

An Entertaining Story Telling of a Very Curious Series of Incidents at
Cliff House School

By Hilda Richards



CHAPTER I.

THE START OF A MYSTERY

CALLERS descended suddenly, and in a rush, upon Augusta Anstruther-Browne of the Fourth Form at Cliff House School.

Madge Stevens and Doris Redfern of the Third were the first. They tapped on the door, and popped two cheeky faces into the room before any invitation was given.

"Oh, Augusta——" began Madge.

"Sorry, but I'm busy!" said Augusta, without looking up from her preparation.

"We only want to borrow your violin," said Madge breathlessly. "We're getting up a jazz band. Fanny Tibbitts says she can manage a violin. So——"

"For a Third Form jazz band? Oh, my goodness!" said Augusta, in that really "crushing" voice that she could command when she liked. "I suppose you don't want to cut it in half so that two of you can use it?"

"Oh, no, nothing like that," said Doris Redfern persuasively. "Madge and I will look after it. I say, do lend it to us!"

"I'm far more likely to lend you all my dresses than the violin!" said Augusta. "Fancy thinking I would! Toddle off and try someone else—Connie Jackson, for instance. I want to be busy!"

She escorted the youngsters to the passage, closed the door, and returned to her seat. Hardly had she picked up her pen than there was a tap and the door started to open again.

"If you think——" began Augusta.

And there Augusta broke off, as she saw that her visitor was none other than moody-looking Marcia Loftus, the most unpopular girl in the Form.

"I've brought you up a letter," said Marcia, tossing an envelope sulkily on the table. "It was on the floor, and the kids were treading on it."

Augusta looked at the envelope with its foreign postmark, and an eager light leapt into her eyes.

"Oh, thanks, Marcia," she said, commencing to tear open the flap. "I think I know whom it's from."

Marcia lingered, a curious expression on her face.

"Yes, I thought——"

Marcia broke off as there was an ejaculation from the passage and the third batch of visitors broke into the study.

There was no time for Marcia to get away from the doorway.

Bump! bump! they went. And Marcia staggered back against the wall and gazed with glittering eyes at Barbara Redfern, the captain of the Fourth Form, and her chum Mabel Lynn.

"Sorry!" said Babs and Mabs, in one breath.

"Idiots!" snapped Marcia, rubbing her shoulder. "Flying into a study like mad girls. Why can't you look where you're going?"

"We didn't know you were standing just inside the door," said Babs.

"Well, look next time!" sneered the ill-tempered girl. "Jolly Babs and Mabs—always so full of spirits, always such dear, excited little girls!"

"Better than always sulking!" said Mabs with cheerful candour.

"Swankers!"

Augusta intervened.

"It was an accident, Marcia! No need to quarrel—"

"Oh, no! Friends of yours!" sneered Marcia. "All so jolly together—he, he, he! I'll bring your letters up to-morrow to see if I can get knocked about again!"

And Marcia flounced out of the study and banged the door in a very bad temper.

Babs and Mabs, not half as "squashed" as they ought to have felt, each grabbed one of Augusta's arms.

"Come on! We came to fetch you!" said Babs merrily. "It's Bessie Bunter! You simply must see her!"

"But I've got a letter—"

"Never mind! That can wait!" said Mabs. "All the fun will be over in a minute if you don't come along."

Augusta dropped the opened letter to the table.

"It's Bessie dressing up!" chuckled Babs, as she and her chum piloted Augusta eagerly to No. 4 study. "Ever since her people wrote saying they wanted a photo of her she's been doing it!"

"And talk about screams—oh, this really is the limit!" laughed Mabs. "Just a minute while I peep. Yes, it's all right."

The door of No. 4 study was opened very cautiously, and the three girls peeped at Bessie Bunter.

The fat girl of the Fourth had a mirror propped up in front of her, and was beaming with great satisfaction as she fumbled in a curious way with her ear.

Augusta saw that Bessie was trying to adorn herself with ear-rings of the type that are held by a small screw!

Bessie Bunter, quite unconscious of the presence of onlookers, was proceeding to turn

the screw of one gaudy-looking ear-ring with her fat fingers.

She gave one brisk, good hard turn.

"Ow-wow-wow!" she ejaculated.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bessie started away from the chair. Something fell immediately, and went scrunch under her foot!

"Duffers! Now you've made me do it!" fumed Bessie.

Babs and Co. pealed with laughter.

"I've gone and pricked myself with one and trodden on the other!" hooted Bessie. "All through you startling me! Look at it! It can't possibly be straightened out!"

Babs and Mabs shrieked afresh as they gazed at the ear-ring that had felt the weight of Bessie Bunter.

"I'm blessed if I can see anything to cackle about!"

"You can't see yourself!"

"Rushing in on a girl, and startling her like that—you'll have to pay me compensation, anyway!"

"Fourpence!"

"Fourpence, when they cost sixpence-halfpenny—I mean, six and sixpence—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bessie Bunter removed the one sound ear-ring from her ear and flung it on the table.

"It's jealousy! That's what it is!" she declared. "You're wild because I think of things that you don't. Ear-rings are awfully becoming, especially to a girl like myself. Don't you think I've got a rather Spanish type of beauty?"

"It certainly isn't English!" murmured Mabs. "Oh, really—"

"African, I should say, Bessie," said Augusta very seriously.

"Yes, African, perhaps," said Bessie thoughtfully. "It might—"

"You only need to black your face—that's all!" finished Augusta.

Bessie sniffed. It was a most emphatic sniff, and it was followed by the banging of the door as Bessie sailed away.



Bessie Bunter, unconscious of onlookers, gazed admiringly into the mirror as she fixed the ear-rings

Augusta recovered from her laughter and turned to Babs and Mabs.

"Poor Bessie!" she exclaimed. "Now let's get back to my study and see what my letter says. It may interest you girls."

"Who's it from?" Babs asked.

"Lorna Grey, I believe."

"Lorna!" said Babs. "My word, how long it seems since she left the school and joined her aunt on the Continent!"

"Yet I often think of her, and the times we had," Augusta replied. "She writes occasionally, and seems to be enjoying herself. Come on!"

She hurried back with them to her study.

But once there Augusta paused, amazement replacing the eager expression on her face.

"Why, it's gone!" she cried.

It was true! There was certainly no letter on the table, although they had seen Augusta drop it there.

"Perhaps it's blown down," suggested Babs; and they started to search.

They hunted everywhere, but without any result.

"What an extraordinary thing!" said Babs.

"Surely no one would take it?" said Mabs.

"I can't think of anyone who would want to read a letter from Lorna Grey," said Augusta. "Perhaps it's a jape."

She ran to the door as she heard a footstep outside. Marcia Loftus was just passing.

"I say, Marcia, you haven't seen that letter from Lorna Grey, have you?" Augusta asked.

Marcia's eyes glinted in sudden anger.

"Do you accuse me of taking that letter?" she demanded. "Saying such a thing, when I troubled to bring the letter up to you!" Marcia continued passionately. "How dare you insinuate such things! If the letter's gone it's where you left it! If you can't look after your own letters, don't you dare to come to me!"

And Marcia whirled round and hurried away.

There were startled looks in the study.

"My word! She can fly into a temper!" said Babs. "And why? There was nothing in what Augusta said to make her reply like that."

"Oh, Marcia all over!" said Augusta. "Let's have another look!"

They had commenced to search again when a loud and discordant noise came suddenly from outside the study.

"Ow-oooooh! Oh-oooooh! Yoooooww!"

Bang, bang, bang!

Trrrrumpitty-trump, trump!

"Gracious! What ever is it?" cried Babs.

Augusta smiled.

"I should say it's the Third Form jazzband come to annoy me because I wouldn't lend them my violin. We'd better go out and clear them off!"

She opened the door.

Madge Stevens was outside, in charge of a dozen cheerful-looking and very noisy youngsters. The "music" stopped abruptly.

"Grab hold of Augusta!" cried Madge.

"We'll make her listen to the band!"

A rush was made at Augusta.

"Rescue!" cried Babs and Mabs, running to Augusta's aid. But twelve Third Formers were far too many for three of their old rivals of the Fourth, no matter how determined they might be. Babs and Co. were seized and held against the wall while Fanny Tibbitts prepared to treat them to a solo from the terribly battered bugle that she had adopted on failing to borrow a violin.

Trrrrmp! Trumpitty-trump!

"My hat! What a giddy rumpus!" cried a voice, as the door of the common-room opened. "Gee whiz! It's the Third! Come and send the cheeky kids away!"

The speaker was Clara Trevlyn, known as the "Tomboy of the Fourth."

Clara led a rush of girls from the common-room.

The members of the Third had not come prepared to deal with such a situation at all. They were simply swept off their feet. The offending musical instruments were seized and treated as such things should. Clara set the lead by rolling the battered-looking drum down the stairs.

"Send them after their things!" ordered Clara. Madge Stevens took alarm.

"Clear!" she ordered; and her followers "cleared."

They were followed by cheery voices from the triumphant Fourth.

"Come back, and we'll roll you down like the drum!"

"We'll make you sing quite a new tune!"

"Give us a solo from down there!"

The Third Formers had descended hurriedly. They looked ruffled and far from happy. They knew that themselves.

So Madge Stevens gave a defiant glare on behalf of the whole party.



Peggy Preston, the cleverest girl in the Fourth

"Bah!" she said. "Cheeky Fourth Formers! Think you're clever!"

"We know we are!" said Babs blandly.

"We'll have our revenge!" said Doris Redfern. "You think you've scored, but it wasn't your business to interfere at all. We were only japing Augusta."

"And it didn't come off!"

"No need for you all to butt in!" declared Madge Stevens. "We'll make them sorry for it, eh? What do you girls say?"

"Rather!" cheered the Third Formers.

They little guessed the far-reaching effects that were to come out of that resolution to revive the ancient "hostility" between the Forms; little guessed the mystery in which they were to be involved—the mystery that had started with the strange disappearance of Augusta's letter.

CHAPTER II.

WHOSE NECKLACE?

