

Happy Hours Every Week With The World's Most Famous Schoolgirls

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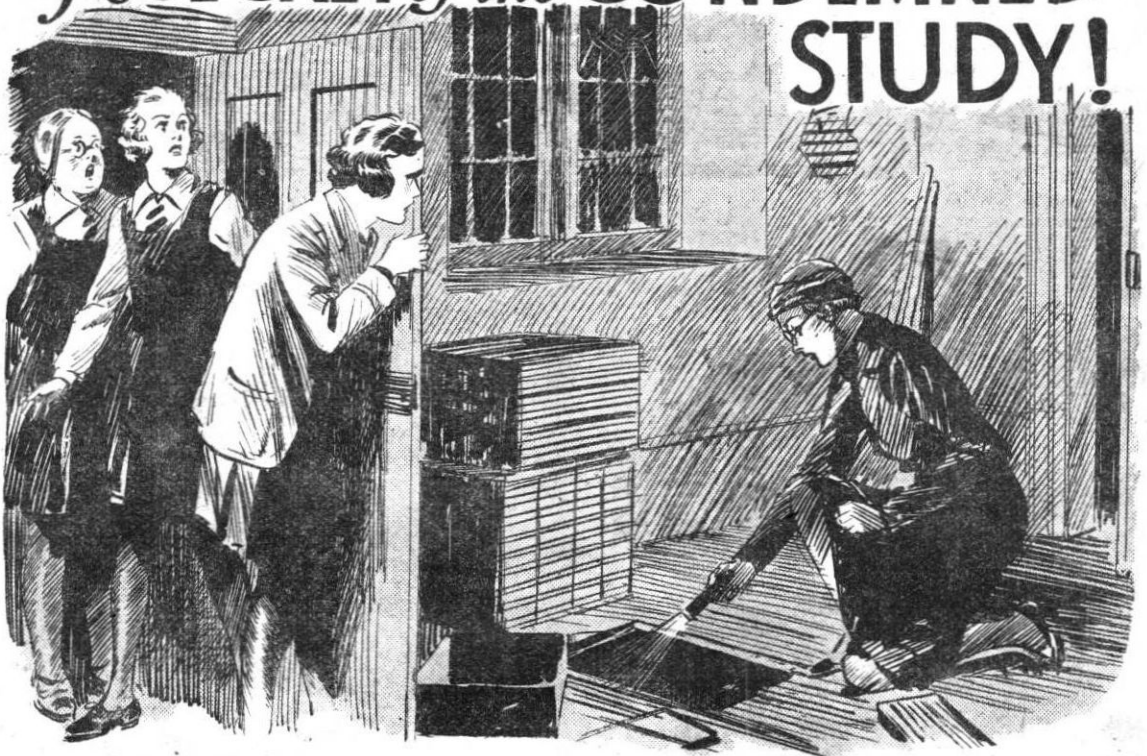
THE RAID ON MISS BULLIVANT'S STUDY!

Whatever the consequences, Babs
simply had to have that picture.

(A dramatic incident from this
week's grand complete story of
Cliff House School.)

Barbara Redfern & Co. of Cliff House School take the trail of mystery in this Powerful Long Complete story. That lovable duffer, plump Bessie Bunter, plays a big part, too.

The SECRET of the CONDEMNED STUDY!



Strange Agitation of a Mistress!



"I TUT-TELL you," plump Bessie Bunter stuttered excitedly, "the old captain's study is haunted!"

"And I tell you, old chump, that you're just imagining things!" Barbara Redfern said severely.

"But I heard—"

"We know. And you saw a great shining dragon with flaming teeth!" Mabel Lynn chuckled. "Chuck it, old Bess; we're busy. Now the question is—"

Bessie Bunter, face red and shiny, glowered at her two unconcerned chums in Study No. 4 at Cliff House. Bessie, for once, looked earnest and excited, and Bessie, of course, meant Barbara Redfern and Mabel Lynn to look excited, too.

"But look here, Babs—" spluttered the duffer of the Fourth Form.

"Can't! Other things to do, old Bess," Barbara briefly said. "We're just discussing the old girls' reunion. Which reminds me that we've got you down for a ventriloquial turn. Now— Oh, hallo, chump; come in!" she added resignedly as a knock came at the study door.

It was the untidy-haired Tomboy of the Fourth who answered that invitation—Clara Trevlyn. She, too, looked excited.

"I say, Babs, have you heard about the old captain's study? It's haunted!"

"There, now, what did I tell you?" Bessie crowed triumphantly.

And Babs and Mabs did pause at that, directing upon the Tomboy from Study No. 7 a very peculiar and searching look indeed.

What Bessie said was always open to question—for Bessie had such romantic and imaginative notions at all times. But Clara, if a Tomboy, was essentially practical and level-headed, and it was not Clara's way to spread stories and rumours without foundation.

"Look here, this isn't a joke?" Babs asked.

"Not unless it's the giddy ghost playing one," Clara said. "I distinctly saw something vague about five minutes ago in the old captain's study."

"Yes, rather, you know! And I saw a face," Bessie put in. "A gig-girl's face! I sus-say, we ought to do something! We might all be murdered in our beds!"

Babs frowned. Mabs smiled slightly. They both knew the old captain's study—Babs particularly—for it contained rather tenderly childish memories for her. Once upon a time, when Babs had been a small girl in Cliff House's Second Form, she had fagged for the then captain of the school—May Gloucester—and her contacts with that study had been many and intimate.

But those days were over now. So were the days of the old study. The whole and ancient wing in which the

study was situated had been condemned, and was fast falling to ruin.

Since the great Fielding Bequest two years ago, a new wing had sprung up in its place, and had it not been for the outbreak of war, the old captain's wing would now have been demolished, together with various other unwanted and out-of-date portions of the ancient school. As it was, the captain's study stood barred and shuttered, behind the laboratory—just awaiting its turn to be pulled down with the rest of the rooms which formed the condemned wing.

Neglect and age had made it dangerous. Ceilings and walls were crumbling. Because of its tumbledown condition, it was forbidden ground to the school.

Nobody now was particularly interested in it, and the old captain's study, which held such tender memories for Babs, was merely an old lumber-room, the lumber to be cleared away with the rest of the stuff when demolition took place.

But this— "Exciting, eh?" Clara asked.

"Rummy, too. I was showing your young sister, Doris, the volley behind the gym, and Doris biffed the ball towards the old captain's study. I went after it. Well, the ball stopped dead under the window—"

"And then you saw the ghost?" Bessie asked.

"No, not exactly," Clara grinned. "But I heard something, or somebody, moving about. I stood there for a moment, looking up at the window, and then I'm sure I saw a figure flit

across the room. After that there was a thud, as if something had been dropped."

"And that," Bessie said seriously, "was the ghost disappearing through a tut-trapdoor, or something, you know. But I saw her face," she added.

"Oh, gammon!" Mabel Lynn cried. "Well, I did, you know! Not so long ago, I happened to be looking round, you know—"

"You mean," Mabs grinned, "you were on your way to the larder to see what you could snaffle?"

"Oh, really!" Bessie looked indignant. "That's an insult, Mabs! In any case, who's worrying about grubbins when there's a tut-treasure at stake—?" And then Bessie, realising she had let a cat out of the bag, turned a fiery crimson. "Oh, really, I didn't say anything about treasure!"

Three pairs of eyes fastened upon her. Babs frowned.

"Treasure, Bess? Is that the latest little game? My hat, I've noticed you ambling off a lot lately! Have you been going to the old wing?"

Bessie looked more confused than ever.

"Oh crumbs! Oh really!" she stammered. "I—I—I—thuth—that is—well, why shouldn't there be treasure?" she added defiantly. "If I find it I shall give you some! Anyway, I did see the ghost! It was the ghost of a girl, peering at me through the window!"

Mabs and Babs glanced at each other, interest quickening in their faces. Adventure at once glimmered in Babs' eyes; mischief in Mabs'. Ghost or no ghost in the old captain's study, it certainly seemed that there was something—and something unusual and strange at that, though Bessie's fabled treasure they mentally discounted at once—Bessie was always getting some funny little bee in her bonnet.

"I say, let's go and have a look!" Babs eagerly suggested.

"But what about the old girls' reunion programme?" Mabs asked. "Miss Skinner was asking me to-day how things were going on."

"Oh, was she?" said Babs, without enthusiasm.

Babs did not particularly like Miss Skinner, the thin-faced mistress who had been at Cliff House when Babs had been in the Second Form. At the moment she was staying at the school again, having been given the temporary job of helping Miss Bullivant while she was waiting for a new appointment at a school in the North of England.

As far as Babs could make out, Miss Skinner was acting almost in a purely private capacity, and had, more or less, the status of a paid guest at the school. Certainly she had no authority over the girls.

"Well, we can go into the programme afterwards," said Babs. "The ghost first! Bessie, get torches, there's a dear."

"But how are we to get in?" Clara Trevlyn wanted to know.

Babs paused, momentarily checked. She hadn't thought of that.

Bessie, however, broke into a fat smirk.

"He, he! That's easy!" she giggled. "What price the old door in the laboratory?"

"But that's locked, chump!" Babs argued.

"Maybe!" Bessie sniffed superiorly. "But locks have keys, you know, and jolly clever girls like me can find keys to fit them! As a matter

By HILDA RICHARDS

Illustrated by T. LAIDLER

of fact, I happen to know that the coal-cellar key fits the lab door perfectly, you know!"

Babs stared. "You mean, you've tried it?" she breathed.

"Well—ahem—well, of course! I—I dud-don't mind you knowing now, but a girl can't find a treasure in the old wing if she can't get into the old wing, can she? I've been there heaps of times, you know—and I'm none the wiser! Look here—"

She broke off there as there sounded a tap on the door again. This time it was Sophie, one of the maids, who appeared. She smiled uncertainly at the group.

"Please, Miss Redfern, Miss Bullivant told me she would like to see you in her study!"

"Dash! Right-ho, Sophie; be along at once," Babs said, and the maid withdrew. "Mabs, will you nip down and get the key while I'm away? Clara, think Janet and Leila would like to come into this, too?"

"Betcher!" Clara chuckled. "I'll fetch them, shall I?"



"Right-ho! Bess, you get torches. Don't go until I come back, though."

And Babs, knowing a sense of irritation because Miss Bullivant should have broken in upon her adventure, flew off at once. The mathematics mistress' door was ajar when she arrived there, and inside the room Babs could see Miss Bullivant and Miss Skinner. Miss Bullivant, tall, angular, pince-nez, and sharp-featured; Miss Skinner, much younger, but far from pretty, looking very much a small replica of her superior, especially as she also wore spectacles.

They were both staring at an old photograph on the wall of the room—a photograph of the prefects and mistresses of the period when May Gloucester was captain of Cliff House.

Babs tapped on the door. "No, my dear Miss Skinner, you have not altered much," Miss Bullivant was saying, "and neither—ahem!—have I—"

"Except, Miss Bullivant, for the better," Miss Skinner simpered, and Miss Bullivant flushed with pleasure.

"I think you're ever so much better-looking now than you were then—ahem!" she added sharply, and swivelled from the photograph as she saw Babs' form on the threshold. "Here is Barbara, Miss Bullivant!"

"Oh, yes! Why didn't you knock, Barbara?" Miss Bullivant said sternly.

"Please, Miss Bullivant, I did," Babs returned meekly. "I don't think you could have heard. Did you want to see me?"

"Yes, Barbara. I want to tell you that the new history books will be used in the Fourth Form to-morrow morning. They are in the cupboard in the class-room. Will you see that they are ready on the girls' desks before lessons?"

"Yes, Miss Bullivant," Babs nodded. These Form captain's duties of hers were many and various.

"That is all, Barbara, thank you!" Out trotted Babs. She reached Study No. 4, to find her chums reinforced by Leila Carroll, the American girl, and Janet Jordan, Clara's chum from Study No. 7. They were all armed with torches.

"O.K.," Babs grinned. "Bull didn't want to slaughter me, or anything. Got the key, Bess? Thanks! Now keep the torches out of sight for goodness' sake, and move warily! Ready?"

They all were, eager and anxious for the adventure now.

"Right! Then follow me!" Babs led the way out. In pairs the chums followed her. Down the corridor they went, descending the stairs and branching off towards the laboratory. The door of the laboratory—one of the old and ancient parts of Cliff House—was unlocked.

"Careful!" breathed Babs. She pushed the door open, taking a quick look down the long work-table. Nobody was there.

A mystery girl in the old, forbidden wing of the school, a girl whose strange activities intrigue Babs & Co. Staggering shock comes when they learn the identity of that girl! The last person in the world they would have expected there! But—despite breaking rules again and again, they determine to help the mystery girl unravel the secret of the condemned study. Threat of expulsion does not deter them.

"Come on. Last girl close the door," she whispered.

Janet Jordan, as last girl, closed the door. Keyed up now, they all tramped along the room to the far wall. Here stood one of the great doors which was a Cliff House pride and joy—a stoutly made oak door of Gothic pattern, tightly locked. Into the lock Babs fitted the key; with an effort turned it. There was a squeak of rusty hinges.

"Gee, we're in!" Leila joyed. "Lead on, Babs!"

Babs flashed her torch as she passed through the doorway. Owing to the boarding-up of most of the windows in the condemned wing it was dark here—almost blackly dark.

In front of them ran the long corridor, its bare boards, which had once resounded to the tread of busy feet, grimed and splintered now, and which, even in this moment, brought back a sense of the familiar to Babs. How long since she had trodden these boards as May Gloucester's diminutive fag?

"Wait a minute—danger!" she muttered, and stopped, flashing her torch at the ceiling, from which a great mass of plaster had fallen, revealing the broken lathes it had left behind. Even as she paused, another chunk, about six inches square, dropped with a soft plop among the debris at her feet.

"Oh crumbs! I sus-say, it—its fuff-rightfully dangerous!" Bessie quivered. "It did that to me yesterday. I was almost stut-stunned, you know!"

But nobody was taking notice of Bessie.

Torch in hand, Babs went on, now and again flashing the light on study doors, some still carrying, in faded letters, the names of their former prefect owners. All were locked; some, indeed, clamped.

The captain's study, however, was nearly at the end of the corridor. Carefully they went on. No sound yet, no sign of life or any movement, except now and again a flutter of plaster dust as the vibrating floor forced some unseen hole in wall or ceiling to disgorge the fine particles within it.

Now Babs could see captain's study, ten yards away. All at once she stopped.

"Hush!" she bade.

Tense, electrified, they all bunched together.

"Wuw-what is that?" stammered Bessie.

Suddenly the door of the old captain's study opened. Out stepped a figure. Babs had a vague glimpse of it before it occurred to her to switch off her torch—the figure of a young woman or a tall girl, of height and build of Miss Charmant, the mistress of the Fourth. And in the same moment that she saw the figure, the figure must have seen her light, for, with a little cry, it sped away. Babs flashed on the torch again.

"Come on, after her!" she cried.

She raced forward, thrilling now. No ghost, after all. But what was that girl doing here? Like the wind she was speeding, making for the stairs at the end of the old corridor, and the chums, abandoning all pretence of secrecy, pelted headlong in pursuit. But alas for them!

A pile of fallen plaster in Babs' path brought her to grief with a crash. Hardly before she had made contact with the floor, Clara sprawled over her, and on top of Clara, Mabel. Then Leila, unable to stop herself, added herself to the pile, and in a welter of white dust they all rolled on the floor.

"Ow! Wow!"

"My hat—"

"Hey, that's my hand you're treading on, Janet!"

"Quickly, after her!" Babs cried. "She's gone down the stairs! Oh, my hat! Where's my torch?"

Luckily her hand closed on the torch even as she said that. In a moment she was on her feet, only to come a terrific purler over Bessie, who had also tripped. Bessie yelled.

"Help, help! I'm stunned! I'm dead! I'm killed!"

"Oh, my hat, shut up!" Clara gasped. "I believe I can hear someone in the laboratory!"

There was a hush at that, but a little too late. The laboratory door opened with a crash, and through the darkness came a voice they dreaded.

"Who is there?"

"The—the Bull!" stammered Janet Jordan. "We're caught!"

Caught they were. No doubt about that. Miss Bullivant's footsteps, accompanied by others, could be heard coming along the passage now. Babs, rising, flashed a torch as the mistress approached. With her was Miss Skinner.

"Barbara!" Miss Bullivant cried.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Babs.

"Give me that torch, girl!" She flashed the torch into six dismayed faces. "I thought you girls understood that entrance to these dangerous premises was forbidden?"

"Well, we—we saw someone!" Babs blurted.

"What?"

"Some—some girl—an oldish girl.

She was coming out of the old captain's study."

"Nonsense!" Miss Skinner cut in sharply.

"But we all saw her!" expostulated Clara.

"Nonsense!" Miss Skinner repeated; and Babs wondered even in that moment at the sharply alarmed agitation which betrayed itself in her features. "Absurd! Ridiculous! How could a strange girl obtain entrance here?"

"Well, we jolly well saw her!" Bessie glowered.

"Barbara, you are sure?" Miss Bullivant asked.

"Quite sure, Miss Bullivant."

"It is merely a fabrication to cover up their delinquencies," Miss Skinner declared; and the chums glared, annoyed at having their story disputed, hotly resentful that a woman who had no authority in the school should dare to dictate as if she were the head-mistress herself. "I suggest it is false."

Miss Bullivant gazed at her.

"Thank you, Miss Skinner, but I am capable of handling this," she said stiffly. "Barbara, you assert this is true?"

"Yes, Miss Bullivant."

"Then," Miss Bullivant decided, "we will first investigate the story. Let us go to the old captain's study."

"But—" Miss Skinner objected. "Let us go," Miss Bullivant repeated rather snappily.

And she strode ahead, while the chums, with sickly glances at each other, followed her; and Miss Skinner, biting her lips, fell behind.

The door of the old captain's study was opened when they reached it. Babs, behind Miss Bullivant, curiously peered in. It was the very first time she had seen that study since the old wing's condemnation; she suffered a little sense of shock.

Here and there the wallpaper had peeled off. Three or four grimy windows were smashed, or boarded up. A great section of the plaster-of-paris moulding on the ceiling had fallen. Torn books and papers littered the floor.

Miss Bullivant frowned.

"Well, there is certainly no one here now," she observed. "Nor does it seem possible to judge whether the room has been used. Let us take a look at the stairs."

They took a look at the stairs. They even climbed them on to the next floor, given up to their ancient studies and barred-up cupboards. But of the mysterious fugitive they found no trace. Miss Bullivant's face hardened a little.

