their livelihood at the farm had been more and more threatened by each successive disaster.

"My dear, there's lots of hope," Valerie declared, with a confident smile. "We almost succeeded this time. And we've scared him, anyway."

Half-ashamedly Dorothy took a little handkerchief from her pocket and dabbed at her eyes.

"Sorry to be so silly, Val," she murmured, trying her hardest to smile. "It was only for the moment. I know—But listen, Val! I believe they're calling out for you. Better see what's wanted!"

"Val! We—want—Valerie!" rose a chorus of demand from the raftered lounge beneath them.

Giving Dorothy's hand a last encouraging squeeze, Valerie ran downstairs, closely followed by her pet. She found an animated scene awaiting her. The guests who had been taking part in Johnny's game of "Fugitive" were arguing nineteen to the dozen among themselves.

"Hurrah, here's Val!" cried Charlie Deeds, in an exceedingly cordial voice. "Val's the girl with all the brains! As Johnny isn't allowed to tell us who the 'Fugitive' was, Val will soon say whether I'm right or wrong. I say it was Mrs. Peck!"

Valerie's eyes dwelt on him for a moment. It was hard to recognise him as the same Charlie who had swept out of the dark-room so recently. For Charlie had had time to think things over for himself, and already he was half-ashamed of the figure he had cut.

"How can I help?" she asked, with a polite smile which did not betray anything of her real feeling towards Charlie.

"Well, the 'Fugitive' we still haven't discovered is allowed by the game to tell three lies!" Charlie eagerly explained. "Passeleigh's just been questioning Mrs. Peck, but she insists she wasn't the 'Fugitive.'"

Valerie smiled thoughtfully. Charlie had insisted on taking charge of this investigation following the game. It would do him good to be taken down a peg or two.

"So it's your definite opinion Mrs. Peck was the 'Fugitive,' Charlie?" Valerie sweetly asked.

Charlie nodded confidently. "Yes. I've asked dozens of questions. You see, I came along and found everyone in a muddle—"

"Did you ask Peter to help you in the questioning?" proceeded Valerie thoughtfully.

"Well, not exactly," answered Charlie, in surprise.

"Wait a minute!" interposed Valerie serenely. "A 'criminal' often tries to escape by fastening the blame on someone else. Isn't that so, Peter?" she smilingly challenged.

And Peter Passeleigh, bursting into an unexpected peal of laughter, nodded his head.

"Of course, Val!" he agreed, beaming at astounded Charlie Deeds. "I was the 'Fugitive.' I thought it best to start asking questions to turn suspicion away from me before people

started questioning me. You've got me first shot! Bravo, Val!"

"What price clever old Charlie now?" chirruped Johnny Jevons, as everyone started to clap. "He's been so jolly sure of himself he wouldn't let anyone else get a word in edgeways!"

Red with mortification, Charlie stood glaring at Valerie as she smilingly acknowledged the applause.

"I'll bet Johnny told her who it was!" he burst out in a fury; and, hands in pockets, strode out of the room muttering things that were anything but complimentary to Valerie Drew!

### Newcomers!

"O H, Dorothy, what a shock!" Valerie Drew's startled expression reflected her dismay at the news she had just heard. "Mrs. Ballantyne and her two daughters leaving this morning? Can't I say a word to them before they go?"

It was just after breakfast on the following day. Valerie, disturbed by the anxious expression on Dorothy's face, had followed her to her little office. There Dorothy had glumly confessed why she was looking so worried. Three of the nicest and "easiest" visitors were leaving at once!

"Sorry, Val, but I'm afraid it wouldn't be any use," Dorothy sadly responded, as she shook her head. "Officially they say that they must have sea bathing. Unofficially it's something quite different. You see—"

She broke off uncertainly, but not before Valerie had read the thought in her mind.

"Then you think they've guessed—the truth?" she hazarded.

Dorothy nodded grimly. "They were all for leaving last night. Of course I felt safe enough then in asking them to stay just a little longer. I told them there'd be a big surprise for them by the morning." She swallowed hard. "Don't think I'm blaming you in any way, Val," she went on sincerely. "Goodness knows you've tried your hardest."

It was unnecessary for her to say any more.