MADGE STEVENS AND CO. returned rather more quietly than usual to the common room that served youngsters who had not attained to the dignity of studies.

Certain low-voiced remarks, however, showed that their calm was only the prelude to action. A chorus, which usually consisted of "Oh, rather!" indicated that the Third were unanimous. It was part of the joy of life for these cheeky, irresponsible youngsters to be "at war" with someone.

"We'll work some ripping jape on them!" declared Madge Stevens.

"Oh, rather!"

"If we could make them come to us and beg for mercy!" chuckled Doris Redfern, taking a great flight of fancy.

"It would be ripping!" said Iris Marshall, one of the Two Blossoms.

"Oh, rather!"

Then they fell silent again, wondering what great and crushing scheme might be hatched for dealing with the Fourth. It seemed easier to hope than to think of the idea, but they made a good effort.

That was why a figure lurking in the Third Form common-room did not hear their unusually silent return.

An unusual figure she was, too, to be seen here at all. There was something mysterious and uneasy in her movements. And what a start she gave as the door suddenly opened, and the first of the youngsters entered!

"Marcia Loftus!" ejaculated Madge Stevens. "I say, girls, just look who's here! A Fourth Former!"

"Cheek!" said Doris Redfern. "What's she doing?"

Marcia was standing over by the window, a spot of colour in her cheeks, her thin lips twisted in an uneasy smile.

"I—I came down to see you," she announced. "Us?"

"Yes. About a—a book. You were asking if anyone could lend you a nice book. I've just read a rather decent one."

Madge Stevens stared.

"Not you!" she said. "Whew! Fancy you ever troubling to tell anyone anything! You've been down here trying to rag us!"

"I haven't!" cried Marcia, starting to move to the door. "I—I wondered where you were. I've only just got here."

Marcia made a sudden rush for the door.

"Here! Not so quickly!" cried Madge, hanging on to her. "We never invited you down. Lend a hand, Blossoms! She's struggling!"

"Let me alone! You sha'n't bully me! Let me go or you'll be sorry!" This and much more yelled Marcia Loftus.

"Marcia, if you dare to kick you'll be sorry!" cried Fanny Tibbitts. "Madge, catch hold of her legs!"

Madge Stevens boiled with youthful indignation.

"I sentence the cheeky Fourth Former to go Under the Table at Sea!" she cried. "Pull her along, all of you! We'll make her sorry for coming here!"

"Don't you dare! Leave me alone! I'll report you!" shrieked Marcia.

The reply of the Third Formers was to roll her on the ground. Experienced hands towed her along and helped to thrust her under the common-room table. The whole assembled company formed gleefully round the sides.

"Now, Marcia, you're going to stay there until you apologise!" said Madge, with reversed serenity. "Understand? Off to Sea, girls!"

The table began to joggle and bump about. "Under the Table at Sea" was one of the specialised "punishments" that resourceful Madge had invented for dealing with unruly Third Formers. There were many of these weird and wonderful ways in vogue in the Third.



Barbara Redfern, the Captain of the Fourth Form

"Stop it! Let me go!" shrieked Marcia in muffled tones.

The table joggled on as the Third Formers moved it all round the room—with Marcia underneath.

If she stopped for a moment the table was sure to descend on her, or else someone would tread on her!

"Had enough?" asked Madge.

Marcia made a sudden dash on all fours as the Third Formers unwisely paused, and in another moment she had scrambled out from under the table and was rushing for the door.

"Capture her!"

But Marcia was out of the door. Marcia may have been very furious, but she also showed wisdom. Under the table was the most uncomfortable place that Marcia had discovered for a long while.

The Third Formers stopped in the passage, yelling with laughter.

"Poor old Marcia—what a shock for her!" chuckled Madge Stevens gleefully.

She led the way back to the common-room, where their further merriment would probably take the form of another of Madge's ingenious inventions—this time the Third Form Dance of Triumph. But hardly were they inside than the door opened again, and a fat face and glimmering spectacles appeared.

"Come in, Bessie Bunter!" invited Doris impishly; and Bessie obeyed.

Poor Bessie was always a very unlucky girl. Through her little tiff with Babs and Mabs over the ear-rings she did not know that a "state of war" existed between Fourth and Third!

"Just thought I'd come along and see you," said Bessie blandly. "I'm having my photograph taken next week, you know."

"How dreadful for the camera!" said Madge.

"Cheek!" exclaimed Bessie. "Better be careful, young Madge, or I shall talk to you severely! I really came down to see if you could lend me one or two things to wear when I have my photograph taken. You know, I'm a girl who looks rather well in jewellery."

"There's plenty of room to put it!" chuckled Doris.

Bessie Bunter gave her a dignified blink.

"I think I'll let you lend me your brooch, Doris," she said. "Of course, it isn't the sort of thing that I'd wear in the ordinary way. But in a photograph people won't see that it's only brass, will they?"

Doris Redfern started.

Bessie's way of putting things was not tactful, to say the least.

"Then I'll borrow two or three bangles—just for the day," Bessie went on blandly. "There's

that one that Madge must have got at a fair or somewhere—it's rather tinny, but it may look like silver in a photograph."

"Cheek!" gasped Madge, astounded.

"Yes, cheap, of course," nodded Bessie. "It's only coloured glass in it, but it'll only be just in the corner of the picture. Then I think I'll have that celluloid hair-slide that Jessie calls tortoiseshell—it will look like it in the print. And I'll have—I say, what are you doing, Doris Redfern?"

Doris looked as though she was hugging Bessie.

"I—I say! Ow!" shrieked the fat girl. "What have I done? What are you trying to do?"

"You're going Under the Table at Sea for your sauce!" said Madge. "Kim on!"

Bessie shrieked with alarm. She knew all about it. Bessie was quite an experienced "voyager" so far as that punishment was concerned.

"Help! Rescue! I won't go under the horrid old table! Let me alone! Ow! You're pinching!"

Bessie Bunter was fat, but they still knew how to get her under the table. Skilled hands did it quickly.

And then came a yell that startled even the Third.

Bessie was shrieking—with excitement!

"Pearls! I say, there's a string of pearls under here!"

"Where?" cried Madge.

Bessie crawled out backwards from under the table, holding a very pretty string of pearls in her hand.

"My hat!" ejaculated Doris. "Wherever did they come from?"

Everyone was clustering to look at Bessie's discovery.

"They were under the table!"

"Never!" cried incredulous voices.

"They were. I saw—Oh, dear! Hooray!"

Bessie Bunter gave a yell of delight. "They're mine—my missing pearls! Those I lost some time ago! I recognise—Oh, I say, what are you doing?"

Madge Stevens had grabbed the treasure.

"Give me my pearls!" cried Bessie Bunter.

"I don't believe they are yours!"

"They are! I tell you I've recognised them! My missing pearls! I shall want them for my photograph!"

Madge held the pearls behind her back.

Bessie struggled in tremendous indignation to get possession of them, and at that moment the door opened and two cheerful faces looked in. It was Babs and Mabs.



Babs and Co. were held against the wall by the Third Formers, while Fanny Tibbitts performed a solo of triumph on a battered bugle

"Hallo!" said Babs. "What's all the racket?"

"They've got my pearls!" cried Bessie desperately. "Those I lost some time ago. They won't give them to me!"

"They're not her pearls!" retorted Madge. "She's trying to bag them for her silly old photograph!"

Babs and Mabs asked for an explanation. It was given in a very noisy manner. Bessie insisted on saying as much as everybody else until seized for a fresh "trip to sea."

"Queer that they should be found there," murmured Babs. "Doesn't anyone in the Third claim them?"

"No," said Madge. "No one's got a string like them."

"I tell you they're mine!" squeaked Bessie hotly.

"They don't look like them," said Babs. "Be-

sides, you lost yours months ago, and you weren't sure whether you dropped them in the school or in the village."

"I'm sure now! I—I dropped them in here!" declared Bessie. "They must have been under the carpet all the time!"

Madge Stevens gave an exclamation. "I know! They're Marcia's. She probably dropped them. See if you can find her, Doris."

Marcia was quickly found and brought somewhat reluctantly along the passage.

"Are these yours, Marcia?" asked Madge, holding the string aloft.

The Fourth Former shook her head emphatically.

"No," said Marcia. "Why should they be mine? I haven't got any pearls like those."

"There you are!" yelled Bessie Banter.

"That proves they're mine!"

"It doesn't! And you're not going to have them!" said Madge Stevens.

Babs intervened.

"They might be Bessie's, Madge, if she's so sure," she said. "She's as much entitled to them as anyone else. I think you'd better hand them over."

"No fear!" chuckled Madge. "Fourth Form advice! Thank you for nothing. We don't want it! We're going to keep these pearls as Third Form Treasure until they're claimed."

CHAPTER III.

LOST AND FOUND

THE discovery of the pearls in the Third Form common-room was the talk of the school that evening.

A Fifth Form girl examined them and pronounced them to be good artificial ones worth a couple of pounds. Now Bessie Bunter's had certainly not been worth anything like that!

But the strange thing was that, although the whole school heard of the discovery, no one with the exception of Bessie made any claim to them. And while the Third Formers advanced wild and most extravagant theories about burglars dropping them, the majority of the Fourth really considered that the fat girl was entitled to them.

She had certainly had pearls, and lost them, at an earlier date. No one else in the school seemed to have lost pearls.

Fourth Formers, considering the matter gravely and judicially, told Madge Stevens that she had no right to keep the treasure. Madge and Co., being "at war" as they termed it, turned the position into a "score."

"We've got them, anyway!" they taunted the Fourth. "Get them if you can! Pearl snatchers. Any way's good enough for the Fourth! Ha, ha!"

In consequence of such boastfulness there were quite a number of skirmishes between the two Forms before bedtime, and it was therefore not surprising that there should be a dormitory raid that night.

Madge and Co., who went to bed earlier than the Fourth, laid their plans with great care. They crept from their dormitory as soon as the Fourth had gone to bed. With one yell they swept upon the foe.

"We'll show them who can guard pearls!" Madge Stevens cried. "We'll show them what we're made of!"