"Either," she gave her verdict, "you imagined what you saw, Barbara—"

"Which," Miss Skinner quickly put in, "is most obviously the case—"

"But all of us couldn't be wrong!" Clara hotly protested.

"Either that, or your story is merely to excuse your presence in this forbidden wing," Miss Bullivant continued. "I shall report each of you to Miss Primrose; and, in the meantime, just to keep you out of further mischief, you will each go to your study and write one hundred times 'I must not trespass again in the condemned wing.' Barbara, take this torch of yours."

Babs took the torch. Quickly she nodded to her chums. Again she led the way—this time, in retreat. But as she passed through the laboratory door she pulled out the key. That, she considered, would serve a useful purpose on a future occasion.

For by no means had Babs & Co. seen this thing through.

A Girl from the Past!



"BLOW!" exclaimed Barbara Redfern disgustedly, and put down her pen, rubbing her aching wrist, and glanced across the table of Study No. 4 at Mabel Lynn. "Have a breather, Mabs."

Mabs, like Babs, was engaged in writing the lines with which Miss Bullivant had burdened them. By no means averse to that suggestion, she put down her pen and lolled back in her chair.

"Funny," Mabs said thoughtfully.

Mabs grunted.

"If you mean these blessed lines—"

"I don't mean the lines—no, I was thinking, though, as I was writing, of Miss Skinner. Notice, Mabs, how startled she was at the suggestion that there might have been someone in the old wing?"

Mabs stared.

"You think that?"

"Well, don't you?"

"Dunno," Mabs confessed. "I just thought she was being bossy. But—hey!" Mabs exclaimed, staring at the vacant seat at the table. "Where's old chuckle-chump got to?"

"Chuckle-chump" was one of the many endearing nicknames fatuous Bessie Bunter had earned for herself.

Babs frowned. Like themselves, Bessie had sat down to her lines; but, unlike themselves, Bessie had departed ten minutes after starting, and had not yet returned. On the table her impot paper remained, but the merest glance at that showed that Bessie had not even written a single line. But she had written something else—or, rather, drawn something else. In some puzzlement, Babs picked up the sheet.

"Oh, great golliwogs!" she breathed. "Mabs, look at that!"

Mabs took the sheet, then her eyes widened.

On that sheet was a rather weird and uncertain-looking diagram—a thing of straggly lines and little squares. Two parallel lines—one smudged—had been labelled by Bessie "Passidge." Each of the little squares was labelled "Study," except one, which had been honoured with the fuller description of "Old Captin's Study." In the middle of that square was a small circle, underneath which Bessie had written "Treasure buried here?"—that announcement being followed by a mark of interrogation.

Mabs grinned a little.

"Seems to have that treasure on her mind," she said. "Babs, is—is that where she's gone, do you think?"

"I don't think—I'm sure," Babs said, and looked worried.

Better than any girl in Cliff House did Babs know the working of Bessie Bunter's muddled mind, and it was obvious now that her presumed treasure of the old wing was the thing which was preying upon it.

Babs didn't believe in Bessie's treasure; neither did Mabs. Most of Bessie's pet ideas, though taken with enormous seriousness by Bessie herself, ended in a laugh, and usually the two chums were content to leave her to them.

Babs rose.

"Come on," she said. "We've got to get the old duffer out of this. Supposing she's caught there again? And ten to one the Bull will be asking for these lines before tea. If Bess hasn't done them—well, she'll catch it. In any case," Babs added, her eyes glimmering, "I'm pretty keen to have

another look round the haunted wing myself. Mabs, what about that girl we saw darting out of the old captain's study? Where did she get to?"

Mabs whistled.

"You think we might see her?"

"Dunno. But if she didn't get out of the old wing, she's still in it. And if she's in it, and old duffer Bess is blundering about, goodness knows what might not happen! Come on!"

Mabs nodded, all serious alertness now. In rather anxious haste they passed out of the study, and, reaching the door in the laboratory, tried the handle. The door itself was open, as no key had yet been found to fit it, but on it was pinned a new notice, in the precise handwriting of Miss Primrose, Cliff House's headmistress:

"This door must remain closed. Unauthorised visits to the old wing will be heavily punished."

Babs pulled a face as she regarded it. But she did not hesitate. Gripping the handle, she pushed the door open, and closed it again as soon as she and Mabs were on the other side. For a moment they stood in darkness faintly streaked with grey, blinking their eyes to accustom themselves to the sudden change of light.

"Now," Babs whispered, "where is she?"

The question was answered almost as soon as it had left her lips.

For along the corridor, from the direction of the old captain's study, came a sudden splintering sound, followed by a heavy bump and a breathless voice.

"Oh crumbs!"

"That's Bess!" Babs breathed. "Sounds as if she's tearing up floorboards."

Flashing her torch, she hurried along picking her way over the debris. In a very few seconds she had reached the old captain's study, from which now a glow of light shone across the floor. True enough, Bessie was there.

The plump duffer, very puffed, was kneeling on the floor, peering into a hole made by the wrenching up of a floorboard. Into the hole Bessie was shining her torch. She gave a jump when she saw Babs and Mabs.

"Bessie, you chump!" Babs cried.

"Bessie, you duffer!"

Bessie sheepishly rose.

"Oh, really! Lul-look here—"

"What the dickens do you think you're doing here?" Babs demanded. "Oh, really, Babs! I—I'm lul-look-
ing for my treasure, you know!"

"And what," Babs countered, "do you think the Bull will be looking for when she finds you haven't done your lines, nunny? Come on—out of this!"

"But look here, supposing that other cat finds it?" Bessie cried.

"What other cat?"

"Well, the gig-ghost, you know—I mean, the girl! If you ask me," Bessie said seriously, "that girl's after my treasure, and that's why she was here. Well, I've just got to find it first, you know. Look here, you help," she added eagerly. "Then I'll give you half!"

Babs grinned a little in spite of herself.

"And how," she wanted to know, "do you know there's treasure here?"

"Because," Bessie triumphantly announced, "I've worked it out, you know. It takes a jolly clever girl like me, with a brain like—like—"

"Mud?" Mabs suggested.

"Oh, really, Mabs! With a brain like—like an electric dynamo," Bessie

said impressively. "I read about it in one of the old books in the school library—about a miser who used to live here, you know. He wrote in his diary that he'd hidden the treasure under the floor of his room, and it said, as plainly as anything, you know, that the room was in the old wing. And so"—but here Bessie broke off with a sudden blink of alarm. "Oh crumbs, what's that?" she quavered.

Babs and Mabs tensed. Distinctly, along the corridor, came a sound. It was the sound of a stumbling step.

"Caught!" groaned Mabs.

"Hush!" Babs hissed. "That's not a mistress. Too cautious!"

She froze, tensely listening. Nearer, nearer came the footsteps, heading it seemed, for this very room. Almost huntedly, her eyes swept round the room, and then she gave a little gasp. In one corner, its door yawning wide as it swivelled on a broken hinge, was the old study cupboard.

"She's coming here!" she whispered. "Get behind the door—there's just a chance she won't see! Bess, put that torch out, you idiot!"

But Bessie, for once acting with commendable presence of mind, had already extinguished the torch. Swiftly, the chums moved to their hide-out position.

Outside, the footsteps stopped. They saw the piercing beam of a torch sweeping the floor. Then they all held their breaths as the stranger stepped into the condemned study.

And as they saw her they all thrilled.

For, dim and fleeting as their first glimpse of this girl had been, they recognised her instantly.

She was the mysterious fugitive of the old captain's study.

At the sight of the hole Bessie had made the girl had paused. She was staring at it. Then she bent down.

Who was the girl? What had brought her here again?

Intently, eagerly, the girl stared. Then suddenly she plunged down her hand.

And from Bessie, fearful for the pre-

sumed treasure of which she had, as yet, found no trace, there went up an involuntary cry.

"Here, dud-don't you touch my treasure, you thief!"

"Bessie!" Babs hissed.

But the cat was out of the bag then. As if she had been shot, the girl spun round. For a moment Babs caught a full glimpse of a white, strained, bespectacled face, of glistening brown hair, practically completely covered with a close-fitting, turban-type hat.

With a gasp, she was on her feet; with one frightened look towards the cupboard, she was starting for the door.

But quickly as the girl moved, Babs moved quicker, and, seeing that she was nearest the door, she reached it first. The girl drew up, panting.

"Please—let me go!" she cried, and Babs wondered for a moment where she had heard that voice. It was vaguely familiar.

"Who are you?" she asked bluntly.

"What are you doing here?"

"Yes, rather, you know! That treasure's mine!" Bessie indignantly said, emerging from behind the cupboard door with Mabs. "And if you jolly well touch it, I shall tell the police, or—something!" she added vaguely. "That's my hole!"

The girl did not seem to understand. Her face was white and desperate, though it was in shadow now, and could not clearly be seen. A tall girl, she was—taller than Dulcia Fairbrother—and, Babs judged, about twenty-two or twenty-three.

"Please," she said again—ever so quietly, but with almost fierce firmness, "I must go!"

And she caught Babs before that girl realised what had happened. Too late, Babs threw her back. With a twirl, the stranger had pushed her to one side and had shot into the corridor.

And then, amazingly, she stopped short, tensed, and suddenly leapt back.

"Oh, great goodness! Quick—close that door!" she cried frantically.

"But—"

"Quickly," the girl cried—"quickly!" And then, as Babs hesitated, she closed



"COME on!" Babs panted. "She went this way!" And she and Mabs hustled the mistress along, while in the background, Bessie Bunter started to ventriloquise. Come what may, they had to bluff Miss Skinner away from the condemned study.

it herself, and, dragging a key from her pocket, locked it. "Miss Skinner!" she breathed. "She's coming along the passage!" Barbara, she mustn't see me—she mustn't!"

Babs almost reeled. Mabs gasped. Even Bessie stared. Who was this girl, who knew Miss Skinner, Cliff House's very newest arrival, who knew Babs by her Christian name? Babs stared, suddenly aware of a strange, uncanny stirring, feeling somehow she was in a world of unreality. This girl—she knew her!

"Who—who are you?" she stammered. The girl paused, gulping. Abruptly she shone her torch full on her own face, and put a hand to her hat. Off came the hat, revealing a billowing mass of brown curls. Off came the spectacles, revealing a pair of large, violet-blue eyes. Babs almost shouted. For, despite the haggard lines, the older look, she knew this girl then.

"May!"
May Gloucester, her old heroine, who had once been captain of Cliff House, it was!

Sticky for Miss Skinner!



"S HUSH, please! Not so loud!" May Gloucester whispered anxiously. "Miss Skinner's in the corridor. I saw her come through the door at the other end. Barbara, you—you recognise me now?"

"May!" Babs breathed faintly. "And—and, Babs, you—you still trust me?"

"May, I never knew—but what—" "Babs, listen, please! Don't ask questions!" May said urgently. "I want your help. I want it more badly now than I ever wanted anything before! Babs, will you help me?"

A glow came into Babs' cheeks. "May, of course!" "Babs, you—you know I wouldn't do anything rotten." The ex-captain's voice broke a little. "You may have heard—or will hear—something about me, but please, please, don't believe it! I've got something to do here. Something big, Babs—something which means everything to me—everything! I—I loathe to remind you of it, but I did what I could for you in the past."

"I know, May," Babs said steadily, "and now it's my turn. Tell me what you want me to do now."

"Just," May said, "get Miss Skinner away. Babs, she mustn't see me—she mustn't! Get her away, and leave me here. I've got a way out. If—" And then she paused, one hand involuntarily going to her chest as there came a rap at the door outside.

Babs took a grip on herself. She felt shaken still. But she knew her cue now. She had promised May she would stand by her, and she would stand by her.

And Mabs, although she had had no experience of May, felt what was going on in her chum's mind, and nodded grimly. And so, for that matter, did Bessie. Babs' fights were always their fights.

Now the first task was to get rid of Miss Skinner.

Not easy that; but, as always, in moments of crisis, Babs' brain was working swiftly. She stepped forward, turning back the key, at the same time nodding frantically to May to step behind the cupboard door.

And as Miss Skinner's voice, raised in rather a piercing treble, demanded: "Who is there?" Babs threw the door open.

"Oh, Miss Skinner, did you see her?" she asked excitedly.

"Her?" Miss Skinner looked amazed. "Barbara—"

"We thought we saw her come in here, but she must have dodged us!" Babs cried. "Mabs, come on! She must be in one of the other rooms! Miss Skinner, hurry!"

"But—but—" Miss Skinner gasped.

"Quickly, otherwise she'll get away!" Babs cried anxiously.

And in the apparent urgency of her excitement, she pushed the mistress, stepping into the corridor with her. Miss Skinner, amazed and confused, gave back, wondering for a moment if she was on her head or her heels. Even that tiny pause gave Babs a chance which she was not slow to use. Quickly she jerked her head at Bessie. "Ventriloquise!" she hissed, hoping almost in agony her fat chum would understand.

And Bessie, for once, understood instantly what Babs wanted, and Babs herself set the ball rolling by tugging at Miss Skinner's sleeve, and yanking her off along the corridor. Mabs took her other arm. Miss Skinner gasped.

"Barbara, really! I insist on searching that room! I heard a voice—"

"Come on!" Babs panted. "She went this way! Wait a minute!" she cried, and frantically signalled to Bessie with her eyes. "Did you hear anything?"

"Indeed I did not! Goodness!" Miss Skinner cried, with a jump.

For from the other end of the corridor, near the laboratory door, came a low moan.

"Come on!" Mabs shouted. "She's that way! Miss Skinner, hurry!"

Miss Skinner's face became keen. Deceived by that voice which, had she only known it, was the result of Bessie's really superb ventriloquial powers, she no longer argued or hesitated. Eagerly she plunged on.

In a body the mistress and the three Fourth Formers tore along the passage. Near the laboratory, outside one of the ancient studies, Babs paused.

"The voice came from here!" she breathed.

"Open the door!" Miss Skinner cried.

Babs caught the handle and turned. She guessed the door was locked, but she also guessed that the lock was so old and rotten that it would snap at the first onslaught. The fierce push she gave at the door proved that theory. It swung in with a harsh creaking.

"Shine the torch!" Miss Skinner quivered, stumbling into the blackness of the room.

"I—I can't; I've dropped it!" Babs said. "It's on the floor somewhere! Mabs, guard the door! Miss Skinner, see if you can find it!"

But Miss Skinner was already frantically groping in the dark. She gave a sudden, ringing cry.

"Oh, goodness, I have put my hand in some wet, sticky stuff!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Barbara, how dare—" "I mean, I—I'm sorry!" Babs mumbled. "My hat! The girl's got away! She's dodged through the door! What— Oh dear, what's that?" she cried, as there was a heavy bump in the darkness.

"I—I don't know!" came Miss Skinner's breathless wail. "But I have now slipped in the sticky stuff! Oh dear, I fear I am in a terrible mess!"

Babs gurgled. She stooped, picking up the torch, upon which she had placed her foot. The gurgle almost became a yell of mirth as she shone it upon the luckless Miss Skinner, now bewilderedly sitting in the middle of the floor, in a pitiful plight indeed.

The sticky stuff to which she referred was a pile of wet plaster-dust, which had fallen from the ceiling and on which she had sat.

Some leaky water cistern above the room had gradually drained into the room. The whole floor was wet and sticky, but wettest and stickiest where the unhappy Miss Skinner now sat. It was all the chums could do to stifle their mirth.

"Oh, Miss Skinner—"

"Please—please help me!" Miss Skinner cried. "Where's the girl?"

"She's got away!" Babs said owlishly.

Miss Skinner gasped. But her interest in the fugitive was forgotten in the misery of her own situation. She struggled up and limped to the laboratory door, the chums following.

"First, I must clean myself," she said dismally. "Afterwards I—" And then she stopped as Miss Bullivant appeared through the far door. That mistress had been passing the laboratory when she had heard the commotion.

"Miss Skinner!" Miss Bullivant cried, in a quivering, scandalised voice. "What—what have you been doing to yourself? And what, pray, are you girls doing again in these forbidden precincts?" she added angrily.

Babs threw a hopeless look at Mabs. "Pip-please, Miss Bullivant, we came to look for something we had lost."

"Indeed? And what, pray, had you lost?"

"Well, something rather valuable," Babs said. "At least, valuable to us. You see," she explained gravely, "we lost our nunny!"

"Oh, my hat!" Mabs breathed; and despite the seriousness of the occasion, almost doubled up.

"You lost your what?" Miss Bullivant asked incredulously.

"Our nunny, please, Miss Bullivant," Babs answered seriously.

"Oh!" Miss Bullivant stared at her. Miss Bullivant had never heard of a nunny before, and never for a moment guessed that word applied to Bessie Bunter. But there were many things Miss Bullivant did not know, and Miss Bullivant, aware of her ignorance of schoolgirl slang, passed over this one now.

"Well, I sincerely hope," she answered stiffly, "you have found your—er—nunny. In any case, you had no right to return to these dangerous premises without permission, and you will each take a further fifty lines! Miss Skinner, perhaps you had better explain in my study how you have got in that state. Now, Barbara, Mabel, Bessie—go and do those lines at once! And if," she warned threateningly, "one of you dares to leave your study until they are done, I will take that girl to the headmistress!"

Babs looked at Mabs, desperately trying to keep her face straight. She looked at Bessie, who was portraying owlish bewilderment. Very glad indeed they all were to obey that threat, and standing not upon the order of their going, went at once. Not, indeed, until they were in Study

No. 4 did they speak again. Then it was Bessie who broke the silence.

"I say, we got out of that all right, didn't we?" she said, with a pleased chuckle. "And—he, he, he! Didn't Miss Skinner look a fright? But I say, Babs—"

"Say on, Bessie, sweet thing!" Babs said serenely.

"What did you mean about going back into the condemned study to look for a ninny? What ninny?"

Mabs chuckled. Then suddenly she caught Bessie by the shoulder, swivelling her round so that she faced the mirror.

"See that?" she asked. "There's the answer, old thing!"

And Babs and Mabs burst into a ringing peal of laughter.

Bessie glowered.

"You sus-sillies!" she glowered. "I jolly well think—"

"Forget it, Bess! Only our fun!" Babs chuckled. She was suddenly serious. "Girls," she said slowly, "there's something we've got to discuss—this amazing business about May Gloucester!"

A Little Too Sweet!



"MY only giddy aunt, what a scoop!" Clara Trevlyn chuckled. "Why the dickens didn't you let me into it? I'd love to have seen the Skinner bird looking like a paper-hanger!"

"Gee, and so would I, I guess!" Leila Carroll gurgled. "Sure must have been a sight for aged eyes! But, Babs, seriously, it was May Gloucester you saw?"