With her chin cupped in her hands, her violet eyes narrowed, Valerie turned the problem over in her mind. Suddenly she looked up again, her eyes bright.

"Dorothy, it's Paizi Logan we've got to look to for the next lead," she declared, a ring of conviction in her voice.

"The gipsy woman?" Dorothy's eyes were startled. "Then you're really sure that she's a friend?"

Valerie nodded decisively. "Yes, Dorothy, she must be. She warned us of the attempt to burgle the safe, and that proved genuine enough. And she seemed remarkably straightforward when I had a frank talk with her. You see, Dorothy, it isn't at all impossible that our enemy is Paizi Logan's enemy as well."

"Why do you think that?" asked Dorothy in greater bewilderment. "Because of the 'clues' we've found incriminating her," Valerie answered quickly. "I'm sure they were left by someone else to confuse us, and put the blame on Paizi Logan."

"Then why," asked Dorothy, in deepening puzzlement, "has Miss Logan been hanging about the place so often in secret?"

"Maybe," Valerie answered, "she was simply after that mysterious key the monkey dropped, and she still doesn't know that I've got it. If we



**BURSTING** into the newcomers' room, Valerie was stricken with dismay. Water was pouring through the ceiling from the bath-room above. The farm's unknown enemy had struck again.

could be sure it's rightfully hers, we might even return it now in exchange for some valuable information."

"Such as?" asked Dorothy tensely.

"Who Paizi Logan believes she saw starting the fire at the barn, and afterwards preparing to burgle the safe," Valerie responded.

Rejoiced to find that she had heartened Dorothy by her disclosures, Valerie left her and went in search of Johnny.

Her problem now was to get in touch with Paizi Logan as soon as possible. For a conviction was growing in Valerie's mind that she might never solve the mystery at Sunnyslants at all, unless she had solved the mystery around the gipsy woman as well.

How was it to be done?

Johnny scratched his dark head, and grinned perplexedly when Valerie explained her urgent desire to make contact with the mystery woman once more.

"Nobody's reported seeing her in the district for some time," he reflected.

"Even if we advertised for her, like the lawyer johnnies do, saying she'd hear something to her advantage, I don't reckon she'd be likely to show up. Not unless she came disguised as Queen Boadicea or something. Reckon she's going to go on lying low—if you follow what I mean?"

Valerie smiled, but her manner was abstracted. She had fastened on to just one word of Johnny's cheerful chatter. Disguise!

"Johnny, I've got it!" she said delightedly. "You've given me the very idea! If we can't get Paizi Logan to disguise as someone else, we might induce everyone here to disguise as Paizi Logan."

"The dickens!" ejaculated Johnny, dumbfounded. "You think they would?"

"For a lark—providing you organise it," Valerie told him, her eyes shining. "The weather's perfect at present. Why not a gipsy sing-song in the paddock, with tents and caravans, food roasted at an enormous fire, and a tzigane band to liven things up a bit?"

Johnny whooped with joy as he appreciated all the fun which could be got out of Valerie's brain-wave.

"Sleuth of my heart, it's the idea of a lifetime!" he declared. "They can

all bring out any amount of bright coloured toggery, and there's heaps of brown stain available." His eyes shone with enthusiasm. "In such a gathering old Paizi Logan could toddle around as large as life, and nobody would ever guess who she was. When's it to be? They'll want time to fix up all their pretties, you know. To-morrow!"

Valerie nodded. "That'll do fine!" she said. "Johnny, old son, do your best to make it an evening they'll all remember!" She hesitated momentarily. "And, much as I dislike the boulder, we'd better include Charlie Deeds this time."

Johnny grimaced agreement. "Right!"

High with hope, Valerie left the farm, with Flash trotting at her side, a few minutes later.

What followed after that, however, proved to be just one of those tedious, dispiriting quests which so often fell to the lot of a detective. High and low, Valerie searched for someone who could give her a clue to Paizi Logan's whereabouts.

All morning she pressed on with her inquiries, only to draw blank in the end. The afternoon was well advanced, and Valerie was nearly beginning to despair when, all at once, she thought once more of the helpful girl assistant at Little Sunworthy Post Office. She decided to see her immediately.

