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issue

THE SCHOOLGIRL

No. 535, Vol. 21.
Week Ending
OCT. 28th, 1939.

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"HERE goes, girls!" And Tomboy Clara Trevlyn, holding firmly to tufts of grass, swung her legs over the cliff edge.

"Clara, you chump, it's too risky!" protested Barbara Redfern. "Please, Clara," entreated Marjorie Hazeldene anxiously.

Clara paused a moment and grinned up at them. Then she glanced downwards to the sea-shore quite a hundred and fifty feet below. She grimaced a little, but was no less determined.

"Rats!" she retorted. "I bet I could get that flower—and I'm jolly well going to get it."

"But the risk, Clara?" begged Marjorie.

"Yes, ru-rather, you know!" stutted plump Bessie Bunter. "If you fu-fell and broke your neck you'd be jolly sorry!"

"Go hon!" Mabel Lynn couldn't help chuckling. But she, like the other girls, regarded the reckless, impulsive Tomboy anxiously. In a way Mabs felt she was to blame for this moment.

The five girls, all members of the Fourth Form at Cliff House School, had been strolling along the sunny shore on this half-holiday. Climbing the winding path up the cliffs near Pegg, gentle Marjorie Hazeldene had espied and admired a little cluster of blue flowers growing out from the cliff face at a point where it was almost sheer.

Promptly, Clara, who was very fond of her studymate, had exclaimed:

"I'll climb down and get them for you, Marjie!"

At which Mabel Lynn, eyeing the cliff face—it was well away from the sloping part up which they were climbing—had scoffed:

"Bosh! You could never climb down there!"

That had aroused the stubborn streak in Clara's make-up. Once on the cliff-top, she had determinedly led the way along to a point above the cluster of flowers. Now, despite the entreaties of her chums, she was cheerfully preparing to make the descent.

To an athletic girl like the junior games captain it was not a particularly difficult feat—but it was definitely dangerous. The first part of the climb was tricky, because although there were many foot and hand-holds in the rock face, the cliff-top overhung at this point. That didn't deter Clara, however. She was in one of her most reckless moods.

"No more chuntering, please," she grinned "I'm off."

Barbara Redfern shrugged hope-

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lessly. Acknowledged leader of the chums though she was, even she could not shift Clara when once the Tomboy had set her mind upon a thing.

"Well, for goodness' sake go steady, you—you chump," she breathed.

But Clara just winked and wormed her way cautiously over the edge.

She felt for and found projections in the cliff face for her feet. She eased herself down.

"Oh dear!" muttered Marjorie.

They caught a last glimpse of Clara's determined face, her unruly, wind-swept hair, before she climbed down under the overhang. Then she was gone.

Down went Clara. There was little chance of the rocky cliff face crumbling and coming away under her grasp. She moved steadily, surely.

"Easy," she chuckled. Her eyes

flickered downward, but as she saw the beach right under her, seemingly miles away, she felt a funny kind of sickness. She glanced up again quickly.

"Mustn't do that," she breathed. A twinge of apprehension came to her. Perhaps, after all, she had been a bit impulsive; perhaps it was too risky—

Clara shook off that feeling. She wasn't going back now. Mabs had dared her, eh? Right. She'd show 'em. Now where was that cluster of flowers?

They were not visible at that second because, some ten feet beneath her, was a projecting ledge. There was a little cave-like hollow in the cliff at that point, Clara knew.

"Might be able to change my direction a bit when I land on the ledge," she decided.



A gust of wind rustled along the cliff face. It disturbed Clara's unruly hair, took a lock into her right eye—actually touching the pupil. A spasm of pain! Clara involuntarily loosened the grip of her left hand, and—

The projecting piece of rock she was clutching with her right came clean away.

Sheer terror gripped Clara. Her feet slipped. She clawed frantically at the cliff face, but found no grip.

Down!

Down she fell with every muscle tensed for the terrible crash on the sands below!

Thud! Her fall was arrested. Her feet had struck the narrow ledge. She swayed wildly. Going backwards, over—

And then her arms were held by something, something that pulled strongly. Reeling forward away from the brink, Clara collapsed limply in the tiny cave, her heart beating almost suffocatingly, and a great surge of wonderful relief throbbing through her. She had hit the ledge and was now lying safely in that little cave in the cliff face. But how—what had arrested her fall? Who—

"All right, please?"

The soft voice, almost disturbingly unreal because of its strange accent, brought Clara upright with a jerk.

The Tomboy blinked, and blinked again.

"Mu-my giddy aunt!" she gulped, and just dazedly stared.

For a moment she just couldn't believe her eyes. It was so incredible—unreal. Why, it just couldn't be, but—

"My giddy aunt!" she murmured weakly again.

Kneeling beside her, watching her solemnly, anxiously, with a pair of big brown eyes, was a dark-skinned girl of about her own age—a girl dressed in torn and muddy silk, a kind of shawl about her dark sleek hair, sandals on her bare feet.

Clara eyed her in fascination, and fought to make her whirling brain grasp logical facts.

An Indian girl—she could be nothing else—hiding in a cave half-way down the face of Pegg Cliffs. Hiding? She must be hiding—otherwise why hadn't she called for help? Hiding—yes. The state of her costume, the thinness of her cheeks, suggested that she had been there without food for some time. But how had she got there? What on earth was she doing there? Why, in goodness' name—

"My giddy aunt!" gasped Clara for the third time. She dropped her arms helplessly. "You—you saved me!"

The girl—she had not taken her dark eyes from Clara's face for a second—slowly nodded.

"Yes," she said softly, simply. "I heard you come. You fell, and I caught your arms. Perhaps"—a piercing, intent look came into her eyes—"perhaps I am glad that you come," she added thoughtfully.

Clara looked at her. Her gaze turned to the opening of the cave, to the shining sea beyond, to a little yacht sailing there. Above, her chums awaited her. That was all normal. But this girl, here in this cave? Somehow it seemed unreal.

"I—I—" stuttered the Tomboy. She gulped almost desperately. "Listen, please!" she begged. "Look! I'm an ordinary schoolgirl, and I had a fall, and—and you saved me. Th-thanks awfully! But you—an Indian girl—in this cave—" She shook her

By HILDA RICHARDS

Illustrated by T. LAIDLER

head wonderingly. "It—it just doesn't make sense, you know."

The dark eyes watched her intently. The brown, thin face was inscrutable. Clara began to feel uncomfortable under that steady regard. Abruptly the Indian girl lifted a slim hand. She placed it under Clara's chin, and raised the Tomboy's face until it was exactly level with her own.

"You are brave," she said slowly; "that I see. You are also, the English schoolgirl—the sport? You—keep to your—your honour?"

"I hope so!" Clara said gruffly. "But, look here," she burst out, "what on earth—"

"My name is Anna," continued this amazing girl calmly. "And you?"

"Clara Trevlyn," the Tomboy found herself answering. "But—"

"The big school," nodded the Indian girl. "A good place!" she added broodingly to herself.

Her eyes again bored into Clara's, and at last her lips trembled into a



"BEWARE OF THE WHITE ELEPHANT!"

said the mysterious Eastern girl whom Clara Trevlyn, Tomboy of the Fourth Form, met in such 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 friendship of long standing.

perhaps I can tell you. But beware"—again the flash of dark eyes—"beware of any of my own country! There is danger if you are not careful! Not one person but you must know of this. Not—" She paused. Her hands fluttered up in wild alarm. "What is that?"

Clara listened.

"Clara—Clara, are you all right?" came a distant hail.

"Oh, my hat!" Clara scrambled up. "Babs, Marjorie, my friends—they'll wonder what on earth's happened to me!"

With cat-like swiftness, the Indian girl came to her feet.

"Your friends," she breathed swiftly. "Not one word to them! They must not know. Oh, my English friend," she added fervently, seeing the dismayed look flash on to the Tomboy's face, "do you not see? Do you not see that I would rather trust no one? But I have to," she cried fiercely, a tiny catch in her voice. "I have to. And I can trust you—yes?"

Without a word Clara slipped the tiny casket into her blazer pocket. Her face was determined. She was thrilling now to the amazing mystery of all this, but her mind was made up. She could not doubt the earnestness of Anna—and Anna had saved her life.

"I shan't say a word to anyone," she answered steadily. "And when you signal to-night I'll come." She paused awkwardly. "But you—what—about—about food, and—"

tiny smile. Somehow that altered the whole expression of her face; somehow her rags, her thinness of feature, the depth of her big eyes made her look almost pitiful now.

Clara felt a strange pang at her heart. Why—why, the girl looked half-starved!

"For many hours I have been here," the Indian girl said slowly, as if reading the Tomboy's thoughts. "I came to England with others of my country." What a flash came into her dark eyes then! "No matter. I left them. I had seen this cave. I climbed down to it—to wait."

"Wait?" breathed Clara, fascinated. "For—for what?"

"It does not matter. But you"—abruptly animation came into the dark face; Anna leant forward, clutching at Clara's arm—"you can help Anna. You can do a wonderful service—right the wrong wicked people of my country might do! I saved your life," she added simply. "You are the English schoolgirl. You will help me—believe what I say?"

Clara flushed. Her grey eyes held the brown of the other's, and, oddly, the conviction came to her that this amazing girl was as honest as the day, and meant sincerely every word she uttered. And she had saved her life.

Anna pressed her arm. "I have money," she said simply. "When the moment comes I will leave here. But listen! Your friends call again! Go!"

Nodding, Clara moved to the cave mouth and reached for a handhold. She drew herself up, and a last breathed warning floated after her:

"Beware the white elephant—"

Clara climbed up. She climbed like an automaton, sub-consciously seeking the best holds for her hands and feet. Her mind was with the girl she had just left—with the fantastic, dream-like happenings of the last few moments.

The slight bumping of the tiny gold casket in her pocket reminded her with every movement that it was far from a dream. She, Clara Trevlyn of the Fourth Form at Cliff House School, Kent, had been entrusted with the most amazing mission of her life.

She must beware of danger—from certain Eastern people, Anna had said. And that final sentence: "Beware the white elephant."

"Oh, my aunt!" breathed Clara, and climbed on.

The bulge loomed above her, her chums' anxious cries were ringing in her ears. She took a firm hold, pulled herself up on to the overhang. Her head and shoulders came into view.

"Clara!" gasped Babs, in relief.

"Oh, Clara!" almost sobbed Marjorie Hazeldene.

They reached forward. Behind them stood Mabs and Bessie, the plump duffer trembling, and Mabs looking thoroughly scared.

With Babs and Marjorie helping her, Clara scrambled up the bulge, over the edge, and plumped down on the grass, panting.

"Phew!" she gasped, and grinned up at them.

The chums' anxiety fled. Babs looked stern.

"Well, you're a fine one!" she charged. "What on earth were you doing all that time? We couldn't see you—thanks to that overhang—"

"But we thought we heard something fall," put in Marjorie, who was still rather pale. "Oh, Clara, I'm glad you're all right!"

Clara, still gasping for breath, flipped a hand reassuringly.

"I—I was just coming down after you, you know," said plump Bessie importantly. "Oh, really, Babs," she protested, "you needn't look at me like that!"

"Catch you trying it, Bess," chuckled Mabs. She looked at Clara curiously. "Well, you reckless old chump, I give in to you. You did it all right. But where are they?"

Clara brushed back her hair from her eyes.

"Where's what?"

Mabs stared.

"Why, the flowers, of course."

"Flowers?" For a moment Clara looked completely blank, so much so that her chums regarded her in wonder. Then, as the Tomboy remembered, she flushed in confusion. "Oh, y-yes, of course!" she stammered. "They—they were out of reach. I couldn't quite—Bit too risky," she trailed away feebly. "Sorry, Marjorie!"

"Well, my golly!" gasped Babs. "You jolly well risk your silly neck, and then don't get what you went after! Sure you didn't forget the flowers?" she added, eyeing Clara curiously. "You—you look sort of strange."

"Oh, stuff, Babs!" said Clara gruffly, almost angrily, because she was hating having to say nothing to her loyal chums of what had occurred in

the cave. "Look here! I'm hungry! What about a spot of tea in Pegg?"

"Ju-jolly good idea!" said Bessie eagerly. "All this exercise and excitement makes a girl peckish, you know."

"Right-ho!" nodded Babs. "Let's go!"

But as they sauntered off along the cliff-top path she, like Marjorie, glanced covertly many times at Clara.

Over tea in the little cafe at Pegg, Clara, conscious, perhaps, that her manner was odd, made a great effort to chat brightly.

On returning to Cliff House School, Babs found that the headmistress wished to see her. Mabs and Bessie decided to go straight on up to Study No. 4, which they shared with Babs, and as Marjorie wanted to mend a puncture in her bicycle, Clara was free to dash up to her study.

For there was one urgent thought in the Tomboy's mind at that moment—hide the Casket of Avisha!

She blessed the fact that Janet Jordan, who shared Study No. 7 with Marjorie and herself, was away on a short leave with her father. There was no one to see her, no one to disturb her.

Inside the study, Clara hastily closed the door.

"Golly!" She paused a moment, panting. "Believe I'm getting jumpy!"

With a hand that almost trembled, she withdrew from her pocket the tiny gold casket. Cautiously handling it, she turned it over and over. It was a beautiful little thing, and Clara couldn't resist a tentative tug at the lid. It did not move. How it opened was a mystery.

For quite a minute Clara stared at it in fascination. Then she had to tackle the problem—where to hide it?

Finally, Clara decided upon an old box in which she kept a few sporting odds. Kneeling beside it, she lifted the lid, and prepared to stow the shining casket away at the bottom, beneath four old batting gloves. Engrossed in her task, she did not hear a murmur of voices in the corridor, but the sudden rattle of the door-knob brought her starting up.

The door knob turned; the door opened. A hand rested for a second on the jamb, and at sight of the slim fingers Clara went stone cold.

They were brown, those fingers—a pale brown. And on the slim wrist was a bracelet. From the bracelet hung a little charm. And that charm—Clara wanted to scream—was white, and in the shape of an elephant.

Mysteriously, warningly, Anna's words flashed into her mind: "Beware the white elephant!"

Unshakable Suspicions!



FOR hours, it seemed, Clara Trevlyn stood staring fascinatedly at that hand on the woodwork, the charm hanging from the bracelet. In reality it was only a second before cheery words rang out, and Clara, hastily concealing the casket, closed the lid of the box.

"Yes, that's right, Daren; trot in!" came Barbara Redfern's voice, outside the study. "Just push, you know."

The door swung fully open, under the touch of the brown hand, and cheerful Babs entered, ushering a girl before her. And that girl—Clara went like a statue again, for this was the second Indian girl she had met in one

day, and clear in her mind rang Anna's warning: "Beware the white elephant; beware my own country people!"

But far different was this girl who stood beside Babs from the torn and muddy Anna. From head to foot she was clothed in the softest, most gorgeous silk. The band over her sleek black hair was as fine as gossamer.

"Clara, old thing, I want you to meet Daren."

The Tomboy came to with a jerk as Babs spoke. She had been looking at the Indian girl in a curiously detached way, almost as if the girl was part of a dream. Now her gaze rose to the delicately tinted features, and there rested upon the biggest, darkest eyes Clara had ever known. Eyes set in most exquisite, tiny features—eyes which met hers steadily. And a small, beautifully etched mouth fluttered open.

"Clara?"

A soft voice, a little husky almost, and Babs gurgled in delight, for this newcomer to the school had already entranced her in many ways.

"Yes, Daren," she beamed. "Clara Trevlyn. She's junior sports captain, you know. She—" She paused, staring at Clara in surprise. "What's up, Clara? You haven't seen Daren before, have you?"

Clara made a great effort, shaking off the strange feeling of foreboding which had descended upon her at this Indian girl's entrance.

"No, of course not, Babs!" Her answer came rather gruffly. Clara was disturbed, unsettled. "How do you do?" she added awkwardly.

A faint breeze from the open window blew fine silk across Daren's face, but the huge eyes shone through it, contemplating Clara. Slowly the Indian girl turned to Babs. Without a trace of emotion on her face, or in her voice, she said softly:

"I am not liked. I am sorry, Barbara!"

"Eh?" Babs stared at her, flashed a glance at Clara, then chuckled. "Don't be a goose, Daren! Do you mean Clara doesn't like you?"

"Her look was strange," was the low reply, and Clara flushed.

"Clara's?" Babs laughed. "Daren, you are quaint! She was just surprised at seeing you, that's all." Though, truth to tell, Babs had had the odd impression that the Tomboy had reacted rather curiously to their entrance. "You see, Daren," she explained, "we haven't any Indian girls at Cliff House, and I expect Clara was taken aback a spot, eh, Clara?"

"Rather—of—of course!" The Tomboy had command of herself now. "You startled me. What's it all about, Babs?"

Babs beamed at the Indian girl, who patted her arm in a quaint, but charming gesture.

"Daren's come along with her father, his Excellency, Bahma Karud Begun," she said excitedly. "You see, Clara, Daren may become a scholar here, and her father wanted her to talk things over with Primmy. He's staying for a while with Primmy, and Primmy asked me to take Daren round and introduce her to the girls." She dimpled at the exquisite face of the Indian girl. "She's met Mabs and Bessie—"

"Beautiful hair is Mabel, and large one makes my heart happy," murmured Daren softly. "Her eyes are good."

Babs laughed delightedly.

"And the next on the list was you, Clara," she explained. "If everything

can be fixed up, Dareen may come to the school. Won't that be ripping?"

"Oh—yes!" Clara rather mumbled, because in some way, and for some reason which she could not fathom, the Tomboy had taken an odd dislike to Dareen. She flushed, loathing to say something she did not really feel. "It'll be—be jolly!"

Babs stared a little. Not like Clara, blunt and gruff though she might be, to show this lack of hospitality.

"Where's Marjie?" she asked hastily, uncomfortably conscious that Dareen was staring wonderingly at Clara. "Marjorie Hazeldene, Dareen," she explained. "Clara's greatest chum, and golly, won't she be thrilled when she sees the embroidery on that coatee thing you're wearing? She loves needlework, you know. Hallo!" Babs beamed. "This sounds like her!"

Marjorie appeared in the doorway. She blinked in wonder at the scene.

"Trot in, Marjie," chuckled Babs, "and meet Dareen. She's visiting the school, and may come here for good some day."