"No doubt about that," Babs said. "Still look the same?" Clara asked eagerly.

"Well, yes—with her glasses off. Older, of course," Babs said, "and looking pretty worried, too. But, of course, you were in the Second Form at the time I was, Clara, and you knew her—"

"I'll say! One of the greatest skippers Cliff House ever had!" Clara said enthusiastically. "The only time I've ever felt like pulling your hair was the day you told me that she'd made you her fag! Remember the hundred and ten not-out she made at cricket against Kenmarsh?"

"Yes, rather! And remember," Babs said, "when she scored a hat-trick in each half of the hockey match against Courtfield Grammar?"

"And remember how she saved that girl—what was her name?—Dolly Hamish—from getting the sack?"

"And will you please remember," Janet Jordan severely cut in, "that this isn't a society for the admiration of May Gloucester, ripping skipper though she might have been! We'll take all that for granted, if you don't mind! Seeing that Babs has let us in for standing by her, it's ways and means of carrying out that object we've got to discuss!"

Babs flushed a little. Tomboy Clara grinned sheepishly. In their enthusiasm for their old-time captain, it is to be feared those two had forgotten that to the rest of the company May Gloucester was an utter stranger.

It was after tea now, the A.R.P. blinds were drawn, and the light in Study No. 4 was on. Miss Bullivant's lines were nearly complete, and in the lull of grinding at those lines the chums were holding a little informal meeting.

Great had been the glee and the laughing jubilation over the defeat of Miss Skinner, though Bessie, of course, had claimed all the credit. And Bessie of all of them, though supporting Babs & Co., was the only one still inclined to be a little suspicious.

"You know, I'm jolly sure she was after my treasure!" she said. "The way she looked into that hole! And if

doing, snooping round, anyway?" Mabs asked keenly. "She had no more right to be in the forbidden wing than we had!"

"Sure, that's a point," Leila Carroll nodded. "She—Hullo, Babs, somebody at the door!" she added, as a tap came.

"The Bull, I expect," Babs muttered. "Quickly, pretend we're finishing lines. Yes, come in, please!"

The door opened. But it was not Miss Bullivant who accepted that invitation. It was Miss Skinner, washed and changed. She blinked at Babs, Mabs, and Bessie feverishly scribbling lines; she looked hard at Clara, Leila, and Janet. Rather uncertainly, she smiled.

"Oh, Barbara, can you spare me a few minutes—in my room? I—I'd rather like to have a word with you!"

"But I've got to finish these lines, Miss Skinner! Miss Bullivant said we weren't to leave the study until they were done!"

"Oh!" Miss Skinner said, and paused. "Well, don't worry, Barbara; that will be all right. I'll explain to Miss Bullivant. Will you come now, please?"

Babs rose, intrigued, curious. Certainly Miss Skinner seemed very anxious—very friendly, too. With a swift grimace at her chums, she followed the mistress out. Once in her room, Miss Skinner smiled again.

"Sit down, Barbara, please!" she said. "Have a chocolate, will you? Or there is some fruit here if you prefer it. Do please help yourself! You know, I have been longing for a little talk with you. You are one of the few girls I remember most during the time I was a mistress here!"

"Yes, Miss Skinner," Babs said meekly, helping herself to a chocolate. "These are nice!"

"I've bought them specially—" And then Miss Skinner pulled herself up. "Yes, they are, aren't they? Do have another one, Barbara—or perhaps one of these apples? Well, as I was saying—dear me, what was I saying?—oh, about the ruins—"

Babs looked up, on her guard at once. What was coming?

"You know, Barbara, they are frightfully dangerous, and it would be dreadful, wouldn't it, if you were caught in those old buildings when there was a collapse, or something?"

"Hullo," Babs thought, "she's trying to warn me off!" Aloud, she agreed: "Frightfully dreadful, Miss Skinner!"

"So please, Barbara, do try to keep away from them," Miss Skinner said breathlessly. "Apart from the danger, I should hate to see you get into fresh trouble. And—and there's also the girl, Barbara, you are sure you saw a girl in the ruins this afternoon?"

"Oh, yes, Miss Skinner!"

"What was she like?"

Babs knew a sense of tingling excitement. Miss Skinner was trying to pump her!

"Well, of course, it was so dark I didn't see her clearly," she said, speaking with perfect truth. "But—but why—"

"Nothing. Except," Miss Skinner said severely, "that the girl is a trespasser. Was she tall?"

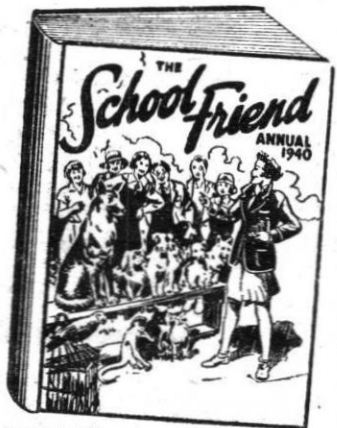
"Well, tallish," admitted Babs.

"H'm! Well, how was she dressed?"

Deeper and keener became Babs' sense of intrigue. Miss Skinner seemed most anxious about that figure.

"Well, as I didn't see her face clearly, I could hardly be expected to notice her clothes, could I?" she asked vaguely. "I think she was dressed in

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she wasn't after my treasure, what was she after?"

"Well, yes, what?" Janet Jordan wanted to know.

But Babs, of course did not know. "Something—of course!" she said vaguely. "But that's her business, isn't it? There's a lot I don't understand. For instance, why didn't she want to meet Miss Skinner? They knew each other well enough in the old days."

"And what was old Skinnygogs

darkish clothes, though. I'm afraid." Babs added hastily, "I couldn't tell you anything more about her."

Miss Skinner sighed. It sounded like a sigh of vexation.

"I see. Of—of course not," she said. "Well, thank you for what you have told me, Barbara."

"And—and I may go now?" Babs asked.

"Yes, of course."

Babs went, puzzled and intrigued. Miss Skinner was obviously upset by the presence of an unknown stranger in the haunted wing, but not for one minute did Babs believe that that upset was caused by her concern for the school. Thoughtfully she strolled off to return to her chums, only to meet Sophie, the maid.

"Miss Redfern, Miss Primrose wants to see you," Sophie announced.

Babs retraced her steps. She went, instead, to Miss Primrose's study. That elderly lady was looking very severe.

"I have sent for you, Barbara, because Miss Bullivant has reported that, in spite of my notice, you have been in the old wing again."

Babs flushed.

"I—I'm sorry, Miss Primrose. I—I told Miss Bullivant why. We went back to look for— for something."

"I am aware of that," Miss Primrose said. "I am also aware that Miss Bullivant has punished you. But I do feel, Barbara, that another personal warning from me is necessary. If the wing was in a decent state of repair there would be no objection whatever to your using it. But the wing is not. The wing, in fact, is in a highly dangerous condition. You must understand that."

"Y—yes, Miss Primrose."

"So please," Miss Primrose said, "do not use it again. If I find you doing so I shall punish you with the utmost severity. You may go."

Babs went, ears tingling, for a moment brought up against sober realities. What Primmy said was true, of course.

And yet— Babs stiffened. There was May. May obviously needed help. Babs was ready to give that help. But it was only right, of course, that her chums should be warned.

And as soon as she reached Study No. 4 again the first thing she told them was Primmy's warning, adding:

"Primmy's right, of course; the place is dangerous. On the other hand, I'm going to help May all I can. But that's not your business, of course, and so if you kids want to back out—"

"Leaving you to handle it, I guess?" Leila asked doubtfully.

"Well, Clara and myself. After all, we were friends of May—"

"Rats!" broke in Mabs warmly, loyal as ever to Babs. "I'm in this, too! There's a risk, of course, but we've taken risks before, haven't we? Count me in!"

And there was a chorus of agreement from the others. They were standing by Babs.

"In the meantime," Mabs said, "what about the Skinner-bird? What did she want to see you about, Babs?"

"Just fishing," Babs said. "Blessed if I can make her out, you know!"

And she told them, very briefly, what had taken place in Guest Room No. 1 and what Miss Skinner had said. There was a gentle shaking of heads, however, as they tried to sort it out.

"Two things are plain," Babs said. "One is, that Miss Skinner's scared of us going into the ruins. The second thing is, that she's more than a bit uneasy about the girl in the ruins. Apart from that," Babs added, "the only

thing we've got to go on is the fright which got hold of May when she saw Miss Skinner in the ruins."

"Sure does sound like a Chinese puzzle," Leila opined.

Chinese puzzle it certainly was—at the present. As Babs said, the only girl who could give them any possible sort of clue was May Gloucester herself. But where was May now? Certainly not in the ruins—obviously she would have bolted after that scare with Miss Skinner.

"She may try to get in touch with us," Babs said. "I remember, when I was her fag, May used to leave little messages about things pinned to the cupboard. She might think again of that system and leave a message to-morrow. Anyway, we'll go and see."

"To-morrow?" Clara questioned.

"To-morrow morning before rising bell," Babs said.

And with that the meeting broke up.

Bessie Steals a March!



"ALL here?" Babs asked. "Where's Bessie, though?" She got up with the rest of us. In fact, she was first up. Some miracle, that!"

It was next morning—very early next morning, as a matter of fact—and the chums, bound once again for the forbidden wing, had congregated in Study No. 4.

But of Bessie, who had left the dormitory first, there was no sign.

"She did say something about going to the library," Clara said—"said something about an old book she wanted. Still keen on her old treasure stunt," she chuckled. "Anyway, never mind old Fatikins—let's go!"

Babs nodded. Perhaps she felt rather relieved that Bessie was not there; on trips like these Bessie was always rather more inclined to prove herself a liability than an asset.

"Torches?" she asked. "Goodie! Right!"

And off they went, thrilling now. But alas! there were unseen obstacles in store. Approaching the laboratory, they halted, owing to the fact that Piper, the porter, and a servant, were engaged upon their early morning clearing-up in that apartment. Rather hastily, they retired to the store-room just near.

And it was a full half an hour before they found themselves free, at last, to progress.

Fortunately, they still had plenty of time, though, to be sure, there was slightly more risk now. The mistresses would be getting up, and the prefects, and in half an hour's time the school would be swarming with life. Quickly Babs led the way to the laboratory door. She opened it.

Then they all stood and listened. There was no sound in the forbidden wing.

"Come on!" Babs muttered. She led the way forward, glancing round her just a little apprehensively, her mind now sharply alert to Miss Primrose's warning. Certainly, the old wing was in a dangerous condition, and certainly it was no place in which to spend any more time than necessary.

"Phew! Talk about being as safe as houses!" Clara muttered. "This one looks— Hallo!" she added, dodging nimbly as there came a crack above her, and a rain of white plaster rushed down. "Phew, get on!"

They got on, a little more hurriedly. Nearing the old captain's study, Babs

paused again. Here, as in several other places along the corridor, the floor was thinly covered in a new fall of white powder from the ceiling, and plainly visible in that fall were two sets of footprints, both fresh, and both leading to and from the door.

"Whoa! Wait a minute!" Babs breathed.

She stared at the prints—two complete and different sets. One was a small, shapely foot—how well she remembered the small, beautiful feet of May Gloucester—the other was longer and flatter in the sole, like the feet of—of—well, who? Babs, an admirer of shapely feet, unconsciously stored up in her mind a mental picture of people's feet, and now it came home to her with a rush—why, yes, those prints might have belonged to Miss Skinner herself! If so, she must have been here recently. Why?

She pointed out that fact to her chums. They all looked excited, but rather flabbergasted.

"And that means," Babs said, "that she is jolly well interested in this wing on her own account. That means, in spite of Primmy's orders, she's doing a bit of snooping around, too. Half a tickle, we'll make sure! Mabs, have you got your folding pocket scissors on you?"

"Yes; but—"

"Hand 'em over, please!" Mabs fished for the scissors. While she did so, Babs drew a folded piece of impot paper from her pocket and smoothed it out. As her golden-haired chum handed her the scissors, she stooped down, and, carefully tracing the print on to the paper, cut it out.

"Just as well to make sure of things," she said. "Thanks for the scissors. As soon as we can, we'll check up this print with Miss Skinner's own shoe. Now for the old study."

Towards the condemned study she groped her way. Though light shone through the cracked and broken windows, it showed up a drearily drab apartment in the sunshine, and Bessie Bunter's treasure-hole was half-filled with litter. Babs moved towards the cupboard door.

And her eyes gleamed. For, surely enough, as in the old days, a note was pinned to that door.

"It's here!" she cried.

"Oh goodie! Let's read it!" Mabs cried.

They gathered round as Babs unpinned the note and breathlessly smoothed it out. It was printed in careful black capitals, and contained no signature. What it said was:

"I hope you will remember the old days and find this. Meantime, I cannot tell you how grateful I am for what you did for me, and should like to have a talk with you. Perhaps you could help me further. If it is possible, could you meet me here to-night, about 10.30? If not, don't worry! And for goodness' sake don't risk any sort of trouble for my sake!"

They looked at each other.

"Well, are we coming?" Babs asked. "You bet!" said Tomboy Clara firmly. "Now, let's get back before we're collared!"

"And, meantime," Babs said, "don't forget Miss Skinner's shoe-print."

They got back, fortunately without incident. Rising-bell was ringing in the school then, and the chums, feeling they really had achieved something, enthusiastically accepted Babs' invitation to a pre-breakfast cup of chocolate and biscuits in Study No. 4. But as

Babs pushed the door open, she stood still in astonishment.

"Bessie!" she cried.

Bessie was there, and she was behaving as strangely as ever Babs had seen her behave. In Bessie's hand was a forked twig; on the table, an ancient book. In the middle of the carpet were three pennies, and, eyes closed, twig in hand, Bessie was approaching those coins with the tautened intent of the hunter about to close with his prey.

Babs stared.

"Bessie, you idiot!"

Bessie jumped round.

"Oh, really, Babs—"

"What's the giddy idea?" Clara demanded. "This a new game?"

Bessie glared.

"Now you've broken the spell!" she declared. "It's not a game, so there. Anyway, go away! This is jolly important," she said. "I'm divining!"

"What?" gasped Mabs.

"Divining—finding treasure, you know. There's the treasure"—and Bessie pointed to the three pennies. "Of course, I'm not supposed to know it's there!"

The chums chuckled.

"And when I get over it with this—this rod, you know, the rod gives a jerk," Bessie said. "It dives towards the treasure!"

"I see. And then picks it up and spends it, I guess?" Leila Carroll asked dryly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bessie sniffed. If nobody else was in earnest, Bessie was. Having failed to find the fabled treasure of the condemned wing in other ways, Bessie was now resorting to more subtle methods. "And who," Babs wanted to know, "put you up to this stunt?"

"Nobody put me up to it," Bessie said indignantly. "A jolly clever girl, with a keen brain like mine, doesn't need putting up to stunts. This book tells you all about finding hidden water and gold by using twigs, you know, and I'm jolly sure that I've got the gift, because we Bunters have most of the gifts. Now shut up, please, while I combinate!"

"Concentrate, Bessie," Babs corrected. "Anyway, go ahead; this looks like being fun."

Bessie sniffed, not deigning to reply. She screwed up her eyes. Clara grinned as she reached for a reel of cotton on the table, and, breaking off a piece, swiftly tied a loop round one end. Slowly Bessie waddled forward, and the chums stifled their laughter as Clara slipped the cotton loop over the end of the twig, deftly scooped up the pennies, and slipped them into Bessie's pocket.

Now Bessie was nearing the spot where the pennies had been. Clara grinned, and suddenly gave a pull on the cotton. Up in the air jumped Bessie's twig, and Bessie, her face suddenly red with excitement, gave a howl of triumph. Her eyes opened and blinked rapidly behind her thick spectacles.

"I sus-say, did you see? It ju-jumped, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the chums.

"I'm a diviner!" Bessie cried excitedly. "I can find any old buried treasure now!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to laugh at! I— Oh crumbs!" And Bessie jumped again—in amazement this time—as she gazed at the vacant spot on the carpet. "Mum-my hat! The tut-treasure's gone!"

"Disappeared before the majesty of a Bunter, I guess!" Leila Carroll murmured.



"Do please help yourself, Barbara," beamed Miss Skinner. Babs did so, but she wasn't deceived by this sudden amiable change in the mistress. Miss Skinner wasn't being pleasant because she liked Babs. She was up to something.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But where—where—" And then Bessie hit her hand against her pocket. With her face full of utter mystification, she plunged her hand into it, and then jumped at the sight of the three pennies. "Oh crumbs! Oh, gig-goodness gracious!" she stuttered. "Look, you girls! The tut-tut-twig picked them up for me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the chums.

"Well, blessed if I see anything to laugh at!" Bessie glowered.

"Look in the mirror!" hooted Mabs.

"But—but—"

"Poor old Bessie!" Babs wept. "How marvellously you do let your leg be pulled! It's not fair, really. Have another look at that twig, old Bess!" Bessie blinked. She looked at the twig, and she found the cotton. It dawned upon her fat mind then that she had been the victim of a jape.

"You—you grinning cats!" she spluttered.

"He, ha, ha!"

"Look here—"

"Sorry, Bessie!" Clara chuckled. "Just a little high-spirited fun. Didn't mean anything, of course. Now do it again, and we'll all stand as still as mice!"

Bessie glared.

"Please dud-don't talk to me!" she said, with stiff disdain. "I know you're all jealous of my wonderful powers, but that's no reason why you should try to be so jolly funny. Anyway, never mind. I'll try it on real tut-treasure, you know, and won't you all look sick and green when I come back staggering with the chest full of gold, and so on. Babs, look after that stick; it's pup-precious," she added. "That stick's going to earn me a fortune as the world's most wonderful woman metal diviner, you know!"

"Sure guess a pickaxe would be more useful," Leila said dryly. "Anyway, cuckoo, where have you been all this time?" And then the American junior whistled as she gazed at Bessie's shoes, showing telltale traces of white dust.

"Bessie, you've been in the forbidden wing!" she accused.

Bessie crimsoned.

"Well, what if I have?" she asked defiantly. "I—I had to go and look for my treasure, didn't I? And it's a jolly good job I did, too," she added wrathfully, "otherwise that other girl might have found it. I caught her, you know!"

"You—you caught her? You mean May Gloucester?" Babs said.

"Yes, rather! She was in the old captain's study."

"When?" Babs asked.

"Oh, a long time ago. Be-before Piper and the servants went in, you know. I nearly ran into Piper when I came out, but he didn't spot me. Only Sophie did, and she wouldn't say anything, of course. But May Gloucester was there," Bessie added seriously, "looking behind an old picture which still hung on the wall."