"Oh, rather!" came the Third Form cry. "At them!"

But the Fourth were not caught as unprepared as they might have been.

"It's the Third!" sang out Babs. "Quick, girls—back against the beds and get the pillows. Mabs—you and I for the bolster!"

Merry cries, and the thud of pillows, echoed through the dormitory when Babs and Mabs put into effect an idea that they had long considered.

Swinging a bolster between them they charged upon the Third Formers.

"Hurrah! They're going!" cheered Bessie Bunter, who had taken up her station on a distant bed. "Look out! I'm going to rush at you in a mum-mum-minute, Madge! I shall hit jolly hard when I do. Go it, Clara!"

Clara and Dolly Jobling were wielding another bolster.

The effect of that second bolster was to strike dismay to the hearts of the daring youngsters who had relied upon a quick and surprising raid on the Fourth, and an equally quick return to their dormitory.

A frantic rush for the door was made by those nearest to it, and the leaders regretfully followed.

Babs chuckled as she and Mabs pursued them.

"Make them run for it!" she whispered to the others. "We'll chase them into a corner and let them think we're really wild with them, eh?"

"Jolly good wheeze!" grinned Clara. "Fancy them thinking they could pillow-rag us!"

Bessie Bunter had descended from the bed. She called a courageous message after Babs and Co.

"You hold them, and I'll come along with a pillow and jolly well lam them for pushing me under the table!" she directed.

But the Fourth were too busy to heed such advice.

Pursuers and pursued fled rapidly.

Madge and Co. had unwittingly blundered into a corridor from which there was no escape. They drew up at the end, panting. The Fourth Formers came on, looking very determined indeed.

"Peace!" gasped Madge.

"Surrender?" asked Babs, in a stern and commanding voice.

"Oh, rather!" said the unfortunate members of the Third.

"All right," Babs said. "We'll pardon them this time, girls. What are the conditions? Supposing they solemnly declare that they are very sorry—a hundred times!"



Augusta Anstruther-Browne,
the Fourth Form violinist

"Oh, rats! We sha'n't say anything like that!" declared Madge cheekily. "We'll say that we'll make you sorry for yourselves to-morrow, if you like!"

"Poor misguided infants," chaffed Babs. "As we are strong so will we be merciful. Go in peace or else you'll go in pieces."

And the Third adopted the former policy.

Hardly had the Fourth returned and started to undress than Madge and Co. were on them again.

"Hallo! They've come for some more!" sang out Babs, moving for the bolster.

"It isn't that!" Madge answered excitedly. "Someone's taken the pearl necklace! It's missing!"

"Missing?" cried Babs, in amazement.

"Yes. Have you got it, Bessie Bunter?"

Bessie gasped.

"Of—of course I haven't! I—I never thought a word—"

"Well, it's gone!" said Madge.

"Tisn't fair to take it when we are ragging, is it, Babs? I mean, a jape's a jape. That's taking advantage."

"Quite true!" admitted Babs.

"But—but—it's one of the girls who wasn't ragging—one who stopped behind here!" declared Madge.

"We're going to search and see if we can find it."

"Steady on!" Babs exclaimed. "You're not going to search Fourth Formers. Here—keep them off! It's like their cheek! We'll do any searching that needs to be done!"

The Third Formers rushed for the beds of those who had been non-combatants.

Hardly had they started than a yell came from Fanny Tibbits.

"I've found it!"

Everyone—Third and Fourth alike—turned in amazement as the girl stooped to the carpet in front of the fireplace and held a pearl necklace aloft.

"Right at the foot of Bessie's bed!" Fanny piped.

"I didn't see it there, anyway!" exclaimed Bessie. "I'd jolly soon have had it if I had seen it!"

Madge and Co. closed round the figure of Fanny and backed, with their precious "treasure," towards the door.

"We're going to keep it, anyway!" announced Madge. "Jolly mean trick taking the necklace when we were ragging."

And the Third departed, leaving an air of profound mystery in the dormitory.

"Bessie, did you have it?" asked Babs.

"No, I didn't!" shrilled Bessie. "And I don't think you're much of a chum to let them rob me of my necklace before my very own eyes!"

"But, Bessie, no one believes it is yours!" said Babs. "You'd really better leave it to the Third, now they've found it."

"I won't!"

"Then you must have had it!"

"I wouldn't have thrown my own property on the carpet if only I'd had it!" declared Bessie; and that certainly sounded convincing enough.

"Then where did it come from?" asked Clara Trevlyn.

No one answered. No one could. For if Bessie Bunter was not the girl who

had stolen into the Third Form dormitory and taken the necklace during the commotion, who was?

CHAPTER IV.

BY WHOSE HAND?

"WHERE is it, Madge? In bed?"

"Under my pillow, and safe as houses!" answered Madge Stevens.

It was more than half an hour later, but there was still some excited whispering to be heard in the Third Form dormitory.

Madge Stevens and Co. were considering two important matters. One was the Fourth Form, and what manner of "return jape" should be played. The other was the necklace.



"Pearls!" shrieked Bessie in tremendous excitement. "They were underneath the table—and—and I believe they're the ones I lost some time ago!"

And really the necklace seemed the more interesting of the two, for at least a dozen times Madge had been asked to make quite sure that she still held the Third Form "treasure."

The fact that it should disappear and then be found in such a dramatic manner made it a far more interesting object in Third Form eyes. Somebody wanted it. It was exciting to hold something that someone else wanted, especially when they could not decide who that someone was.

For the members of the Third were, now they came to talk it over, not quite sure that Bessie was the culprit.

Just as they were dropping off to sleep Madge Stevens heard Fanny Tibbitts softly call her by name.

"Madge!"

"Oh, what is it now, Fanny?"

"Can you feel a wind—as though the door's open?"

No answer came.

"Madge, I believe you can! And I'm positive the door's open!" said Fanny, her bed creaking as she sat up. "Someone strike a match!"

Madge's chuckle sounded rather forced.

"No good trying—you simply won't scare me!" she said. "I'm guarding the necklace, and I'll see it stays under my pillow—Oh!"

The last sound was a gasp of alarm.

Suddenly Madge saw it—a black figure in the darkness. A hand grabbed at her and threw her roughly to one side of the bed—she almost fell out. Then her pillow jerked smotheringly across her face.

Madge wriggled free, and yelled.

"Help! Help! Someone in the dorm—someone's stolen the necklace!"

She heard a swift pattering footstep, a bump—then silence.

Everyone leapt out of bed and blundered towards the door.

"Someone's stolen it and rushed off!" Madge Stevens cried. "But I'll catch her, whoever she is! I'll— Oh!"

Doris gave a gasping cry, and there came the sound of a heavy thud. Someone at last switched on the electric light. Madge was sprawling in the doorway, and under her feet was the pillow that had caused her fall.

The bed that she had left was in scattered and wild disorder.

"Hurt?" they cried, running to help their chum to her feet.

"No. Someone left that pillow. I fell over. It doesn't look like one of ours. Some girl must have dropped it. We'll find her, this time."

She was already hurrying into the corridor.

The Two Blossoms, Fanny Tibbitts, and Minnie Jerome—famed as being of a most inquiring turn of mind, and always in everything—pattered across the dormitory and followed.

"Some Fourth Former for a certainty!" Madge muttered. "My word, it's all in darkness. But it must have been one of them. If we're quick we may see."

She spun open the door and clicked on the electric light. Their eyes took in a long line of slumbering figures—and one empty bed. That bed was near to the fireplace.

"Hallo! What ever's the matter?" asked the sleepy voice of Babs as she sat up and rubbed her eyes.

"It's Madge again!" gasped Clara. "My hat, if that bolster—"

"I say, we've been robbed!" Madge interrupted breathlessly. "Someone's just stolen the necklace. She came this way. Who's out of that bed there?"

Babs looked, and gasped.

"Bessie Bunter! But—but—"

"Is this her pillow?" asked Doris.

"I don't know!" said Babs, more bewildered. "But there certainly isn't one on her bed. It looks— Oh, my goodness!"

There was a patter of footsteps. The fat figure of Bessie Bunter, clad in slippers and dressing-gown, whizzed into the dormitory.

"Oh, dear," she gasped, "what ever is it? Bib-bib-burglars?"

The Third grabbed her, bringing a further yell from her.

"Where's the necklace?"

"I—I don't know!" stammered Bessie Bunter.

"I—I've looked everywhere."

"What?"

"But I—I couldn't find where you've hidden it—"

"And you were the burglar!" said Madge grimly. "It's no good pretending, Bessie Bunter. You've been in our dormitory. Where have you hidden the pearls?"

Bessie stared at Madge in bewilderment.

"I—I haven't been near your dormitory!" she cried.

"Fibber!"

"It's a fact! I've been down in the common-



Clara Trevlyn, the Tomboy of the Fourth Form.

room. I thought you might have hidden the pearls there!"

"Then how did your pillow get in our room?" asked Madge, exhibiting that article triumphantly.

Bessie blinked from the pillow to her bed and back to the pillow.

The sleepy voice of Marcia Loftus chimed in at that moment.

"What ever's all the noise about? I wish you kids would go and argue somewhere else!" she said peevishly.

"Bessie's taken our pearls!" said Fanny Tibbits.

"I—I haven't had them——"

Marcia sat up in bed, frowning sleepily and disagreeably.

"Oh, don't listen to Bessie, Madge!" she said. "You know what a story-teller she is—always full of excuses! Make her show you where they are!"

"I haven't been near your dormitory, Madge!" quavered Bessie. "I didn't know the horrid old pearls were there at all. Oh, dear, I've had such a shock, too, thinking there were bib-bib-burglars!"

Babs interposed.

"I say, you kids, pack it up now!" she advised the Third. "We don't know anything about the pearls, and I'm sure Bessie doesn't! Bessie would tell you if she'd hidden the pearls. Go away! You'll find out who's got them when it's daylight. It's all through making such a song in the school that you've been japed about like this!"