Marjorie's surprise vanished. Instantly, though vastly intrigued, a welcoming smile touched her face. Her hand came out.

"Dareen! I'm awfully glad to meet you!"

The Indian girl slowly stepped towards her.

"Marjorie!" she said tenderly then, and seemed to linger over the word. "Your face says lovely things." And she moved forward and kissed Marjorie full upon the lips.

Babs gaped, Marjorie flushed crimson, and a surge of anger ran through Clara. Clara was her dearest chum, and somehow that kiss made her blood boil.

Dareen moved back, saw Marjorie's crimson confusion, and instantly her slim hand fluttered out. Regret and sorrow were vividly portrayed on features that up to this moment had showed no trace of emotion.

"Oh, it is wrong I do?" she faltered. "Please—it was because of the sweet things in your face. I did not know—English girls—"

Marjorie instantly took her hands, rosy-cheeked, but in her heart completely captivated.

"No, Dareen," she said softly. "It was sweet of you, eh, Clara?"

Thus appealed to, the Tomboy simply could not check the word which leapt tempestuously to her lips.

"No," she said curtly; "I think it was cheek!"

"Clara!" gasped Marjorie, and stared at her chum in hurt bewilderment. "I do think that's unkind of you. You've hurt Dareen."

It was Clara's turn to crimson then. She felt irritable, unsure of herself. After all, what had she really got against this Indian girl? Only a strange feeling, probably only brought about because of her meeting with Anna that afternoon. No, she told herself roughly, perhaps she wasn't being fair. Perhaps—

And Clara, on the point of speaking, found herself looking full into Dareen's eyes. Again she could have sworn there was a mocking look there. Dareen said, very gently:

"It is a temper, Clara. I forgive you."

An apology was checked stone dead on Clara's lips. Her eyes gleamed. An accusation of temper was one of the things which always stirred her. Without a word, she strode towards the door.

"Clara, please—" cried Marjorie, in dismay.

"Sorry, Marjie," said Clara gruffly. "I'm going."

"Clara—here, wait!" Babs spoke rather angrily. "You silly chump—"

Clara had gone. Out into the passage, angry with herself, but determined, her head high, her face flushed. Down the passage, down the stairs into the quadrangle.

"Oh, dash, dash, dash!" she muttered half-savagely, half-miserably. Savagely because she knew she must have seemed churlish to her chums; miserably because old Marjie had looked so hurt.

But then Babs and Marjorie didn't know what she, Clara, knew. They had not the slightest reason to suspect Dareen of being anything other than a charming foreign girl visiting the school.

"But am I being a chump?" Clara frowned, roaming across the quad. "Just a silly, suspicious chump?" Then she remembered Anna's words, her warnings, and felt again that instinctive dislike of Dareen. "No, I'm jolly well not!" she said aloud, firmly. "There's something fishy about Dareen, something in the way she looked. And it's dashed queer she should turn up like this—almost as if she knew Anna had given me that casket!"

Clara felt a thrill then. The Casket of Avisha! Mysterious casket; obviously of terrific importance in some way. And given into her charge, for her to protect. Supposing Dareen had some connection with it? Clara's eyes gleamed. If Dareen wasn't all she appeared to be, then she, Clara, wasn't going to let her get away with anything! Rather not.

Musing, Clara found herself near the Head's house, and it was with a start and quickening interest that she noted Miss Primrose walking in the garden with a very tall, dark-skinned man.

He was dressed immaculately in a light lounge suit, but his dark face, with short, curling beard, was topped by a snow-white, tightly wound turban.

Quite a few girls from various Forms were interestedly watching him, striving not to stare rudely. This, obviously, was Dareen's father, his Excellency Bahna Karud Begum.

Clara slowly turned back towards the schoolhouse. A new and pulse-quickening

thought had come to her. If Dareen was to be distrusted, then so also was her father!

She shook herself. Characteristically, she decided there was nothing to be gained by puzzling. She must wait until Anna signalled—the moment when she passed over the mysterious Casket of Avisha. In the meantime—

Clara came to a decision. She hated the thought of any strained feeling between herself and her chums. She meant to clear that up and try to be civil to Dareen at the same time.

So off the Tomboy trotted into the School House. Outside the Fourth Form Common-room she paused. There was a buzz of excited conversation from within, and Clara caught the voices of Babs and Marjorie. She opened the door.

Quite three-quarters of the Form was present, and faces were flushed and eager. Of Dareen, however, there was no sign. For a moment Clara stood, unnoticed, and she caught fragments of conversation.

"That husky way she has of talking," Rosa Rodworth was crowing, "sort of—of gives me a shiver—"

"That silky stuff she was wearing," put in Diana Royston-Clarke, nodding her pretty face sagely—"that must have cost a packet, you know."

"She's terrifically rich all right," nodded Barbara Redfern—"or, at least, her father is. But, I say, girls," she cried, "it will be fun, eh, if she comes to Cliff House? She'd be in the Fourth!"

"Lovely!" Marjorie Hazeldene said that enthusiastically; and Clara, hearing, could not help the little tug at her heart. "She said—" Marjorie paused then; she had seen Clara. Instantly she crossed the room. "Clara, I say—"

Clara mumbled:

"Sorry about just now, Marjie, old thing."

Marjorie smiled.

"Oh, forget it, Clara! But, please—" Her hand came out anxiously.

TENSELY Clara crouched behind the bush, watching that Eastern form with its searching torch. She had come here to meet the mysterious Eastern girl. That girl had not appeared. And instead—someone of the same race was prowling round, seeking—what?



ously. "Surely you don't really dislike Dareen? She's so sweet and—" "I'd rather not talk about her," said Clara bluntly. "Where is she, by the way?"

"At the Head's house, with her father. She went off a few minutes ago," Marjorie said, and looked at her chum a little reproachfully. "Clara dear, don't you think—" But the Tomboy's eyes were gleaming suddenly.

"You say she went off to the Head's house a few minutes ago?"

"Why, yes!" Marjorie blinked at the Tomboy's rather jerky fierce question. "What's the matter?"

Clara did not answer that; she did not mean to. So Dareen had gone to see her father, eh? A few minutes ago. That could not be true, because she—Clara—would have passed her. And only a minute ago Primmy and Dareen's father had been walking and talking—alone.

Then—where was Dareen?

Unbidden, four words leapt into Clara's mind, and with them a startling suspicion.

The Casket of Avisha!

"See you later, Marjie!" snapped the Tomboy, and, leaving her chum looking blank, she whirled and dashed out of the Common-room.

The stairs up to the Fourth Form passage she took two at a time. Her long legs simply flew—until she neared Study No. 7.

Then Clara slowed. Her breath came quickly. She tiptoed to her study door. Her head to the panels, she listened. How her eyes flamed as movements sounded from within!

Down to the door-knob flashed her hand. A quick twist and a thrust and the door banged wide. Clara strode in. One swift glance showed her Dareen—Dareen bending before the open drawers of the bureau—Dareen rummaging amongst the contents.

And as the Indian girl turned with a tiny exclamation Clara halted, grim accusation on her rugged, flushed face.

"And what do you think you're doing?" she demanded curtly.

Slowly Dareen rose, the many bangles on her slim arms—among them the strange elephant charm—jingling musically. Her small, beautiful face showed no trace of emotion.

"You asked?" she queried softly. "You made a question?"

Clara's lips curled scornfully.

"You heard me all right!" she challenged. "I want to know what you're doing searching private possessions in my study!"

Surprisingly Dareen dropped her little head into her slim hands. For a second she held that pose. Then her chin came up high. She moved towards Clara.

"You do not like Dareen?" She touched her chest. "It brings a shadow to my sunshine here. It is sorrow."

A huskily sweet voice and quaint gestures, but somehow they left Clara cold.

"What were you doing here?" she repeated doggedly.

Dareen looked at her.

"I do not stay," she breathed. "Please—" And she made to pass the Tomboy. But Clara, her suspicions leaping now, moved back and planted herself firmly in the open doorway. Her arms came out wide.

"No, you don't," she said grimly. "You're jolly well not going to put me off! You're not leaving this study until you answer me!"

Dareen paused. Her eyes seemed to be probing into the Tomboy's thoughts.

"I say nothing, because you have no

love for Dareen," was her low-voiced reply. "I think perhaps you are a bad girl."

Clara glared, her eyes gleaming angrily.

"Thanks," she said tartly. "But it doesn't matter two buttons what you think of me! What does matter is that there's something jolly fishy about you, and you can't bluff me with any of your sugary stuff—"

"Clara Trevlyn—how dare you!"

That shocked, incredulous voice from the doorway brought Clara whirling round like a top. Dismay claimed her as she saw the headmistress standing there, and behind her the hawk-faced, bearded Bahna Karud Begum. The Tomboy gave back into the study.

"Clara, such rudeness, such insolence to a stranger!" Miss Primrose was very angry indeed. She advanced into the study, and the tall Indian moved with dignity behind her, his face as expressionless as his daughter's. "Explain yourself, girl!" she demanded. "Really, sir," she added in apologetic tones, "I cannot understand Clara saying—"

"They were strange words I heard," Dareen's father said slowly in perfect English, his dark eyes dwelling on the Tomboy's flushed face. "I also would hear an explanation." His eyes flashed then. "My daughter is not used to being spoken to thus."

Miss Primrose nodded grimly. "Quite so, Clara," she rapped, "explain yourself!"

Clara clenched her hands.

"It's Dareen who ought to explain, Miss Primrose," she said steadily—"explain what she was doing sneaking about in my study!"

Miss Primrose gasped.

"Clara! You dare to accuse Dareen—"

"Yes," cut in Clara doggedly. "I'm sorry, Miss Primrose, but she's jolly well going to say what she was doing here by herself. She told the other girls she was going to join her father—and I found her here. I think she was up to something fishy!"

"Clara!" burst out the Head furiously. "Not another word! Upon my word, I am amazed that one of my girls could behave like this to a guest! You will apologise to Dareen immediately, and then—"

Miss Primrose paused. Quick footsteps had sounded in the corridor, and Marjorie Hazeldene appeared. She stared at the scene, and before the Head could continue had burst out with:

"Clara—Dareen! What—what's the matter?"

"I caught Dareen—" started Clara doggedly.

Miss Primrose made to interrupt, but it was Dareen herself who, with a rustle of silk, stepped forward and raised a slim brown hand.

"Please, I speak?" she asked huskily. "I explain?"

Miss Primrose pursed her lips, regarded Clara grimly, and then nodded.

"If you wish, Dareen," she said graciously.

Dareen's small mouth fluttered into a smile at anxious Marjorie. With a slow, very graceful gesture, she indicated Clara.

"Clara," she said softly, "she finds me here. She is angry and says: 'What do you?' But really I come to look at the things Marjorie has done with her needle."

Miss Primrose looked puzzled. Marjorie, however, with a hurt look at Clara, nodded in understanding.

"I was talking to Dareen about

embroidery, Miss Primrose," she explained. "I said that I would like her to see some things I had done. They are in the bureau there."

Dareen smiled at her.

"Yes," she murmured. "So I think I would like to see. So I come and look, and then Clara comes. It is all," she added, with a quaint shrug.

"And Clara thought—" started Marjorie. She looked at her Tomboy chum. "Oh, Clara; how could you?"

Clara did not answer. She stood staring at Bahna Karud Begum's darkly angry face, at Marjorie's hurt expression, at Dareen's big, soft eyes, at the Head's ominously stern features. She stared bewilderedly.

Was this then the simple explanation? Had Dareen merely been looking at Marjorie's embroidery?

On the face of it the answer was "yes." On the face of it, Clara had not only been extremely rude and discourteous, but had made an utter fool of herself. And yet—

Clara was not satisfied.

"Clara!" Miss Primrose's voice, coldly angry, burst into her whirling thoughts. "You will see me in my study in ten minutes' time! Dareen, and you, sir, I can only express my regrets—"

"Please, madam, do not distress yourself," the Indian said courteously. His dark eyes rested on Clara. They seemed to glitter. "This girl made a foolish mistake—that is all. Come, my daughter," he added abruptly, and turned.

Dareen looked at Clara, slowly shook her head, and rested a slim hand on Marjorie's arm.

"Please, we go," she said softly. "You will walk down with me to say the good-bye. It will lighten my heart."

Marjorie smiled at her. Her eyes went to Clara. She spoke hesitantly.

"Clara, don't you think you ought to— to tell Dareen you're sorry?"

"Ah, yes," said Dareen gently. "I would be so happy then."

Clara looked at her chum, whose eyes were pleading.

"Sorry, Marjie," she said gruffly. "I've nothing to say."

Marjorie flushed. She was hurt.

"Very well. I will walk down with you, Dareen," she said quietly.

She turned to the door. With a soft rustle of silk the Indian girl followed. Clara gulped. Because Marjorie meant a lot to her, she wanted to call her back, but to apologise to Dareen was utterly beyond her.

She stood, her head high, lips set, as the two left the study. And then—

She jumped to her old sports box and whipped open the lid. Instantly her eyes narrowed, her breath came quickly.

The odds and ends on top had been shifted! Definitely they were not as she had left them!

"She was searching!" breathed the Tomboy fiercely. "But did she—"

Her fingers delved to the bottom, and a thrill ran through her as the cold metal of the casket met her fingers. Slowly Clara straightened. She stared straight in front of her, brain working swiftly.

Suspensions were mounting!

"I—I bet she came to search for the casket!" she breathed. "Then she heard me coming and turned to the bureau. My giddy aunt! I came just in time! Another few seconds, and she must have discovered it was here!"

The Tomboy had no doubts at all now.

"Dareen and her father are here to get the casket!" she exclaimed fiercely. "I don't care what Marjie and the others think about Dareen! It's me against her!"

Swift Happenings!



"YOU know, Babs, I just can't understand Clara. It's so unlike her!"

Marjorie Hazeldene spoke worriedly.

"Certainly is queer," Barbara Redfern nodded. "She seemed to take an instant dislike to Dareen—for no reason at all."

"And Dareen is just ripping," cried Mabel Lynn.

"Yes, rather, you know!" came from plump Bessie Bunter. "She—she said nice things about my eyes, so that proves she's right."

There was a little chuckle at that. The four chums had just seen Dareen and her father off at the gates, Dareen promising to see them again soon. Quite half the Form had been there, too. There was no doubt that the beautiful little Indian girl had completely captivated all hearts—with the exception of Clara's.

"Clara seemed so—so definite," said Marjorie worriedly, as they sauntered across Big Hall. "I've told you what happened in front of Primmy. It—its sort of staggered me."

Babs nodded. She was thinking that Clara had seemed strange altogether just recently—ever since that climb on the cliffs.

"Here she comes!" said Mabs swiftly.

They paused.

True enough, down the staircase the Tomboy approached. She saw the little group waiting, and, her rugged face flushing, walked straight up to them.

"I've just seen Primmy," she stated in that blunt way of hers. "Three hundred lines!"

They whistled.

"Pretty steep," opined Mabs. "But—well, don't you think that you—"

"That I asked for it?" demanded Clara swiftly. "Thanks!"

Marjorie hastily interposed. True she had been disappointed in her chum's attitude towards Dareen, but any trace of resentment had soon evaporated. She said gently:

"I'm awfully sorry, Clara!"

Clara looked at her. Her colour heightened.

"And I'm sorry, Marjie," she said gruffly. "But—oh, dash it!" she burst out. "I'm not going to talk about it. You all think I've been a rotter about Dareen. Well, leave it like that. I'm sorry if I was a bear to you, Marjie, but I don't like Dareen, and I'm glad she's gone, and that's flat!"

And she stepped round them and strode on. Marjorie made a move to follow, but Babs swiftly caught her arm.

"Shouldn't, old thing," she advised. "She'll come round."

Marjorie bit her lip. She nodded. Babs was right. They moved on.

And Clara?

Clara strode out of the school—out through the gates. She wanted to be alone. She wanted to think.

Pretty stiff, that ticking-off from Primmy, but it hadn't altered her attitude. She distrusted Dareen; was immensely glad and relieved that the girl had left the school.

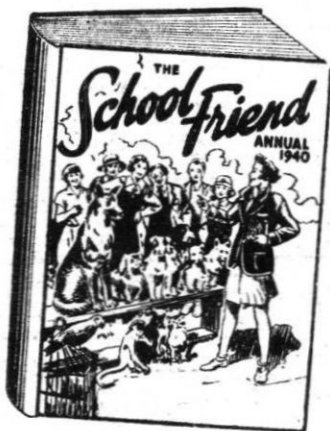
But oh, how rotten to have this strained feeling with old Marjie! If only she could have told the whole story to Marjie, to Babs and the rest! They would have understood then.

"Dash it, they'd've felt like I do then!" muttered Clara. "They couldn't help themselves!"

She plunged into the South Copse of Friardale Woods, seeking an outlet to her confused feelings in swift walking.

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"Funny that feeling I had about Dareen straight away," she mused. "Because after all she's jolly pretty and—and quaint and things. But I'm sure there's something fishy about her. I'm sure she's after the casket. The Casket of Avisha!"

Again that odd thrill came to her at mere thought of the casket. If only she knew what it all meant, the significance of that casket, why that strange girl

Anna had wanted her to keep it, protect it, until—

Clara gave a little jump then. She had been walking without conscious knowledge of her speed or the direction she was taking. But now she realised that it was already dusk, and that she was well into the woods. Her gaze dropped to her watch. She peered closely.

"Quarter to eight!" she exclaimed. "And—and Anna signals at eight!" The nerve-tingle of impending excitement and action came to her. "My hat," she breathed, "I'll have to get back quickly!"

And back through the wood she trotted.

But Clara had cut it fine. It was a minute to eight when she neared the fringe of the woods. To her left showed the walls of Cliff House. She paused, panting. Better to wait and spot Anna, then afterwards go and get the casket.

So Clara waited tensely, occasionally peering along the road. It grew darker. Clara became anxious. Another glance at her watch showed her that Anna was ten minutes late. She was contemplating climbing the school wall so as to be sure of seeing any signal made towards the school, when a slight sound made her freeze.

The soft pad-pad of feet, somewhere near. Listen! Now the crack of a twig. Clara held her breath. Was it Anna?

Then Clara stiffened. What was that—on the other side of the road? A dark shadow, moving stealthily towards the walls of Cliff House. But—it couldn't be Anna! That vague shape was too big.

Clara's heart began to pound. What was happening here in the dark?

Crack!