Babs frowned.

"An old picture? What was she doing that for?"

"To fuf-find the treasure, of course," Bessie explained. "But she gave it up like anything when she saw me, you know, and tut-told me to tell you that she was looking forward to seeing you to-night, Babs."

Babs blinked.

"And you were there an hour ago?" she said. "Then—oh, my hat, was it your footprint we spotted?" Then Babs shook her head, gazing down at Bessie's plump little feet. "No, not yours, Bess. You must have dodged the dust."

"Looks as though it may have been Skinnergogs, after all, eh?" Mabs put in.

"Yes, and we're going to check up on that," Babs nodded determinedly. "Now the question is: How do we get her out of her room?"

"Well," Mabs suggested, "how did we trick Miss Skinner in the old wing? Bessie's ventriloquism! Wait a minute; I've got it! She'll be dressing now Bess, game for the job?" Bessie looked lofty.

"Well, of course, if you cats can't get on without me—"
 "Bessie, we can't!" Mabs confessed solemnly. "Without you, old thing, we'd be helpless. Anyway, here's the little wheeze. Knock on Skinnygog's door and imitate Miss Bullivant's voice. Tell Skinny to go along and see the Bull as soon as she's ready. Then once she nips out—"
 "We nip in!" Clara grinned. "Good scheme! Come on; let's go and put it into action!"

And put it into action without delay the chums did. At once they made their way to the guests' corridor. There they hid while Bessie, tripping up the corridor, gave a very "Miss Bullivant" tap at the door of Room No. 1, and in Miss Bullivant's own rousing and acrid tones, called out:

"All right, Miss Skinner, please don't hurry. When you have finished dressing, please come along and see me."
 "Good old Bessie!" breathed Babs gleefully, as Miss Skinner's reply came back.

"Yes, Miss Bullivant; be there in two minutes," it said silkily.

But by that time Miss Skinner had reached Miss Bullivant's study, and Miss Bullivant, never at her very best thing in the morning, glared a little as she came in.

"Good-morning!" she said rumbly. "It is rather early, isn't it? I have not yet had breakfast."

Miss Skinner blinked.

"But you asked me to come along to—"

"I did?"

"Yes, indeed! About two minutes ago you knocked on my door."

"I did?" Miss Bullivant repeated, with surprise.

"Definitely! You asked me to come along as soon as I was ready."

Miss Bullivant stared at her. It was on the tip of her tongue to dismiss Miss Skinner with a curt word about a too-vivid imagination, when suddenly she paused. Miss Bullivant, in company with everybody else at Cliff House, had heard of a certain girl who possessed ventriloquial powers.

"I see," she said slowly. "I assure you, Miss Skinner, that you have been deceived. I will not make the accusation until I am sure, but perhaps you

Miss Skinner's shoes in Babs' hand. They stopped dead.

"Barbara!" Miss Skinner cried.

"Miss Skinner, please! I will deal with this! And so," Miss Bullivant said heavily, "I was right. You decoyed Miss Skinner from this room in order to play a trick. Barbara, what have you been doing?"

"Nun-nothing, Miss Bullivant."

"Do not tell stories, Barbara! What is that shoe you have in your hand?"

Babs dropped the shoe. But Miss Skinner turned white as she recognised that shoe as one of the pair she had worn in the ruins.

"I—I'm sus-sorry!" Babs stammered.

"I—I just picked it up."

"Picked it up!" Miss Skinner flamed. "Picked it up! Miss Bullivant, the girl is lying! That shoe was in my wardrobe! They have been searching my rooms!"

"Barbara!" exclaimed Miss Bullivant; and then her eyebrows raised as Clara Trevlyn, Leila Carroll, and Janet Jordan drifted in rather sheepishly from the bed-room. "So you are in this, too? Where is Bessie Bunter?"

"Please, Miss Bullivant, she's not here," Babs faltered.

"No? But she was," Miss Bullivant accused. "You used Bessie Bunter's ventriloquism to decoy Miss Skinner out of the room in order, I presume, to play some wretched sort of practical joke on her. Barbara, you will come with me! All of you will come with me! I am going to report you all to Miss Primrose."

The chums exchanged feeble, sickly glances. But one thing, at least, they had established—that the sole of that shoe fitted Babs' print perfectly, proving without any doubt that Miss Skinner had been the unknown prowler in the ruins that morning. Perhaps that discovery in some measure compensated them for the penalty they now had to face.

They did not find Miss Primrose in her most lenient mood.

"I am rather tired of these senseless pranks," she declared herself, when Miss Bullivant had given her report, "and you will all do an extra hour's detention. Barbara, as captain of the Fourth Form and a leader who is supposed to be an example to the rest, I must say I am surprised. You will do the detention, and you will also write an essay on your duties as captain to remind you of them. And please," she added almost fiercely, "do not offend again. If any of you girls are reported to me within the next three days, I shall send home a special report!"

They left, feeling a little crushed, a little subdued.

"I guess," Leila Carroll said, when they reached Study No. 4 again, where Bessie was immersed in her book on metal divining, "we've got to tread sort of careful. Primmy's getting fed-up. Question is now, where do we stand? You know, thinking it over, I've got a sort of hunch we're no better off!"

"We are," Babs said.

"And how?"

"Well, put two and two together!"

And Babs glanced keenly at her chums.

"What's the conclusion? It's pretty safe, I think, to assume now that May keeps visiting her old study to search for something—"

"Yes, rather! My tut-treasure!" Bessie said indignantly. "If you want to know—"

"We don't!" Babs said. "Pipe down, old Bess! Whatever May is after is in that study—and if you ask me, Miss Skinner knows it, and Miss Skinner has

The Editor says:

"THANK YOU, GIRLS—"

for the way in which you have taken my advice about making quite certain of your favourite paper every week. As I have already explained, owing to the War and the difficulties of transport, supplies of papers to newsagents are being limited. In future, newsagents will only stock those copies they are sure of selling, and so, unless you have placed an order, you may find it impossible to obtain your copy. Fill in this form and hand it to your newsagent to-day."

THE SCHOOLGIRL

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Bessie smirked as she rejoined the waiting chums. A minute they waited, Babs fingering the paper pattern of the footprint. Then suddenly the door of Room No. 1 came open, and very primly Miss Skinner trotted off along the corridor.

"Meredith, we're in!" giggled Janet Jordan. "Now's the day, and now's the giddy minute! Forward, the troops!"

In a moment they had darted from their hiding-places, all except Bessie, who, anxious to get on with her "treasure divining," while there was no likelihood of interruption, ambled off, leaving them to it. In a breathless group they plunged into Miss Skinner's room, Babs closing the door behind her.

The guest's room was built on the principle of the mistress' studies—a small bed-room adjoining a sitting-room. Certainly there were no shoes in the sitting-room, and when they went into the bed-room there was, at first, no sign there. It was not until Mabs investigated the wardrobe, indeed, that Miss Skinner's shoes were found. Then they discovered half a dozen pairs of them.

do not know that Bessie Bunter of the Fourth Form is an expert ventriloquist, and this certainly sounds like one of her ruses to get you out of your room. If that is the case, there must be another motive behind it—probably inspired by Barbara Redfern. Come, Miss Skinner! Let us go back to your room."

Miss Skinner stared.

"Miss Bullivant, what was that you said—this girl Bunter ventriloquises?"

"She does. It is the one thing, apart from cooking, which she can do remarkably well. But why do you look so startled?"

Miss Skinner did not reply to the question. But she was thinking of her last experience with the chums in the forbidden wing, and the awful suspicion was dawning upon her that perhaps she had been a victim of Bessie's ventriloquism then.

Miss Bullivant did not wait for a reply. She swept majestically out of the room, Miss Skinner agitatedly tripping at her heels. With frowning brow Miss Bullivant marched along to Guest-room No. 1, and flung the door open. As she did so, Babs and Mabs emerged from the bed-room, one of

got the wind up because of it. She's got the idea, I'm sure, that May's in the habit of visiting those ruins, and for some reason she doesn't like the idea. Why?"

"Shucks! You're asking the questions: answer them," Leila said.

"Remember," Babs said, "Miss Skinner and May were at school together. Well, we know May's true blue. We know that whatever she's doing in the condemned wing is being done with a good object. But what about Skinnygogs? She's got wind of that. She's anxious to scotch whatever it is May is trying to do."

The chums nodded. That, also, was simple reasoning.

"But what," Mabs asked, with the faintest touch of irritation, "is May searching for? And why should Miss Skinner be trying to mess her schemes up? That's what I can't get the hang of!"

"And neither," Babs said, "can I. We've got to work to find that out. And to-night we will find it out, because I'm going to ask May, when we meet her, to tell us the whole story point blank. Meantime," she added grimly, "keep an eye on Skinny."

Miss Skinner Keeps Watch!



BUT there was no need to keep an eye on Miss Skinner, as it happened. For it became very apparent before long that Miss Skinner was keeping an eye upon them.

No doubt now that Miss Skinner was both suspicious and nervous of Babs & Co.—strengthening all the theories that Babs held.

After lessons, when Babs walked down to the tuckshop with Mabs and Jean Cartwright, the lanky Scots junior, Miss Skinner followed them. After dinner, when Babs, with Clara and Marjorie Hazeldene and Christine Wilmer, cycled into Friardale Village, Miss Skinner also followed.

That evening, before bed, on two occasions Miss Skinner looked into Study No. 4 on the flimsiest of pretexts.

"Uneasy in her mind about us," Babs said. "She thinks, obviously, that we are still making contact with May. Not a bad idea to-night, when we go off to meet May, to turn the key in the lock of her door while we are away. We can easily unlock it on our return journey."

A good idea that. And accordingly, when they crept from their dormitory through the inky-black corridors of Cliff House that night, they made a special detour to pass Miss Skinner's room. With a quiet chuckle Babs turned the key—Janet Jordan already having made certain that the key should be on the outside of the lock for that purpose.

Without incident the chums—all except Bessie, whom they had left behind—reached the laboratory. Torch in hand, Babs stepped through the door into the forbidden wing. She switched the torch on.

"May!" she breathed.

"Oh, Babs!" came a relieved voice from the darkness. "Everything all right?"

"Right as rain!" Babs cheerily answered. "Whoa, close the door there! May, you wanted to see us?" she breathed, stepping forward.

"I did." May Gloucester nodded. In the torch-light her face showed white, strained, anxious. "You were

bricks to come to my rescue as you did, and—and— Oh, Babs, I'm in fearful trouble, and if you and your friends could help me—"

"Just say how," Babs answered quietly. "We're all on your side, May. But, tell us first, how is Miss Skinner mixed up in all this?"

The old captain gulped.

"I want to tell you that; I feel you are entitled to know. Miss Skinner"—and here a note of bitterness crept into May's voice—"is the biggest rotter I know, Babs! You remember, when at school, she and I were quite good friends?"

"Yes."

"I trusted her. I was sorry for her. We helped each other in a good many ways—and I thought she was true-blue! But she always had one dangerous fault—her lack of control where money was concerned. Just before I

thought nothing further about it until the very week she was leaving.

Miss Primrose, at that time, had been called away to a conference. Before May had actually left, Miss Skinner had visited her, showing her a typewritten letter which the head-mistress had sent, and in which she, Miss Primrose, had suggested that as she would not be able to return to Cliff House before May's departure, May should hand over the Longmore testimonial fund to Miss Skinner. May, of course, had been glad to do so.

"But I insisted first—just a pure formality, of course—that Miss Skinner should give me a written acknowledgment in return for the money and the books I handed over. It did not strike me at the time how reluctant she was to do that; but when



THE chums stared and grinned at Bessie. Bessie was convinced that hidden-treasure was the secret of the condemned study, and the plump duffer was trying out a new method for finding that treasure!

left school, Babs, she was up to her ears in debt. Perhaps you remember at that time that the school was collecting money for the Longmore testimonial? Perhaps you remember, too, that I was the treasurer of that fund?"

"Yes," Babs said. Vaguely, she did remember that.

"And perhaps you remember that the testimonial had amounted to something like twenty-five pounds?"

"But what has this to do—" Clara broke in.

"I'm coming to that. At that time Miss Skinner was frantic for money. I lent her what I could—but that was a mere drop in the ocean. She said she must have ten pounds."

And then she went on to give the rest of the story. How Miss Skinner, in her desperation, had hinted that as the testimonial money would not be required for some time, she should lend her the ten pounds out of that. May, soul of honour that she was, had refused—had not even taken the request seriously, imagining that the suggestion was only put forward as something in the nature of a joke. She had

I insisted it was merely a formality, she did it. I remember I was framing a photograph when she brought the acknowledgment in."

"And—and then?" Babs said.

"I don't know. From that moment I never saw the acknowledgment again," May confessed. "I thought afterwards—but, anyway, I'll come to that. Well, in due course I left the school. I went abroad for a year, and in that time, travelling from place to place in order to learn my father's business, I had forgotten all about the testimonial and everything else. Imagine my surprise when, returning to England, I found a nine-months' old letter from Miss Primrose!"

"About the fund?" Babs guessed. She began to understand now.

"About that—yes. Apparently, when the fund had been audited, a ten-pound deficit had been found. Miss Primrose's letter mentioned nothing about her instructions to hand over the fund to Miss Skinner, but Miss Primrose said she was so deeply grieved to feel that I had made use of the

(Continued on page 14)

OUT OF SCHOOL HOURS



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

THIS winter is going to be a season of hobbies, I'm thinking. Don't you agree with your Patricia?

Before very long there won't be one of us who isn't quite an expert at something or other which we were no good at before.

I look like becoming quite a track cyclist, for one thing. I used not to be very keen on "biking"—much preferring to travel by bus or in the family car for any distance.

But now the buses are few and far between—and very crowded. And the family car is alone and forgotten in some mysterious garage, where we shall never see it again.

All sorts of hobbies are being taken up, I've discovered, some of them very possible, and some of them just amusing. But it doesn't matter—as long as it's a hobby, something to pass the long evenings enjoyably.

● With Matchboxes

Take matchboxes, for instance. What a lot of things you can do with them!

If you've got a good imagination—and some sticky stuff, and a few drawing-pins—it's amazing what charming dolly's furniture you can produce to delight the young folks. (And the older ones, too, for that matter.)

A doll's chest of drawers made of six matchboxes all covered in wallpaper or other pretty paper, and with beads or drawing-pins for handles, is a perfect boon in a doll's house.

You can make music stools, with padded tops, divan beds, kitchen dresser—in fact, there's no end to the furniture just ordinary matchboxes make.

Or you can make little trinket boxes for yourself, for holding, pins, hairpins, "grips," and so on.

They look so dainty on your very own dressing-table, especially if you could find some scraps of silk or other pretty material with which to cover the boxes, instead of paper.

Collecting things, too, has become one of the latest crazes. I read in the papers of someone, the other day, who actually collected old pencil stubs!

Then there was another person whose joy in life was to collect the odd cards from packets of playing cards, and try to make up complete packs with odd cards.

And to make one pack, apparently, took him years!

Oh well, there certainly are some amusing hobbies around. But as long as

they give pleasure—that's the main thing, isn't it?

● Another Hobby

This reminds me that I wanted to say how glad I am you like the puzzles I've been digging up for you.

As you'll see, I'm giving you a bit of a rest from them this week. But you shall have some more next Saturday. Meanwhile, it's not a bad idea to save these, pasting them in a book—with the answers at the back—for use when that "What shall we do now?" mood comes over the family.

Incidentally, that sounds almost like another hobby for you, doesn't it?

● Under Your Coat

You'll probably smile at this jerkin in the picture here, and say "what is it?" or "goodness, I couldn't wear a thing like that!"

But couldn't you just! If you were to ask any soldier, or any land-girl how they'd like a wind-proof jerkin to wear under a coat on the chilly frosty days—why, they'd just bubble over with enthusiasm.

Quite seriously, these jerkins are one of the latest notions. For girls whose winter coat isn't fur-lined or anything luxurious like that, they're a perfect boon.

You see, by covering chest-box and back as they do, they keep out piercing winds from the rather cold-catching parts of the body. Also, being so slim-fitting, they're not bulky, and so don't spoil the line of your coat when it is fastened on top.

One of the best materials you could make this jerkin of is wash-leather—you know, the sort you use for cleaning windows. But if that's too dear, then a good imitation leather, or thick woollen fabric is the next best thing.

Only a yard is required, cut into two pieces, measuring about 16 inches across by 16 or 18 down.

Shape it slightly for the armholes and for the neck (as shown in the diagram). Then bind each piece with bias binding or tape and join on the shoulders.



Join the sides with tape fastenings, and there you have one of the most practical garments for extra cold days that has yet been invented.

● Funny Child

I asked my small brother, Heath (whose full name is Heatherington) the other day what on earth he was going to do with all the conkers we've collected lately.

"Well!" He wrinkled his forehead. "We can't roast them and pretend they're chestnuts, can we?"

"No," I agreed. "An' I offered them to mummy to trim her hat with—but she didn't want them," said Heath patiently.

"I'm not surprised," I muttered. "So," Heath continued, "I think I'll jus' keep them!"

And that was that! I thought at least he was going to plant them to make a forest of trees in our garden, or offer them to our First-aid Post near by for filling sandbags. But no—he's just going to keep them.

"You're nothing but a little hoarder!" I told him cuttingly.

● With a Motto

This needle-case in the picture is rather unusual in design, isn't it? It would be lovely made in leather, or leatherette. A strip cut from an old belt would do beautifully.

Cut off a piece about 8 or 9 inches long. Fold in half, and then cut off the corners at the ends to make a point.

A small piece of the belt is then sewn on to the back piece, inside, to make a pocket, and a piece of flannel is stitched just above, to hold needles and pins. The bar at the top is made from a pipe-cleaner curled up at the ends, and through the curls is looped a piece of cord for hanging.

If you stitch or paint the words "A Stitch in Time Saves Nine" on the front, your needle-case will look just like a banner with a motto on it and be jolly useful, too!

Take care of your young selves—and keep cheery, won't you?

Your friend,
PATRICIA.





A COSY CAP To MAKE A PRETTY DECORATION

Just the thing for frosty days—and so easy-to-wear.

darning-needle with the wool, and over-sew the pieces of the cap together, using fairly close stitches.

Other girls may be clever enough to do this with a crochet hook and wool. I think perhaps the darning-needle way is a spot easier—though the other way is stronger and makes a more even join.

You could, if you like, use contrasting coloured wool for the joining. Say it is a brown cap you are making, joins of green wool or yellow would look very gay.

There—and now the hat is ready to put on.