The general opinion supported Babs; and Clara went further and offered Madge and Co. a good shaking if they robbed her of further "beauty sleep." And so, after a last protest, Bessie was allowed to take her pillow and return to her bed; and Madge and Co. went.

The dormitory was in darkness. Babs had turned over to sleep again when a sudden thought struck her. She was quite startled.

No one had explained how Bessie's pillow came to be in the Third Form dormitory!

A mystery that—unless, indeed, it was positive proof! And then Babs thought of Bessie. She was a blunderer in the general way. Was it possible for her to make such a daring and single-handed raid on the Third?

It was a perplexing thought and enough to keep Babs awake for longer than she wished.

BABS woke on the following morning to hear the complaining voice of a girl who seldom complained in the ordinary way.

"It's getting a bit of a craze—this taking of things that belong to someone else," Augusta Anstruther-Browne was remarking. "That letter of mine from Lorna Grey hasn't turned up. I don't see how it could possibly interest anyone, and yet it's gone!"

"A very clever business that," said Clara Trevlyn.

"It would have been returned by now if anyone took it for a jape," said Augusta.

"You weren't out of the study for five minutes—that's what beats me," said Babs. "Someone must have gone in and taken it at once."

Augusta gave a puzzled frown and went to wash.

Babs slid out of bed and cast an eye round for the slackers. As Form captain it was more or less her duty to see that everyone turned out in time for breakfast.

Bessie, as usual, was snoring.

But there was one vacant bed, and Babs cried out:

"Where's Marcia?"

"Gone down to do some prep. she didn't do last night," said Clara. "She was nearly dressed when I got up. Must have risen before rising-bell."

"Strange for Marcia to worry about prep!" ruminated Babs. "Wish she would every morning."

Now then, Fatima—awake, my fairy!"

Babs stooped and whirled the bed-clothes off Bessie Bunter's curled-up form, and "the fairy" abruptly straightened out and shrieked.

"Ow! It's cold!"

"Time to get up, my sweetest!"

"I'm going to have another five minutes!"

"Yes, without the bedclothes!" smiled Babs, holding them tightly. "Curl up peacefully. I'll tell you when the time's up!"

Bessie Bunter favoured Babs with an indignant glare and rolled discontentedly out of bed. Five minutes under those conditions wasn't good enough!

The Fourth Formers were still chuckling, when the door opened to reveal the cheerful faces of Madge Stevens and Co. Madge stepped into the room—wearing a string of pearls!

"My hat," cried Clara, "have you found them?"

Madge Stevens chuckled delightedly.



Bessie Bunter, the fat girl of the Fourth Form

"Of course! Trust the Third to get what they want!" she said. "We were up before rising-bell searching for them. You'll never guess where they were!"

"Under your pillow all the time?" suggested Babs.

"Wrong—so there! We found them tucked on top of a beam in the corridor. Only one of them was showing! We searched ever so long before we found them."

Bessie Bunter having just commenced her real ablutions, whirled round from the wash-stand.

"Have they found the pearls?" she gasped. "I say, Babs, grab them! Have they found the—Ow! Ooooh! Where's a towel? A towel, someone!"

"But you haven't washed the soap off your face!" said Mabel Lynn.

"It's all gone in my eyes through trying to see the pearls!" wailed Bessie Bunter. "Oh, I'll be blinded! Give me a towel, quick!"

It was most unfortunate for poor Bessie that she would not even see the treasures!

"And we didn't find them with the help of the Fourth, either!" said Madge triumphantly. "We've had a helper from your Form—Marcia gave us a hand."

And with this surprising piece of information the youngsters departed as quickly as they had come.

"So they're back," said Babs in a puzzled voice. "Found on a beam in the corridor! Marcia helped them, too! Curious!"

Bessie raised a red face from the towel.

"Did you grab them, Babs?"

"Of course not, Bessie."

"Well, I've told you I'm going to have my photo taken—"

"Oh, bother the photo! I don't believe they're yours at all!" said Babs quite crossly.

"I've had enough of those pearls!"

"I haven't had one of them yet, although I found them!" said Bessie morosely. "It's my necklace, too. I'll have it!"

Babs let it go at that, rather than argue. She was not pleased at the vanity that Bessie was showing over her forthcoming photograph. She wished that Bessie's people had never thought of the idea and given such long notice.

After breakfast the Fourth Formers were strolling in the quadrangle when Bessie Bunter came rushing up to them in a very breathless and excited state.

"Babs! Mabs! Clara! I'm being insulted!" she cried. "I say, come and go for them, girls!"

Clara tapped her forehead significantly.

"She's lost her reason at last!" Clara sighed.

"That's right—I mean, don't be so silly.

Clara!" cried Bessie. "You come along and see what the Third are doing. They're making fun of the most influential girl in the Form. It's an insult to the Fourth! You come along and go for them! They're in the common-room. It's an absolute insult! I'd a good mind to go to Miss Primrose when I saw it! Oh dear, I do feel annoyed! You come and shake them, Babs!"

Babs sighed and followed Bessie. Quite a number followed Babs. They had an idea that there was something interesting.

And there was!

The Third Form common-room door was open. A crowd of gleeful youngsters were arranged around a queer dummy propped on the table. Babs and Mabs looked at it—and went off into shrieks of laughter.

The dummy was made from a sack, and was very fat. It had a very large head, and wore "glasses" made out of bent wire. Around its neck was a string of white turnips, evidently representing "pearls," and two carrots hung from its ears as ear-rings. And a notice pinned on the dummy read:

A Typical Fourth Former.

All Ready to be Photographed.

Isn't it Wonderful!

Clara Trevlyn, Flap Derwent, Phyllis Howell, and Peggy Preston looked at the dummy—and shrieked as well!

"Oh, I say!" exploded Bessie Bunter furiously. "You're laughing!"

"No—no," said Babs feebly. "It's only a rumour!"

"It's supposed to be *me*!" shrieked Bessie. "They say it's a typical Fourth Former. Don't you think it's an insult?"

"It is—to call you typical!" grinned Clara.

"You're one on your own, Bessie! Ha, ha, ha!"

Madge Stevens and Co. were also peeling with laughter.

"One of the pearl-loving Fourth!" she chortled. "I say, Babs, aren't you proud of your old chum now?"

"There you are!" hooted Bessie. "They're still being insulting, and you're afraid of them. Yah! Afraid to go for them! Coward!"

"How about yourself, Bessie?" asked Mabs. Babs turned to the others.

"It's very funny, but I suppose we'd better give these Third Formers what they're asking for, girls," she said. "Catch them!"

"If you can!" said Madge Stevens; and she headed a frantic rush for the passage, broke from Clara who grabbed at her, and fled, peeling with laughter, at the head of her followers.

Bessie Bunter rushed at the "guy," dragged it from the table, and jumped on it furiously.

"Now you can understand what we feel we'd like to do to you sometimes, Fatima," said Clara.

"Eh? What's that?" said Bessie, pausing. "Why, what you're doing now! Jump on you!" said Clara.

Bessie Bunter glared furiously.

"You were afraid to go for the Third, anyway!" she said. "I wasn't! I called them all sorts of things when I saw this horrid old dummy. When they've got my missing pearls——"

Marcia smiled apologetically.

"I'm sorry. I shan't do so again. If it's your necklace you ought to have it. I see that now. If you like, I'll try and help you get your pearls again. And I think I've got a plan."



"It's supposed to be me!" shrieked Bessie. "This is an insult to the Fourth, and I call on you, Babs, to avenge it."

"Oh, for goodness' sake be quiet about the pearls, Bessie!" cried Babs. "Come on, girls, and let her talk to herself!"

Bessie Bunter saw her Form chums depart, with the Third unpunished. It made her so angry that she jumped on the guy again—twice. Even that did not relieve her feelings.

Marcia Loftus came along just then.

"Got the necklace yet, Bessie?" she asked.

"No, I haven't!" growled Bessie. "And I don't want to talk to you about it. You backed up those Third Form kids last night."

CHAPTER VI.

THE OTHER PEARLS!

BESSIE BUNTER was in quite a fever of excitement at dinner-time that Wednesday. She had just heard Marcia's "plan."

"The pearls," said Marcia, "were locked in a box in the Third Form common-room, and the key hung on the wall, concealed underneath a kettle-holder!"

Bessie would have rushed off at once to secure the key and try the box if Marcia had not stopped her.

"Not yet, Bessie!" she warned. "Take your time; pretend you know nothing. I believe they're going to carry out some jape on the Second. That will give you your chance."

And Marcia went away, chuckling.

Bessie hung about in the corridors, waiting her chance. She was very excited. Twice she nearly gave herself away when she was lurking near the Third Form common-room, and girls came along.

But at last her opportunity dawned.

Madge and Co. came out in a body and went cheerily up the stairs. Bessie watched the last of them go, and then moved to the common-room. She was inside—and alone! At last!

Her fat fingers trembled so badly as she took the key from its hiding-place that she dropped it twice on the floor.

But there was the playbox that belonged to Madge Stevens—a big wooden affair. Bessie turned the key in the lock. Her heart thumped at the creaking of the lid, and she threw terrified glances in the direction of the door. But no one seemed to have heard.

And there were the pearls!

She took them out of the box and put them round her neck. She beamed on herself in a looking-glass. Her pearls at last!

Bessie was so wildly excited that she almost forgot to lock the box and return the key.

But she did so. Then she took off the pearls and tied them up in her handkerchief. Looking a picture of guilt, Bessie crept away from the common-room and scuttled up the stairs.

Now that she had taken them, she certainly felt a rather uneasy conscience pricking her.

No. 4 study was empty when Bessie entered and banged the door with quite unnecessary force in her excitement. She gazed round for a hiding-place. The bookcase? Behind the dusty old cookery books with which she had long since dispensed—the very spot!

Bessie hid the pearls—and her conscience pricked her again.

Bessie was a very poor one at keeping a secret.

"I—I think I ought to tell Babs and Mabs," she muttered. "They're bound to be in the quadrangle. I'll go down and see them."

Bessie Bunter, trembling between admiration of her own daring and a queer uneasiness, scuttled off to the quadrangle.