Startlingly loud the snapping of a twig to her left made the Tomboy's heart jump into her mouth. Someone else. Two people, at least. One might be Anna, but the other?

Clara gritted her teeth. She had plenty of courage, but this stealthy coming and going in the dark, and Anna's own warning of danger, made her a little jumpy.

Then came the cry!

It was faint and cut off, as if a hand had been swiftly clapped over the mouth which had uttered it. Clara's heart raced, and a thought leapt immediately into her brain. Anna! Had that been Anna's cry? Had something happened to Anna?

Fresh sounds came to her ears; sounds of distant hurried movement. Clara peered in vain into the night; she could see nothing.

"Mum-my hat!" she breathed. "I—I—"

It said much for her courage then that Clara, steeling herself, crept from the shade of the wood, padded along the road, and headed towards the high wall surrounding Cliff House. Something had happened in the dark by that wall.

Abruptly Clara flung herself flat in the grass. A torch beam had sprung into being not twenty yards in front of her. It shone downwards on the grass, and its reflected glow picked out a tall, robed figure.

Clara's breath began to jerk. The man holding that torch was an Indian! She did not move an inch. Quivering with excitement, she watched. The torch beam danced over the grass in a small circle for some ten seconds. Then it was clicked off. Footsteps padded off into the night.

Still Clara lay motionless. Her

strained ears picked up a faint humming sound—like the engine of a motor-car in the distance. It faded—was gone. Seconds ticked by—minutes.

At last Clara rose. She felt a little shaky as she moved forward towards the wall. She neared the spot where the Indian had been searching. Her toe struck something, sending it forward a few inches. It tinkled as it hit a stone.

Clara paused. She stooped and groped. Her fingers touched a circle of cold metal. With it in her hand, Clara straightened. She brought it up close to her eyes. It was dark, but at such close quarters not too dark to prevent the Tomboy recognising a signet ring.

And a ring designed in the shape of an elephant!

"Beware the white elephant!" The words came to Clara's mind, and she chilled. Slowly she dropped that ring into her pocket; slowly she looked about her.

For ten minutes Clara Trevlyn waited for Anna, but Anna did not come, and Clara knew she would not come now.

"CLARA! CLARA, where on earth have you been?"

It was Barbara Redfern who made that anxious query as Clara breathlessly slipped in through the school-house doors, and the Fourth Form captain hurried to meet her. She stared at the Tomboy's face. It was white.

"Here, what's wrong?" she demanded. "I suppose you know you missed call-over, you chump? Fortunately Marjie took a risk and answered your name for you, so you're O.K., but"—very puzzled her pretty face was then—"what's the matter?"

Clara drew a deep breath, and tried to compose herself. Not easy that, with the knowledge that the mysterious Anna had been kidnapped beneath the walls of Cliff House. Not easy, when she had just come to the grim decision that the fate of the Casket of Avisha rested entirely upon her shoulders now.

Looking at Babs, she ached to tell everything to her, ask her advice; but she had given a vow of secrecy. She must play a lone hand.

"Oh, just out, Babs!" she said jerkily. "I—I felt like a walk. But good for old Marjie, getting me out of a scrape. Where is she, Babs?"

Babs looked at her curiously for a moment. She knew the Tomboy well enough to see that there was something on her mind. Still, it wasn't her affair.

"I expect she's just taking Daren to the dorm," she replied. "She was jolly worried about you, but Daren wanted her to—"

"Daren!" cried Clara blankly.

Babs stared in her turn, and then laughed.

"Golly, of course, you wouldn't know!" she chuckled. "Yes, Daren's back. Her father fixed it up with Primmy. She's going to stay in the school for a few days, and if she gets on O.K., then she'll stay indefinitely. Well, is it so odd?" she demanded, as Clara continued to stare almost in horror.

The Tomboy flushed.

"No, I suppose not," she admitted slowly, and her brain was racing—racing. So Daren had returned. Why? The answer leapt unbidden to her mind. Because she, or her confederates, had not got the Casket of Avisha from Anna, and she suspected that Clara still had it. "I see," said the Tomboy, a little heavily. "And she's sleeping in our dorm, Babs?"

"In Janet's bed, as a matter of fact," said Babs. "And as Janet's away, she'll be in your study, too. Daren seemed awfully keen when she heard that."

In Study No. 7. No wonder Daren was keen, thought Clara grimly, her pulses leaping. For in that study was hidden the Casket of Avisha!

Without another word, Clara led the way upstairs. When she and Babs entered the Fourth Form dormitory, her eyes flashed instantly to Janet Jordan's bed. Her lips compressed as she saw the dark head of Daren on the pillow.

The rest of the Fourth were already in bed, too, including Marjorie. Silently, swiftly, Clara undressed. Then she crossed to Marjorie's bed.

"Thanks, Marjie, for answering my name!" she said, a little gruffly. She paused a second, glancing towards Janet's bed. Daren's eyes were closed. It was on her lips to mention Daren to Marjorie. She could almost feel her chum's gaze, pleading, upon her, but somehow she just couldn't. "Good-night!" she added gently.

"Good-night, Clara!" answered Marjorie. "And—and, Clara," she added hesitantly, "please try to be nice to Daren now she's here."

Clara gulped. She did not answer that, but turned to her own bed. Nice to Daren? Impossible! Oh, impossible—especially as she was convinced in her heart what Daren's next move would be.

Without doubt, Daren's next aim—the vital aim, was the Casket of Avisha!

Artful Daren!



MIDNIGHT chimed from the old clock tower at Cliff House

School.

In the Fourth Form dormitory a dark shape glided silently past the ends of the beds. It paused by the door. A faint creak; the door opened. The figure slipped through, and the door closed again.

Janet Jordan's bed was empty.

Clara Trevlyn sat up. With a swift movement she tossed back the sheets. She had seen. She knew it was Daren who had left. For Clara had lain awake—too much on her mind to allow sleep to claim her. She had heard Daren's stealthy movements; she had watched the Indian girl leave.

And now—"Got her!" breathed the Tomboy fiercely.

No doubts in her mind. Daren had slipped out with one object in view—the Casket of Avisha!

Clara padded with gleaming eyes to Babs' bed, and gently shook her shoulder. And Babs, awakening with a start, was greeted by:

"It's Clara, Babs. Now listen! Daren's sneaked out. I know where she's gone. You think I've been a surly rotter. Now I'm going to prove to you that there is something fishy about Daren. Wake Mabs. I'll get Marjie."

There was a ring in the Tomboy's voice which made Babs act instantly. She sprang out and turned to Mabs. Within thirty seconds, their dressing-gowns donned, the four girls, led by Clara, were stealing out of the dormitory.

Down to the Fourth Form corridor. At the end Clara paused.

"I'm certain," she whispered grimly,

"that Daren's come down to snoop in Study No. 7."

They stared at her in the gloom. Certainly that was a staggering accusation. Daren in Study No. 7? But why? Yet dimly they all felt that it was a little strange that Daren should have left the dormitory.

"But, Clara," breathed Marjorie, "what should Daren want in our study?"

Clara did not answer. She could not, of course. But convinced that Daren was in search of the mysterious casket, she hoped to catch the Indian girl before she could find it—catch her in the very act of searching private property.

She won't be able to use the excuse that she's looking at Marjie's embroidery this time, was Clara's grim thought.

On tiptoe she moved down the passage. Silently the others followed. Outside Study No. 7 Clara paused and listened. A faint sound from within! All four girls heard it. Their breathing came quickly.

Babs, Mabs, and Marjorie felt a sense of staggering shock. So Clara was right! Daren was in there—doing what?

"You hear?" gritted Clara. Her hand flashed to the door knob. She turned and pushed. In darted her fingers to the electric light switch, jerking it down. A blaze of light, and—"Now you twister!" cried Clara. "Got you!"

She halted as if shot. Her expression changed. The fierce challenge was replaced by sheer bewilderment.

"What—what—" she stammered. Mabs, Babs, and Marjorie just stared.

In very truth it was a strange scene which met their eyes.

In the armchair sat Daren. She lay well back, her big, soft eyes directed at the ceiling. About her was a shimmering blue dressing-gown, and her whole attitude was one of complete repose. Not the slightest suggestion that she had been active in this study—except for something on the mantelpiece.

That something was a small shallow silver tray. Two little dark sticks were smouldering on the tray, giving forth a faint, strange-smelling smoke.

For quite three seconds not a girl moved. Clara was staggered and baffled, and her chums blinked wonderingly from the mantelpiece to Daren. It was left to the Indian girl to break the tenseness.

She sat up. Not by any stretch of imagination could it be said that she looked guilty. But there was apology on her beautiful features.

"Dear one"—she looked straight at Marjorie—"forgive, please."

It broke the spell. They stepped into the study rather hesitantly, as if conscious that they intruded. Clara seemed hypnotised. This was something she could not understand. "This was not what she had expected."

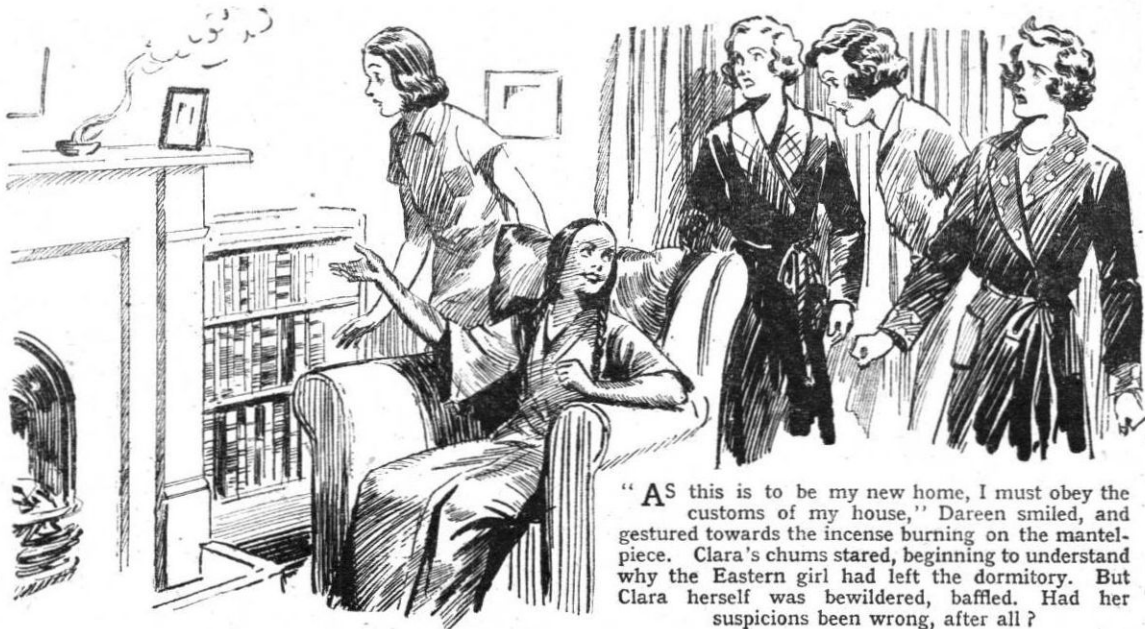
"Hallo, Daren!" said Marjorie, rather weakly. "We—that is—Well, what on earth are you doing here, dear?"

Daren rose smoothly and gracefully. She went straight to Marjorie.

"Forgive, please," she repeated, and her huge eyes added a pleading. "This thing I do now, for I feel you would not like if I ask you if I may. Yet this thing I had to do, so I try to do without you knowing."

"That, Daren, do you mean?" asked Marjorie hesitantly, pointing at the tray on the mantelpiece.

Daren nodded gravely.



"AS this is to be my new home, I must obey the customs of my house," Dareen smiled, and gestured towards the incense burning on the mantelpiece. Clara's chums stared, beginning to understand why the Eastern girl had left the dormitory. But Clara herself was bewildered, baffled. Had her suspicions been wrong, after all?

"This," she said, with a quaint little gesture round the room, "is my new home to be—yes? Thus, before I live in it, I must obey the customs of my house."

"Oh!" breathed Marjorie. Babs gave a little whistle. Beginning to understand, she shot a sharp glance at Clara.

"You mean, Dareen," she asked gently "that when you're going to be in a place many times you and your family burn some of this—this sort of incense first?"

"And because you were afraid we might get funny about it, or—or laugh," put in Mabs, "you came down to do it now?"

Dareen dropped her head. "Yes," she said huskily. "You—you are displeased?"

The three girls looked at each other and then at Clara. Clara, standing nonplussed, flushed under their accusing stares. It was Marjorie who answered.

"Of course we're not displeased," she said sincerely "We think it was jolly thoughtful of you."

"Rather!" said Babs, and Mabs nodded.

Marjorie flashed another glance at Clara.

"Mabs—Babs," she said, "would you see Dareen up to the dormitory? There is no need to stay, Dareen," she added gently. "We will let them burn."

A brilliant smile curved Dareen's small lips.

"Thank you, dear one. You are so kind."

She did not look at Clara, but walked straight to the doorway. Babs followed her out, and Mabs, after a pointed stare at the Tomboy, stepped behind. Their quiet steps—just in case a mistress or prefect was on the prowl—died away. Then Marjorie turned to Clara.

Her chin was high and her eyes gleamed so that Clara shifted uncomfortably.

"You ought to be ashamed, Clara," said Marjorie steadily. "From the moment Dareen arrived you've been mean to her, and to-night—this!"

Clara ran a hand agitatedly through her unruly hair.

"Marjie, you—you don't understand," she said haltingly. "I—I don't understand myself about to-night. I thought that—that—"

She broke off helplessly, and made a fierce little gesture. How could she convince Marjorie? She could offer no proof. It was only her own feelings, her own knowledge of Anna, the casket. But of those things she could not speak.

"Sorry, Marjie," she said gruffly. "There's nothing I can say. Don't let's row about it, but the fact remains that I still distrust and dislike Dareen, and nothing can alter that."

Marjorie's lips quivered. She fiddled agitatedly with the cord of her dressing-gown, and then suddenly turned to the door.

"Very well, Clara," she said shakily. "Good-night!"

For a long minute Clara stood with clenched hands. At last she took control of herself. A fierce determination swept over her. She'd convince old Marjie; she'd jolly well show her that Dareen was no real friend of hers! And the way to do that was to bowl out Dareen.

Clara did not doubt herself in the slightest. Her confidence in her own theories was unshakable.

"She didn't come down just to burn that—that stuff!" muttered the Tomboy, glaring at the smouldering sticks in the tray. "That must have been a blind—just in case she was discovered. Yes, that's it!" she gritted, with conviction. "And she jolly well must have heard us coming. That was why she was leaning back looking so innocent!"

Clara glowed. It seemed very feasible to her.

She strode across to her old sports box. She had no qualms that the casket would have vanished. Dareen could have had no time to search. A swift look in the box made her nod. The casket had not been touched.

"But with that clever cat actually in the school—in this study," she muttered, "it's not safe here. Somewhere in the attics would do, until—"

Until she could get in touch with Anna!

Clara Comes a Cropper!



"NO W, listen, Clara—" "You've got to stop it—"

"Just what I sus-say, you know—"

Clara Trevlyn drew a deep breath and looked extremely stubborn. "Sorry," she said briefly. "I can't make myself feel something that I don't feel. I can't like Dareen, and I can't be nice to her. But so long as she doesn't try any sugary stuff on me, I shan't start a row. That's all I've got to say."

Babs, Mabs, and Bessie looked at each other. Babs shrugged hopelessly.

It was the following morning, and just before breakfast Babs had collared Clara outside the dormitory. Babs hoped that a quiet chat with the Tomboy might make her see reason. For quite three minutes Babs and Mabs had attempted to prove to Clara that her attitude towards Dareen was all wrong and mean. This was the result.

Babs sighed. "O.K., then," she shrugged. "You can be a stubborn old mule, Clara."

"Thanks for the compliment," retorted Clara; but she grinned a trifle. "Where—where is Marjie?" For Clara had dressed before the others. "With Dareen, I suppose?"

Mabs nodded. "Yes. Dareen said she wanted to see Primmy. Said it was a pleasant surprise, and Marjie took her off—"

"I sus-say, here is Marjorie, you know," interrupted Bessie, blinking down the corridor. "She looks excited—perhaps she's had a postal order."

They turned. Clara was flushing a little. Up hurried Marjorie, and indeed she seemed most happily excited. She smiled at Clara, for however much the Tomboy's attitude the previous evening had hurt her, she was not the girl to bear malice.

"Girls—such news!" she panted. "The afternoon off, and a grand treat into the bargain!"

"What?" "Yes," beamed Marjorie. "And it's

all Dareen's doing. She actually persuaded Primmy to let a party of us go over to her home and have tea!"

"Oh, I say!" breathed Bessie, her eyes gleaming.

"A—a whole halfer!" whooped Babs.

"Yes," thrilled Marjorie. "Her father has taken Droon Lodge—that big place on the Courtfield Road. Dareen's going off before breakfast to make arrangements for us, and then she's going to send a car to fetch us at half-past two!"

"Oh, my hat!" crowed Mabs delightedly. "But who's going, Marjie?" she added anxiously.

"You, Babs, Bessie, myself, Leila Carroll, and—" Marjorie hesitated. Suddenly she turned and looked steadily at Clara. "And, Clara," she added quietly, "Dareen told me just now that she especially wanted you to make the sixth. She feels very deeply your dislike of her, and wants to be friends with you."

"That's sporting of her," said Babs warmly.

Clara clenched her hands. Dareen particularly inviting her? What did this mean? Instantly suspicious, the Tomboy looked for an ulterior motive. Did—did Dareen want to get her out of Cliff House—so that she could search for the mysterious casket? Rather a wild theory, perhaps, but a possibility. Not that the casket would be found in Study No. 7—now.

"Clara," pressed Marjorie. "Will you come and—try to be friendly? She's such a sweet thing. Will you—for my sake?"

It is possible that that earnest plea from her dearest chum would have had its result, even without another good reason which suddenly leapt to Clara's mind. Anna! If, as she suspected, Anna had been kidnapped, then wasn't it likely that she would be a prisoner now in Droon Lodge? Wasn't this just the chance she wanted to try to get in touch with Anna again?

"Well—thanks, Marjie," she said suddenly. "I'll be glad to come!"

Marjorie's eyes shone.

"Oh, Clara—I'm so glad!"