It can be worn as close as a scull-cap, or slightly ruffled, as shown in the picture. Wear it with an air, pulling it this way and that until it really suits you—and you'll be thrilled with it, I promise you.

I need hardly mention, that if you can manage to find enough "bunny wool" to make it, it would look even prettier than ordinary wool. But I leave that to you.

CROCHET STITCHES

Just for the sake of those of you who'd like to do a bit of crochet, but aren't quite sure how to begin, or who'd like to have your memories refreshed, here are the details of the stitches for this hat.

CHAIN.—You always start with this. Make a loop first. Slip the hook through, and pull the wool arranged over your left fingers from the back to the front of the loop.

DOUBLE CROCHET.—There's a loop over your hook. You dig the hook into the chain, and pull through the wool over your finger. Then hook the wool again, and bring it through both the loops on the hook together.

FLOWERS are very scarce these days, aren't they?

So if you see some of those colourful Cape gooseberries or Chinese lanterns on sale for a few pence, do buy some.

They should be hung up, head downwards for the first week or so, until they have lost their leaves and are thoroughly dried off.

After that they can be used for decoration in any way you like.

They can be stood in a vase—with no water. Or they could be placed in a flower-pot, which you have filled with stones, pebbles, or even pretty shells.

The flower-pot should be painted to look gay, of course. Blue would make a perfect colour contrast to the vivid orange of the lanterns.

Dust them lightly now and again with a soft dusting brush, and they'll remain bright and cheerful all through the winter days.



HERE'S the very cap to wear on chilly days. It can be perched on the back of your hair to look frisky, or pulled well down over your ears if you'd rather be just plain warm.

But you must be able to crochet, if you'd make it. (If you can't, perhaps there's someone in the family who'd help.)

First you must make a circle of double crochet. Start with a loop of chain, and then work round and round until your circle measures about 5 inches across. Fasten off.

Now start again with some chain measuring about 3 inches. Work in double crochet along it, and increase one stitch at each end. Continue like this for about 5 inches, or until your work has grown from 3 inches to 5½ in width. Then fasten off.

Work three more panels like this, then join the narrow ends to the circle you made. Now join all the side seams together.

You can do this in one of two ways, according to your choice.

Some girls may prefer to thread a



This Week:
MARJORIE HAZELDENE.

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.

But when she is on her own, Marjorie can often be found doing the most intricate embroidery. This is close work, and requires every ounce of her attention.

Clara is the wearer of more than one of Marjorie's knitted pull-overs. "They're better than shop," says Clara stoutly. (Though I don't think she really notices—or cares—what she's wearing!)

The children and aged people of the parish where Marjorie's father is rector are also proud of the garments they wear, made by "Miss Marjorie, from the rectory." There are wee socks, jackets, and bonnets, romper suits, bed-jackets, and shawls.

Just now Marjorie is again busy at knitting—when her first-aid classes give her the time—making winter woolies for the evacuated children who have been billeted in Friardale.

She still manages to find time to make novelties for bazaars as well, though. Cliff House's own annual bazaar is very proud of its M. Hazeldene's contributions.

Last year Marjorie embroidered a fire-

screen in wool "petit point." It really was a lovely thing. And to her pleasure it was bought by Lady Courtfield for no less than eight guineas—a grand sum for the Cliff House charities.

This year she is making more useful things. Those cosy knitted hoods are all the rage at the moment, and Marjorie is making them as fast as she can, in every colour. They should sell well, too, for the cost of the wool is only about eightpence, and people will gladly pay two-and-six for them—or one and six, without scarf attached.

A great number of girls at Cliff House have taken up knitting with great industry this autumn. Socks are a favourite, and Marjorie spends much precious time, patiently explaining, both to the "babies" and some of the older girls, the secret of heel-turning.

Marjorie's hobby, which was once considered a little "homely," has now become all the rage—quite a fashionable hobby in fact—bringing the quiet Marjorie right into the limelight!

I THINK everyone knows what Marjorie Hazeldene's hobby is. But actually she has two just now.

Still first, comes sewing and all sorts of handicrafts. Knitting, crochet, embroidery—Marjorie loves all these. She is also very keen on first-aid—and really is a splendid little nurse.

It's difficult to say which of all the forms of handicraft Marjorie likes best of all.

She certainly does a lot of knitting, and does it beautifully. Marjorie says she likes doing this because you don't have to concentrate very hard on knitting, and can talk and listen and even read at the same time.

(Continued from page 11)

money. Of course, I wrote at once—rather late, as you will guess. Miss Primrose, rather curtly, wrote back telling me that she had seen Miss Skinner, who had denied absolutely that she had taken over the fund, and the matter was now closed. That year," May added, biting her lips, "my name was struck off the Old Girls' Club."

"Oh, May!" Babs breathed. "And then—then— Oh, I don't know! But, somehow, it all got back to my father. My father was in a terrible state about it. He went to the school. He saw Miss Primrose—Miss Skinner having left, then—and Miss Primrose made it plain that I had taken ten pounds from that cash. He traced Miss Skinner and saw her, and she, lying like the hypocrite she is, actually told my father that she knew I had had the use of the money and had spent it. My father was in a terrible fury when he returned. He felt I had besmirched the family name. Well, we had a row," May said, with a weary sigh—"a dreadful row. And—and I left home. Things haven't been so good since then."

Her voice broke a little. "And—and now?" Babs asked, after a pause. "Now," May said almost fiercely, "I'm doing the one thing I can—find the proof that I handed over that fund to Miss Skinner. The one thing, and the only thing, which will prove it is that acknowledgment I received from Miss Skinner. I left that in my old study. I know I did. And I have an idea— Oh!" she broke off, with a startled gasp.

And they all wheeled in utter consternation and dismay as the laboratory door slammed open suddenly and a bright torch beam cut through the darkness.

"Oh, crumbs!" Clara gasped in horror. "Primmy—and Miss Skinner!"

For Cliff House's headmistress and the temporary assistant mistress it was!

Bessie Brings a Clue!

 TOO late May stepped back. In a moment Miss Skinner, rushing forward, had caught her by the shoulder. "Let me go!" May cried. "No, no! Miss Primrose, help!" And Miss Skinner struggled with her. "This—is this the girl! This—" And she stopped then, as Miss Primrose shone the torch full in the ex-captain's face, at the same moment giving an exclamation of amazement. "This is the girl who was in my room!" Miss Skinner cried.

"In what?" Babs gasped. "In my room! Miss Primrose, I told you, didn't I? I was awakened not so long ago by an intruder—rifling things from my desk—but when I called out she flew away. Miss Primrose, this is she!"

"Why, good gracious, it is May Gloucester!" Miss Primrose cried. "May, what—"

"Wait a minute, Miss Primrose!" Babs burst out. "There's some mistake here. May wasn't in Miss Skinner's room—couldn't have been in Miss Skinner's room, because—well, I suppose I had better own up now—we locked Miss Skinner in her room!"

"Indeed!" Miss Primrose said coldly. "Then how do you account for the fact that Miss Skinner is here now?"

Babs blinked. That certainly was a

facer. She did not guess in that moment that Miss Skinner had not been in her room when they had locked it; that actually the mistress had been on the watch near the Fourth Form dormitory and had followed the chums downstairs. She had heard them lock her door. When they had gone she had unlocked it, and then, having made sure where they were going, had fetched the headmistress.

Without friendliness Miss Primrose's eyes fastened upon May.

"May, what are you doing here?" "It's plain what she is doing here!" Miss Skinner cried triumphantly. "Up to her old tricks, of course! Miss Primrose, a small wad of pound notes, tied with a rubber band, is missing from my desk; also a gold bracelet with my initials on it. No doubt May has made this old wing her headquarters in order to make raids upon the valuables of—"

"Why, you—" cried May in fury. "It's not true, Miss Primrose!" Babs flashed out.

"Then what is this?" Miss Skinner viciously cried, and before anybody could move she had darted at May. Into May's coat pocket she plunged her hand, and then, with a triumphant little cry, drew forth two objects—a small wad of Treasury notes fastened with a rubber band, and a gold brooch containing the initials "E. E. S."

"Miss Primrose, does that prove anything?" she cried. The chums goggled. For a moment even Babs looked staggered. But from May came a ringing cry.

"Miss Primrose, don't believe her!" she cried. "She's lying! It's false! She had those things in her hand when she groped in my pocket—"

The headmistress interrupted angrily. "Really, May, you can hardly expect me to credit that! It is apparent that Miss Skinner had grounds for her accusation— You will come with me, May. In the morning, since you are no longer under my jurisdiction, you shall explain yourself to the police."

May fell back, her face draining of colour.

"The police! Miss Primrose, please—please—"

"The police!" Miss Primrose repeated. "I cannot forget, May, that when you left this school you had already used ten pounds of the school money. I hushed up that matter—wrongly, as I now perceive."

"But—but—" gasped Babs. "Miss Primrose, you can't—you can't! May isn't guilty—"

"Barbara, be silent!" Miss Primrose snapped. "It is perfectly obvious that this girl has deceived you all and bluffed you into helping her. I might overlook your foolishness in that direction, but I can't overlook the fact that you have dared to come to these forbidden premises again. I shall see you all in the morning; but, meantime," she added, her voice striking its harshest and most warning note—"meantime, if I catch any one of you in these ruins again I shall have no hesitation in expelling that girl instantly! Now go!"

"But—but—" "Go!" Miss Primrose thundered.

"Yes, please, girls," May entreated. "Don't—don't get into any trouble for my sake—please! I—I'll clear this up somehow."

Brave words. But how hopeless a job, they all felt that was! Babs was desperate.

"Well, we've got to do something," she said, when the crestfallen party arrived back in the Fourth Form dormitory, all stepping quietly lest they should disturb any of the sleeping

girls. "We've got to! Once let the police come—"

"Which means," Mabs said, "we've got to do it before to-morrow morning. But what—"

"Only one thing," Babs breathed. "The one thing which will prove May's innocence is that letter which she fancies is hidden among the rubbish in the old captain's study. Well, she can't find it now, that's a cert. But I can."

"Rats! If you're going, we're coming!" Clara said warily.

"And all get expelled?" Babs asked. "And keep your voices low, for goodness' sake! We don't want to awaken the others."

"Well, if you're willing to risk expulsion—"

"No. Wait a minute!" It was Janet Jordan who spoke. "We're all talking rot. How can we all go? Babs is right. The best thing is for one of us to go—and one only. Less chance of being caught. But we're all in this, so we'll all take an equal chance."

"How do you mean?" breathed Babs. "We draw lots to see which one goes," explained Janet. "I've got a box of dominoes in my locker. Highest scorer goes."

That, again, was a good suggestion—sensible, too. A candle was lit, and the box of dominoes was found. On the floor of the dormitory the dominoes were placed face downwards and shuffled round. Each girl drew one. In the light of the candle they displayed their choice. Leila smiled tensely.

"Guess I've drawn a double six! Say, can you beat that?"

Obviously nobody could. The job was Leila's, and, with the whispered good wishes of her chums in her ears, she crept off, armed with a torch.

The chums anxiously climbed into their beds. But nobody even thought of sleep. Hearts and minds were all with Leila. Each one of them was burning with the hope that Leila would bring back that all-important letter, and each of them knew agonies of suspense as the time ticked away.

Eleven chimed from the clock tower; after that, twelve; after that, half-past. Babs groaned.

"Oh, crumbs! Where is she? Look here, I'm going to search—"

"Shush!" hissed Mabs. "Somebody coming!"

They all tensed. Footsteps plainly were to be heard along the corridor. Then suddenly the dormitory door came open; the voice of Miss Primrose, quivering with wrath, cut through the darkness.

"And to-morrow morning, Leila, you will be expelled! Now go to bed!"

The chums went cold with horror.

They heard Leila slipping off her dressing-gown. As soon as Miss Primrose had gone, Babs sat up.

"Leila!" she breathed. "You were caught, then? What happened? Did—did you find the—the letter?"

"I guess not!"

"Then how—"

"While I was searching, that awful Skinner woman came snooping. Guess that woman is mighty scared of what might be found in the old captain's study. Anyhow, she carted me off to Primmy, authority or no authority, telling Primmy that she'd followed me into the ruins. That was a whopper, if you like, because I'd been there over an hour when she came barging along. Guess I'm for it now, though!" she added quietly, a slight tremor in her voice.

Leila was. No doubt about that. Leila had tried and failed. Once

more Miss Skinner had been triumphant. Desperately glum indeed were the chums then—with May due to be handed over to the police to-morrow morning, with one of their own chums booked for expulsion.

Trouble was added to trouble the following morning when, immediately after rising bell, they were all, barring Leila, summoned before the severe-looking Miss Primrose.

"You know what has happened to Leila?" she said. "For her wilful disobedience and her flouting of orders she is to be expelled to-day. You can each consider yourselves fortunate that you have not been dealt with in the same way. As it is, you are detained each half-holiday for the rest of the month, and I shall dispatch a special report to your parents to-day!"

"And—May?" Babs asked.
 "May," Miss Primrose flintily informed them, "is being held in custody until the arrival of the police. I forbid any of you to have any communication with her whatsoever. Please go!"

They went, heavy-hearted, thinking of Leila, of May. By common consent they made their way back to Study No. 4, picking up Leila on the way. In Study No. 4 they found Bessie Bunter studying a photograph.

"Hallo, Bess, what's that?" Babs asked listlessly.

"I dunno!" Bessie frowned. "You know, I think it's a bit thick! I went to the old wing this morning—and what do you think? Grace Camperhill is on guard there, and she gave me a hundred lines for even sticking my nose near the place!"

"But the photograph?" Babs asked.
 "Well, May threw this out of the window, you know!"

"May?" Babs asked quickly.
 "Yes, rather! When I was coming back from the old wing I passed the window next to Miss Bullivant's. That's where May is being held, you know. May was at the window, and she just said: 'Catch, Bessie! Give this to Babs!' and then darted in again. But blessed if I can see what she meant by it!" Bessie said, ponderously frowning. "There's no message or anything on it, you know! Perhaps it's a photograph of the hiding-place of the treasure!" she added. "And now the police are coming for her, she wants me to have it!"

Babs took the photograph from her. It was a snapshot—obviously one of May's own—and a very good one at that—for Babs remembered how interested and keen May always had been on photography. It was a landscape, but most certainly not a landscape of any of the country surrounding Cliff House. Babs frowned puzzledly.

"Well, I'm bothered if I can see—" she began, and stared again at the photograph. "My hat, wait a minute!" she breathed. "This is the clue!"

"Clue?" Mabs questioned blankly.

"Yes. Don't you see?" And Babs' eyes lit up. "May didn't have time to tell us her idea of searching in the old captain's study; she was hauled off before she could do that. My hat, I begin to see now!" Babs cried excitedly.

"Remember when Bessie spotted May the other morning? She was looking behind an old photograph on the wall of the captain's study. Remember what she said last night—that when Skinny handed her that acknowledgment she was framing a photograph. This morning she pitched this photograph at Bessie. Why?"

"Miss Leila, Miss Primrose wants

you," Sophie, the maid, said, peering in at the door. "She says you are to pack your things and then go to her study."

"Oh, my hat! That means—" Mabs faltered.

"Right-ho, old thing!" Leila answered nonchalantly—but she went a little white. "Peckers up, sisters—don't worry about little Leila!"

"But—but—" "Bye!" Leila said briefly.

And perhaps to hide the tears she felt springing to her eyes, she bolted. Babs gulped.

"Oh, my hat!" she cried. "Girls, we've got to do something! Wait a minute!" And then she gave another jump. "Look!" she muttered, pointing towards the window. "The police!"

The chums' hearts all seemed to turn to stone as they saw Inspector Winter and a constable, of the Courtfield Division, come striding up the drive.

Supposing," Babs cried—"supposing that by accident—or on purpose—when she was framing the picture she used Skinny's letter of acknowledgment as part of the packing? It's a thing that might easily have been done."

They stared, feeling the possible truth in that statement, but feeling also the desperate wildness of it.

"It's a chance," cried Babs, "and even half a chance has got to be taken at this moment! Once we find that acknowledgment we've got Skinny bottled up, and once Skinny's bottled up, she's bowled out for the fiber and the schemer she is! And May's cleared, and they can't very well expel Leila for helping to prove her innocence. I'm going!"

"But, Babs—" Mabs cried.
 Babs, however, was already out of the study. Time was short. Ten minutes, and the assembly at which Leila was due to be expelled would be called.



"GUESS I've drawn a double six," said Leila Carroll, holding up a domino. The others caught their breaths. This meant that the American junior was the one who would have to take the risk of entering the condemned study once more. If Leila were caught—she would be expelled.

"Babs, what can we do?" Mabs asked despairingly.

"Something—something!" Babs spoke almost fiercely. "Oh, wait a minute!" she cried desperately. "Let me get this thing worked out. The photograph—that's the clue! This is May's way of telling us it's the clue! This photograph doesn't mean anything except as a hint that we've got to look for a photograph—some other photograph—some photograph, obviously, which once hung in May's study. And—whoopee!" she cried, her face suddenly flaming with fierce excitement.

They all eyed her.

"I've got it—or I think I have!" Babs choked. "Remember that photo hanging in Miss Bullivant's room—the one taken when May was captain of the school? Remember that May isn't in that photograph—which means that she took it. And if she took it wouldn't she be the one to frame it? In that case, it probably once hung in May's study, and has been taken down, and that's the one May is searching for.

May already was being interrogated by the police. Like a mad thing, Babs rushed down the stairs and, almost without stopping to knock, burst into Miss Bullivant's study.

That mistress jumped up.
 "What—what! Barbara, how dare you—"

"Miss Bullivant," Babs cried, her eyes going at once to the photograph on Miss Bullivant's wall, "will you please give me that photograph?"

"What? Indeed, I will not!" Miss Bullivant glared. "Barbara, are you also taking leave of your senses? May Gloucester has told an extraordinary story about a letter from Miss Skinner being hidden in the back of a photograph—"

Babs' eyes flamed.
 "She did?"

"Certainly she did. But—" "Miss Bullivant," Babs cried, "please—please tell me! Miss Bullivant, this—is this desperate! Where did you get that photograph?"

"I have not," Miss Bullivant said flintily, "the faintest idea. I think—"

but I only think—it came out of the old wing. Now, please, Barbara, do not persist in wasting my time. You cannot have the photograph, and I am extremely busy. Barbara, what are you doing?" she added, almost with incredulity in her voice.

For Babs, quivering suddenly, had made a plunge at the photograph. She caught it, tugged at it. Off the rail with a jerk came the photograph.

"Barbara!" Miss Bullivant spluttered. "Goodness me! Barbara, come back!" she shouted.