Although it was a Wednesday afternoon, it was not a very promising day, and numbers of girls were still in the quadrangle, talking.

Babs and Mabs were in conversation with Miss Bullivant when Bessie sailed up.

Bessie had no wish to converse with the "Bull," as affectionate pupils called her. But

something in the mistress's excited manner made it impossible for Bessie to keep away.

"I have just returned from Friardale," Miss Bullivant was saying in a jerky tone. "I am telling you as Fourth Form captain—a girl likely to be able to throw some light on the matter. For pearls to be missing is really such a serious thing that I could do nothing but return immediately."

Bessie Bunter's heart seemed to give a leap right into her throat.

"But, Miss Bullivant," Babs was protesting, "surely this has nothing to do with Cliff House—"

"It has!" said Miss Bullivant sharply. "Two days ago a string of quite valuable artificial pearls disappeared from the jeweller's shop. A Cliff House girl had been making purchases there when they went. The jeweller has made no accusation, but he has talked—talked to everyone."

"Then it's only talk—"

"Talk is worse than an accusation!" exclaimed the mistress. "I only heard it second-hand in the village. I was most indignant. That the common tradesmen should be saying such a thing about a Cliff House girl—no, that man shall apologise! I will have the whole matter thrashed out!"

Bessie Bunter's throat was dry as she listened.

"I will make him apologise for such scandalous talk in the village. He declared that the pearls were lost after a Cliff House girl had bought some cheap and tawdry ear-rings! The story was so absurd that I would not even go to question the man. It is ridiculous to believe that any girl at this school would purchase sixpenny ear-rings! I would like you, Barbara, to find out the names of the girls who have recently visited this jeweller and let me know. I am now going to see Miss Primrose."

Miss Bullivant sailed grimly away, intent upon clearing the honour of the school she loved in her own jealous and stern way.

Bessie Bunter shook like a fat jelly as Babs and Mabs looked at her.

"Sixpenny ear-rings!" Babs breathed. "Why, Bessie, are you the girl who has been to this shop?"

Bessie Bunter could hardly speak.

"Only w-w-w-once—"

"But you have been there?"

"I—I didn't steal the pearls!" gasped Bessie. Babs and Mabs stared at her.

"They—they're my mum-mum-missing nun-necklace!" stammered Bessie. "I—I recognised them when I sis-sis-saw them in the Third. I—I haven't stolen them."

Babs was looking very serious, and her brow was puckered with thought.

"No, Bessie, we know *you're* not a thief," she said gently. "But this is really a very serious business—pearls missing from the village, and a stray necklace turning up at the school. I must tell Madge Stevens that it will be better for her to give the necklace to Miss Primrose at once."

Bessie Bunter clung to Babs and Mabs as they would have hurried away.

"She—she kik-kik-can't!" gasped Bessie desperately.

"How? Why not?" said Babs.

"I—I've got them myself—they're in No. 4 study!"

"My hat!" said Mabs.

Bessie Bunter shook with alarm.

"Y-y-yes. Marcia advised me to take them. I had the chance. I—I really thought they were mine. But I—I don't want the horrid old pearls now. I—I'm a particular sort of girl. I won't touch them if—if there's any kik-kik-question about them!"

Babs and Mabs took her arms and hurried her to the school.

"You're a silly duffer to have taken them when we told you they couldn't be yours," said Babs, as they raced her up the stairs. "But I'll take charge of them now and give them to Miss Primrose. We simply must, when there's such a question about them."

They hurried into No. 4 study.

Bessie Bunter was very upset and very sorry for herself.

She had no hesitation at all in revealing her hiding-place.

"Behind the old cookery books, Babs. I—I only put them there just before I came down. I'll get them."

She dragged the books out and they crashed dustily to the floor.

Behind them was a handkerchief. The fat girl grasped it and gave a shrill cry of amazement and dismay.

"They've gig-gig-gone!"

Babs and Mabs stared as she shook the handkerchief over the carpet to reveal its emptiness.

"They can't have gone if you put them there, Bessie!" said Babs incredulously.

Mabs began to drag the bookcase away from the wall.

"Of course not!" she said. "They've fallen down somewhere. I'll find them."

Bessie Bunter began to weep dismally.

"I—I know they have gone!" she quavered. "I tut-tut-tied them in the handkerchief."

Mabs gave a startling cry.

"There are no pearls to be seen here, Babs! They haven't dropped down anywhere!"

Babs looked thunderstruck.

She was beginning to hate the very name of these pearls that could play such extraordinary pranks, apparently of their own free will.

"You hid them somewhere else, Bessie, and you've forgotten!" she declared.

"I—I didn't!" wailed Bessie. "They were tied in the handkerchief."

"Let's have a proper look and see!" cried Babs. She and her chum started to ransack the study

while Bessie stood by, tearful and upset. Marjorie Hazeldene and the chums from No. 7, who happened to look in, were pressed into service as well.

The search was at its height when the door opened to reveal the stern face of Miss Bullivant.

"I hear, Barbara, that a mysterious string of pearls has been seen in the school recently," she said. "I was told that it was in the possession of the Third Form, but Madge Stevens declares that it has been stolen away from her keeping."

There was a dramatic silence in No. 4 study.

"It appears from general conversation, Barbara, that Bessie Bunter may possibly know where they are."

"I—I—I don't!" stammered Bessie glumly. "I—I hid them

in here."

"What, you admit taking them from the Third Form room?"

"Only for fif-fif-fun. But——"

"Then, Bessie, where are the pearls?"

"I—I don't know!" wept Bessie.

Miss Bullivant's voice resembled thunder.

"Good gracious! You admit having a string of pearls this very afternoon—a string not your own?"

"I—I thought they were mine!" said the fat girl desperately.

"Produce them instantly!"

"I—I can't!"

Miss Bullivant's brow was puckered in lines of wrath.

"Bessie Bunter, you will come with me to my study instantly!" she cried.

"But I—I'm innocent!" yelled Bessie. "I haven't sis-sis-stolen the pearls!"



Marjorie Hazeldene, the needlewoman of the Fourth Form

"We will see," said Miss Bullivant; and dragged her away.

CHAPTER VII.

A MASS OF EVIDENCE!

MISS BULLIVANT was a grim and relentless questioner, and Bessie was one of the most talkative and blundering witnesses possible.

Within a minute the mistress had no doubt that Bessie was the girl upon whom the jeweller's suspicions had fallen, causing him to make such a scandal in the village.

When Bessie explained that she only bought the ear-rings because she wanted plenty of jewellery for her photograph, it only made matters worse.

Babs and Mabs, try though they did to protect their fat chum, were very soon silenced when the accused girl was giving such condemning evidence against herself.

"You say that the girls have said that the pearls did not belong to you, Elizabeth Bunter?" rumbled the Bull.

"But I was sis-sis-sure they were mine!" wept Bessie.

"You mean, that you insisted on claiming them, and did all you could to get the pearls by stealth? Wait a minute. I will find the first Third Form girl I can, and question her."

By the worst possible luck, Miss Bullivant found Minnie Jerome, famed for her talkativeness.

The youngster was scared by the seriousness of the scene in the mistress's study, and did not know how much was known.

Very soon she unwittingly betrayed how the pearls had disappeared twice in one night, and the suspicion had fallen on Bessie each time.

"As though this girl was trying to get them without anyone knowing that they were in her possession?" asked Miss Bullivant.

"Yes, Miss Bullivant," admitted Minnie; and she was told that that would do.

"But it wasn't Bessie who took them at night, we're all positive of that, Miss Bullivant!" cried out Babs.

"Then whom do you accuse?" asked the mistress coldly.

Babs could say nothing.

"I will see Madge Stevens, who seems the most important girl in the Third Form," said Miss Bullivant grimly. "Dorothy Jobling, you are not required here. You may fetch her."

Madge Stevens was fetched.

Miss Bullivant questioned her very sharply indeed as to how the pearls came into the possession of the Third Form, and Madge could only tell the true story.

"So they were found under the table by Bessie?" said the mistress. "No one had seen them before that?"

"That's true, Miss Bullivant," admitted Madge.

There was a very hard light in the Bull's eyes.

"In other words, Madge, it was possible for Bessie to throw the pearls under the table and then to pretend to find them?"

Babs nearly jumped with horror.

"Oh, Miss Bullivant!" she gasped.

"Silence!" cried the Bull. "Is that so, Madge?"

"It—it might be," said Madge. And impulsively: "But I won't believe *that* of Bessie, all the same!"

"You are not asked to believe anything," said the mistress coldly. "You are positive that no one else saw the pearls before Bessie?"

"Yes. But all the same——"

"That is enough! You may go."

Madge Stevens was driven forth.

"This is a very serious case indeed," said Miss Bullivant, again repulsing the frantic attempt that Babs and Co. were making to intercede for their chum. "Very serious! Elizabeth Bunter admits visiting the jeweller. She is gravely suspected of endeavouring to create a false impression about these pearls. They must be found at once. No. 4 study will be searched."

"We've searched it and found nothing!" burst out Babs.

"It will be searched by a monitress this time," said the mistress grimly.

Iris Bentley undertook to search No. 4 study—in the presence of Bessie and her chums, of course.

There were numerous other Fourth Formers outside the study, and prominent amongst them was silent Marcia Loftus.

Iris began to search quickly and methodically.

The bookcase sheltered nothing. Nor did the work-baskets. Then she came to the cupboard and looked there. Almost the first thing to hand was an apparently empty jampot and—it rattled!

What a thrill there was at that!

Not one pair of eyes failed to watch the flushed monitress as she took the jampot and turned it over on her hand. And then—what a simultaneous gasp as its contents were revealed!