At once Marjorie was in the best of spirits. So were Babs, Mabs, and Bessie—and so was Leila Carroll, the American junior, when she heard the good news.

Naturally the little party was regarded with envy by the rest of the Fourth, and there were quite a few jealous remarks from girls like Lydia Crossendale and Freda Ferriers, especially after dinner, when a gleaming black car swung into the drive with a dark-skinned, uniformed chauffeur at the wheel.

The lucky six were there waiting.

"Are you from Dareen?" asked Marjorie eagerly.

Gravely the Indian chauffeur nodded. He swung the door open smartly, and the delighted chums stepped in, watched by many envious eyes from class-room windows.

Off they purred.

The powerful machine seemed to eat the distance to Friardale and on along the Courtfield Road. Excitedly the chums chattered.

Clara thrilled when the car swung in through the gates of Droon Lodge. A huge, rambling old building, it had been empty for some months. Was Anna somewhere in there?

Before the doorway, the car stopped. Swiftly the chauffeur leapt out and opened the door. They stepped down. Instantly the chauffeur slipped behind the wheel again and drove off round the side of the house.

"He—he's left us, you know," complained plump Bessie, blinking. "What do we do now, you know? Where's Dareen?"

"Well," chuckled Babs, "it wouldn't be a bad idea to go up the steps to the door. Certainly that chauffeur hadn't much to say!"

They mounted the steps, all a little excited and expectant. There was a great knocker on the door, but even as Marjorie rather hesitantly raised her hand towards it the door swung open. So swiftly and silently did it happen, indeed, that Bessie gave a little jump.

Before them stood a tall Indian, dressed in plain white robes. He bowed deeply. How oddly Clara tingled at sight of the little white brooch pinned in the centre of his turban!

"Enter," was the only word he said. "Come on," smiled Marjorie, and led the way.

As they entered the big hall, they all paused a second. None of them had ever been inside Droon Lodge before, but they had all expected to see something typically English. But no!

Although Dareen, her father and servants had only been in possession of the house a short while, there was a very distinct trace of the East on all sides.

Skins were on the polished floor, quaint ornaments were on little, inlaid tables, rich tapestries hung from the walls, and at the foot of the broad staircase, on black pedestals, stood large ivory models of elephants. From the open mouths of each came a faint perfume they recognised. It was the same as that which had issued from the little sticks Dareen had been burning in Study No. 7 the previous night.

Beautifully embroidered silk hung over every window, and light was supplied by softly glowing lamps of Eastern craftsmanship.

Subconsciously the chums held their breath.

"It's strange—and sort of beautiful," murmured Marjorie, her eyes sparkling. "I didn't expect—oh!" She broke off, for a door almost immediately in front of her had silently opened, and another dark-skinned servant was standing aside to allow them to proceed.

They caught a glimpse of a richly furnished room beyond. Babs glanced at the silent servant. Obviously they were expected to continue.

"Come on, girls," she said.

Curiously, they filed into the room before them. Once through, the door closed silently behind them. Clara gave a quick glance back as it did so. This Eastern atmosphere, the lamps instead of daylight, the silence of the servants, did not charm and intrigue her as it did the others. She felt there was something sinister in it.

But then Clara had come to this house with a purpose. And Clara had the firm conviction that this house was a prison for Anna, that the people who lived here were people to be distrusted.

"Dareen," breathed Marjorie then.

Their eyes lit up. At the far end of the room were four big tiger-skins. On those skins were scattered perhaps twenty gorgeous, silky cushions. Amid them sat Dareen, dressed more exquisitely than ever. Carefully arranging the gossamer-like silk which covered her sleek, black hair was yet another Indian servant, a girl this time.

Dareen saw them. A little cry of pleasure left her lips.

"My friends!" She started up. A tiny movement of one slim hand, and the Indian girl who had been tending

her padded away through thick curtains. "I am so happy," breathed Dareen, advancing to meet them, and indeed her dark eyes glowed like stars. "You have all come. Thank you, Clara," she added softly.

The charm of that made Clara flush and feel awkward, and her rather gruff "Not at all," sounded so clumsy.

"We're the ones to thank you, Dareen," smiled Babs. "It's topping of you to invite us—and get us a halfer into the bargain," she chuckled. "Wish you could tell us how to get round Primmy like that."

A gay little laugh rippled from Dareen.

"Get round?" she queried huskily. "It is so strange the words English use. But I understand. Now, please."

She clapped her little hands softly together. The resulting sound was faint, but it brought two Indian girls in simple blue robes padding silently from behind the curtains.

"Your coats and hats," smiled Dareen.

The chums' hats and coats were taken, and then Dareen smiled invitingly at them.

"And now," she queried, "will you?"

She indicated a low table. On it were many glasses, a huge carved jar, dishes of fruit, and trays containing the most tempting-looking Eastern sweetmeats.

"Golly!" chuckled Mabs. "Wish I hadn't had dinner! But I'd like a drink, please, Dareen!"

They all moved towards the table—all, that is, save Clara. The Tomboy had wandered towards the big curtain, and there she suddenly pulled up short, her whole being thrilled and startled. For from somewhere behind those curtains had come a faint cry!

Anna!

The name jumped instantly to Clara's mind. A cry in a girl's voice! It must be Anna!

The Tomboy's glance flashed to her chums and Dareen. But they were gathered, chattering, around the table. They had not heard.

A second Clara hesitated, breathing heavily. Then she made up her mind. One swift movement and she was through the big curtain. A long passage confronted her. There were no doors in that passage, but at the far end was another curtain.

Her heart pounding, Clara stepped swiftly, silently along. She reached the curtain, and—Surely that was another cry, suddenly muffled?

Nothing could hold the Tomboy back now. She whisked aside the curtain, ready for anything. A room, lit by one lamp, was beyond. It was empty, but there was a door in one corner.

It was the only other outlet to the room. Her eyes gleamed. The cry had come from this direction, and as that was the only other outlet—

Swiftly she crossed to it. The handle of the door turned in her grasp, but the door did not open. Locked!

Clara moistened her lips. She must take the chance.

"Anna!" she called softly. "Anna, are you there?"

Silence. She tried the door again, and then her heart leapt. A slight sound had come from behind her. With a convulsive spring she whirled, and exclaimed in blank dismay.

Before her, his arms folded, his dark, penetrating eyes blazing at her, was his Excellency Bahna Karud Begum. How he had appeared so silently Clara did not know, but he was there, and she shrank from the fury in his dark, hawk-like features.

Before either could speak there came a distant cry.

"Clara, where are you?" And footsteps hurried down the passage leading to the room. The curtain was brushed aside. Marjorie stepped in, Dareen just behind her, and the rest of the chums in tow. They halted and blinked.

The sight of their chum facing the silent, glittering-eyed Indian filled them with foreboding. His dark hand suddenly flashed out, pointing at Clara.

"Is it the way of the English guests to behave like thieves and spies?" he asked bitingly. "Is it thus their way to repay hospitality?"

Babs & Co. started, staring in consternation at Clara, who had flushed a brick red.

"Oh, I say, sir," protested Babs awkwardly, "surely Clara wouldn't do—"

"Clara," hissed the Indian, his eyes flashing scornfully, "is all that I say. She has no right to be here."

Marjorie Hazeldene was white with dismay. She regarded Clara with a look of agonised pleading.

"Per-perhaps she lost her way," she faltered.

Angrily the Indian sneered.

"Lost her way!" he cried furiously. "So! Did I not see her trying to force that door, to try to sneak the more?"

The chums were silent. They could not answer that. The answer must lie with Clara, and bewilderedly they regarded their flushed chum.

"Clara," begged Marjorie, "please explain?"

Clara heaved a deep breath, a sort of fury mounting within her, casting all her caution to the winds.

"You want to know what I was doing here?" she burst out. "Well, you jolly well ought to know! You and Dareen can't fool me—"

"Clara!" exclaimed Marjorie, in horror.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Babs. "Clara, for goodness' sake—"

"Stop!" The Indian owner of the house stepped nearer to the flushed Tomboy. "What," he demanded with ominous quietness, "do you mean by that?"

Clara faced him with heaving chest, her chin up.

"I'll tell you!" she flamed. "I'll tell all of you!" She whirled to the locked door. "Open this door!" she challenged. "I dare you! I dare you to let me see what's on the other side!"

"Oh golly!" groaned Leila Carroll. And, indeed, the rest of the Cliff House girls felt like sinking through the floor with dismay.

To talk to the Indian like that in his own house! To make demands of him—after having been caught herself in very suspicious circumstances! It was Dareen who saved the day.

"Please, my father," she breathed quickly, "she is young and foolish! Let her see! She knows not what she says!"

"Foolish, eh?" rapped Clara furiously. "Not so foolish that I can't see through you!"

"Clara, be quiet!" cried Babs, in agony. "Sir"—she turned agitatedly to their host—"please—please don't take any notice—"

He held up one hand. He seemed calmer suddenly. Without another word he strode to the door. From one pocket he took a key, inserted it in the lock and turned it. He swung the door open and stood aside.

"The door is open," he bit out. Surprised, yet not to be bluffed, Clara leapt forward into the room. The others crowded behind. The Tomboy halted. Her tenseness relaxed as slowly

her baffled gaze wandered round the room. It was very simply furnished save for a bureau of Eastern workmanship in one corner.

There was no other door. And the room was empty.

Clara almost staggered.

"I—I—"

"The door I keep closed because in that bureau I keep things of importance," cut in the Indian curtly. "Well, English girl? I have opened the door. You have seen into the room. And now?"

"Oh, my giddy aunt!" breathed Babs. "Clara—"

Clara's hands clenched. Her brain was whirling. She had been so certain that Anna had been a prisoner in this room. Even now she was not convinced. She had the feeling that somehow she had been tricked.

"And now?" repeated the Indian ominously.

"Yes, foolish one," said Dareen gently. "It is well to say you are sorry—yes? And then we will forget."

Clara stared into those dark, glowing eyes. And she knew that they were mocking her.

"I don't care!" she cried. "I don't care what you think. I'm not going to

It was Marjorie who was at her side in a flash, one arm comfortingly about Dareen's shaking shoulders. And it was Leila Carroll who said, as the chums looked on sympathetically:

"Clara's a silly, suspicious, clumsy chump, I guess!"

And in every mind was the same thought. Each girl was annoyed with the Tomboy, and yet each girl was asking herself blankly what on earth was the reason for Clara's dislike of Dareen—the reason for her amazing actions in this house!

CLARA TREYLYN held the Casket of Avisha in her hands and stared at it broodingly.

Clara was not happy.

And, seated on an empty trunk in one of the attics, she regarded the small, exquisite object which was the cause of all her troubles.

"Golly! What a mess!" she muttered.

It was past tea-time. Clara had returned to the school in haste from Droon Lodge. Babs & Co. were also back—now. Clara had seen them, she had suffered their angry demands for an explanation in silence. Stubbornly

Every Reader Please Note!

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Fill in this form to-day and hand it to your newsagent.

say I'm sorry," she added wildly. "There's something wrong here, I know. And you, Dareen," she raged, as that girl laid her hand on her arm, "don't try that sugary stuff on me! It won't work. I—I—"

She faltered, crimson-faced, inwardly kicking herself for that wild outburst, but quite unable to stop it. For a second she stood with heaving chest, and then whirled and strode through the curtains.

Marjorie, her face white, cried out. "Clara!"

But the Tomboy had gone. No one made a move after her.

The Indian broke a lengthy silence. "It is well that she has gone," he said sharply. "Such a girl I do not wish in my house." He seemed to become aware how uncomfortable Babs & Co. were feeling. "Please," he begged courteously, "do not distress yourselves. It is my wish that you are happy here on this visit to my daughter, Dareen—"

He broke off.

Dareen had dropped her head. Great sobs were shaking her slim frame.

"I—I—" she choked. "I am filled with sorrow that Clara hates me!"

she had refused to say anything in exoneration of her actions.

She had said too much in Droon Lodge as it was.

Babs & Co. had given it up as a bad job. Marjorie had not been present. Marjorie, bitterly hurt and disappointed in Clara, had kept out of the way.

It was Babs who had told Clara that Dareen, most terrifically upset, would not be returning to Cliff House that night. In fact, the afternoon's visit which had promised so well had trailed off dismally. Babs & Co. had left earlier than intended.

"Dareen's not coming back," murmured Clara. "And I think I know why."

Yes, Clara thought she knew. She thought she knew, too, why she had expressly been invited to Droon Lodge. For while they had been absent the chauffeur who had driven them had returned to Cliff House.

He had encountered Miss Bullivant and said that he came for a little case of Dareen's. Miss Bullivant had given him permission to go up to Study No. 7 and also to the Fourth Form

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.

beautifully, requiring less paper and less wood than usual.

I have another coat suggestion for you this week—one for making your autumn coat warmer to face the chilly days in store, and so save the necessity of buying a new one.

From an old piece of tweed or coloured blanket, cut a sort of little sleeveless coatee—like the one in the picture.

Slip this over the coat itself, turn in the raw edges, and hem it (invisibly) to the coat.

There you have a really smart touch given to a simple coat, and extra warmth as well round your back and chest-box, which should be kept snug these chilly days, so that you don't have any colds this coming winter.

Then you could also add false cuffs of the same material—just to complete the picture and to take away any suggestion that it might have been altered.

● My Own Invention

Oh, I must tell you about the little discovery—or perhaps I could say invention—that I made all by myself.

You know that it's the rule now for all bikes to have a red rear-light, don't you?

Well, I'd tried several shops to buy one, but just couldn't get one anywhere.

All I had was a torch—but that didn't seem much good, unless I could cover the front with red paper. And, of course, I couldn't find any red paper.

It was then that I had my brainwave.

In my dressing-table drawer I have the most amazing collection of nail-

polishes. (Yes, I know I never recommend nail-polish for schoolgirls, but that's no reason why I shouldn't use it, now is it?) Anyhow, among this collection was a bottle of particularly objectionable red—a red that was much too vivid for my taste and which I just hadn't used.

As you've guessed, I expect, I had the idea of painting over the front of this torch with the red nail enamel. It did the trick beautifully—and dried in a twinkling.

And, of course, the joy of it is that as soon as I do manage to get a proper rear-

light, I can use my torch again for the purpose for which it was intended, merely by dabbing the glass over with nail-polish remover!

So you can have that idea, with my love, if it's any use to you.

Though, quite seriously, I don't recommend this biking in the dark, if you can manage to stay indoors.

● A Fluffy Collar

Instead, you really should have a shot at making the pretty little collar here in the picture.

It is sweet, really. It's made of the new "bunny" wool, that pretty, fluffy stuff which is so soft and cuddly looking.



I can just imagine it in pale blue on a navy or brown dress or in that fresh shade of lime green which is so bright for the duller days.

To make the collar, you should be able to do simple crochet—chain and treble, at any rate—or double crochet.

Make enough chain in the bunny wool to fit the neck of your dress, turn with three chain, and work treble into each chain. Increase one treble at the end of each row, in the same place each time, and continue like this for three and a half or four inches.

Brush up the bunny wool when you have finished and slip it on to your dress. It'll look charming, I promise you—and even better after washing!

● A New Family

Oh, I must tell you that we're thinking of keeping chicks at home. We haven't got them yet, but father is busy studying the subject, and talking very airily about Wyandottes and Buff Orpingtons.

They seem to be rather costly to buy at the moment, so we're having a good look around first, to see if we can get some real bargains. I must confess that I'm rather disappointed we're not actually having baby chicks, so that we can watch them grow up. But still, I suppose we must be sensible these days—and the older hens will "lay" immediately. (That's what we're counting on, anyway.)

Still, I'll tell you more about the "new family" when it arrives.

Bye-bye now until next week, my pets!

Your friend, PATRICIA.

ISN'T it odd to think that summer-time is going on until the middle of November this year? That means we shan't get our yearly extra hour in bed yet awhile.

But I don't think that will worry us very much, do you? It certainly won't your Patricia—for we in our family find ourselves with so much to do these days that we're all getting up very much earlier in the morning.

Also, we're going to bed earlier at night. This means we save electricity—and improve our looks as well. (Or so we like to think!)

You remember I told you last week how furiously we were all knitting for the young "evacuees" who are stationed in the safety zones near us?

Well, I've finished the pullovers I was making for the three small boys and now I'm sorting through all the oddments of wool in the house to see how much I can find.

There's an unbelievable amount—in all sorts of colours.

And do you know what I'm going to do with it? Knit a blanket.

It sounds a huge task, doesn't it?—almost like making a loose cover for a settee, or something like that.

But actually it isn't, at all. For, you see, you just knit lots and lots of small squares of plain knitting and then join them together, either by oversewing or by crochet.

In case you like the idea and decide you'll also make a blanket, it's useful to know that the squares should be about eight inches (square, of course). You knit in plain stitch or spider stitch, fasten off strongly, and then start another square—in any old colour.

When these squares are all joined together and bound around the edge with coloured ribbon or material, they look so gay on the bed.

And goodness, are they warm!

● So Saving

Now here's a little economy hint for you all that you can pass on to a grown-up if you can't use it yourself.

Empty sugar bags should always be saved for lighting fires. For even if you shake the sugar out ever so carefully into the jar there are always just a few grains left in the corners. And when the fire is laid with these bags it'll flare up

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.



This week: MABEL LYNN.

MABS has several hobbies really, but they're all connected with her one big hobby—acting.

That doesn't mean to say Mabs is always dressing up for stage parts, or rehearsing "lines," or anything like that.

She simply adores reading for a start, and has quite a collection of books of her own, which she's very proud of.

Lives of great actresses—and actors, too—fascinate Mabs. She says such books are every bit as exciting as "made-up" stories. Though, of course, she can't get everyone to agree with her over this.

One of Mabs' most treasured possessions is a very super volume of Shakespeare, most beautifully bound in real leather, and with a coloured frontispiece.

She loves to dip into this occasionally. "But Shakespeare shouldn't be read in whole wadges," says Mabs. (That is her own word, by the way.) And it really does worry her that the greatest English poet should have been spoiled for so many school-girls and boys just because they're forced to read chunks of it at a time, without first learning to like it for themselves.

Her favourite play from Shakespeare is "Macbeth," though "King Henry V" runs it a close second.