The girl gave her a pleasant smile of recognition as Valerie strolled into the little general shop, but an obvious touch of caution came into her manner as soon as Valerie mentioned Paizi Logan's name.

"She doesn't come here for letters any more," she hastily assured Valerie.

A day of discouragement had sharpened Valerie's wits.

She was sure she detected a slight emphasis on the word "come."

"Oh, I'm sorry!" she replied. "I did so want to send her a letter! Have you still a way of getting her letters to her?"

The girl hesitated, colouring slightly, and Valerie knew in a moment that her shrewd guess had been correct.

"Honestly, I'm her friend!" she assured the girl quickly. "I'll promise not to try to find out how you make contact with her. If I write the letter now, will it be all right?"

Her persuasive smile won the girl over. Dashing off a letter which explained the present position as well as possible, Valerie sealed it, and handed it over the counter.

Well satisfied, after all, with the day's work, she set out for the farm.

Entering the farmyard, she paused at an amazing sight. A burly and decidedly rough-looking man, collarless, and with a red, heated face, was "bowling" mangold-wurzels to a tall, grinning youth, who wielded an improvised cricket bat in front of the chicken run. A stout woman, and a lanky, untidy girl were bawling instructions to the two "cricketers" at the tops of their voices.

"Gaw on! 'T' em! Knock it over the top of the 'ouse!" cried one.

"You ain't never been trying so far!" the other added, going off into a shrill peal of laughter. "If you can't 'it one of them there turnips, you're 'opeless!"

Valerie stood still in consternation. Without being anything of a snob, she was rather shocked by this quartet. How ever had they got here?

Hearing a nervous cough, she turned. Spectacled Uncle Nathan, blinking more than usual, and clasping his hands, stood near by.

"I do hope I've done right," he assured Valerie anxiously. "I knew we must have more guests to fill the empty rooms. I found these people at the station. They wanted to put up somewhere, so I brought them along here. They—er—do appear a trifle exuberant, don't they?"

Valerie bit her lip. Uncle Nathan had never been of any great use to anyone since Valerie had been at the farm, though so far he had always been quite harmless. Now, while doubtless meaning well, he had made a terrible blunder.

Rowdy, ill-mannered "guests" like this quartet would be likely to empty Sunnylands Farm in no time!

### Charlie's Clue!

"**E**RE, I've got an idea, 'Arry!" Bob Bantry, the burly father of the newcomers, shouted across the table, when dinner was nearly over that evening. "Ow about chasing them chickens for a lark? All them what gets caught 'as to lay two eggs to-morrow morning for a punishment!"

"Cor, they'd be scrambled eggs!" cried his equally noisy daughter, going off into peals of shrill laughter at her own joke.

Valerie compressed her lips. The uncouth family had taken charge already, and were making sufficient noise for three times their number.

What, Valerie asked herself, could be done about it?

She glanced to the head of her own table, and, for a sympathetic moment, her eyes watched Dorothy's white face. Then she turned her gaze to Uncle Nathan. The blunderer who had caused all the trouble sat, stammering and embarrassed, beside her, evidently fully aware of what he had done.

On the faces of the other guests, Valerie read expressions ranging from dismay or mild disgust to positive fury.

"It's a big world, of course, old sleuth," Johnny murmured, as he joined her in the passage, "but I do feel the Bantrys are rather outsize in outsiders."

Valerie smiled wanly. "If they don't go," she glumly opined, "everyone else will, pretty soon!"

"And why, may I ask?" inquired a voice unexpectedly. "Going to call it Snoblends Farm in future?"

They both turned in astonishment; there, grinning widely, apparently amused and delighted to have come upon them once again without being observed, stood Charlie Deeds.

"Hallo! Look what's turned up, Val!" murmured Johnny mischievously, gazing at Charlie as though he had never seen him before. "May be something that's escaped from one of their suites."

"Ha, ha! Very funny!" commented Charlie, his eyes glittering. "I suppose you're looking all aloof because you feel too good to meet the sort of people who work for their living!"

In an instant Valerie divined what was in Charlie's mind.

He was still chagrined because, at their last encounter, Valerie had so neatly scored off him. He had been waiting for an opportunity to repay the grudge he bore her; now he believed it had come his way.