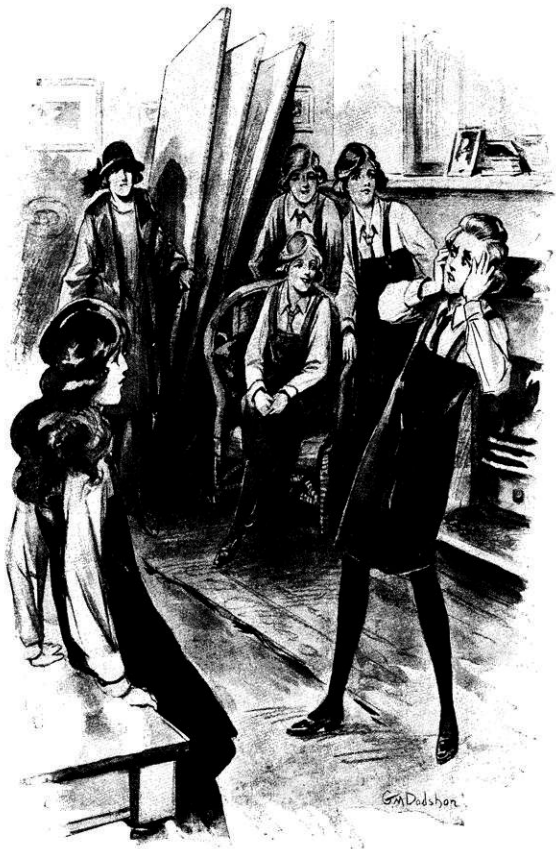
The pearls!

There was the elusive string of pearls—there it was, gleaming on Iris's hand.

"I—I didn't put them there!" cried out Bessie, in a sort of shriek.

Marcia Loftus spoke in a sort of triumphant whisper.

"Fancy her thinking of a jampot!"



The screen swayed and fell against the wall, disclosing to Marcia the form of the girl she thought was hundreds of miles away

Babs wheeled round, with burning eyes.

"Bessie didn't hide them there, Marcia, and you sha'n't say such a thing!" she cried out.

"Silence!" rumbled the mistress.

"But, Miss Bullivant, this is the work of someone else——"

"Barbara!"

"While we've been out of the study! No one was left to guard it——"

"Enough! Elizabeth Bunter," cried Miss Bullivant, "you will come with me to the Headmistress instantly. Iris, of course, will be required as a witness, and also Barbara, Mabel, Clara, and Marjorie. At once!"

Sobbing and protesting, Bessie was almost dragged by mistress and monitress to Miss Primrose's study.

Babs saved her efforts now, preparing for a final desperate appeal to the Headmistress herself. Surely Miss Primrose would not be so harsh and ready to judge by circumstantial evidence?

But what course was there for the Headmistress?

She listened to Miss Bullivant's report, and it was certainly a very black case indeed against the fat girl. Babs knew that protests of innocence were useless against such an array of facts and suspicions. Tensely she whispered with Mabs before stepping forward to make her appeal.

"Miss Primrose, please!"

"Unless you have actual evidence in Bessie's favour, Barbara——" demurred the Headmistress.

"We think it's a mistake, Miss Primrose," Babs put in breathlessly. "We can't account for this necklace, but we don't think it's the missing one."

"How can there be any doubt?" exclaimed Miss Bullivant.

"For Bessie's sake, Miss Primrose," Babs begged, "will you let us go to the village and get an exact description of the missing necklace?"

"Why?"

"Because Mabs and I are both sure we've seen this one before—somewhere!" said Babs in a startling voice. "We can't be sure, but we're almost certain that we have seen it. May we go, Miss Primrose?"

Miss Primrose gave permission. They must only ask for details of the loss, and promise to say no word of what had transpired at the school.

Leaving tearful Bessie still in the study, Babs and Mabs slipped away, eager for their investigations. They found many Fourth Formers waiting anxiously for news.

"What's happening?" asked Peggy Preston anxiously. "Is it any better for Bessie?"

Babs explained their mission in quick sentences.

"What a splendid idea!" was the unusual comment of Marcia Loftus. "Well done, Babs! I believe you'll have luck, too!"

So unexpected was such a speech from Marcia that everyone stared.

"Thanks, Marcia," said Babs drily. "We sha'n't fail if we can help it."

They hurried down to the shed for the bicycles, and trotted with them to the gates. In the very act of jumping into the saddle Babs gave a cry of surprise.

"Puncture?" asked Mabs.

Babs laughed almost gaily.

"No. I've just thought, Mabs!" she said breathlessly. "You know how puzzled we've been over that necklace. I remember, now, the girl who used to wear one like it. She's away from the school—that's why we didn't guess before. That girl is Lorna Grey!"

"Lorna!" ejaculated Mabs. "My hat, Babs! Lorna Grey! Why, of course! She did have a necklace just like that once. It disappeared when—when Marcia Loftus was threatening to tread on it and smash it after a quarrel they had. I don't remember seeing it again after that!"

They rode on, their minds full of exciting thoughts. Both felt positive now. Did it mean that they were at last on the track of the explanation of what had been a baffling mystery?

CHAPTER VIII.

LOST AGAIN!

TWO very cheery looking girls rode up to Cliff House School, dropped their bicycles against the wall, and went running for the door. Marcia Loftus, who had apparently been strolling up and down by herself, intercepted them.

"Good news?" she asked.

But their faces showed that. Babs and Mabs were full of smiles. In the ordinary way they would not have been so courteous to Marcia, but they were in the mood to talk to anyone now!

"Rather!" said Mabs.

"Bessie—she's going to be quite all right, after all," Babs declared. "Sorry we can't stop, Marcia, now—we're in such a hurry to get upstairs."

On they raced, to be besieged immediately by a crowd of Fourth Formers who wanted to know everything. But the crowd had to be content with scraps of information. Babs and Mabs were bound for the Headmistress's study.

They found Miss Primrose talking to Miss Steel, the Fourth Form mistress, while Bessie sat in one corner, sniffing loudly. Boker, the page, was summoned to bring Miss Bullivant.

"And the necklace, Barbara?" Miss Primrose

asked. "You have a written description of the missing article?"

"No, Miss Primrose," said Babs.

"But really—why not, may I ask?"

"Because there is no missing necklace!" Babs announced dramatically.

"Good gracious!" ejaculated Miss Bullivant; and Miss Primrose puckered her forehead and gave Babs a harder look.

"You see, Miss Primrose, the necklace has never really been missing," Babs explained. "What Miss Bullivant reported was nothing more than village gossip!"

"Gossip?" cried Miss Bullivant. "But—I was told by Miss Tabitha Tenson, who considered that I ought to know—"

"It's quite true, Miss Bullivant, that the jeweller told everyone that he believed he had been robbed," said Babs. "But, as it happens, there was no robbery at all. The necklace was sent to a customer in error, and has been returned. He was ashamed to admit his mistake, but that is why he had taken no further action."

"Goodness gracious!" said Miss Primrose.

She was giving Miss Bullivant the sort of look that said, very plainly: "Now, why did you not make further inquiries?"

Miss Bullivant appeared to be quite as embarrassed as she must have felt.

"I—I am very sorry indeed, Miss Primrose," she stammered. "But I was quite impartial. You will admit yourself that the evidence was most conclusive. However, I—I must say that Bessie Bunter is entirely vindicated."

Bessie Bunter blinked, and wiped her eyes, and tried to grin as Miss Bullivant approached her.

"Bessie, I am very sorry, and I withdraw whatever I have said."

"Oh, dear!" gasped Bessie. "It's quite all right, Miss Bullivant, as—as long as I'm not going to be expelled!"

Miss Primrose was patting her back while Babs and Mabs shook the fat girl's arms.

"It is a mistake for which we are all very sorry," said Miss Primrose cordially.

Bessie Bunter began to beam.

"Oh, that's all right, Miss Primrose," she said. "I say, it's awfully good of Babs and Mabs to have made inquiries. I suppose they knew I was innocent from the courageous way I took it all, eh?"

"The what?" murmured Babs.

"My fearlessness," said Bessie, growing more and more like her own self. "You know, some girls might have been quite cut-up if they'd been in my position, even if they were innocent."

Miss Primrose looked away to hide a smile.

"But the necklace!" she exclaimed a moment

later. "The one that was found in No. 4 study—we have not yet decided whose property it is. Do you still claim it, Bessie?"

"I—I don't know, Miss Primrose," said Bessie doubtfully.

Babs and Mabs exchanged a look and decided to say nothing of their own suspicions—at present.

"Bessie Bunter certainly found it," put in Miss Bullivant.

"And everyone in the school knows of it," nodded Miss Primrose. "You have it, Miss Bullivant?"

"Yes, Miss Primrose. In the table-drawer in my study."

"Then, as Bessie is the only girl who has made any claim to the necklace, Miss Bullivant, I direct that it shall be given to her for safe keeping."

Bessie Bunter giggled delightedly.

Miss Bullivant reached her study and went straight to the drawer.

She pulled it open, and only paused when her hand had gone halfway towards it, to give vent to a startled cry.

"The pearls! They are gone again!"

If the ceiling had fallen in, the girls could hardly have been more startled.

Bessie Bunter jumped forward and peered at the papers that filled the drawer.

"Perhaps they—they've got pushed to the back!" she gasped.

Miss Bullivant was breathing heavily.

"Nothing of the sort! They were right in the front—Bessie! Girl! How dare you treat my papers in that manner?"

For Bessie Bunter was taking the matter into her own hands, and starting to search—as only Bessie could search!

Miss Bullivant felt at the back of the drawer to satisfy the clamouring Bessie.

"No. They are not here now!" she declared.

Miss Bullivant dismissed them with a wave of her hand.

"I shall hold a very close inquiry into this outrageous offence!" she declared. "This is not the last that will be heard of the matter. You may all go now."

"Bub—bub—but the necklace!" gasped Bessie. "My pearls!"

"Kindly leave the room, Bessie," said the mistress, with acidity in her voice.

Babs and Mabs seized hold of the protesting Bessie by either arm and marched her out of the study.

"I wish we had never seen the wretched pearls," said Mabs, as they walked back to meet the rest of the form, who, eager for news, were awaiting them.

CHAPTER IX

TWO AND TWO

BARBARA REDFERN and Mabel Lynn were taking counsel with the chums of No. 7 study.