But Mabs likes modern plays, too, particularly Bernard Shaw's "St. Joan." (And oh, how she'd love to play the name part in this.) J. B. Priestley and James Bridie are other favourites of Mabs', some of whose plays she has seen more than once.

Her favourite actor at the moment is John Gielgud, and most admired actress, Flora Robson. Next week: Clara Trevlyn.

FUN and GAMES FOR ALL

Now that most of us are spending the long winter evenings indoors, we can't have too many jokes, games, and puzzles to pass the time enjoyably.

RIDDLES, puzzles, and, round-the-fire games are going to be all the rage these black-out evenings. And you young people will be expected to supply plenty of ideas, I expect.

So your Patricia has been digging out some old favourites for you, and will combine them with new games and catches.

I won't give any solutions here, in case it spoils the fun for you. But you'll find them in column three—printed upside down, just for fun! (I'll number them all, so that you can find the answers more easily.)

First some quick-fire riddles.

1. What coin is exactly double its value by taking away a half?
2. What has four legs and only one foot?
3. What American state is high in the middle and round at both ends? (A bit tricky, that one.)

CATCH-Y

Now here's a catch, that is worth puzzling over.

4. Some men went into a teashop. There were two fathers and two sons, and each ate a shillingworth of food. What was the least amount that they would pay for the meal?

* * *

Now another, that will probably be familiar to some of you—though I doubt if you have heard the correct answer.

5. As I was going to St. Ives, I chanced to meet with nine old wives;
Each wife had nine sacks;
Each sack had nine cats;
Each cat had nine kits;
Kits, cats, sacks and wives,
How many were going to St. Ives?

You'll find everyone doing sums for all they're worth on quoting that rhyme. But, sh! 'twill all be wasted.

WITH PENCIL AND PAPER

Next, here's a pencil and paper trick with figures.

6. Ask a chum if she can put three twos in a row so as to make 24. Sounds impossible, doesn't it? But it can be done. Make everyone try before you give away the answer, won't you?

* * *

Word-changing is another favourite game that you can play with pencil and paper.

7. For example, could you change the word LETTER to KITTEN, making only three changes of words? There's one rule, though—each change must make a complete word.

Just try it before you look at the answer.

* * *

Now you brainy ones can try this.

ALWAYS USEFUL

That's what everyone says about pin-cushions.

"YOU just can't have too many pin-cushions," 'tis said. (Rather as it is about hankies.)

But, of course, we don't mean just ordinary, everyday ones; we mean nice, interesting ones—like the toadstool and the mushroom ones in the picture below, for example.

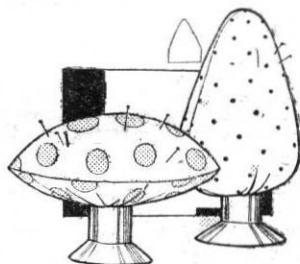
To make one of these you'll require an empty cotton-reel and a small piece of silky or velvet material from mother's treasure trove—her piece-bag.

For the mushroom style—that is the flat one, cut two circles of material, one a little bigger than the other. Join these round the edges, turn inside out, then cut a hole in the middle of the larger circle. Gather this up with cotton, stuff inside with sawdust or bran, and slip it over the top of the cotton-reel. Pull up, and tie tight.

For the toadstool, cut two pieces of material to a slightly pointed shape, as shown in the little diagram attached to the picture. Join these, stuff with bran or sawdust, gather up the end, and then fasten over the cotton-reel, as before.

Finish off with a bow of ribbon tied around the join if you like, and paint the cotton-reel to match the material you have used.

You'll be so pleased with the result.



8. What word contains all the vowels in their correct order? (No trick in this—just sheer hard thinking!)

9. Here's a catch that I think will take in most of your listeners. Ask them: "Which weighs the most, a pound of feathers or a pound of gold?"

The clever ones will probably say: "They both weigh the same, silly, if there's a pound of each."

But just show them the answer. And now a riddle to end up with.

10. What seven letters of the alphabet did the old lady say when she looked into her empty purse?

- * * *
10. OICURMT!
the gold 5,760 grains.
9. The feathers weigh 7,000 grains, and
8. Faeitious (A E I O U).
KITTEN.
7. LETTER, better, bitter, bitten,
6. 22+2=24.
the others were coming away from it!
5. One only was going to St. Ives. All
fathers was also a son, you see.
4. Three shillings. (For one of the
3. Ohio (o-high-o).
2. A bed.
1. Halppenny.
- ANSWERS.

(Continued from page 11)

dormitory, where Darcen had placed some things in Janet Jordan's locker. June Merrett had overheard this, and casually mentioned the matter to Clara on her return.

But Clara was convinced that the chauffeur had come for another purpose. The chauffeur had come to make a thorough search for her—Clara's property! A search for the Casket of Avisha!

It was this conviction that had brought Clara up to the attics in a rush. But the casket had been there still, safely concealed beneath a huge pile of trunks and cases.

Yet—what now?

Clara rose.

Carefully concealing the casket once more, she left the attic. She had come to a decision—one which thrilled her. She wouldn't wait for another move from Darcen and her father. She would act first—sneak out that night and go to Droon Lodge!

"If Anna's there, I'll find her," she breathed.

Clara went downstairs. She had done her prep—alone in Study No. 7. Marjorie had done hers in Study No. 4 with Babs, Mabs, and Bessie. That had hurt Clara, but she knew dear old Marjie had every justification for avoiding her.

The door of Study No. 7 was ajar as Clara walked slowly and thoughtfully down the Fourth Form corridor. About to enter, she drew up sharply. The study was not empty now. A girl sat at the table, her head in her hands, crying softly.

Clara's lips quivered.

It was Marjorie. Marjorie had come back to Study No. 7.

And as Clara hesitated a little, broken whisper just reached her ears from that bowed figure.

"Oh, Clara—Clara—"

Clara gulped. Dear, sweet Marjie! It stabbed at her heart to see Marjorie in such distress, and yet somehow it was a happy hurt. To know that she did mean that much to Marjorie, that Marjorie's unhappiness was not for Darcen's sake, but because she was disappointed in her chum.

Clara drew back softly.

She wanted to go in and comfort her chum and say how sorry she was. But then Darcen's name would come into it, and Clara could not lie about Darcen. No, the one way to clear up everything was to expose Darcen for the girl she really was.

And the determination to do that burned more fiercely than ever in Clara.

She strode off grimly down into the quad. She didn't want to go to the Common-room and mix with the rest of the Fourth Formers who might be there. She wanted to be alone—to think.

So Clara wandered out into the quad.

It was getting dark, and a fresh wind rustled the old elms. Brooding, Clara gave a startled jump as a figure came hurrying up in the gloom. She relaxed instantly, however, as she recognized Boker, the bright-faced page-boy. He grinned at her.

"Been looking for you everywhere, Miss Trevlyn!" he panted. "Message—delivered by one of the village blokes." He handed over a little envelope. "Good-night, Miss Trevlyn!"

"Night-night, and thanks!" said Clara gratefully.

Curious, she moved towards the school gates and gazed at the envelope

in the light which shone from the lamp above them. It was simply inscribed, in a handwriting strange to her: "Miss Clara Trevlyn."

"Who—?" muttered Clara. She slit it open, took out the sheet of paper within, and unfolded it.

The message was short, but it set Clara's heart pounding.

"All is well with me now. Bring it to the big tree at the end of the lane to-night. At eleven o'clock. I will be there. How well you have done, my friend!"

It was signed simply: "Anna."

At Their Mercy!



A PALE streak of moonlight fell upon the sleeping form of Marjorie Hazeldene in the Fourth Form dormitory. She moved restlessly.

On the locker beside her a little clock showed the time to be fifteen minutes to eleven. The dormitory was quiet.

The shaft of moonlight was broken. An arm moved out cautiously towards Marjorie's pillow. The hand held a sheet of notepaper, pierced at the top by a pin. Cautious fingers pinned the paper to the pillow.

A little intake of breath from the silent figure as Marjorie moved uneasily in her sleep, and then it backed, its task done. Marjorie slumbered on, beside her head the pinned message.

A creak from the door. It swung open, and a moment later closed again.

Clara Trevlyn had left on her vital mission with the Casket of Avisha.

She left by the lobby window, dropping down in the quad with the lithe landing of an athlete. The air was damp, and she wore a hat and a light raincoat. Under one arm was a small oblong package.

Clara was a little pale and very keyed up. That little note to Marjorie had been a last thought—a precaution which might, or might not, prove necessary.

Not strange that she thrilled as she swung cautiously over the school wall and headed up the lane. For here was the climax of it all. Here, at long last, was the moment when the mysterious casket would pass from her possession—the moment when she might learn the whole truth.

Breathing jerkily, Clara padded on to the grand old oak-tree at the bend of the lane. She peered at the mass of shadow in the shade of the spreading boughs. Anna—was she already there? She stepped nearer. No, there was no one.

Relaxing, she did not hear the step of tall figures behind her; suspected nothing until the swift clasp of a big hand over her mouth made her scream with the shock. But it was a muffled scream, and next instant something descended upon her head with sickening force, and all went black.

The next thing Clara remembered was opening her eyes and blinking desperately about her.

Instantly she grew rigid. She was bound to a chair in the room which she suspected had been Anna's prison—the room Bahna Karud Begum had allowed her to see into that afternoon. And she wasn't alone.

In the soft glow from a single lamp the tall Indian himself was revealed, standing beside the bureau. He did not look at Clara. Held in hands that trembled slightly was the oblong package the Tomboy had brought.

He began to remove the brown paper. It was then that Clara saw the bureau quiver. For a second she believed her eyes were playing her tricks. But no. Into the room the bureau swung, revealing a square opening in the wall. The Indian took no notice as a figure slipped through into the room.

Clara knew then. So that was it. She had been right. Anna had been a prisoner here that afternoon! But she had been spirited away through that secret entrance before Bahna Karud Begum had opened the door. That was how she had been tricked. That was why—

Clara became very still.

For the figure who had slipped through the entrance, and was now straightening beside the Indian, was—

"Darcen!" she breathed. "Darcen!"

The gorgeously robed Indian girl did not look at her. She stood with her back to Clara, her head bowed a little as she watched the package in her father's hand. The brown paper crackled.

Suddenly a fierce and furious exclamation. A crash as the object which had been in that paper was hurled savagely to the floor. It bounded and rolled over and over—a rather heavy pencil-box which for many years had belonged to Clara Trevlyn.

Clara brought a grim little smile to her dry lips, and, with a really fine show of courage, said jerkily:

"Tricked you, didn't I?"

Impulsive and hot-headed, Clara might be, but she had been shrewd this time. That note, purporting to come from Anna—she had brooded over that a long time after the first thrill of receiving it. Certain as she had been that Anna was a prisoner, how, she had wondered, had Anna managed to get that message to her?

Clara had been doubtful, suspecting a trap. And so, just in case, she had prepared this dummy package. And she had fooled them!

Yes, but what now?

Darcen, whose back was still facing Clara, raised one slim hand and whispered rapidly, softly, a meaningless jumble to the Tomboy. Her father looked at her, a glow in his dark eyes. At last he seemed to agree, for with a black stare at Clara he turned and vanished through the opening in the wall. The bureau swung back into place.

Darcen remained standing still. She seemed to be looking down at the pencil-case. Seconds ticked back.

Clara licked dry lips.

Well, why didn't Darcen do something? Why—

And then Darcen, the girl who had captured all hearts at Cliff House, turned to Clara Trevlyn, the one girl who had disliked and distrusted her. Slowly she moved forward and bent towards the Tomboy, holding her defiant gaze unemotionally.

"So, Clara Trevlyn," she breathed huskily. "You were right. And you have been clever. The casket you did not bring."

"You bet I didn't!" Clara taunted spiritedly. "I don't know what is so jolly important about the casket, but you crooks won't get it! And don't think you can get away with this, because—"

She jerked off with a gasp of pain. It seemed that a streak of fire had flashed across her arm. A tiny, thin cane had appeared like magic in Darcen's hand, and it was that which had viciously cut into her flesh.

"So! You knew I was not what I seemed! You taunt! You laugh! Laugh now—and now—and now—"

Clara's lips twisted. Not into a smile. They twisted with pain—yes, and perhaps horror. Pain because with every "and now" the Indian girl brought the little cane hissing down on her arms; horror because of the savage hatred which contorted Daren's exquisite features.

The mask was down. And although Clara had suspected that mask to be false, she was almost frightened by the girl—the real girl—now revealed.

Teeth gritted, Daren wielded that little cane.

"You—you awful thing!" choked Clara.

Daren suddenly paused, listening. The bureau was moving again. It swung right into the room. Bahna Karud Begum appeared. Behind him he dragged a girl whose hands were tightly bound.

Clara gave a cry. "Anna!"

Yes, Anna, but a different Anna from the girl Clara had met in the cave on

"You still have it!" broke in the Indian, his voice biting furiously. "It is still at the school—yes? Will she speak, Daren?"

Daren slowly shook her beautiful head.

"No, my father. But there is a way." Daren turned to Anna. Slowly she raised the little cane. It hit smartly on the Indian girl's cheek—not a very hard blow, but one that made Anna wince, and brought a choking cry from Clara. Daren smiled at her. "You see, Clara?" she said softly. "You will speak, or there shall be more blows—many more—and harder!"

Anna's head came up. Suddenly there was animation there.

"Clara—my friend," she cried. "Do not speak—do not! The casket must not be theirs! Do not speak to save me—"

She gasped as the little cane hit again. Clara writhed in her bonds.

"Stop—stop!" she choked. "Don't do that. I'll tell you—"

And Clara, unheeding Anna's desperate plea for silence, began to give directions.

boy's empty bed and then swiftly round the dormitory. Her eyes widened.

"Mabs!" She caught at her chum's arm. "Clara's out!"

"Clara!"

Mabs whistled shrilly. For a second they stared blankly at each other. A startled, dismayed cry made them whirl. Marjorie Hazeldene had leapt out of bed. In a streak of moonlight she was feverishly studying a sheet of notepaper. Suddenly she looked up, her eyes wide.

"Babs!" she almost shrieked. "It's a note—from Clara! Oh, look—look!" And while she stood there aghast, Babs and Mabs leapt towards her.

In the meantime, back at Droon Lodge—

The room of captivity contained only two people now—Clara and Anna.

Many, many minutes had passed since Daren and her father had left, after passing on to one of their servants the information Clara had given rather than see Anna suffer anew.

Poignant moments those, for Anna had broken down completely, and



BESIDE herself with recklessness, Clara started forward. "Open that door!" she challenged. "I dare you to. I dare you to let me see what's on the other side!" The Indian remained impassive, his arms folded. Babs & Co. were horrified. What ever had come over their Tomboy chum?

the cliffs. She had been a little haggard then—but now: Drawn cheeks, quivering lips, despairing eyes, testified to the treatment she had received while a prisoner. Anna saw Clara then. She dropped her head hopelessly, as if this was the end of everything.

"Oh, you brutes!" gasped Clara. "You—you've starved her!"

The tall Indian regarded her stonily. "She was foolish," he said coldly. "She would not speak. We caught her after she had hid in the cave. The casket was not with her. She escaped from us. But my daughter had seen from the distance a girl climbing up the cliff. She did not recognise you, but she recognised the blazer you wore. We suspected Anna had passed the casket to a girl from Cliff House School. So we laid our plans. Daren came to the school—"

Daren laughed lowly.

"And you, Clara, fool," she said huskily, "made me suspect you by your manner. Then my father's men were watching. They captured Anna outside the gates. But no casket. You still had it."

But Clara Wasn't Beaten!



"OH, my hat, what on earth is that?"

Barbara Redfern gasped the words as she jerked out of a deep sleep and shot upright in bed. She was not alone in moving. Rustles and sleepy inquiries sounded along the whole length of the Fourth Form dormitory.

And no wonder. From outside, carrying up through the open windows to their startled ears, came a hideous din of barking, yelping dogs. And not difficult to know whence it came.

"The Pets' House!" gasped Leila Carroll. "My giddy aunt, what on earth's disturbed them?"

Girls were leaping out of bed now, chattering, donning dressing-gowns, crowding to the windows.

"I say," cried Babs, "I'm going to look into this, Mabs. Where's Clara—"

She broke off, staring at the Tom-

sobbed piteously. She was quiet now, and suddenly she raised her head and stared at Clara. Baised securely, they lay side by side.

"Forgive," she muttered chokily. "That the casket should be theirs, after all. It made me weak. Yet you spoke to save me, and you have been so fine."

Clara tried to smile encouragingly.

"I had to, Anna," she said quietly. "Those awful things—" How her eyes flashed. "The way they've treated you, just for that casket."

Anna looked at her oddly.

"Just for that casket," she repeated slowly. "My English friend, you do not understand. But you have proved so wonderfully that you are fine that I shall tell you certain things."

A brooding, far-away look came into her eyes.

"In India," she said, "I am a servant in the house of a mighty rajah. In a short time he will visit this country. His cousin came before him, and this cousin did wish more servants. I was chosen. We came to England, and then I discover this cousin is evil."

Clara's eyes flickered.

"Bahna Karud Begum? He is this cousin?"

"Even so. I discover he has robbed my master!" Hate grew on Anna's face. "Always he has pretended great friendship for my master, but before leaving my country he stole the Casket of Avisha. My master would not suspect him. But I, Anna, discovered this great evil. I would not allow it. I took the casket and fled, meaning to hide until my master did arrive. Then would I take the casket to him and speak of the evil Bahna Karud Begum had done."

Clara gulped. Understanding as she did now, she felt a glow of amazement and admiration for the loyalty of this little Indian servant. A flash came into her eyes.

"Anna," she breathed, "those directions I gave to him—they were false! They would lead Ali to the Pets' House at the school, to the kennel of my dog, Pluto. If he tries to open that kennel, Pluto will start every dog in the place barking, and—"

She bit off the sentence. The bureau against the wall was moving again. As it swung back Bahna Karud Begum and Dareen slipped into the room.

"Ali has not yet returned," said the tall Indian slowly. "Yet he went in a fast car, and he is a man who works well. It is not wise for us to stay here long, for in the morning you will be found missing, Clara Trevlyn." He moved closer, his eyes smouldering. "If you have lied to us, Clara Trevlyn, you will remain missing for many, many moons!"

The Tomboy's mouth felt very dry. "I—I gave you the directions," she said defiantly.

He nodded slowly. "It is well, if the directions were right. We shall give Ali thirty more minutes."