But Babs then was out of the study. She slammed the door behind her, tearing with her fingers at the back of the photograph as she went. How she hoped to goodness her guess was right!

Dashing up to the Head's study, she heard Miss Bullivant coming in pursuit. "Barbara! Stop!"

Along the Head's corridor Babs panted. A hasty tap at the door, then she whisked it open. The five people within jumped round. There were Miss Primrose, May Gloucester, Miss Skinner, and the police.

"Miss Primrose—" Babs cried; but before she could say more Miss Bullivant hurriedly entered.

"Miss Primrose, this girl has dared to—"

"Wait!" Babs cried. "Oh, please wait!"

With a last desperate effort, she tore the cardboard back from the framed photograph. As she did so, several sheets of paper fell out, and with them a blue piece of notepaper. Miss Skinner gave a strangled cry.

On to that piece of paper Babs pounced. Even in that moment she saw the signature, and she knew, from the ghostly pallor of Miss Skinner's face, that her hunch had been right. As Miss Skinner made a grab, she whisked the paper at Miss Primrose.

"Please read that!" she cried.

"Why, bless my soul!" Miss Primrose cried, in astonishment, staring dazedly at the rather faded writing.

"Miss Primrose—"

"Please wait!" Miss Primrose said.

Her eyes were very wide. "Bless my soul! Bless my— Dear me, how I am repeating myself! May, then—then your story is true! Here is that letter of acknowledgment you spoke of—in Miss Skinner's handwriting! Miss Skinner— Why, bless my soul!"—as Miss Skinner swayed and Miss Bullivant hurriedly stepped to steady her. "Barbara, get some water, please! Miss Skinner has fainted!"

"And I don't," Babs muttered, "wonder at it!"

She darted out. She got the water, returning to find Miss Primrose holding May by the hand, the two police officers smiling, and Miss Skinner in a chair, with Miss Bullivant beside her. Miss Primrose was shaking her head.

"And to think, May, all the years I have thought this of you—"

"And would," May said, laughing, "be thinking it still had it not been for Barbara here! Oh, Babs—Babs, how ever can I thank you?"

"Just," Babs said, "by asking Miss Primrose a favour. I say, what about Miss Skinner?"

"Miss Bullivant, please try to revive Miss Skinner!" Miss Primrose said. "Barbara, what is the favour?"

"The favour," Babs said breathlessly, "is to let Leila off! Oh, please! She was only in the old wing to help prove May's innocence!"

Miss Primrose nodded slowly. "Yes, of course! I realise that now," she said. "Dear me, what amazing events! Do not fear, Barbara. Leila

is freely forgiven, and—and—well, considering all the circumstances, I can do no more than to let you and your friends off their punishments at the same time! What an extraordinary morning!" she murmured. "What a fluster I am in! But, Barbara, thank you—thank you a thousand times for all you have done! I—I am glad, my dear, for once that you disobeyed!"

Inspector Winter rose.

"And, meantime," he asked, looking at May, "what do we do about Miss Skinner? Do you wish to charge her?"

May smiled.

"Thank you—no," she said. "All I want is a confession from her in her own writing to show to my father. And I don't think," she added happily, "I shall have much difficulty in getting that. In the meantime, Miss Primrose, I wonder if you'd mind if I took Barbara and her friends to the tuckshop?"

"By all means," Miss Primrose said pleasantly. "And I shall be pleased, May, if you would consider yourself a guest at the school for the next few days. I feel that we can never do enough now to make up to you for our misjudgment of you in the past. As for Miss Skinner—" and she looked at the slowly stirring mistress in the chair.

"H'm, perhaps we—we could leave Miss Skinner to you, Miss Primrose?" said Babs, and as the Head nodded: "Come on, May!"

And in triumph she led her out of the study. They ran into Leila Carroll almost immediately—Leila coming to report to the Head. What joy then to break the good news to the American junior! What cheers of triumph there were when they hurried on to Study No. 4 and told the whole wonderful story over again.

Then victoriously they marched in a body to the tuckshop. All was happiness, all was riotous excitement. One point Babs wanted cleared up, however.

She called across to May above the hubbub of cheery voices.

"It's pretty obvious, May, that Miss Skinner had a suspicion that it might be you snooping about the ruined wing. But why did she? After all, she had no reason to suspect you were anywhere about."

May moved to Babs' side, shaking her head.

"You're wrong, Babs," she said quietly. "As a matter of fact I realise now that Miss Skinner did see me! It was a few days ago in Friardale. I had just arrived; she was shopping. I spotted her and dodged away, but I had the feeling then that she may have recognised me."

"Oh!" said Babs, and nodded. "That's it, then. Obviously she wasn't sure it was you, but became suspicious when she heard there was a stranger in the wing. That was why she tried to pump me as to what the stranger was like."

"But tried in vain," May said warmly. "Good old Babs. Come on, have another cake! And you other girls, too!"

At that moment Bessie Bunter wandered in, and the plump junior was looking utterly down in the mouth. She blinked as Clara boisterously slapped her on the shoulder.

"Oh dud-dear, the tut-treasure, you know!"

"What? You've never found it, Bessie?" Babs cried.

"No." Bessie shook her head. "And I nun-never shall find it, you know, because I've just found that the old wing I thought was the forbidden wing was pulled down a hundred years ago—there was another blessed old wing in the school! Oh, really!—I sus-say, what are you cats laughing at?" she added indignantly.

But the "cats" were not merely laughing. They were almost hysterical!

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

NEXT WEEK'S SUPERB CLIFF HOUSE SCHOOL STORY

Never has Barbara Redfern, popular captain of the Fourth Form at Cliff House School, been lacking in courage. And so she did not hesitate to play a most audacious role in order to help another girl. It meant impersonating the girl at a fair-ground; it meant danger and difficulty. Alone, Babs might have failed, but there was Jimmy Richmond, her boy chum of Friardale School, to back her up wholeheartedly. Never has **Hilda Richards** written such an enthralling yarn as this. You simply must not fail to read it.



ORDER YOUR "SCHOOLGIRL" WELL IN ADVANCE

Another delightful Romantic story of the 18th Century, featuring—



JESS AND HIGHWAYMAN JACK

By
IDA MELBOURNE

Her Hero Captured!

IF I can but be in time—” Jess Reynolds, breathless with running, weighed down by a man’s heavy winter coat, stumbled through the darkness of the forest towards where a path ran. The ground was hard underfoot, and the air was ice-cold, so that her cheeks felt numbed even though she had been out but a few minutes. Only a short while ago she had been as warm as toast, cosy and snug in the hall of her father’s inn, the Rising Sun, the light of which she could see when now and again she looked back over her shoulder. In the inn a roaring fire blazed, before which four travellers from the London coach had toasted themselves before resuming their journey.

Those travellers had been in jovial mood, and did not seem the least bit alarmed of the fact that ahead of them lay Highwayman’s Heath, with perhaps Highwayman Jack ready with his pistols.

But there was good reason why they were not nervous—the same reason that had sent Jess hurrying to the fringe of the forest. The soldiers were on the heath again, lying in wait for Highwayman Jack!

It was news that had cheered the travellers—reassuring them—but to Jess, it was a knell of doom.

Highwayman Jack was her friend. Others might dread him, thinking that he was just a robber, a pest; but Jess knew better. He was a gallant of the road, harming no one—and, strange though it seemed, taking only what was his own. But the soldiers hunted him night and day as if he were a rascal, and Jess knew that, if he were caught, then the gallows at the cross-roads might be his fate.

That was why Jess hurried now—with the hope of meeting him on his way to the heath. Yet the hope was faint; for if he meant to stop the London coach, then he was by this time at his hiding-place awaiting it.

Jess, reaching the path that ran through the trees, halted. With hand

to her heart, which thumped madly, she tried to regain her breath so that she could listen intently.

To the left, from the direction of the heath, came the clapping of galloping hoofs, and a rider came, dimly seen, a mere shadowy figure.

“Hallo, there!” called Jess huskily. The rider reined up, and Jess, not sure yet that it was her highwayman friend, prepared for instant flight should it be a stranger.

The rider, walking his horse, called out:

“Jess!”

It was Highwayman Jack’s clear musical voice, and Jess’ heart leaped.

“Yes—Jess!” she answered.

He laughed, and she echoed his

Because she repaired Highwayman Jack’s tunic, Jess caused an innocent youth to be arrested—so that she had to save him as well as her outlaw friend!

laugh in relief, glad that he was safe, and free from the soldiers.

“They have not caught you, then?” she breathed. “I came to warn you of the soldiers on the heath. They are lurking there!”

Highwayman Jack rode nearer, then smiled down at her.

“I saw some soldiers,” he said softly, with a laugh. “But they didn’t see me! But, look!” And the young highwayman looked more serious. “In evading them I gashed this red velvet tunic of mine on an overhanging bough. A matter of small account, but I must crave the loan of a needle—”

Jess was immensely relieved that he was unharmed himself. The tear was nothing; she could mend it easily herself.

“Let me but have the jacket and the tear shall be mended neatly and swiftly,” she said eagerly.

Highwayman Jack hesitated for a moment as though unwilling to give her so much trouble, but as she insisted, he presently slipped his cloak, took off the jacket, and gave it to her.

“You are kindness and sweetness itself, little friend,” he said, his eyes

shining through the black mask that covered his face. “I am proud of that tunic, and the tear would mar it sadly. Your skilled fingers will make it like new again. There! And to-morrow? Will it be ready then?”

“To-morrow for certain! I’ll mend it to-night,” promised Jess, “and leave it in the hollow oak in the forest. At the end of this same path, and to the left,” she said. “You must know it.”

“I know it well, my dear,” agreed Highwayman Jack. “To-morrow as I ride along, I will seek it there!”

Then, leaning down, he patted her cheek, bade her good-night, and, not caring to loiter much longer in case soldiers were on his track, waved to her, and rode off.

Jess folded the jacket carefully under her coat, and at slow speed picked her way back towards the inn, the lights of which glowed yellow in the darkness.

In the seclusion of her own little bed-room at the inn ten minutes later, she examined the torn jacket. The sleeve had been badly gashed; but long though it was, Jess’ needle could mend it; and she vowed that it would

be so well done, that no one would ever guess that it had been torn at all.

For the moment, however, she tucked it out of sight in her bed under the coverlet; for it would not have done to run the risk of her stepmother peeping into the room while she had the jacket in full view.

There would be time and opportunity to mend it when the inn was closed for the night, and everyone else was abed.

Jess went downstairs to the hall, from which came the murmur of voices. Her father’s, her stepmother’s, the squire’s—and several others that she did not recognise. Pausing on the landing, she looked down.

In the bright firelight she saw the gaudy apparel of the squire.

“I’ll never rest until that scoundrel of a highwayman’s caught!” he was snarling. “He’s escaped the soldiers again!”

What if he could see the red jacket hidden in her room upstairs?

Jess busied herself getting the food and drink they ordered, and as she did so she heard snatches of conversation. While she scurried about, the inn door opened, and the captain of the soldiers

came in, and the squire began conversing with him about Highwayman Jack.

"'Tis that girl who befriends him!" he said, thumping the table viciously. "Bertha, ne calls her; but they say there's no Bertha hereabouts."

But never once did anyone turn a suspicious eye on Jess; for she was far too well known, and did not seem the kind of girl likely to befriend highwaymen.

The captain of the soldiers, a tall man with white wig and splendid uniform, was talking to Jess' father, and as she drew near she heard his words.

"He caught his sleeve on the bough of a tree when fleeing from my men and tore it. And I'll wager that the girl Bertha is mending it now. Let a girl but be seen with a red jacket to mend, and her days are numbered."

Jess caught her breath and warily moved away from him, but he did not give her even a glance.

Later Jess, feigning tiredness, yawned, bade her father and her stepmother good-night, went to bed.

But she did not go to sleep. Instead, when the inn was quiet, she lighted a candle and got busy with the torn jacket. Her quick fingers, skilled with the needle and silk, soon repaired that slit; but not until she was satisfied that

it hardly showed, except under close scrutiny, was she satisfied.

At an early hour in the morning, when she arose to take her father his morning tea, Jess slipped out of the inn.

In her basket was the tunic, and covering it an old frock which she intended giving to a poor girl in the village who went about nearly in rags.

There was no one else about at such an hour; but Jess looked about her carefully, all the same, as she hurried through the wood towards the hollow oak.

She heard no one, she saw no one; nevertheless, her heart pumped madly as she slipped the red jacket, wrapped in rags to protect it from damp and dirt, into the hollow oak.

A sigh of relief escaped her when at last it was safely there out of sight, and, without waste of another moment, she raced back to the inn.

She did not look back, and her running steps prevented her hearing the rustle of the thicket as a youth who had been in hiding stepped out.

So far as Jess knew, she had been unobserved, and it was without the slightest qualms that she got on with her work.

There were floors to sweep, water to take to visitors, breakfast to prepare, and beds to make.

At eight o'clock Jess carried a loaded tray to the dining-room, where already three travellers were at their tables.

But she did not get farther than the door; which she was just kicking open, when from the hall came an excited shout.

An ostler ran in, hurling the main door wide open.

"Hey, there!" he yelled. "There's tidings—great news! The rascal's done for now; they've got him at last!"

Jess swung round to him, and her face drained of colour.

"The rascal?" she asked, her pulse quickening.

"Highwayman Jack!" cried the ostler excitedly. "The soldiers have him. They've got him outside in the road now, and are bringing him here!"

Highwayman Jack's Risk!

JESS stood there white-faced for a moment; then, turning quickly, she put the tray on a table and waited.

Staring at the doorway, she heard the sounds outside—men's voices, shuffling feet, shouting, and some jeering.

Then into the inn, pushed by two soldiers, came a youth she had never seen before in her life—fair haired, eyes wild with fright. He wore no hat, his breeches were shabby and worn, his hose wrinkled and about his ankles; but—but he wore the bright red jacket of Highwayman Jack.

"Here he is—Highwayman Jack!"

"Caught at last!"

The youth was hauled forward into the hall, and two soldiers with muskets kept him covered. Never in her life before had Jess seen anyone so completely cowed and afraid as he was—nor, indeed, anyone with greater reason.

Her heart went out to him in sympathy, and she wanted to run forward and cry out in protest that he was not Highwayman Jack.

For, whoever he was, he was not her laughing highwayman. His build was different; he was not so tall; he had not his merry, bright eyes.

Jess moved forward and looked at the lad.

"Why, indeed," she murmured, "I should have thought to see someone more dashing than he!"

"Huh! They're all the same!" scoffed the sergeant.

But now the youth, straining still to free himself, managed to speak. His tone was frenzied, frantic.

"Highwayman! I'm not a highwayman!" he cried. "I'm telling you the truth! I did but find this jacket. 'Twas hid in the tree, and I put it on—that's all! I'm not a highwayman; I'm just a lad running away to sea!"

Jeering and mockery came from the soldiers and from villagers who had seen him being brought to the inn and had followed, in the hope of seeing exciting happenings. Jess' stepmother, forgetting the tray, was standing with arms akimbo glowering at the youth in scorn.

"Rascal, a sorry sight you look for all your fine red jacket! No more you'll hide on the heath and rob travellers, my lad! Your career is over!"

Jess stood back, her brain a-whirl with thoughts; for she knew that the lad spoke the truth. By some fluke he had found the jacket she had put in the tree—and it had been his ill-luck that he should have been caught wearing it.

A word of explanation from Jess, and he would have been set free; but

BETWEEN OURSELVES



MY DEAR READERS,—Quite a lot of things to chat about this week; first, some words about your friends and THE SCHOOLGIRL; then "Mickey's Fun Fair"; then next week's Cliff House School story; and finally, news of a wonderful new serial.

I'd better deal with them in that order, I think, hadn't I?

Well, now—your friends and THE SCHOOLGIRL. It's all connected with the need these days, as I've been explaining for some weeks, to order your favourite paper well in advance if you want to make quite sure of obtaining it.

I know there's no need for me to repeat the advice to you. But what of those friends of yours who occasionally buy THE SCHOOLGIRL, or who, not having yet done so, are likely to in the near future? They'll be faced with exactly the same difficulty as you. Unless they have also ordered their copy in good time they may be disappointed, so do try to persuade them to take the only real precaution, won't you? Another Order Form appears on page 10, by the way.

That's No. 1 on the agenda dealt with! So on to the next item—"Mickey's Fun Fair." Everybody loves an exciting game, don't they? And everybody loves a card game that can be played by both grown-ups and younger ones. Well, "Mickey's Fun Fair" is exciting, it's a card game, and it will appeal to young and old alike.

It costs half-a-crown, and can be bought at all large stationers and bookstalls, as well as a number of

toy-shops. Just the thing for the long, winter evenings!

And now we come to next Saturday's Hilda Richards story—

"THE QUEST OF BABS AND JIMMY!"

Jimmy Richmond, of Friardale Boys' School, is almost as popular with you as Babs & Co. themselves, I know, so you'll find double pleasure in this great story starring two of your favourites.

And what a dramatic, exciting story it is, too.

To help another girl who is faced with serious trouble, Barbara Redfern impersonates her at a circus and fun fair, with the aid of loyal, resourceful Jimmy. And it is just as well that Jimmy is such a reliable chum, for Babs very soon finds herself involved in the most sensational—and by no means comfortable—adventures.

But that is not all. Owing to their joint activities, Babs and Jimmy innocently affect a most important hockey match which Cliff House School and Friardale Boys' School have arranged to play. (A very novel idea, this, for the girls and boys are to be mixed to form one team—a sort of Co-ed eleven!)

There is fresh trouble for Babs and Jimmy, and a great deal of unpleasantness. Don't miss this magnificent tale whatever you do!

Finally, we come to the new serial I referred to. It is some little way off, as a matter of fact, though I knew you'd love to have a hint about it, because—it will feature Valerie Drew and Flash! Lovely, isn't it? Do keep your eyes open for further news.

As usual, next Saturday's programme will include another delightful Jess and Highwayman Jack story, further thrilling developments in "Valerie Drew's Holiday Mystery," and more of Patricia's Useful and Interesting Pages, with, of course, a further tiny contribution from—

Your sincere friend,

THE EDITOR.

instantly she herself would have been arrested—and Highwayman Jack, too, for he would easily be trapped.

At some time during the course of the day Highwayman Jack would go to the tree. If the soldiers knew that he was due there, they had but to lie in ambush in order to capture him red-handed.

The sergeant was examining the tunic the lad wore.

"Why, repaired already, eh?" he asked.

"Repaired!" said the dazed lad.

"Don't try clowning!" sneered the sergeant. "Who mended this tear? Bertha, eh?"