Bessie Bunter was not with them. She was occupied in a zealous and indignant search around the school in quest of pearls. Bessie was most annoyed to think that, only when she had really been pronounced entitled to them, they should mysteriously and utterly disappear.

Babs and Mabs were looking for causes and explanations rather than pearls.

"It isn't Bessie!" Clara Trevlyn said, shaking her head. "Of course, this last disappearance proves it completely. There's some other girl in it. Who?"

Echo answered: "Who?"

"You feel sure that the necklace is really Lorna Grey's, Babs?" asked Marjorie Hazeldene.

Babs nodded.

"Practically," she said. "It's a long while since Lorna Grey was at school, and I've had time to forget it. But I think there was one flawed pearl in her necklace, and it was seeing a flawed pearl in this mystery one that has worried me all the time. But go on, Clara. You were going to reason things out. I've got an idea, but I'll keep quiet while you have your say."

Clara addressed the assembled company.

"If it was Lorna Grey's necklace," she said, "it was obvious why Bessie was the only open claimant. Now, Bessie's motives were transparent. Bessie wanted to look smart. She admitted that. She admitted that she was not sure. But, as no one else claimed the necklace, she wanted it herself. And someone else wanted it—secretly. Someone who has been cunning enough to work so cleverly that suspicion has always fallen on the girl everyone was likely to suspect—Bessie!

"The necklace disappeared while we were pillow-ragging, and was found near Bessie's bed. Why? Because the real culprit lost her nerve, and didn't want the necklace to be found on her. The same girl—obviously a Fourth Form girl—tried to get the necklace the same night. Again she threw suspicion on Bessie. Perhaps she was lying awake when Bessie got up, and really did go to the Third Form common-room as she told us. That made it easy for this girl to take her pillow—to delay pursuit, of course—and get the necklace. She hid it this time, so that

there should be no danger of it being found on her."

"Good!" nodded Marjorie Hazeldene. "That's sense, anyway. And because this girl—whoever she is—doesn't want anyone to know that she had the necklace she's never claimed it openly."

"It's really getting very obvious," said Babs, with an enigmatic smile.

"Eh?" said Clara. "I'm afraid I don't see it. What happened next? The pearls were found, and hidden by the Third. Bessie found out where they were, and took them. Of course, anyone could find out where Bessie hid anything. So Miss Who-is-she took them. Then followed a giddy mix-up. The young lady who had them

didn't want them any longer, so she put them back in Bessie's study. Then Bessie is cleared, and Miss Who-is-she wants them again. She has some urgent reason for that, I expect, because it wants a bit of nerve to visit the Bull's study and take them."

"Someone working behind Bessie all the time, someone who wanted to have the pearls, but not to let anyone know that she even wished to have such things!" muttered Mabs.

Babs said, very quietly:

"It's funny how careful Clara has been to leave out the name of Marcia Loftus all the time!"

And Mabel Lynn laughed!

Clara Trevlyn started.

"Eh? You've guessed it?" she said.

"You've guessed that it's Marcia?"

"Marcia and none other!" said Babs in the same quiet tone.

Clara smote the table with her open palm and gave a rueful grin.

"Well, I really did think I'd solved it myself," she said. "When did you guess?"

Babs smiled.

"I'm not sure. The idea's been in my mind longer than I realised. But I began to get suspicious this afternoon when I heard that Marcia had told Bessie how to get the pearls. Marcia never tries to help anyone—let alone Bessie—without some reason, and it's seldom a good-natured one."

"My hat, yes!" said Clara. "She told Bessie, you think, so that Bessie would get all the blame if there was any mistake?"

"Of course, Marcia's been careful all the time that she shouldn't arouse suspicion of herself," said Babs. "She's accused me of being afraid of the Third, and of treating Bessie unjustly. But



Mabel Lynn, the Fourth Form's leading actress

we really might have guessed something this morning when Marcia got up so early to 'do prep.,' and pretended to help the Third look for the pearls. It was Marcia who knew they were hidden, and wanted to get them back off that beam."

"Marcia—and she must still have them!" breathed Marjorie. "But whose pearls are they really? How is it that we've seen them?"

"What was in that letter that Augusta lost?" countered Babs.

"What? The one from Lorna Grey?" cried Marjorie.

"Yes. Marcia brought it to Augusta," said Babs. "She flew into a temper when Augusta asked if she had seen it. Yet she had had a chance of slipping in to Augusta's study to read it."

"And if the letter was about pearls, that accounts for the letter disappearing when Marcia had read it—a mean trick that she's ready to do with anyone's letter," said Mabel Lynn.

Clara drummed on the table with her fingers—a habit she had when deep in thought.

"Lorna Grey's pearls disappeared because Marcia said Lorna had spoilt something, and she was going to smash the pearls to be 'even with her,' as she said," murmured Clara.

"Go on!"

"Where did they disappear? Lorna must have hidden them, and that letter probably told Augusta the hiding-place."

"The Third Form common-room, of course!" said Babs.

"Eh? How do you make that out?" asked Dolly Jobling.

"Because Marcia was found in the Third Form common-room, looking rather guilty. She'd taken the pearls from some hiding-place, I reckon,"

said Babs. "In that business of 'Under the Table at Sea' she dropped them."

"And she was spying about outside the door to know what was going to happen when we thought we saw a figure!" declared Mabs.

"It's growing as clear as clear, girls!" she exclaimed. "There's hardly anything to be explained now. Marcia dare not claim the pearls openly because everyone knows that she doesn't possess such things. She wanted to get them and say nothing about it. Probably, in her mean way, she's quite convinced that she's entitled to

anything of Lorna's."

There was a long silence in No. 7.

Although there was still no proof, the evidence against Marcia was now ten times stronger than it had ever been against the unfortunate Bessie.

Clara rose suddenly to her feet.

"It wouldn't be a bad idea if we went and chatted with Marcia!" she exclaimed, with somewhat grim relish.

But there was no sign of Marcia in her study.

They inquired here and there, and finally went to the gates. Piper was able to give information. Miss Marcia had been out of the school nearly

half an hour now.

"Gone—while we've been jawing!" cried Clara. "My goodness, what a sell! She must have bolted off as soon as she got the pearls!"

"And where's she gone now?" asked Dolly Jobling, in dismay.

They were standing in a group, looking perplexed and baffled, when a voice floated to their ears, and a figure came running towards them.

It was Augusta Anstruther-Browne, and she waved a buff envelope.

"I say, I've been looking for you everywhere!" said Augusta breathlessly. "I've got the queerest telegram imaginable. Guess whom it's from?"



"I didn't put them there!" shrieked Bessie. "I'd no idea the pearls were in that jampot."

"Lorna Grey!" said five voices in unison.

Augusta was startled.

"Right," she said. "But how did you know? And the message—I suppose you'll be telling me that, next? Is it a jape?"

"Not that we know," smiled Babs. "But what does it say?"

"Lorna asks me to meet her at the town hall instead of the railway-station at five o'clock, and I hadn't the foggiest notion that she was even in England."

Babs gave a yell of pleasure and hugged Augusta.

"Meet her at five o'clock?" she cried. "How splendid! And—ha, ha, ha—I believe someone else is going to be disappointed.

Augusta, put on your things, and we'll all cycle to Courtfield with you."

"But—but what—" stammered Augusta, astonished at their excitement.

"We'll explain as we ride over," said Babs gaily. "We've got something to tell you—something that will take quite a long while. And I think our meeting with Lorna Grey is going to be more interesting still."

"'Twill be a lovely cycle ride!" quoth Clara; and she headed the rush of the chums of No. 7 study for their hats and coats and Courtfield.

CHAPTER X.

BLUFF AGAINST BLUFF

"COME in, Marcia! We'd like to speak to you."

Tea was over at Cliff House. There was almost a full muster in the common-room when Marcia Loftus poked her face round the door and received that invitation from Barbara Redfern.

"What do you want?" asked Marcia sulkily. She had a dejected and somewhat hangdog air, but there was a touch of defiance in her tones. Babs seemed to answer quite cheerily.

"We'd like to have just a little chat," she said. "Something that concerns the Form."

"Oh," said Marcia, in a tone of relief, and entered. She took a seat near the fire.

"It is about a pearl necklace," announced Babs, in a more casual tone than ever.

"Yes-s!" murmured Marcia.

"Something that concerns the Form, certainly," nodded Babs. "This does very much, as it happens." She turned round and looked at Marcia. "The fact of the matter is, Marcia,

we'd like you to lay Lorna Grey's pearl necklace on the table!"

Marcia's cheeks had gone crimson.

Everyone in the room was staring at her.

"I—I don't know what you mean," said Marcia, in a thin voice.

"I think you mean that you don't want to know," answered Babs.

Marcia Loftus leapt to her feet.

"What are you insinuating, eh?" she cried, in a high-pitched, trembling voice. "I—I stand a good many insults from you, Barbara, but I won't stand this! Say what you profess to mean!"

"Cut it out, Marcia," advised Clara. "Where's the necklace?"

Marcia took a step back, defiant and at bay.

"I—I won't have this sort of thing said!" she cried out. "I don't know anything about a necklace. Who says I do?"

"I do," answered Babs.

Marcia whirled on her, her lips twitching, her eyes full of that curious greenish glint.

"Then prove it, Barbara Redfern!" she shouted. "Prove it! You shall, now! I'll go to Miss Primrose, and you shall prove it! Do you dare? I'll go to the Headmistress, unless you apologise at once!"

"It would be better for you to put the necklace down and go and tell Miss Primrose all about it afterwards," said Babs.

There was a sensation in the common-room, for half of the girls did not know the truth as yet.

The words seemed to strike a chill to Marcia's heart.

"Go—go and tell Miss Primrose afterwards?" she repeated.

Babs nodded.

"That's what it will come to, after all that's happened," she said. "There's no other way. Marcia, you've been scheming to keep that necklace, and Bessie has had to suffer. It's only fair that the Form should see the real culprit and know who's hoodwinked us all."

"You know nothing—nothing at all!" shouted Marcia. "You're trying to make a case against me!"

"Augusta would like her letter back as well," Babs said.

"Her—her letter?" repeated Marcia.