Then there was silence in that room, save for Clara's jerky breathing.

Four still figures, the soft rays from the single lamp playing upon them. Clara and Anna upon the floor near the curtains beyond which was the passage leading to the door in the main passage; Bahna Karud Begum and Dareen standing motionless by the bureau, which had swung back into place.

And thus the room remained while the seconds—minutes passed by.

Fifteen—twenty minutes. Dareen and her father had not moved. With cold, deadly patience they waited.

Twenty-five minutes. Clara wanted to scream. She knew fear as never before in her life.

Bahna Karud Begum stirred. "Come, my daughter," he said softly, "it is time."

He stepped towards the curtain, gripped it, and then stopped, while Clara stared as if hypnotised. Suddenly, about the hand with which the Indian had grasped the curtain, appeared something which glittered coldly in the lamplight. There was a click.

A shriek from Dareen, a furious exclamation from her father. The curtain was whirled aside. Figures swarmed in. There sounded another click, and Bahna Karud Begum reeled back, handcuffs encircling his wrists!

Clara almost yelled with relief and joy.

"In-Inspector Winter!" she choked. "Anna—Anna, we're saved!"

It seemed like a dream. Everything was happening so swiftly. Uniformed policemen were now on each side of the manacled Indian. Inspector Winter, of the Courtfield division, had one hand on

Dareen's shoulder. And there was a pattering of footsteps up the corridor.

Even as the inspector turned to Clara and Anna the curtain was whirled aside. Three girls burst in, and this figure hurrying agitatedly behind them—it was Miss Primrose. But the girls—

"Marjorie!" cried Clara. "And Babs—Mabs! You twigged my message!"

"Clara—oh, Clara!" Marjorie was half sobbing. She saw Dareen and her father then. Horror was on her sweet face. "Dareen," she breathed, "to think—that you—"

"Fool!" bit out Dareen savagely. "Soft fool—"

"Enough of that!" cut in the inspector curtly. He looked grimly at the Indian, who stood with clenched teeth; then glanced at the shocked features of Miss Primrose. "Well, Miss Primrose," he nodded, "your girls were right—the message Miss Trevlyn sent was right. Release her and that other girl, Jones," he commanded one of the constables.

But Marjorie was already on her knees beside Clara.

"Oh, Clara—Clara," she choked, "I've been a fool! You were right—you were right. If anything had happened to you—"

Clara smiled. Her eyes were shining. "Old chump!" she said awkwardly, but very, very tenderly. "Release Anna, too, will you, Marjorie? I—I want to get out of this place, and there's a lot to be cleared up."

There was.

But it wasn't until an hour later, actually in Miss Primrose's study at Cliff House, that full explanations were finally made. By that time Droon Lodge was empty. Bahna Karud Begum and Dareen, with their many servants, were safely lodged in Courtfield Prison. And with them was Ali.

Clara, still in her raincoat, held the floor. She was seated beside little Anna, and that girl was very hungrily consuming coffee and a plate of sandwiches called for by Miss Primrose. Babs, Mabs, and Marjorie were there, too, and with the headmistress listened in growing wonder and amazement as the Tomboy told her story.

Anna put in a word rather shyly now and then. Clara finally came to the fake message from Anna, how she had been suspicious. Told of the dummy package she had taken.

"But, just in case," she concluded, "I pinned a message on old Marjorie's pillow, telling the real truth and where I should be if anything went wrong."

Miss Primrose shook her head quite breathlessly. "And, of course, it did go wrong, Clara," she said. "What wonderful fortune that that awful man captured in the school grounds aroused the dogs in the Pets' House!"

Clara couldn't help grinning a little. "But that was why I sent the messenger to the Pets' House, Miss Primrose," she said demurely. "I was counting on Pluto starting a row so that Marjorie would be awakened and would read the message."

They stared at her admiringly. Miss Primrose leaned back.

"Amazing—quite amazing!" she exclaimed. "To think that Dareen and her father— Well, well!" She frowned. "Clara, my dear, I congratulate you. And, Anna—" She turned to the little Indian servant. "My dear," she added gently, "I have decided that you must stay here at Cliff House until your real master reaches England."

Anna's dark eyes lit up, and Clara breathed softly:

"Good old Primmy!"
"But, Clara," Babs put in puzzledly, "suppose that message from Anna had been the real thing? You wouldn't have been able to pass over the casket, would you?"

Anna had swiftly arisen. "My friend Clara—yes," she cried. "The casket! Where is it?"

Clara started. That vital casket had actually slipped her mind for the moment. A slow grin crossed her face. She looked at their curious faces, and one of her hands stole inside her raincoat.

"I would have been able to pass it over, Babs," she retorted, "because here it is!"

And there in her hand was the shining Casket of Avisha!

Anna almost pounced on it.

"You—you had that on you all the time?" gasped Miss Primrose. "My dear Clara, if those awful people had known—"

"But they didn't, Miss Primrose—they didn't!" exclaimed Marjorie, her eyes glowing with admiration. "Oh, Clara, you—you wonder!"

Then all eyes went to the casket. Anna was handling it reverently, her dark face radiant with joy. She must have felt their glances, for she looked up. Her eyes met Clara's and her lips trembled into a smile.

"My friend," she breathed softly, "I wish to do something now which I know my master would approve. You shall see within the Casket of Avisha!"

Breaths were caught. Everyone leaned forward. Anna's slim fingers wandered over the casket. They must have touched secret springs, for suddenly, without a sound, the lid flew up.

"See!" said Anna in a hushed whisper. She held the casket forward. "The Eye of Avisha!"

They looked and they gasped. In sheer, dazed fascination they gazed down upon the thing which lay in a nest of soft velvet. It winked up at them, glowing with glorious richness—a ruby of such a size and perfection of cutting and polishing that it literally took their breath away.

"Mu-my giddy aunt!" stammered Clara, aghast. "And I've been looking after that! I've had that on me! I—I—"

"Wonderful!" murmured Miss Primrose. "Bless my soul, it—it must be worth a fortune!"

Anna gravely nodded.

"Even so, madam," she said softly, "it is almost—you say?—priceless. A priceless thing for which Dareen and her father would have paid any price to gain. But they did not gain it, because—because Clara saw the evil in Dareen."

"Dareen—" murmured Marjorie. Her hand touched the Tomboy's.

"Clara, I—I—"
Clara smiled and pressed her gentle chum's hand. She did not speak, and Marjorie said no more. But they both understood.

Dareen had been unmasked. Dareen had gone, and all was well once more between those very dear chums.

There is only one thing at Cliff House now which might recall the advent of that treacherous, beautiful Indian girl. It stands on Clara Trevlyn's mantel-piece, and it is a tiny, exquisite replica in solid gold of the Casket of Avisha, presented by a very grateful rajah of high rank.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

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



Valerie Drew's HOLIDAY MYSTERY

FOR NEW READERS.

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

FLASH, are on holiday at Sunnylands 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 JEVONS, 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, which Valerie frustrates. Later the unknown enemy makes the bath overflow, and one of the guests,

CHARLIE DEEDS, an interfering fellow, who thinks himself a detective, declares he has found a clue.

(Now read on.)

Her eyes widened. It was the very colour of a scarf she had often seen tied over Paizi Logan's black hair.

A moment later, taking care to leave the running tap untouched, Valerie had grasped the chain to the outlet, and the bath water began to make its noisy escape.

"Clumsy—" began Charlie, only to pause as footsteps were heard along the corridor. Johnny Jevons, enveloped in a brilliant orange dressing-gown, appeared in the doorway with several other people close behind him.

"Gosh! Did Charlie forget to turn the bath water off?" asked Johnny, gazing accusingly at the amateur detective.

Charlie's eyes shone with indignation. "Course I didn't!" he ejaculated. "Whoever's been causing scares all over the place has been up to his old tricks again." His eyes narrowed.

Dorothy's exactly on top of her form in smoothing them down again. See what you can do with a spot of tact!"

"O.K.! Come on, Peter, and everyone else!" Johnny immediately instructed, turning back to the others. "Peace mission now sailing!"

They followed Johnny's lead as always.

Compressing her lips, Valerie closed and locked the door, and turned to stare at the wet floor, the ebbing bath water, and the gleaming tap.

She knew she must act quickly. In a minute or two one of the maids would be along to wipe up what remained of the flood. And Charlie had been right in one particular. Dorothy's enemy had clearly struck yet again. Taking cunning advantage of the presence of the rowdy Bantry family at the farmhouse, he had chosen them as his victims, fully aware they would create

Out to Help Her Rival!

"IF you will think it over again, Charlie," Valerie Drew responded evenly, "you'll see there's every reason why I should look at what you've just found."

Her voice was quite steady, and outwardly her manner was perfectly calm. Only an almost imperceptible tightening of her lips showed that she realised the true significance of this amazing change in Charlie Deeds.

Her case was baffling enough already without having a rival "detective" working against her!

Charlie stood with his hands behind his back, stiff defiant. Though rather red-cheeked, he was evidently thrilled by his own audacity.

"I've thought already!" he told Valerie. "And I'm not showing you what I've found. It's my clue!"

Valerie was thinking at lightning speed.

"You might at least stop the flood!" she exclaimed; and, making a brisk move towards the overflowing bath, collided lightly with Charlie.

Charlie took a clumsy step to one side exactly as Valerie had intended. Behind him there was a mirror on the wall. Before Charlie could collect his wits, Valerie managed to glimpse a reflection of what he was clutching behind him—a sodden piece of scarlet material.

WHEN VALERIE DREW WISHED TO MEET SOMEONE IN SECRET, SHE GOT ALL THE FARMHOUSE GUESTS TO DISGUISE AS THAT PERSON—WITHOUT THEIR REALISING IT!

"Fortunately I've got a clue. This time I'm going to have a crack at finding out who it is!"

"His clue's behind his back!" explained Valerie blandly.

"Oh!" commented Johnny, and moved significantly towards Charlie.

Charlie, making a rush for the doorway, nearly bowled Peter Passleigh over, and sped away at top speed along the passage.

"Worm!" commented Johnny, startled and indignant, and was just about to dash off in pursuit when Valerie stopped him.

"I wanted Charlie to get away!" she explained softly. "I've seen what he's got, and it's worth nothing at all!"

Johnny whistled softly with astonishment. Then his boyish face relaxed into a grin of admiration as he looked at Valerie.

"That's the stuff!" he commented, chuckling. "And what can I do, old sleuth?"

"I'd like you to pop downstairs, old son," Valerie gently said. "Those Bantrys are nearly raising the roof, and it doesn't sound as though poor old

more commotion than anyone else in the building

So far as Charlie's precious "clue" was concerned, Valerie had meant what she had said to Johnny.

Even if it was Paizi Logan's scarf Charlie had recovered, it was merely a trick with which Valerie was already quite familiar—a trick on the part of the real foe to blame the gipsy woman.

Valerie's gaze came to rest on the still-running tap itself. The last hand to touch it had been that of the secret foe.

Taking her powerful magnifying-glass from her handbag, she pressed the switch of an electric torch to give her still more light, and went over every inch of the tap.

There was not the least trace of a finger-print to be seen anywhere on it! Its highly polished condition could only lead her to one conclusion. Her enemy

By

ISABEL NORTON

had been careful enough to wear gloves!

Undaunted, Valerie took fresh stock of the room.

Appreciating at once that entering openly by the doorway was not the kind of risk her enemy ran, as a rule, she crossed to the window.

The lower sash was slightly raised, and Valerie, lifting it higher, looked outside. It was very dark, but beneath her she could faintly discern a narrow ledge running along the brickwork to the thatched gables rising on each side.

There was, alas, nothing whatever remaining on the ledge to tell Valerie who had passed along it so recently.

Turning as she heard a tapping on the bath-room door, Valerie closed the window quickly, turned off the tap, and opened the door. A maid had arrived with flannel and pail. Standing thoughtfully to one side, Valerie waited until the floor had been cleaned and dried as far as was now possible. As soon as the girl had finished, Valerie switched off the light, and, leaving the room, locked the door and took the key with her.

By the time she returned to the vicinity of the Bantrys' room the worst of the bother with them was over. Fellow-guests, inspired by Johnny, had kindly provided them with dry night attire, and another room had been found in which they could complete their interrupted slumbers.

"All the same," murmured burly Bob Bantry, as he turned to shuffle off, "you won't be seeing no more of us arter breakfast to-morrow, and that's that!"

Standing at one side, her face drawn with anxiety and dismay, was Dorothy Dean, the girl hostess on whom the brunt of every successive disaster always fell.

It was a poignant moment. Valerie went up to her and, taking her arm sympathetically, walked with her back to her room. Dorothy accompanied her without a word, moving like a girl in a dream.

"At least, Dorothy," said Valerie softly, "we shan't have those terrible Bantrys with us any longer."

Still Dorothy made no reply, but at

last she began to cry softly, unable to hide her deep distress any longer.

In bed at last, Valerie turned sleeplessly on her pillow.

Their unrelenting enemy, despite his recent narrow escape from capture, remained as daring and determined as ever.

Now, so far as the running of the farm-house was concerned, there were almost certain to be grave consequences.

Mystery and menace hung once more like black shadows over Sunnylands. Unless something was quickly done to bring about the apprehension of the elusive foe, there would certainly be more talk of people leaving.

During breakfast Valerie listened closely to the conversation which ensued at Charlie's table.

The amateur detective, now that he had come out into open rivalry with Valerie, was making no secret of his intentions. He was going to catch the criminal!

It might be impossible to do anything herself unless Charlie was elsewhere occupied. Therefore—she must use a plan.

Rising from the table at last, she exchanged friendly greetings with other guests as she left the room, but chose to stroll on alone with Flash in the farmyard.

The sky was clouded over this morning, and, because there was a threat of rain in the air, nobody was hurrying to decide on the day's activities. Valerie, knowing she still had plenty of time left in which to put her new plan into operation, was gazing with seemingly idle interest at the milking machinery when a voice behind her hissed:

"The informer's here, old sleuth!"

Smilingly Valerie turned to see the beaming face of Johnny Jevons, who stood just behind her.

"Inform away, Johnny!" she invited him, with a laugh.

"It's Charlie," Johnny explained, "He's actually thinking of 'borrowing' Flash this morning, Val, without you knowing anything about it—"

"Johnny, how marvellous!" Valerie broke in, her face, to his amazement, lit by a delighted smile. "I don't need

Flash at all at this moment, but I do want to feel sure that Charlie's out of the way. If he thinks Flash can pick up a scent from a scrap of rag that's been soaked in water, that's going to be Charlie's headache—it won't do him any harm to find out that even Flash can't do that sort of thing! We'll fix up with Peter Passeleigh to take charge of Flash at once, and that'll give Charlie his chance. Johnny, my boy, things couldn't possibly have turned out better for—my little scheme!"

Failures—and Successes!

OUTWARDLY as calm and serene as ever, but inwardly decidedly pleased with the way events were shaping, Valerie walked through the raftered lounge hall of Sunnylands Farm a few minutes later.

Full details of Johnny's plans for the grand gypsy sing-song arranged for to-night had just been posted on the board, and most of the guests were gathering around to read them.

The knowledge that a car had just driven away with the disgruntled Bantry family seemed to have heartened everyone, and despite the present overcast sky, everyone was hopeful that Johnny's latest stunt was going to prove a worthy successor to the many other bright schemes he had thought out for previous occasions.

In the distance Valerie had already glimpsed Peter Passeleigh with Flash, being spoken to very earnestly by Charlie. Now, gathering a distinctly satisfying impression from the other conversations she overheard, Valerie made her way through to the winter garden on the south side of the farm-house, where tall ivy geraniums grew luxuriously close to the glass, and nectarines ripened against the mellow stone wall.

She found Dorothy Dean, as she had anticipated, neatly trimming the plants where necessary. Her Uncle Nathan was flustering about with a water-can, clumsily making, as usual, nearly as much work as he did.

"Hallo, Val!" Dorothy greeted the girl detective. "Sorry I was such a misery again last night—"

"When?" Valerie asked, her eyes opening as though she had completely forgotten all about Dorothy's distress. "Oh, the Bantrys, of course! Well, they've gone now, thank goodness—"

Dorothy laughed uncertainly. "I'm afraid, Val, I broke down rather badly," she ruefully confessed. "I can't understand it myself now—I seem to be getting so nery these days for no reason at all, and it isn't a bit like me. It looked such a terrible mess last night, yet this morning everything's so different. The ceiling's drying out beautifully, and there's no damage we can't put right. And when you give permission for the bath-room to be unlocked—"

"That, Dorothy," put in Valerie in a changed voice, "is what I came to see you about. You see, I've still got a rather important clue in there."

"A clue?" Dorothy cried excitedly. Uncle Nathan set down the watering-can with a clatter.

"Where?" he ejaculated; and, removing his glasses, polished them with nervous haste. "What kind of clue, Miss Drew?"

Valerie smiled mysteriously. "That's something I can't exactly tell you," she answered. "But it's very important. For the moment I don't want anyone to go near the bath-room. That's why I've kept the key."

Uncle Nathan blinked.

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 No. 703. "AT SCHOOL IN THE SOUTH SEAS!" one of Elizabeth Chester's fascinating foreign adventure stories.



No. 700

"I say, what good news—to think there's a clue!" he declared. "Won't everyone be glad to hear that! I say, Miss Drew, can I tell some of the guests you're really on the track at last?"

Valerie pursed her lips.

"Be careful who you tell, Uncle Nathan!" she warned him. "I don't want it generally known, of course, in case it gets to the wrong ears. But if you only mention it to really trustworthy people it won't do any harm."

Completely unaware that he had only just done so, Uncle Nathan once more removed his spectacles and polished them.

"Yes, of course," he agreed. "I shall be the soul of discretion, Miss Drew."

Five minutes later, leaving the farmhouse by a side door, Valerie stepped briskly across the countryside, feeling thoroughly satisfied with herself.

She had certainly not chosen chatter-box Uncle Nathan for his tact and discretion, but because she knew that within a very few minutes everyone at the farmhouse would know what she had said about a vital clue still being in the locked bath-room.

Amongst them, she was hoping the news would reach her secret enemy!

Little though Uncle Nathan, or even Dorothy, had guessed it, Valerie was merely setting a neat trap for the mystery foe.

She wanted him to return to the bath-room, and this time, unsuspected by anyone else, Valerie would be watching for him.