"Not at all, Charlie," Valerie answered, in her pleasantest tones. "I work quite hard at times myself, but that doesn't prevent me liking good manners. Did you want to tell us anything?"

Charlie shifted uncomfortably from one leg to the other, evidently not knowing how to reply to that.

"The Bantrys may be a bit hearty, but I reckon they're straight, anyway," he answered defensively.

Johnny produced a miniature football from his pocket and offered it to Charlie with a grin.

"Go and measure 'em to make sure, and let us know the result next week," he suggested, his eyes twinkling.

"Rats!" answered Charlie; and, looking anything but pleased by his encounter he strolled away.

To Valerie, the evening which followed seemed the longest and most tedious she had spent at the farm. The Bantrys shouted derisively at each other while they played darts, and were even noisier at table tennis. Their rowdy manners shocked everybody.

In bed at last, Valerie lay wide-eyed and unhappy, staring up at the ceiling as she thought of the stupidity of blundering Uncle Nathan.

It was quite obvious, of course, that the Bantrys would have to be asked to leave in the morning, even though they might create a scene.

A bigger and quite unexpected problem in Valerie's mind, however, was Uncle Nathan himself.

Quite apart from his folly in bringing the rowdy quartet along as visitors, his constant apprehension and gloom was having a decidedly bad effect on Dorothy herself.

More than once of late Dorothy had been toying with the idea of selling the farm. It seemed to Valerie that it was weak-willed, apprehensive Uncle Nathan who was putting the thought into her mind.

"If we could only get him out of the way for a few days I'm sure Dorothy would soon be in better spirits," Valerie reasoned. "Bother the man!"

She fell asleep at last with her problem still unsolved.

Suddenly wide-awake again, less than an hour later, Valerie sat up in bed

with a start, listening incredulously to the wild sounds which rang through the building.

"Do something, Bob!" a woman was screaming shrilly. "I'm wet through already! Don't stand there simply staring at me!"

"What can I do?" a man's voice boomed in reply. "It's pouring down through the ceiling all the time!"

Valerie waited to hear no more. Hot with apprehension, she leapt out of bed, dived into dressing-gown and slippers, and dashed along the passage.

The door at the far end was wide open; Mr. and Mrs. Bantry, two of the rowdy newcomers, stood just inside it, also clad in dressing-gowns, and shouting at the tops of their voices. This time, alas, there seemed to be real justification for the noise they were making. Appalled, Valerie glanced inside their room. The ceiling was saturated; water was oozing and dripping down from a dozen different places all over the room.

In an instant Valerie knew what it meant. A bath-room was situate immediately above them. Something had gone wrong in the night, and a flood had resulted above.

Turning without a word, Valerie dashed upstairs, for clearly the first thing to be done was to turn the water off.

Just as she was half-way up the flight she glimpsed a figure moving along the upper landing. It reached the bath-room a dozen paces ahead of her. As the light clicked on she recognised—Charlie Deeds.

He was first in the field this time!

Hastening after him, Valerie reached the bath-room a few moments later. The floor was flooded; the bath, full to the brim, was overflowing. Charlie, his back to her, bent swiftly over it. Just as Valerie stared into the room more water slopped over its edge as he dived one hand down to the submerged taps.

She guessed in a moment what he had seen.

Something had been attached to the open tap so that the water running from it would fill the bath without making any splashing sound; the rude awakening of the Bantrys' below being, in consequence, the first indication that anything was wrong.

It could only mean that the flooding was deliberate—once more Dorothy's unseen enemy had struck!

"What is it, Charlie?" Valerie asked as, detaching something from the tap under water, he withdrew his hand from the bath.

Charlie turned immediately, his eyes glittering, his teeth showing in a queer smile, his hand held deliberately behind his back.

"That's my business, Valerie!" he answered, breathing unsteadily in his excitement. "It's a clue—and I've found it this time. If you want to find out who's done this, you'd better take a look round for yourself. I'm not giving up what I've found to anybody."

**SERIOUS** as things are owing to the flood, they will be even worse if Charlie Deeds discovers the amazing truth. What can Valerie do? Don't miss next week's dramatic chapters, so be sure to order your copy well in advance, because that is the only way of making really certain of your **SCHOOLGIRL**.