"Yes, please," came from Augusta. "You see, I haven't read it at all, Marcia. Besides saying where the pearl necklace was hidden,



Phyllis Howell, the sports-girl of the Fourth

there must have been a lot of interesting things in it."

Marcia took a step back, standing as though dumb.

"It would be awkward if you were searched and a necklace found on you when you denied having one," said Mabel Lynn gravely. She saw that Marcia needed further frightening. "You probably will be searched if you don't give it up!"

"I—I don't care! You—you can't frighten me!" said Marcia. Her face twitched. "As—as a matter of fact, I've bought some pearls this afternoon. I—I suppose some of you clever little spies have been following me, thinking you could make a case against me!"

Babs stared.

She was astonished for the first time. Was Marcia making a desperate attempt to bluff even now? It seemed so.

"Yes, this afternoon I bought them!" Marcia went on, as though gaining confidence. "Here they here!"

She groped in her pocket and produced a little red case. It fell on the table, and she opened the lid with trembling fingers. Packed in wadding inside were strung pearls.

"My pearls!" yelled Bessie Bunter.

Marcia Loftus whirled round on her.

"Well, they're not!" she cried. "And you can see for yourself that they're new—that I've only just bought them! Someone's got to know I've bought them, and they're trying to get me mixed up in this other business. But I appeal to the Form for justice!"

That was the signal for Katie Smith to rise.

Katie considered herself to represent the Form when the justice of Babs and Co. was challenged.

"Can you prove that you bought the pearls this afternoon?" she asked.

Marcia nodded eagerly.

"Yes, in Courtfield. The girl assistant—she happens to be a friend of mine, unfortunately—but she will tell you that I bought them at her



"Marcia," said Babs sternly, "we'd like you to lay Lorna Grey's pearl necklace on the table"

shop. I—I've wanted some pearls of my own for a long while."

The silence in the common-room, at that statement, was dramatic in the extreme.

Marcia, emboldened by it, beckoned to Babs.

"You were clever enough to start on me, thinking I—I'd be scared by your threats," she said, a touch of the old venom in her voice again. "How about your story that—that they belong to Lorna Grey, who left the school terms ago?"

"I'm not sufficient judge of pearls myself," Babs answered.

"I should think not——"

"But Lorna Grey herself would be!"

Marcia turned on Babs, with a sneering, triumphant retort.

"Then fetch Lorna Grey! Tell her to come and identify her pearls—if you can!"

Babs smiled at last.

"Yes, that would be the best way, wouldn't it? Lorna, come and identify them!"

A gasp went round the common-room as a screen swayed and fell against the wall.

Marcia screamed out in horror, and hid her face.

Walking across the common-room from her hiding-place was the elegant figure of Lorna, who had once been a Fourth Former.

"Lorna! Here—here!" Marcia gasped, her face still hidden in her hands.

Lorna picked up the pearls with languid interest. "Quite right, Babs," she said. "The flawed one is still here. And here's the clasp, with that stupid dent I made when I tried to make it stronger one day. My pearls all right, Marcia, kindly placed in a new box provided by your friend."

Marcia shuddered, and looked up at last with horrified, tear-filled eyes.

"Lorna!" she gasped. "We—we were friends once. Give them to me—give them to me now! Make them mine! Oh, Lorna—do!"

"When you've tried to steal them?" asked Lorna cuttingly.

"I—I didn't steal them. You said in your letter to Augusta that you had thought of writing and telling me of the hiding-place that you had forgotten all about—"

"So you admit reading it?"

"Oh, yes, yes—I must," Marcia muttered. "But I felt justified. I brought the envelope up. It was very thin paper, and I could see my name, where you had printed it in capitals—it showed through the paper. I felt I was justified in seeing what you said about me. I had the chance when Augusta left the letter in the study. I didn't see any harm in reading a letter—from you, especially when it was opened."

"And not letting Augusta see it at all?" asked Lorna sarcastically.

"You described where the pearls were hidden," mumbled Marcia. "You put it in such a way that I felt as much entitled to them as Augusta, who doesn't need them at all. I used to be more friendly with you than Augusta. I meant to return the letter to her when I had found the pearls, but there was such a fuss that I—I lost my nerve."

"And you were going to get over the difficulty of Augusta's meeting me to-night at the station, by meeting me yourself, I suppose, and explaining that Augusta couldn't get away from school?" asked Lorna.

Marcia trembled.

"I didn't mean any wrong by it," she said tearfully. "I've wished a dozen times I'd never touched the pearls. But I couldn't go back. And I couldn't sit and see Bessie have them when I felt they were mine—in recompense for that dress of mine you spoilt, when I said I'd smash the pearls if I could!"



Philippa Derwent, the best horsewoman of the Fourth.

Lorna held the pearls in a delicate hand and toyed with them, looking no more at Marcia.

"Well, I find you as big a sneak as ever!" she declared. "It isn't my business what happens now; but I'm glad I came up to school when Augusta was so pressing. Babs'll have to decide."

"You can't do anything!" said Marcia, through her teeth.

"We don't want to," Babs answered. "But we shall act if you don't, Marcia. You've let things go too far. We wouldn't have minded if you had just hoodwinked us. But Bessie has suffered when you could have explained so much. The Bull won't let the matter drop. If you don't go and explain everything to her, we shall. Lorna, she needn't say that she's

come near stealing, need she?"

"No," said Lorna. "Let her pretend to the Bull that it was a mistake as to who was to have the necklace. I suppose, in her way, she did make a mistake."

Bessie Bunter gave a cry of delight.

"I say! I've got it, girls! I see it all!"

"What ever do you see?" asked Clara, interestedly.

"Why, I've guessed the whole mystery!" cried Bessie, triumphantly. "I've just worked it all out in my head. Marcia dropped the pearls in the Third Form common-room when they ragged her."

"How clever of you!" said Clara, with some sarcasm.

"Well, it's quite right, anyway," said Bessie. "And, of course, she tried to get them at night, and jolly well threw the blame on me. And she must be the girl who took them from my fine hiding place—"

"A very fine one!" smiled Augusta.

"And then put them back, and then jolly well took them from the Bull's study!" declared Bessie. "I say, I don't suppose you girls had guessed all that!"

"I think you're wonderful, Bessie," said Clara.

"Well—"

"I can't think how you do it, really. That isn't a brain you've got at all. It's a gramophone record!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bessie Bunter was not pleased by the merriment.

"Look here, Clara—"

"Oh, do give your poor little tongue a rest for a moment," said Clara. "Marcia's not going to get

away as easily as she seems to think. Marcia, just come back!"

Marcia, half-way towards the door, stopped and glared.

"I suppose you're going to Miss Bullivant now, Marcia?" asked Babs.

"Why should I?" muttered Marcia.

"Well, you'll simply have to," said Babs. "You'll have to clear Bessie. Lorna says you can plead that it was all a mistake.

"And if I refuse?"

"The Form will have to explain the whole truth," Babs answered.

In another moment Marcia had turned and was going out of the common-room without a word.

A crowd thronged about Lorna, congratulating her, chaffing her, plying her with all sorts of questions. And Lorna laughed, and explained that she was really enjoying life very much indeed, and had only intended to pay a flying visit that would not enable her to come to Cliff House.

"But I wired to aunt, and here I am!" Lorna declared. "Jolly glad I came along, too—it seems just like lovely old times. And the necklace—I say, Augusta, you don't really want it, do you?"

"No, thanks!" smiled Augusta.

"Then why shouldn't Bessie have it?" Lorna exclaimed. "I don't want it, and I'm sure Bessie deserves something for all she's suffered."

Bessie Bunter gave an incredulous gasp.

"Wh—wh—what? Me have the necklace?"

Lorna Grey winked an eye that Bessie Bunter could not see.

"Still, of course, I don't know," she said.

"When I come to think of it, I don't think pearls would suit Bessie's style of beauty. What do you girls think?"

The girls played up well.

"Most unsuitable!" said Dolly Jobling.

"They're lost on her!" said Mabs.

"Absolutely!" agreed Clara. "She's too big for little pearls. What Bessie wants is a string of young turnips!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bessie Bunter was a picture of wrath.

"Lorna! Don't you listen to them! It's only because they're jolly well jealous!" she cried. "I look spiffing in pearls!"

"Don't you believe her!" said Clara.



Dolly Jobling, the Fourth Form cookery expert.

Bessie Bunter whirled round. "That's just because you're jealous—you want them yourself, Clara! I call it mean of you. And spiteful!"

Lorna Grey laughed.

"Look here, girls!" she said. "Supposing we put it to the vote. Hands up those in favour of Bessie having the pearls!"

Two podgy hands shot into the air—only two.

They were the hands of Bessie Bunter herself.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bessie Bunter looked as though she could have leapt at her chums.

"It's those in favour—not those against!" she cried. "Put up your hands! You know you're all in favour."

"In favour of Bessie not having them—rather!" said Clara.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really, you girls—"

Lorna Grey interposed, and beckoned to the fat girl.

"Never mind, Bessie—I'm only pulling your leg," she said. "Here they are! You can have them!"

Bessie Bunter gave a whoop of delight as she grabbed the necklace and hung it lovingly round her fat neck.

"Lorna, you're a brick—topping!" said Bessie, wild with excitement. "Babs—I say, just look! Don't you think I look spiffing in my pearl necklace? I say, Babs, have I told you I'm going to have my photo taken next week?"

There was a shriek of laughter.

"Are you really?" asked Babs, very solemnly.

"Yes. My pater wants it specially to hang in the Hall at Bunter Court, you know."

"To keep away the burglars?" asked Freda Foote; and there was a fresh yell.

But they did not worry Bessie, and she strutted proudly up and down.

"It'll be a spiffing photo now!" Bessie declared. "I think Lorna's a brick! They're lovely pearls—far better than the ones I lost!"

And that scene of gaiety was to mark the end of Bessie's troubles. For Marcia had indeed gone to make a cautious but incriminating confession of her part in the pearl mystery. And the large imposition she received as a punishment was voted by everyone to be thoroughly deserved.