From the bath-room window she had already taken careful stock of the countryside. She had observed a small, isolated hill, so situated that, from its top, she would be able to keep perfect observation on the ledge of brickwork outside the bath-room window. That ledge, from every other angle, was hidden from sight by the two thatched gables on the roof.

Now, taking a pair of powerful binoculars with her, Valerie was making for that hill at top speed.

Without adventure, Valerie reached the chosen vantage point and, sinking into the cover of a convenient clump of bushes, began to keep careful observation on the now distant farmhouse.

Soon, however, she found herself glancing up with increasing apprehension at the sky. It had darkened considerably.

She was wondering whether the rain would keep off, when all at once she saw something which immediately caused her to forget the gathering clouds completely.

Not two hundreds yards away was Charlie Deeds—and Flash!

Flash, on a lead, was straining to follow a scent. Charlie, grinning with excitement, was hurrying along behind the eager Alsatian as fast as he could.

But the thing was—Flash was making straight for the very spot where Valerie was hidden!

In a flash of understanding, Valerie guessed what had happened.

Flash had naturally been quite unable to pick up any scent from the red veil Charlie had found in the bath-room, but he had come unexpectedly on Valerie's scent instead. That had naturally decided Flash immediately.

For the moment Valerie felt cold with dismay at this unexpected development.

The very last person she wanted to see here was Charlie.

Opening her handbag, Valerie took out an unusual little silver whistle and blew one sharp, compelling blast on it.

To human ears the whistle gave no audible sound at all; but Flash, with



PRETENDING to turn off the still-running tap, Valerie glanced in the mirror at Charlie's back. Clever though Charlie fancied himself, he little knew that the clue he was determined to conceal from the girl detective was now perfectly clear to her!

his keener and different hearing, was aware of it instantly.

Giving one joyful yelp, he bounded forward so suddenly that he snatched the lead from Charlie's hand. Then, at top speed, he raced towards the clump of bushes where Valerie was concealed.

"Hi, come here, Flash! You silly idiot!" cried Charlie, angry and excited at the same moment. "Don't do anything without me! Wait until I catch you!"

He started to run as fast as he could in pursuit of the truant Alsatian, sure that Flash was at the end of the trail.

Luckily, Flash's superior speed gave him a big advantage. He crashed through the bushes, while Charlie was still some yards behind. With a puzzled, questioning bark, he pulled up and stood with head on one side, tongue lolling, gazing at Valerie as she lay under the leaves.

"Clever old boy!" Valerie whispered. She gave her pet an affectionate pat, but her brisk manner told Flash at once it was no time for the usual civilities. "Take this, old boy!" she instructed tensely, giving him one of her leather gauntlets. "Take it back to the farmhouse!" she impressed on him. "Back—home!"

Flash accepted the glove, whimpered a puzzled protest, and, turning away in the nick of time, darted back into the open.

"Here! Hey, what's the game?" gasped Charlie breathlessly, as he nearly fell over Flash. His eyes opened wider as he looked at his mouth. "What have you found? What's that you've picked up? Come here at once! Give it to me!"

Valerie could not repress a smile as, watching her pet, she saw him stop, wait until Charlie had all but caught him, then gambol playfully on, with Charlie panting and protesting in vain pursuit. There was quite a lot for Charlie to learn about Flash, and his first lesson was starting now.

In a few minutes they had disappeared completely, and Valerie, safe again, was once more keeping her vigil on the distant farmhouse.

Suddenly a thrill shot through her.

She had seen a slight movement on the roof.

A figure had emerged from the doorway of the loft, and was just starting to move cautiously along the ledge on the face of the wall.

Adjusting her binoculars more finely still, Valerie had a brief glimpse of brilliant red hair and a long trailing garment like a macintosh. Then, to her dismay, the shower of rain which had threatened for so long chose that very moment to descend.

It swept in a grey swirl across the intervening landscape, turning the farmhouse immediately to a shapeless blur and blotting out the figure on the ledge altogether.

When the shower ceased little more than two or three minutes later, the figure had vanished completely.

Though Valerie waited for nearly another hour, it did not reappear.

Rising at last, stiff from inaction and discouraged, she decided to return to Sunnylands. She had glimpsed her enemy for the first time, but only under the most tantalising conditions. The red hair had looked long, like a woman's, and the macintosh suggested a similar sex. Yet nobody staying at the farm had hair of such a brilliant, distinctive hue.

All that she knew for certain was that her message, left with Uncle Nathan, had got through and alarmed her enemy. And that enemy, beyond any further shadow of doubt, was somebody living openly at the farm!

It was only as she was nearing the farm again that Valerie suddenly recollected her pet. Peals of laughter, swiftly succeeded by angry cries in Charlie's familiar tones, drew her to the paddock. There, looking over the gate, Valerie saw an amazing scene.

Flash, still with her glove grasped between his teeth, was nimbly dodging a dozen laughing guests, who, at Charlie's urgent request, had evidently joined in this strange game of hide-and-seek.

Easily master of the situation, Flash anticipated all their manoeuvres, and dodged every time they tried to catch him.

"Hallo, Val! Sherlock's been

having the time of his life!" Johnny Jevons laughingly greeted her, as Valerie leaned on the closed gate to watch. "Charlie's been out and got a clue all by himself, but Flash won't let him see what it is!"

"Really?" Valerie sweetly responded. "Flash, what is it? What have you got there, old boy?"

Charlie gave a whoop of alarm and disappointment as he saw Valerie so close to his prize.

"Come here, Flash!" he roared. "Don't let her have it! You picked it up for me, you idiot! We'll soon find out who the criminal really is now—"

"Why, Charlie, what makes you think that?" Valerie asked, as Flash, trotting up to her, surrendered the coveted "clue." "This is only my missing glove—I must have lost it while I was out for a walk. Thanks ever so much for finding it."

"Y-y-your glove?" stammered Charlie dazedly.

And a completely stunned look came over the face of the would-be detective as Valerie, smilingly slipping the glove on her right hand, revealed beyond question that it was the counterpart of the one she already wore.

"Good old Sherlock!" chortled Johnny Jevons, leading the peal of laughter which immediately rewarded the unhappy sleuth.

Furious at his humiliation, Charlie thrust his hands into his trousers pockets and strode out of the paddock without another word. Valerie herself was just on the point of turning away when little Jim Muddle, the page-boy at the farm, came hurrying up to her with a letter.

"A boy on a bicycle brought it, Miss Drew," he reported. "Said there was no reply."

Valerie thanked him, stared for a moment at the printed address, then tore the flap open. Drawing out a folded sheet, she felt a thrill of deep satisfaction as she read:

"I accept your terms and believe in your guarantee of good faith. I want what you have to offer me, and will tell you something useful in return. I will be at the sing-song in the paddock soon after 8.30 to-night.

"P. L."

Paizi Logan, the mystery gipsy woman, had received her message, and this was her reply.

Despite the disappointment she had just received, Valerie Drew was elated. She might still learn exactly where to look for Dorothy Dean's sinister enemy!

The Boy with the Torch!

"SING up, my brave tziganes!" directed Johnny Jevons encouragingly, waving his arms, encased in the braided sleeves of his brightly coloured jacket. "A bit more pep and a pennyworth more polish, please, Peter Passleighvitch! Off you go!"

Valerie Drew watched with an amused smile as Johnny set to work to conduct the impromptu choir chosen to render the musical honours at his amusing gipsy sing-song.

It was the same evening. Dinner, earlier to-day, had been served as soon as it was dark, in order to ensure that there should be as much time as possible for to-night's unconventional revels.

Gazing around at the scene in the

paddock, Valerie appreciated what a triumph the gathering was for Johnny's cheerful inventiveness and organising ability.

An old caravan, found in a neglected corner of the farm, had been dragged to the spot and decorated with bright curtains and coloured papers. Lit by hanging oil lanterns, it now served as a running buffet.

Practically all the guests at the farm had, under Johnny's encouragement, disguised themselves as gypsies. With their brown faces and brilliant costumes, they were, in many cases, almost unrecognisable.

A band had been formed amongst volunteers from the younger element. Equipped with combs in tissue paper, and almost anything that would make something resembling a musical sound,



CHRISTINE Breaks Out Again!

"Temper!"

That was the unenviable nickname which Christine Wilmer once earned at Cliff House School, for it was so easy for her to fly into a rage. With Barbara Redfern's help, Christine managed to control that fault for good, it seemed.

Suddenly, though, Christine flares up in the old, old style. And really she has some justification. It has to remain a secret, however, and because of that there is much unpleasantness, involving not only Christine herself, but also loyal Babs & Co.

Don't miss this magnificent COMPLETE Hilda Richards story — next Saturday. Be sure to order your

SCHOOLGIRL
in good time.

they were enlivening the night to their hearts' content.

Even for the older people it was a cheery occasion, for the unsettled morning had been followed by a perfect evening, and it was thoroughly comfortable to sit in deck chairs and merely watch the others.

While appearing, on the surface, to be enjoying the unusual lark as heartily as anyone else, Valerie was watching points closely. For a little while she was in the band, busy with a bell; when the choir seemed short of sopranos, she lent them her voice to keep things going. But not for a moment did Valerie forget the true purpose of this gathering, known only to Johnny and herself.

It had actually been organised to make it possible for Paizi Logan, the

mystery woman who appeared to be anything but the gipsy she professed to be, to come to Sunnylands Farm without attracting any notice.

A glance at her wrist-watch suddenly told Valerie that it was very near half-past eight at last.

Watching for a favourable opportunity, she slipped away from the merry throng around the caravan, and moved discreetly to the quietest corner of the paddock.

In her handbag was the mystery key which Flash had brought her in the ruins—the key she was now convinced she had every right to offer in exchange for the vital information she hoped the woman could give her.

Suddenly, in the shadows just beyond the edge of the paddock, Valerie's keen eyes detected a cautious movement. In another moment the hedge moved, and a figure crept quietly through a gap and stood fully revealed. The light of a distant lamp shone on a brown face with an aquiline nose and bright, deep-set, searching eyes which turned inquiringly in Valerie's direction.

Recognising the woman instantly, Valerie gave a slight sign with her hand. Reassured, Paizi Logan moved softly forward to Valerie's side.

"Good-evening," she said, her tone cautious, yet businesslike. "It's a clever disguise you're wearing, Miss Drew, but I saw through it at once. Maybe I'm an expert."

The statement surprised and puzzled Valerie, but it was not a line to be followed at the moment.

"I'm very glad you've come, Mrs. Logan," she answered, in the same low tones. "In my note I mentioned a key."

Paizi Logan nodded. "Yes, you did! That key," she declared, with a sudden change of manner which impressed Valerie considerably, "means everything in the world to me!"

"Just a rusty, ordinary key?" Valerie exclaimed.

The dark-eyed woman came a step nearer; her hand, resting on Valerie's arm, trembled as though some still deeper emotion had taken possession of her.

"That key was stolen from me," she assured Valerie, "by the very person you're after. I didn't know it last time we met, though I was suspicious. For double-faced treachery that person has no equal. I don't wonder you've been puzzled so far, Miss Drew—you're not the first one who's been deceived. But, unless I've made a mistake, you're straight—you'd stick to any bargain you made. And so will I! Give me the key, and I'll tell you—"

"Stop! Stay where you are!" a voice triumphantly rang out that very moment. "She's here—the very woman I've been after all day! I've caught her talking to—Valerie Drew!"

The voice which uttered those dramatic words was the voice of Charlie Deeds.

Filled with consternation, Valerie turned her head just as the brilliant ray of an electric torch leapt to being in her rival's hand and shone full on Paizi Logan's confused and bewildered face!

WHAT a startling happening this is! Once again interfering Charlie Deeds looks like ruining Valerie's chances. On no account miss the continuation of this grand story, so order next Saturday's copy well in advance. That is the only way to make absolutely CERTAIN of your copy.

Another exciting, romantic story of the 18th Century, featuring—

JESS AND HIGHWAYMAN JACK

By
IDA MELBOURNE



The Runaways!

THE sun's setting, dad, and by the look of things there'll be a frost to-night. Shall I draw the big curtains and heap logs on the fire?"

And Jess Reynolds, turning from the latticed windows of the Rising Sun Inn, looked towards its landlord, her father, who sat before the roaring fire in his high-backed chair, drawing at his pipe and dreaming.

"What—what? Draw the curtains; make up the fire? Yes, by all means, m'dear," he said. "Let's shut out the night. When it comes I'll warrant it'll be cold enough to freeze poor travellers' overcoats solid."

Jess thought so, too, and was glad that she was indoors. There was no better fun than being snug indoors when the outside was bleak. All the same, she had thought for others—for travellers by the stage coach, for lone riders, and for those unfortunates who had to make their way on foot.

She pulled the heavy curtains across, and the night was shut out; then, fetching huge logs of wood, she heaped them on to the great open fire, which sent smoke curling up the open-mouthed chimney.

Outside, the inn sign creaked in the wind, but inside there was only the sound of crackling wood.

"Ah, it's lovely here, dad!" sighed Jess. "And won't travellers be glad to see the fire? Wonder if any will pull up here? Who knows—one day we might have someone very important—a prince, or—"

She broke off because there came to her ears from outside the sharp ring of horses' hoofs on the hard, frosty road. The horses were moving at a spanking pace, but whatever vehicle it was they pulled was of too light weight to make much sound.

"Hark—hark!" cried Jess, her eyes a-sparkle with excitement, as she held up a finger. "They're stopping here."

"Ay, horses slowing," agreed her father, sitting up.

"Whoa!" came a shout from outside. Jess ran to the door with light, skip-

ping steps that were almost a dance; but before she could open it, it was thrust in from the outside, and there entered a young man clad in a long grey coat with three-tiered cape.

"Come, sister!" he said. "My faith, but it's grandly warm in here!"

Standing aside, her face radiant in welcome, Jess dropped a curtsy as a young woman of fashion followed the handsome man over the threshold of the inn.

The girl—for she was hardly more than seventeen—had a sweetly pretty face, the loveliness of which had not been marred by the weariness of travel. It was pale but well shaped, and her

A HARSH FATHER—

forbade his daughter to marry the young man of her choice. But—

JESS AND HIGHWAYMAN JACK—

saw that she did; and that the father relented.

bright violet eyes were soft and lovely to look upon.

"Good-evening, my lady!" said Jess after a moment of spellbound wonder at such exquisite loveliness.

"Good-evening!" said the visitor, with a gracious smile. "Oh, how lovely and warm it is! And I am half-frozen."

Jess' father stepped forward with welcoming smile.

"Walk in, sir. And you, too, madam," he said. "Here are seats by the fire; and in a moment you shall have hot coffee, hot tea, or what you will. Quick, Jess—get busy!"

Jess was already helping the girl out of her heavy travelling coat and ushering her to a cosy seat in the inglenook fireplace.

The young man did not approach the fire, she noticed; he stood near to the door, head on one side, as though listening expectantly.

"I think they must have mistaken the route at the crossroads. Let's pray it is so," he murmured in relieved tones.

Hearing that, Jess' father pricked his ears.

"Were you followed by footpads or highwaymen, then, sir?" he asked.

The young man turned to him; and Jess noticed that he flushed, and a slightly alarmed expression came to his eyes.

"Why, no; just—just someone we want to avoid—someone we do not yearn for as a travelling companion," he said, with a wry smile. "If there is room my sister and I would like to spend the night here; dinner and a good night's rest, and stable for the horses."

"It shall be arranged," said Jess' father. "The best of everything for yourself and your sister, sir."

Jess turned to the young woman.

"If you would wash, there's a kettle on the range," she said. "Hot water in plenty."

"Just what I need," said the girl, Phyllis, rising. "I am travel stained and untidy. I'll enjoy the cosiness here all the more for being fresh and clean."

But as Jess led the way to the stairs the young man gave a sharp cry, ran to the door, and pulled it wide.

"Wait a bit, Phyllis!" he called hoarsely. "I hear the horses—"

Jess heard the girl give a frightened gasp.

"Will he stop here?"

"He may indeed," said the young man anxiously. "If he sees our chaise—but no, no. It's in stables already, thank goodness! But he'll stop—"

Jess looked from one to the other wonderingly. Both were alarmed, the young woman now as much as her brother. Her lips were parted, and one hand was at her heart, as though it was palpating terribly. She was frightened; no other word could explain her manner.

But frightened of what?

The young man, after staring out for a moment into the gathering dusk, whipped inside and put his back to the door.

"Landlord," he exclaimed, "do I look an honest man?"

"Why, sir, of course," said Jess' father, taken aback.

"Then do not mistrust me if I ask you to deny that a young lady and gentleman have stopped here should the question be asked."

"Oh!" murmured the landlord, looking down his nose a little.

"I will not insult you with an offer of a bribe, sir," said the young man in

BETWEEN OURSELVES



MY DEAR READERS.—A letter, with a sad confession—and a moral!

That is what I have just received from one of my readers; and that is what I want to chat about for a few moments.

This reader, it appears—we'll call her Joan, just for to-day—usually gets her *SCHOOLGIRL* on Saturday mornings from the first newsagent she happens to pass. She does not go to the same one every week; sometimes she may go to an entirely different one for as many as three or four weeks running.

Now, in normal times Joan has never had any difficulty about obtaining her favourite paper. But last week-end—well, here is the story in Joan's own rather pathetic words:

"I just couldn't get one anywhere, Mr. Editor. I went to dozens of shops, and not one of them had a single *SCHOOLGIRL* left. They all said they weren't getting in so many, because of the war, and they didn't want to have any left over. What exactly do they mean?"

Well, that is the story; that is the woeful confession. And now here is the moral for you all, and some advice as to how you can prevent yourselves being similarly disappointed.

Owing to the war, no copies of *THE SCHOOLGIRL* which are unsold can be sent back to us by the newsagents, as is ordinarily the case. This is in order to save paper and transport. Therefore, newsagents will stock only the minimum number of copies which they think they can sell. We shall no longer be able to give newsagents plenty of copies, to allow for casual buyers.

Now, it's clear, you'll agree, that if newsagents are only going to stock those copies which they feel certain of selling, the only way for you to

make certain of securing your copy is to let the newsagents know. Decide upon one newsagent, therefore, from whom you will have your copy every week. On page 11 of this issue you will find a special form. Sign it, give it to Mr. Newsagent, and then you will not only be helping him, helping the Government, and helping to save waste—but you will have no fear of missing your weekly treat!