The lad looked puzzled for a moment, then a light of hope shone in his eyes.

"Bertha!" he cried. "You mean the girl who put the jacket in the tree?"

Jess fell back in horror, her cheeks like chalk as she heard this; but no one luckily heeded her in the excitement brought by the lad's words.

"I told you, I told you!" the lad insisted. "I did see a girl bring the tunic and put it in the tree. Then, thinking it might be food, why—why I took out the bundle; and lo! 'twas this same jacket."

"And you don't know what she looks like?" sneered the sergeant. "Not your friend Bertha, who's helped you so often, Highwayman Jack?"

Jess stiffened. She knew now that the youth had seen her place the coat in the tree. Had he seen her face?

"Come, out with it! What's she like?" thundered the sergeant. "Tall, fair, short, dark, or what?"

The wretched lad shook his head miserably.

"Except she was dressed in a thick coat like a man's, I did not get sight of her, for I hid myself. But she had some kind of shawl on her head."

"Pah! We know all that. We know how this Bertha dresses, and you know you're giving nothing away by telling us, you cunning rascal. But describe her face, and mayhap—mayhap," said the sergeant, in a bargaining tone, "it might get you prison instead of losing your life."

Jess shuddered at the thought of the innocent lad losing his life. Nothing could stop her talking.

"Oh, the poor lad might be—might be taken to the gallows!" she gasped, in dread.

"That's the fate for highwaymen, lass," said the sergeant.

And then he turned again to the lad and pointed to Jess.

"Was she, say, as tall as this lass—as fat or as thin?"

Once again Jess' heart began palpitating anew.

"I couldn't rightly say," said the victim.

Jess breathed more freely; yet her heart ached for him, innocent victim that he was.

"All right, there'll be some way of making you talk!" snarled the sergeant. "Away with him to the squire's house to be charged!"

Jess, biting her lip, watched the lad being taken from the inn. He struggled until a blow in the back from a musket, and the threat of another, quieted him.

"He must escape," Jess muttered. "He must be freed."

She hurried into the garden of the inn, crossed it, and went through the gate that gave on to the forest.

There seemed to her but one way of freeing this unhappy lad. She had to see Highwayman Jack and get his aid—and soon, or it might be too late.

If he learned that another was being charged with his offences, then, unless Jess had gravely misjudged his char-



"HIGHWAYMAN JACK! They've caught him!" came a shout from the hall. A hand to her cheek, Jess turned, and then her heart seemed to stand still with fresh shock. For it was not her highwayman friend who had been caught, but a perfect stranger!

acter, he would not rest until the lad was freed.

But first Jess had to find him.

Up to the present she had not seen him in daylight; had never seen him without his mask, so that if she saw him walking in different clothes from those he wore at night she would not instantly have recognised him without hearing his well-known voice and laugh.

Taking cover amongst the trees, she stole towards the hollow oak.

She saw it presently, and saw, too, a figure that loitered there as though on guard, a man clad in a long, waisted surcoat, with a fashionable three-tiered cape and a black tricorne hat at an angle on his head. Near at hand a horse was grazing.

At that moment the man turned, saw her, smiled, bowed, and lifted his hat.

But his face Jess could not see; it was masked. Through the slits of the mask twinkled eyes that she knew well, and in gladness she ran forward.

"Highwayman Jack! Thank goodness you've come!" Jess gasped thankfully.

He replaced his hat and smiled.

"Little friend, you are excited. Have you lost the jacket? Or," he added "does danger threaten you?"

Jess took his strong hands and looked up at him in appeal.

"A terrible thing has happened!" she cried. "The jacket has been taken—"

"What? By the soldiers?" he exclaimed, surprised, and looked about him as though fearing that some red-coats might be lurking even now.

"No, no. Some lad, on his way to the coast—running away to sea—found it in the tree," said Jess, in agitation. "And now he has been arrested—arrested as Laughing Jack the Highwayman, a poor harmless lad."

Highwayman Jack stiffened, and a slow smile curved his clean-cut lips.

"What, they mistake some harmless lad for me! Shame! It is an insult!

Lead me to them!" And laughter again left his lips.

Jess spoke in gentle reproof.

"It is no laughing matter. The poor lad may be flung into prison. He may even—even go to the gallows!"

Laughing Jack was no longer smiling. He dropped a hand on her shoulder and spoke gravely.

"Have no fear, kind friend. He shall not come to harm. I will save him."

He spoke confidently, but Jess shook her head, for she did not see how the rescue was to be performed when the lad would be well guarded by soldiers.

"Not at risk of your life," she begged softly. "There must be some other way—writing a letter, perhaps."

Highwayman Jack gave a jaunty laugh at that.

"La! I shall not risk my life more than usual," he said. "But my precious red jacket—no one shall take that from me. At the pistol-point the thieves shall stand and deliver it!"

Jess gave a little cry of apprehension at that.

"Oh, no—please!" she begged. "You would never succeed—"

He laughed.

"Never succeed, kind friend?"

"No. They'd capture you—"

"You do not know Laughing Jack as well as I thought," was the light-hearted reply. "I shall be safe."

With a quick movement he turned. Before Jess could detain him to question him further about his plan, to suggest some less hazardous way of clearing the lad, Highwayman Jack was in the saddle of his horse.

He waved to her, and laughed merrily.

"Have no fear!" he called. "What is mine I shall regain, and only I shall suffer for the supposed wrongs I have done."

In another moment he was gone, leaving only the echo of his horse's hoofs.

The Hold-Up!

"PRITHEE, dad! Let me go with the soldiers to the squire's house!" begged Jess.

"You, my lass? But why should you go?" her father asked, in surprise. "There is work for you to do here."

Jess bit her lip. She was in fretful, anxious mood, fearful that the young lad might be made to suffer when they tried to extract the truth from him. And now there was an ever greater fear gnawing at her heart.

If Highwayman Jack was determined to regain his red tunic at the pistol's point, he must do so at the squire's house.

True, he might clear the lad, but he would be captured himself.

The only end of this dread adventure that could bring happiness to Jess was that both the lad and Highwayman Jack should escape. Yet she couldn't for the life of her see how.

And she could not see how she could get there to witness it. It would be too far to run on foot, and soon the mounted soldiers and the squire's chaise would be under way.

"No need for you to go, Jess," said her dad again, and turned away in the hall of the inn where they stood.

Jess bit her lip, moved towards the door slowly as though about to defy him, and then heard the squire's voice outside.

The squire had been informed of the capture, and had come post haste to the scene. But he was returning to his house with the prisoner in his chaise. The necessary papers for an indictment were there, and evidence had to be sworn. The squire was in a rare jovial mood, as the capture of the highwayman would throw credit on himself.

Jess ran to the door, and shouted:

"Squire! One moment, sir!"

"What is it? What is it?" fretted the squire, as he paused in the act of entering his chaise, where the prisoner, well bound, had been placed.

"Hurry! I have no time to waste on a wench like you!"

"Squire, let me be a witness against Highwayman Jack," said Jess artfully. "For I was held up by him in the coach, and dare say I can swear against him."

The squire hesitated, and reflected for a moment. Then—

"Here, lass!" he called. "Do you recognise him? Is he the highwayman rascal who held you up?" he asked.

Jess approached the chaise, and, with the squire taking her arm, she peeped in at the window at the terrified pale-faced lad.

Jess' heart thumped. She could not say "Yes," but if she said "No," there would be no reason for her going to the squire's house.

And go there she must. Only then could she possibly aid the daring highwayman who was risking his life to save this innocent young fellow.

"Why, I—I must first see him masked, and wearing a tricorne hat," she said. "Then doubtless I should know him."

"There is fifty pounds' reward," mused the squire, and gave her a sly wink. "Methinks perhaps a pound might go to one who helps identify him, eh, captain?" he asked.

The captain shrugged, and cast the squire a look, which had he but known it, was filled with contempt. Jess also eyed him with scorn. How she despised this rascally evil squire. He did not care if this was the real highwayman or not, so long as he was con-

victed. The squire would have some of the reward, and that was all he was thinking about.

But Jess led him on. At the last minute she could say definitely that this was not Highwayman Jack. Until that moment, it was best to be tactful.

"I can but try," she murmured.

"Then into the chaise," said the squire. "No—!" Suddenly he realised that the girl was of lower station than he, and, therefore, couldn't ride with him. "On the box with the coachman!"

In front of the chaise rode three mounted soldiers carrying swords, and three similarly armed were behind—a fine party for one highwayman to do battle with.

If Highwayman Jack tried to hold up this cortege, his fate would surely be sealed. How could he compete with six mounted swordsmen? It was impossible.

Jess shivered with dread expectation as the chaise reached a narrow lane along which were high hedges, bushes, and trees; for the soldiers were looking right and left most warily.

Of a sudden the captain gave a muttered cry, and pointed ahead with his sword. At that same moment Jess herself saw the tricorne hat above the hedge, and the muzzle of a pistol held aloft, just round the bend of the lane.

Highwayman Jack was not fully concealed.

Only just in time Jess stifled a scream; and well that she did so, for it might have implicated herself in all the trouble.

But the captain had already seen Highwayman Jack.

"Halt the chaise!" he ordered tersely. "Draw swords! Forward!"

Then with signals which the men understood, he directed them—some over the hedge to the left, others to the right, in case the highwayman, scenting danger, should ride off in either direction.

"We have him now!" yelled the captain. "As I thought, there are two of them!"

The squire sprang down from the coach.

"What—what—another?" he cried.

Jess scrambled down from the box, pale with agitation, every instinct urging her to run to the highwayman's aid. But she did not move.

From behind them came a cool, clear voice.

"Stand and deliver! The first man who calls out or moves, drops dead with a bullet in him!"

Jess wheeled; the squire reeled. But how different their facial expressions as they saw, not five yards behind them, astride his black horse, Laughing Jack, a pistol in either hand cocked, and ready for action.

"If you sh-sh-shoot me, you sh-shall su-suffer for it!" chattered the squire, his knees knocking with fright.

He presented a pitiable sight now. His hands were up, but shaking like aspen leaves. His pale face was devoid of any colour. He stood there, shivering with utter terror, completely cowed.

Jess looked at him in scorn, and then, realising that for one who should fear the highwayman, she was too calm, she suddenly clasped her hands, and gave a piteous cry:

"Oh, spare me, highwayman! Don't shoot! Oh, spare me!"

Highwayman Jack's right eye twinkled through his velvet mask; his left closed in a wink that the squire was far too agitated to notice.

"Wench, get you gone where you

belong!" snapped the highwayman. "I want no truck with girls! Go! Face front, coachman, or die!"

Jess moved away; but moved behind the coach. There, creeping forward, she opened the far door, and, putting her finger to her lips to signify the need for silence, she met the wide eyes of the youth.

From the inside of her cloak she took the knife that she had placed before she left the inn.

But time was precious. The soldiers would return soon. With quick slashes Jess freed the lad's ankle bonds, and beckoned him out of the chaise. Then she pointed to the hedge near by. But the youth needed little advice or persuasion; he bolted, clearing the hedge at a bound.

Hardly had he disappeared, when Highwayman Jack hailed her in sharp tones.

"Girl, take the squire's big kerchief from his tail pocket, and tie it tightly about his mouth! Try to trick me, and, girl though you are, I shall shoot!"

Jess winked at him, and then, doing as he bade her, gagged the squire, doing even more—blindfolding him with the kerchief. Nothing had ever given her quite such a complete satisfaction.

"Drive on!" roared Jack. "I will ride on the tailboard, and if you call to the soldiers, I'll shoot!"

They did not look round, and, therefore, did not know that he had not carried his threat into execution. Fully convinced that he was indeed on the rear of the chaise, they whipped their horses, and raced off.

Jess did not wait to see the end, but made for the inn. And Laughing Jack himself paused only long enough to turn the squire round three or four times in the road, at the end of which that old rascal reeled and tottered dizzily.

"Keep your hands up!" snapped Jack.

Then away he went over the hedge!

It was not until two nights later that Jess met Highwayman Jack again. She met him on the fringe of the forest just before the London coach was due.

"Oh, but that was brave and daring and reckless!" she murmured, with shining eyes. "You saved that lad. I only hope he escaped altogether."

"Why, yes; I set him on the road," said Laughing Jack merrily. "On a horse I borrowed from the squire's stables. Unhappily the old rascal was not there to give permission. However, it served the lad, who thought it was my own. By now he is at sea. And you—no one has suspected you?"

Jess laughed lightly.

"Good!" said Highwayman Jack, smiling. "Brave lass, you saved an innocent youth from prison. And you saved Highwayman Jack's tunic, and saved his reputation. For he would not care to be thought a reckless lad. Good-night!"

"Good-night!" called Jess softly; and, with shining, admiring eyes, watched him ride off until he was swallowed up by the darkness.

Soon, perhaps, they would meet again. But—when, when?

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

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Valerie Drew's HOLIDAY MYSTERY

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VALERIE DREW, the famous girl-detective and her clever Alsatian dog, FLASH, are on holiday at Sunnyslands Farm, which is run as an hotel by a hard-working, likeable young girl.

DOROTHY DEAN, 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, enabling Valerie to frustrate it. She later catches the foe cutting an electric cable near the farm. He bolts. Valerie is examining the damage when up comes

CHARLIE DEEDS, an interfering guest, who thinks himself a detective, with other guests. Charlie demands: "What are you up to, Valerie Drew!"

(Now read on.)

By

ISABEL NORTON

"Don't be a bigger ass than you can help, Charlie!" said Valerie, stung to an unusually spirited retort. "I only got back here a minute ago. You must have seen me crossing the field."

Charlie showed his teeth. "You won't get away with it so easily this time," he darkly yowled.

"Idiot, I've nothing to get away with!" Valerie crossly replied. "I came here to catch someone. He got away too quickly, but I'd still have had him if Flash hadn't fallen down the old well."

"Poor old Flash! Why, he's still wringing wet!" Marjorie exclaimed, immediately sympathetic as she observed Flash's condition. "Charlie, if you can't even see when a dog's wet, you—"

"Rats! He's probably been rolling

A piece of wrapping paper put Valerie Drew on the track of the unknown enemy—and her rival in terrible peril!

in a pond while Valerie's been at work!" declared Charlie, offhandedly. "We want the truth from Valerie this time!"

Hands in pockets as usual, still with the ghost of an amused grin on his good-looking face, Johnny remained easily the most self-possessed person there.

"Bright lot of pals, aren't they!" he commented. "It was old Sherlock's idea that we all got up and trundled down here like this. But I'm still on your side, Val."

"Oh, you are?" said Charlie unpleasantly. "You'd better go back to school, and wait until someone asks for your valuable opinion. Firstly," he went on, in a determined voice, "I'll ask you to hand over that pair of pliers, Valerie Drew!"

"Hear, hear!" said Mr. Weeple encouragingly.

Valerie set her lips as she glanced at the polished handles on which the finger-prints were so plainly visible. There would be nothing left worth

having once Charlie's clumsy hands had grasped them!

"What for?" she asked ominously. "I shall find out where they came from," Charlie answered pompously. "Get in touch with the makers, y'know, and trace them—"

Valerie turned her head quickly. It was no time to argue with a fellow like Charlie. Luckily, she still had one staunch, unfaltering supporter.

"Got a clean hanky, Johnny?" she whispered tensely.

"Never any other kind," Johnny replied, with a grin, as he pulled one from his sleeve.

"Then catch!" directed Valerie swiftly.

Johnny spread the handkerchief between his hands, showing immediately that he had noticed and appreciated Valerie's careful handling of the pliers.

"Johnny, don't you dare!" cried Charlie, his voice rising to a squeak of excitement. "Stand back! Valerie, give me those pliers instantly! Such valuable evidence—Wow!"

Neatly Valerie had tossed the pliers towards the waiting handkerchief. Charlie, leaping forward to prevent her, trod unwisely on the very edge of the excavation. Losing his balance, he sprawled ignominiously in the pit, while Johnny caught the pliers in his handkerchief, and drew the four corners together.

"Stop him!" bawled Charlie, from the ground. "I say, don't let him get away! They're frightfully important!"

"Ta-ta all!" said Johnny brightly; and, turning on his heels, he ran like a hare back in the direction of the farmhouse.

"This means they're both in it together!" declared Charlie, scrambling furiously to his feet. "He'll change them for another pair, of course. Now we'll never know—"

"We may," Mr. Weeple sternly put in, "if Miss Drew will answer a few questions."

"Caught standing beside a cut electric cable, with a pair of pliers in her hand, is not a usual activity for a detective," agreed Mr. Anthony tartly.

Valerie stepped up to the level field. She had recovered from her shock, and was quite ready to face her accusers.

Evidence of the Clocks!

"WHAT in the world, Charlie, do you imagine I'm up to?" Valerie Drew ejaculated, in blank amazement.

She stood like a girl in a dream, still holding the vital pair of pliers carefully by their extreme ends, staring back at the crowd of people who had rushed so dramatically on her.

The reflections of their torches, thrown up by the ground, dimly lit their faces. She saw Charlie, eager and accusing, hovering in the forefront. Close at hand stood freckled Marjorie and prim little Peter Passleigh. Elderly Mr. Weeple had hastened along with Mr. Anthony. Even Uncle Nathan, fumbling about with a defective torch in his usual nervous, unhelpful manner, had turned up. It was quite a relief to see Johnny Jevons' honest, boyish face amongst them as well.

"What've you been doing with those pliers?" demanded Charlie, egged on by the excited whispers of the crowd behind him.

Valerie stared at him in consternation as she realised what was in his mind.

He was apparently so utterly stupid that he actually believed she had cut the electric cable herself!

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No. 704.

"Perhaps, sir," she said, looking fixedly at Mr. Weeple, "I can save you the bother of asking me questions. You'd first of all like to know how I became interested in this spot. I'll explain that with pleasure. Charlie told me about it!"

"Me?" gasped Charlie incredulously. "Why, of all the neck—"

Charlie explained that, while spying out for Paizi Logan, he hid under a hurdle over a hole where the cable was exposed. Valerie proceeded, unheeding. "Though he thought nothing of his discovery, to me an uncovered cable seemed highly significant, so I determined to keep watch to see if the person who had first uncovered it would return later on to complete the work of cutting it."

"How can we believe that?" asked Mr. Weeple, his expression still hard and scornful.

Valerie pointed to the trees.

"A tiny mirror is fixed to show a reflection of a light from here in my room," she responded. "I needed that to tell me when he was back at work."

"A fine tale!" scoffed Charlie. "More than—"

"We can see for ourselves if this mirror exists," Mr. Weeple interrupted him. "In my opinion, however, it will still prove nothing. Is it all you have to say, Miss Drew?"