I'm afraid I've taken up a tremendous amount of space to tell you this, but it's very important, isn't it? So do please forgive me.

In next Saturday's issue—

"CHRISTINE BREAKS OUT AGAIN!"

is the "top-of-the-bill" feature, another magnificent Complete Cliff House School story by Hilda Richards, featuring Christine Wilmer—who, thanks to her ungovernable temper in the past, was nicknamed "Temper"!

But something happens which makes Christine go back to her old tempestuousness. What that something is exactly I won't tell you, because it would spoil your enjoyment of the story, but I can say that it is connected with Christine's hair, of which she is very proud. And it is also of such a nature that I know you will sympathise with her actions—and that many of you would probably have acted in just the same way.

There is a secret about Christine's hair and, touchy on many things, she is desperately anxious to keep the secret to herself. But she cannot.

Innocently, Babs & Co. place Christine's secret in danger. There is trouble; things go from bad to worse; mean-spirited girls deliberately goad Christine, until finally she breaks out more furiously than ever before.

You will be gripped from beginning to end of this splendid story. Don't miss it. As usual, of course, next week's programme will include further thrilling developments in Isobel Norton's intriguing girl-detective story; another charming Jess and Highwayman Jack story; and more of Patricia's Bright and Useful Pages. You'll remember that Registration Form on page 11, won't you.

With best wishes,

Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.

then a grating as the braked wheels of a chaise dragged on the ground.

In the hall stood the young man Gerald, pale-faced but proud-looking, and Jess saw that his right hand had gone inside his coat to his sword.

"Quick—hide—the parlour over there!" exclaimed Jess. "Leave this to me—"

Her father, who had stood in frowning silence, gave a gasp, but she did not heed him at this moment, for in a crisis he was apt to debate so long that he was swept willy-nilly by the trend of events.

And this was a time and occasion for swift action.

"Hide—hide—!" cried Jess. "Hide, and you may drive on to-morrow in safety—"

The young man was silent and motionless as a statue for a moment; but then, hearing an angry shouting voice outside, he swung round, and with quick steps reached the parlour Jess had indicated.

He was hardly out of sight when the main door was flung open, and in burst a red-faced powerfully built man whose eyes blazed.

"Hey—landlord!" he roared. "I'm seeking a runaway couple, a good-for-nothing rascal, and my daughter he has stolen from me. Have they been here? Quick man—answer! Yes or no—"

Help from Highwayman Jack!

JESS saw her father open and close his mouth. As usual in a crisis, he could not make a decision. He did not want to lie, but on the other hand, he did not want to betray the young couple.

"My father is hard of hearing, sir," she said sweetly to the irate man. "But perhaps I can help you. If the young couple were in a post chaise—"

"They were!"

"They came along this road. I heard their horses' hoofs clattering—they were going at terrific speed," said Jess. "If you delay here—"

The irate father turned back to the door.

"On the London Road?" he asked.

"Yes—this is the London Road. But beware of Highwayman's Heath," said Jess. "It's time for the coach to be held up again. Laughing Jack has given it a rest these past four days. If you wait until darkness falls, he may get you."

The red-faced father stood frowning in the doorway.

"Laughing Jack, eh? Maybe he has stopped the runaways already. If so, then for the first time I'll have cause to thank a highwayman."

He slammed the door, and was gone.

Jess, in excited relief, did a skip in the air, for she had disliked the father as much as she liked his daughter and the handsome young man. Nothing could delight Jess more than that the happy pair should reach their destination safely.

"And, my goodness—what joy if gallant Laughing Jack should hold him up and take his sword," she breathed.

"Jess, Jess!" reproved her father, coming to from his seeming trance. "'Tis no way to speak of gentry—you should not wish travellers ill, nor call rascally highwaymen gallant."

A glimmer of fun showed in Jess' eyes then. The title "gallant" had slipped out automatically—for to her Laughing Jack was gallant. Laughing Jack, unknown to her father, was a friend of hers. He was no rascal, but chivalrous and kind.

agitated tone. "But it means much to us. If you refuse we must drive on—"

"Too late—too late!" murmured the girl and swayed slightly, as though she might swoon.

Then, recovering herself, she suddenly came to vigorous life. Wheeling, she lifted the hem of her long frock and went swiftly up the stairs.

Jess for a moment was off her guard; but then, swinging round, went after her to the landing.

"Which room—which room?" fretted Phyllis.

Jess ran to the door of the largest best room and hurled it open.

"Here, please!" she said; and added in low tone: "I cannot answer for my father, but for my own part I shall not betray that you have been here."

In the doorway the lovely girl paused, and then, taking Jess' arm, drew her into the room and closed the door.

"Something's terribly wrong—what is it?" asked Jess earnestly. "If there is anything I can do, please let me know.

Are the Bow Street Runners after you? Is that it?"

The girl looked quite shocked for a moment, and then faintly amused.

"Why—no, no!" she exclaimed. "It isn't that at all. The man who is pursuing us is my own father."

A touch of colour came to her cheeks, and of a sudden Jess jumped to the exciting, romantic truth.

"Why! You are eloping!" she cried.

"Eloping, yes—and if we can but get to London we shall be married before my father can intervene. We are in love, and it is wrong and selfish and foolish of him to try to come between us. If he catches us, then I know that there will be a duel. He is a wonderful swordsman, and—and he might not spare Gerald."

Jess gave her a look of deep, warm sympathy.

"There's only one thing to do—hide!" she exclaimed. "Stay here in your room, and leave it to me!"

As Jess ran down the stairs, the clatter of hoofs came from outside, and

"'Twas but a trivial passing thought, father," she smiled.

"And another thing, my dear," he frowned. "This is my inn, not yours. It is for me to decide. I am not sure yet that you did right in letting the man go away. As nearly as possible you told him a lie, and—"

His words were brought to an abrupt conclusion by the inn door being thrust open.

Like a roaring lion the father rushed in, his face suffused with colour.

"You lied to me! The ostler has shown me their chaise. They are here—here, and I demand to see that craven, good-for-nothing, cowardly—"

"A coward, am I, sir?" asked a quiet voice in scorn, and the young man stepped out of the parlour.

Instantly they both drew their rapiers; the steel flashed in the firelight and then clashed.

A table crashed over, a chair was knocked sideways, as the handsome young man and the angry father danced to and fro, their eyes glinting, lips taut, left hands poised in the air.

From the landing came a scream, and Phyllis, hands to cheeks, eyes wide in horror, came down the broad, red-carpeted staircase with a swish of a long frock.

"Oh, stay, stay—father!" she cried in terror.

The young man turned his head for a moment. It was his undoing. A quick jab from his opponent's darting rapier sent his own clattering across the floor, and next moment the sharp point was at his breast.

Jess struggled with her father so that she might go to his aid, but she was held. Phyllis, swaying slightly, seemed hardly to be breathing; she stood as one petrified.

"And now," said her father, in grim triumph, "he is at my mercy. Take your choice, Phyllis. Will you come with me? If your answer is 'yes,' then I sheath my rapier. If it is 'no'—why, the—"

He made a slight forward movement. "Say 'no'!" choked Gerald, with a show of courage that sent a thrill through Jess.

But Phyllis, seeing him at her father's mercy, clasped her hands.

"If I said 'no' he would kill you. Oh, father, though I'll never forgive you, I'll come with you—"

"Phyllis!" cried the young man.

But Phyllis ran for the doorway, not even pausing for her travelling coat.

Jess' father slackened his grasp then; and Jess, swinging round, ran across the room, snatched the thick coat from the chair where she had dropped it, and ran after the sobbing girl.

"Miss Phyllis, your coat," she whispered. "Oh, but I'm so dreadfully, dreadfully sorry."

Phyllis, swallowing hard, mastered herself.

"It was the only way," she said. "Oh, but if only I could escape. If only—"

Jess pressed her arm.

"Wait! There may be a way even yet," she said. "You must go with him; but first he will change his horse. Then, with darkness fallen, he must cross Highwayman's Heath—"

Phyllis met her eyes, and then shook her head slowly.

"There will be no highwayman to stop us," she said.

But Jess smiled to herself, and felt a thrill of excitement.

"Don't be so sure," she said.

Without another word she slipped away, ran round to the back of the inn, and from a corridor took her thick coat and scarf. Running then to the stables,

she seized a mount which stood awaiting a rider who would call for a change of horses.

Leading him out while the ostlers stood and discussed the exciting happening, Jess climbed to the saddle, lifted her frock, and rode astride—rode for the heath, Highwayman's Heath, where, if the luck was with her, Laughing Jack would be loitering.

ON THE dark heath Jess cupped her hands to her mouth and gave a shrill bird call.

Three times she gave that signal, and then from the distance came the answer, and a horseman loomed up.

"Greetings, Laughing Jack!" she murmured. "Has the London coach had rest enough, then? I guessed that you might be lurking here to-night!"

"You guessed wisely," he replied, and laughed. "Let us hope that the soldiers are not so clever. But need I tell you that it is not gold I am seeking, nor jewels. I have news that on the coach to-night there may be more things I seek—"

But Jess knew that his hold-ups were staged not for the purpose of robbing good travellers, but only, as he had explained to her, that he might gain possession of what was rightly his, but was held by another. It was a certain traveller he sought—and certain papers.

"But tell me," he added, "what brings you here on such a freezing night, good friend?"

In a few brief words then she told him just what had happened at the inn, and his every comment showed that his sympathy, like hers, was with the young couple.

"It came to my mind that perchance on their way they might meet a highwayman, and—"

Jess wheeled her horse, for there came the clatter of hoofs on the heath road, and two dim lights showed in the distance.

"A chaise!" exclaimed Highwayman Jack.

"And the father and daughter!" breathed Jess.

Highwayman Jack rode forward. "Come, then; and you shall see highway robbery of another kind," he said.

Jess was twenty yards behind when he crossed the road, to take shelter behind a large, shadowy bush. Down the road came the chaise.

Highwayman Jack drew his pistols, straightened his mask, and then, when the chaise was nearly level, cantered on to the road, just ahead of it.

"Whoa! Stand and deliver!" he shouted. "Your money or your lives."

The chaise slowed; the horses slithered, and from the window Phyllis' father glared out.

"What's this? What's this?" he roared.

"Stand and deliver!" called Highwayman Jack. "Come, I will not harm you."

"Harm me!" roared the father, in fury. "I'm not such a cowardly, blackguardly ruffian as you, sir."

He sprang down from the coach and drew his rapier.

"Take care, Jack!" breathed Jess anxiously.

She had had proof enough of the father's skill in swordsmanship!

But Highwayman Jack, putting his pistols back in their holsters, sprang down from his horse and flashed out his rapier.

Blades clashing in the chaise lights, the swordsmen danced in the semi-darkness of the roadway. This way and that the duellers moved; and then there came a clang as a sword hurtled away in the darkness.

This time it was the father who had lost his rapier, and he stood chalk white, completely at the highwayman's mercy.

"Come, sir," smiled the highwayman.



"THERE must be another duel," Jess told Highwayman Jack, in tremulous voice. "And you—you must lose it!" Her mysterious friend stared at her in amazement.

"I shall not run you through; but as the winner of the duel I must claim the prize—the hand of your daughter in a minute."

Under cover of darkness, Jess dismounted, tiptoed to the far side of the chaise, and opened the door gently.

"Have no fear!" she breathed. "Trust him; he is a gallant, not a robber or thief."

The heavy clouds drifted past the moon, leaving a gap, and a shaft of moonlight fell upon the scene as Phyllis, quaking a little, stepped from the chaise.

She had recognised Jess' voice, and although bewildered by this strange turn of events, felt encouraged.

"Phyllis, you cannot!" protested her father.

But Phyllis stepped forward to Highwayman Jack, who, having broken the father's rapier at the hilt, had sheathed his own.

Jess looked at him with deep admiration as he doffed his tricorne and bowed in a manner that a courtier might have envied, his right arm forward, his left to his heart. But she was puzzled.

Her idea had been that Highwayman Jack should whisk Phyllis away, that he should—

The dance ended after a dozen steps. For Laughing Jack suddenly seized Phyllis by the waist, and with the greatest ease, almost before she had time to give a little gasp of dismay, swung her on to Blackie's saddle.

Jess clapped her hands in glee, and then laughed as the furious father, recovering from the shock, ran forward.

"Bring her back!" he raved. "Bring her back—"

Highwayman Jack's laughing voice replied.

Then he was running away with his captive.

"Back—back to the inn!" the father shouted. "I do not leave this district until I have my daughter back again!"

Jess Reynolds had already wheeled her horse, and with clattering hoofs she urged him down the road, back to the inn for which Highwayman Jack and his captive were already heading.

Won by a Trick!

JESS leaned against the door of the best bed-room in the hotel and laughed until the tears coursed down her cheeks. On the bed sat Phyllis, her eyes dancing.

"Oh, but that was wonderful!" she gasped. "To think that he should bring me here—a highwayman risking so much. And for what?"

"Because he is gallant," said Jess, smiling. "Because he is no ordinary highwayman."

"All is well," said Phyllis happily, "save that my father is here, too, and will not leave until I am found."

That was a complication certainly. Nevertheless there was a good chance that while the father slept, Gerald and Phyllis could sneak away—and when next he met them they would be married.

Leaving Phyllis to find out what was happening below, and warning her to keep very quiet, Jess hurried down to the hall.

In the centre of it the father and Gerald were arguing furiously.

"See what has happened now, sir!" fumed Gerald. "She has been taken away by a highwayman. Was she not better with me?"

The father stood with his back to the fire, livid with rage.

"No; at least, he was brave."

"Ah! And would you have her marry him, then?" demanded Gerald.

Jess saw the triumphant look on the father's face.

"She can marry no one without my permission; for I have sent a rider on to London. Whoever would marry must get a licence from Doctors' Commons, as you know. My rider will take my ban. No licence will be issued. No marriage can take place."

Jess gave a little gasp of disappointment; for now it did not make any difference whether Phyllis hid or not. Not even a midnight ride could aid them.

This delay had served the father's purpose, and, in consequence, he had won the struggle.

"Why, sir," Jess protested to the father, "what have you ill against so well-favoured a young man as this?"

"What!" the father cried, startled by her cheek in interrupting. "Why, that is my affair! She shall marry whom I choose—a brave man, not a craven coward!"

"I am no coward!" flared Gerald.

"It was not he," murmured Jess, "who let Phyllis be taken by the highwayman, sir."

"I would have died first!" said Gerald stoutly. "And if I find the rascal, then, even if he is armed and I have only my hands, I will challenge him!"

"Hear, hear!" cried Jess.

The father regarded her angrily, and then flashed a look of scorn at his would-be son-in-law.

"You! I'd like to see you challenge Highwayman Jack! Why, if you had the courage for that, I'd not think so ill of you!"

Gerald stepped forward eagerly.

"You mean that, sir? If I can get her back, bring her here—well and unharmed—"

"If—if—if—poof! If you can do that, sir, unaided, why, you shall have her for your bride!" said the father witheringly. "If—if—but a swordsmen too good for me would run you through at the second thrust!"

Jess, her eyes shining with excitement, turned across the hall, and went into the inn yard. At the end of it she whistled softly, and a voice answered her.

"What news?" came the voice of Laughing Jack to the accompaniment of a soft chuckle. "If there is a duel between the two, I must certainly see it!"

"Shush! There must be no duel!" said Jess. "Unless it is between you and the young man. And you must lose!"

"What? I must lose? Would you have me pierced through by a rapier?" he asked in gentle reproof.

"No, no—it need be but pretence!" said Jess quickly. "But if this young man can recapture Phyllis, they can marry with the father's consent."

"So-ho!" said Laughing Jack. "What fun we have! Why, little matchmaker, that is easily arranged! Wait while I but fix my mask anew. Then go inside and prepare to watch."

Jess returned to the hall to find Gerald buckling his sword-belt, and slipping on his travelling-coat.

But before it was buttoned the inn door was burst open.

Dressed in flying cloak, under which a rich velvet jacket showed, a masked highwayman stood in the doorway, his laughing eyes looking through slits in the mask.

"Come, gentlemen, love you the lady so little that you lack the courage to reclaim her with the sword?" he cried.

Gerald, whipping out his sword, crossed the floor; but Laughing Jack darted through the doorway, and the clatter of his horse's hoofs came almost at once.

The rest was up to Jess. While the father in the stables roared for a horse, she led Phyllis down, wrapped in her thick coat.

Down the road in the moonlight two duellers fought, and Jess, taking advantage of the trees at the roadside, led Phyllis to the scene.

But it was no mock duel that was being fought; for Gerald, his eyes flaring, fought with deadly earnest.

Laughing Jack, dancing as in a minuet, moved swiftly this way and that, parrying, and now and again thrusting.

Not until he heard Jess' voice, and Phyllis' terrified cry of fear, though, did he bring the end. Then, with a flick of the wrist, he gave the gallant young lover the coup de grace.

A shining rapier shot through the air, and Gerald, unarmed, was at the highwayman's mercy.

But as the young man turned, the highwayman jumped for his horse, and before even Gerald's fingers closed upon his rapier's hilt, Blackie was taking her master away.

Laughing Jack, waving his tricorne hat, looked back, and his merry laugh floated to them.

The clatter of hoofs was lost in the distance, and his laugh was no more than an echo, when the father came riding from the inn on a horse hurriedly saddled.

He was too late for the duel, but in time to see the lovers embrace.

"He's won!" cried Jess. "He's proved his courage! And now, sir, what have you to say?"

The father took his defeat like a man; he drew up, and held out his hand to Gerald.

"You have won her back—and therefore won her as your bride!" he said. "Who could defeat that Laughing Highwayman is fit to be called son by me!"

Jess stole away; and then, skipping and dancing, returned to the inn to give orders for another two rooms to be prepared, and the large table to be set for a celebration banquet. A right royal banquet it was, too, ordered as she knew it would be by the father!

"To your happiness together," the father toasted them—a toast which Jess and her father, guests at the banquet, also drank.

But the lovely Phyllis had another toast.

"To the highwayman gallant," she said.

"To that rascal—never!" said the father.

But Jess hid a smile.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

DON'T miss another lovely story featuring Jess and Highwayman Jack in next Saturday's **SCHOOLGIRL**. And remember that the only way to make quite certain of your copy is to order it well in advance.