"Wait!" directed Valerie softly, an altered expression on her face. "I've just remembered something. You know Dorothy's alarm clock, Marjorie?"

"Why, of course!" Marjorie answered, in surprise. "I've often borrowed it. It's such a marvellous timekeeper that it doesn't matter that the jigger to alter the hands is bust."

"Just when we were leaving the room to-night," Valerie went on, her tone almost dreamy, "Flash had an accident. He upset the table with the clock on it. I heard it stop ticking at once, so that'll tell you the exact time I left the building. In the dining-room there's an electric clock. It would stop at the very moment this cable was cut. If someone will be good enough to

examine both clocks before I have a chance to touch them—"

"Yippee, that's a brain-wave, Val!" ejaculated Marjorie. "I'll do that with pleasure."

"And I'll come to make sure you don't cheat!" volunteered Peter Passleigh promptly.

"I say! How about me?" demanded Charlie, in an injured voice, as they immediately hastened off. "I jolly well brought you down here—"

"You did, Charlie, and I'm not forgetting it!" Valerie assured him, in a voice that suddenly made Charlie stare. "I'll give you plenty of opportunity to talk in a few minutes. Are we quite ready, Mr. Weeple, to return to the house?"

Mr. Weeple exchanged a sharp, inquiring glance with Mr. Anthony. Mr. Anthony nodded. Muttering: "Yes, yes," they set off for the house, followed by Valerie and Flash, and a watchful but now decidedly puzzled Charlie.

There was a candle burning in the hall. Johnny Jevons, smoking a cigarette, sat in a chair beside it, looking very cheerful.

"Hallo, Sherlock Cleverdick!" he greeted Charlie. "Still looking for that pair of pliers? As I'd hate to tell you a lie, papa, I have just swallowed them!"

Marjorie came running downstairs, carrying an alarm clock, the face of which was broken, just as Peter Passleigh emerged from the dining-room.

"One sixteen," she reported breathlessly. "What was the time by the electric one, Peter?"

"One sixteen exactly!" said Peter in astounded tones. "Both clocks must have stopped at the very same moment!"

Johnny, who had already heard them say what they were doing, and its purpose in checking up on Valerie's movements, chuckled delightedly.

"A demonstration of what they call the long arm of the law, Charlie," he explained mischievously. "Valerie must have reached out of her window and cut through a cable half a mile away!"

Mr. Weeple and Mr. Anthony looked completely flummoxed.

"It's all a fake!" said Charlie obstinately. "I don't care even if Marjorie and Peter are in with Valerie as well. I'll still get at the truth—"

"Nothing, Charlie, will suit me better," Valerie interposed. "We all want to know the truth, and you're the one who can help us most."

"Me?" said Charlie, amazed at such a remark from Valerie. "Look here, Val, if you're trying to soft soap me now—"

"Listen!" Valerie directed, her stern expression instantly believing any such intention. "How did you know where to look for me, Charlie?"

"Eh? How?" A spot of colour leapt to Charlie's cheeks. "Why, I've suspected you all the time—"

"I left my room about a quarter past one!" said Valerie in clipped tones. "There was certainly nobody else awake in the house at the time. The only person who knew I was out was the person Flash chased. Yet you, Charlie, raised an alarm and brought these other people down to the field." Her gaze was stern as she looked into Charlie's uneasy eyes. "Who told you I was there, Charlie?" she demanded.

Mr. Weeple stared at crimson-cheeked Charlie, opened his mouth as though about to say something, then abruptly changed his mind.

Charlie himself, toying uncertainly with his immature brown moustache, had never appeared so near to being speechless before.

"I—I—I absolutely refuse to be cross-questioned about my—my methods!" he managed to stutter at length, turning away.

Valerie's accusers all realised what a set-back they had had.

Charlie went upstairs, glowering and muttering, and Mr. Weeple and his friend followed his example. Uncle Nathan, still looking greatly mystified, shuffled away in silent perplexity, and Marjorie and Peter returned to their rooms a few minutes later.

"Wait here," Johnny directed, seeing the coast clear at last. "Won't be two ticks, old sleuth. They've been in Charlie's overcoat all the time—I guessed he'd never think of looking there!"

Valerie took the candle into the lounge, and within a minute Johnny returned with his handkerchief. He unfolded it carefully, and Valerie took up the vital pair of pliers, holding them as before by the extreme ends. Johnny, intently silent now, watched as she dusted the shiny handles with finger-print powder, carefully blew off the surplus, and pressed highly glazed white paper against them.

"Gosh, what a marvellous job of work, old sleuth!" he admired, grasping her hand excitedly. "They're perfect finger-prints. You've really got him at last!"

"I'd rather say 'all but' got him, Johnny," Valerie softly corrected. "But to-morrow, with your help, we ought to know—a lot more!"

Charlie's Secret!

"DOROTHY, you've managed marvellously!" Valerie declared in tones of warm admiration, as she stood within the doorway of the kitchen on the following morning. "Everything cooked on the range and oil-stoves, and yet you're only ten minutes behind the usual time! Jolly good show, my dear!"

Dorothy smiled a trifle uncertainly—and Valerie understood why.

Two shocks had been awaiting the girl hostess this morning when she awoke: for Valerie had had to admit that the mystery enemy was still at large, and, as a further consequence of his treacherous work, everything electrical would be out of service until they had the cable repaired during the morning.

"I only hope people don't start complaining, Val," Dorothy answered, with a nervous laugh. "It isn't by any means the usual breakfast."

"It's a jolly good one, Dorothy!" Valerie warmly insisted, her hand resting affectionately on Dorothy's shoulder. "And things can't go on much longer now. You're doing swell, dear!"

And off Valerie went, with an encouraging smile, to the dining-room.

Sitting at the head of his table, Johnny Jevons caught her eye and gave her a broad, significant wink.

"Morning, Valerie!" said Charlie Deeds with loud bravado, as she passed the spot where he was sitting.

Valerie gave him a quick glance. Though he obviously wanted to appear as perky and self-satisfied as usual, she knew that last night's events had shaken his self-confidence considerably.

"Good-morning to you, Charlie!" she returned sweetly.

And she sat down in her own seat. Presently in through the doorway came Uncle Nathan, tottering uncertainly, with a tray laden with hot-water jugs.

"Look out, everyone!" Johnny humorously advised. "Here comes the fire-water man! Those who don't want to find themselves in hot water had better get under the tables!"

Valerie snatched a glance at Dorothy's flustered, inefficient relation, whose chief merit seemed to be that he always took Johnny's jokes in such good part.

"We've only just got the second lot of water to boil on the oil-stoves," Uncle Nathan explained, as he bumped the tray down on a service table. "Some more water for you, Miss Marjorie?" The jug slopped visibly as he set it on the table. "You, Major Adams? And Mr. Weeple—"

Mr. Weeple turned sharply at the sound of his name, though it seemed to Valerie he must have been perfectly well aware that Uncle Nathan was in the vicinity.

In a second there was a collision.

As Mr. Weeple's hand came into abrupt contact with the hot jug, he gave a gasp of alarm, and snatched it hastily away again.

Uncle Nathan, staggering back, gave a shriek of pain as the water poured out of the jug over the fingers of both his hands.

"Oh dear!" gasped Marjorie. "How terribly clumsy!"

"Poor old nunky!" cried Johnny, in genuine concern, leaping to his feet.

Uncle Nathan, white and shaken, pressed his hands painfully together and tried to smile.

"It's all right!" he muttered. "I'll see Dorothy. It won't take her a moment to put something on my fingers. Accidents will happen. Oh dear!"

Everyone was looking concerned.

"Let me take you to Dorothy!" insisted little Mrs. Peek, determined to take charge.

Valerie watched while Uncle Nathan, still protesting vaguely and apologetically, was escorted from the room. When he returned, some ten minutes later, the fingers of both his hands were wrapped in bandages.

"That's one set of finger-prints we're

not likely to get for a few days, Val!" Johnny whispered, joining her as soon as the meal was over. "Luckily, it doesn't seem to matter, nunky being the sort of prizewinner who'd blow himself up to the moon if he ever tried to cut an electric cable. But did you notice old Weeple?"

"What about him, Johnny?" asked Valerie, an inquiring gleam in her eyes.

"Well, if you saw what I saw," answered Johnny significantly, "you'll probably have decided that it was Mr. Weeple who intended to get the hot water over his fingers, but his little stunt went wrong, and uncle caught it instead. Cigarette, sir?" Johnny smilingly offered, whipping a shining cigarette-case from his pocket.

He had just observed the very individual they were discussing standing only a few feet away!

"Thank you! Very kind of you, my boy!" answered Mr. Weeple, with an unusual smile. "The first you've ever offered me, I believe."

And, despite Johnny's subtle endeavour to make him take hold of the case, Mr. Weeple carefully selected a cigarette without touching the case and strolled away.

"Foiled!" said Johnny, pulling a face.

Valerie had to laugh at his glum expression.

"You'll get his finger-prints later on," she assured him. "Try some of the others first. I'll be just inside the writing-room waiting for you."

Johnny, agreeing, strolled off into the winter garden, where, as the morning was overcast and rain threatened, most of the guests had already gathered to chat together.

Offering his cigarette-case to Marjorie, he allowed one side to sag so that she had to hold it up as she helped herself to one. The finger-prints she unconsciously made on its shiny surface were perfect. Moving unobtrusively to where Valerie was waiting, Johnny watched her dust it with powder and transfer the vital outlines to glazed paper.

Major Adams and Mrs. Peek followed. A few minutes later Peter Passleigh fell an equally innocent victim to the guileless Johnny. Valerie, waiting in the writing-room, was just wondering who would be next when she heard a loud guffaw of laughter.

"Can't take me in, Johnny!" declared the voice of Charlie Deeds gleefully. "I've already guessed what you and Valerie are up to between you!"

Rising to her feet in instant concern, Valerie strolled into the winter garden. There she saw Johnny, his cheeks slightly flushed with annoyance, still holding an open cigarette-case in front of Charlie.

"Finger-prints—eh?" asked Charlie, with a wide grin. "Don't think it matters this time! Have one of mine instead, Johnny!"

And Charlie, whipping out his own case, pressed the catch. To his consternation, a piece of torn paper lying just inside it immediately fluttered out and fell to the ground.

"What's that?" cried Johnny at once.

Charlie, his expression changing amazingly, made a grab to pick the paper up again. Valerie, however, had already stooped towards it, intending to hand it back. Just as she was picking it up she read—her own name printed on it in capitals!

"Just a moment, Charlie!" she exclaimed. "It looks as though this paper should interest me as well!"

"You'll give it back to me at once!" Charlie shouted at the top of his voice, making a rush towards her.

Johnny moved at the same moment, wrapping his arms round Charlie's waist. Charlie gave a shriek, and rolled on the ground with Johnny on top of him.

"It's all right, Johnny," said Valerie coolly. "You can let Charlie stand up now. This little piece of paper explains quite a lot that's been puzzling me. I'll read it aloud!"

"You won't!" throbbed Charlie, struggling furiously to escape. "Let up, Johnny! That's a very private paper—"

"It reads," proceeded Valerie, unheeding:

VERY carefully, Valerie played out the string, while Flash watched her clever plan to catch the secret foe with anxious eyes. But someone else was watching, too — interfering Charlie Deeds!



"LOOK FOR VALERIE DREW IN LONG FIELD AT ONCE. SHE'S UP TO MISCHIEF.—A FRIEND."

There was an audible sensation at her revelation.

"Golly!" said Johnny blankly. "So that's how Charlie knew where to find you last night! And he told us he'd been following up his own brilliant deductions!"

Charlie's cheeks were crimson with mortification as he knew every eye was turning questioningly on him.

"I—I was quite justified, as it happens, anyway!" he stammered. "We—we all saw Valerie with the pliers, and—"

"Who gave you this note?" Valerie demanded in a tone that made Charlie jump.

"Nobody!" muttered Charlie. "There was just a tap on my door; the note was pushed in underneath—"

"By the very person I was after!" Valerie commented bitterly. "A trick to get you out of the house and put me in a false position, and you fell for it!"

"Come outside with me, Sherlock," suggested Johnny in an almost kindly tone, "and I'll knock that silly block of yours off before it gets you into any more trouble!"

Charlie did not accept the offer. Never in his life had he felt—and looked—as completely foolish as he did at that moment. For Valerie had really got him; and even Charlie, after taking so much credit to himself, could hardly deny that he deserved all he got.

"All right, Miss Clever!" he remarked bitterly. "Tell us who did write that note—if you can!"

And, hands in pockets, nose held defiantly in the air, he marched out of the winter garden, leaving Valerie with a tiny spot of colour mantling her cheeks.

There had been an unkind enough sting in that last taunt which nobody could have missed.

Valerie had made many attempts to unmask the mystery enemy at the farm, but it was perfectly true that he still eluded her!

Drama on the Roof!

IT was later in the day, when the maids had finished their work upstairs, and Valerie Drew was now pursuing a keen but lonely investigation.

The last clue with which Charlie had so dramatically presented her seemed to Valerie so full of possibilities that she had decided that even the further checking of finger-prints might be deferred until a more favourable opportunity.

She was positive that something of vital importance was to be learnt from the "warning" note, and the manner in which Charlie had received it.

What was she to deduce? Intently she studied the fragment on which the unknown foe had printed the warning.

It was the torn-off corner of a piece of fairly heavy, pale-brown paper, which must have originally come from a much larger wrapping sheet.

Indeed, Valerie judged that it had been torn from the sort of sheet used in shops for wrapping large parcels.

"He'd be standing just about here," she keenly reflected, as she roamed the passage where Charlie's room was

situated. "The nearest flight of stairs leads up to the little box-room, where any parcels found lying around the house are always dumped until they're claimed. And I noticed two or three in there only yesterday."

She went softly up the stairs and reached the dark little box-room, lit only by its small, dusty skylight set in the middle of the flat part of the farmhouse roof.

Scarcely able to credit her good fortune, Valerie remained on the threshold, staring at a bigish parcel lying against the wall.

One end of the paper was torn. Holding the vital fragment against it, Valerie found that it fitted exactly into position!

For several moments she stood quite still, thinking hard.

What was to be done now?

One possibility which immediately came into her mind was that if she fetched Flash, who was at present downstairs, he might be able to pick up the mystery man's trail at this point.

Second thoughts decided Valerie against it for the moment. To employ Flash upstairs would be rather obvious, and therefore likely to put her enemy on his guard.

The parcel with the torn end still fascinated her.

How, Valerie asked herself, had the mystery foe known exactly where to find it in the darkness unless he had seen it previously—or put it there himself?

Closing the door behind her, Valerie noted exactly how the parcel was lying on the floor. Then, carefully untying the string, she lowered the paper and looked inside.

Her eyes opened wider as she saw what it contained.

There were two packages, each labelled with the name of a chemical substance, which, as Valerie knew, would blaze fiercely and give off dense volumes of smoke when mixed together and placed on a fire.

Her present knowledge of her enemy's method of working immediately suggested their intended use at the farm.

Knowing the kitchen range must be used for cookery until the electric supply was restored, the enemy's next plan was obvious. The moment he had a suitable opportunity he would climb to the flat roof and drop the chemical mixture down the kitchen chimney, to fill the kitchen with alarming clouds of smoke.

The panic which might result from such a dastardly trick could easily be imagined.

Her lips compressed, her violet eyes reflecting the horror and disgust which filled her at this further evidence of the unscrupulous enemy's resolution to ruin the farm, Valerie tied up the parcel and left it exactly as she had found it.

Returning to her room, she took a reel of very thin, dark silk, and crept back to the box-room. And this time, in her eagerness to complete her work as soon as possible, and leave the scene apparently clear for the enemy to carry on, she failed to glance back and make sure she was not observed.

Had she done so on this occasion Valerie would have seen the bright, eager eyes of Charlie Deeds watching from behind a curtain on the landing.

For Charlie was really desperate now. Despite all his efforts to shine as a detective, he had come badly unstuck. He knew that unless he very quickly did something to retrieve his latest

blunders he would remain the laughing-stock of everyone at the holiday farm.

Unable to discover anything for himself, Charlie was not above trying to learn something from Valerie instead.

If only it led him in the right direction, Charlie would still be prepared to claim all the honour to himself.

Unaware that Charlie was an unseen witness of her actions, Valerie attached the loose end of the silk to the underside of the parcel. Then, unreeling the silk as she went, she led it downstairs, along the passage to her room, and under the door. And there, placing the reel inside a tin where it would jangle the moment the thread was pulled by anyone touching the parcel, she sat down to wait.

Half an hour passed. Downstairs a darts contest was in progress in the winter garden. From the kitchen came the cheerful clink of basins and cooking implements as the staff prepared the usual attractive lunch.

Seated at her table, completing details in her case-book while she waited, Valerie suddenly thrilled.

The reel of silk in the tin rattled so violently that the tin fell to the floor.

In a moment Valerie was on her feet. Tiptoeing along the passage, she moved with silent stealth up to the box-room at the top of the narrow flight.

The skylight was open. A box from which one could easily climb to the roof was now standing just underneath.

The chemicals had vanished.

Hastening across the room, Valerie sprang to the box, grasped the edges of the open fanlight, and drew herself up so that she could peer out on to the roof.

Astounded, she found herself gazing, not at one, but two figures, only a few yards away from her!

One, muffled from head to feet in a clinging black garment, was standing just beside the smoking kitchen chimney, hastily untying the parcel of chemicals. The other, creeping eagerly towards his back, was—Charlie Deeds!

In a flash Valerie realised what had happened. Charlie had forestalled her yet again. He had found her telltale silk and watched it from a spot nearer to the box-room. Probably the fanlight had been opened unexpectedly from above, and the hooded enemy had obtained what he wanted by using a hooked stick to pick it up. Charlie, entering a few moments later, had put the box in position and leapt to the roof.

"Got you!" yelled Charlie's voice, in a cry of triumph. "Now we'll see who you are!"

He rushed forward, and the masked figure turned at bay at his cry. Then, in three catastrophic seconds, the rest happened.

In obvious dismay and terror at being caught, the masked figure rushed at Charlie, wildly waving his arms. One reckless blow caught Charlie on the chin, sending him tumbling helplessly away across the roof. A cry of startled warning burst from Valerie's lips just a moment too late.

Unable to do anything to save himself, Charlie gave one shriek and rolled clean over the edge to the depths below!

WHAT a startling happening this is!

On no account miss next Saturday's dramatic chapters. Have you placed a regular order for your SCHOOLGIRL yet?