

IN THIS ISSUE:

"THE ORDER OF EXPULSION!"

A Magnificent New Long Complete Story of the Girls of Cliff House School, featuring AUGUSTA ANSTRUTHER-BROWNE

No. 142. Vol. 6.

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The School Friend

Every 2nd Thursday



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The Order of Expulsion!



A Magnificent New Long Complete Tale
of the Girls of Cliff House School,
featuring Augusta Anstruther-Browne.

By HILDA RICHARDS.

The Photograph!

"COME on, Bessie!"
"No; there's plenty of time!" said Bessie Bunter. "I want to look in the photographer's window. I expect there'll be one of me!"

"I don't!" said Clara Trevlyn. "He wants to get orders!"

But Bessie Bunter did not seem to hear that somewhat sarcastic remark. She was already moving across to peer in the window of the photographer's shop.

That was a way that Bessie had when she was out.

"There's still a quarter of an hour before we're due to meet Augusta at the Cash Trading Store," smiled Barbara Redfern, looking at her watch. "I suppose we may as well gaze in here as anywhere else!"

The six Cliff House juniors were out shopping, in Courtfield. Babs, Mabs, and Bessie were, of course, the famous chums from Study No. 4. With them were Marjorie Hazeldene, Clara Trevlyn, and Dolly Jobling from Study No. 7. They usually shopped together. To-day there were special and important reasons for their journey.

"My word! Look!"

It was that gasp from Dolly Jobling that made Bessie roll anxiously across to the side window to see what Dolly had discovered.

"Is it me, Dolly? It's a bit silly of them to put me at the side, but still—"

"It isn't you at all!" said Dolly. "It's Augusta Anstruther-Browne!"

"Oh, really—"

"And look, girls—it's an old portrait!" Dolly went on, as they clustered round. "See—it must have been taken before—well, before Augusta changed. See how proud and haughty she looks, and the way she's dressed, with all that jewellery?"

There was an odd expression in Barbara's eyes as she looked at the portrait.

"Yes, it is Augusta!" she breathed.

"And somehow, girls, it is so characteristic of how she used to look that it brings all those old memories flooding back to me!"

"When she was so wilful and reckless, and hated us all!" Marjorie nodded.

"When Augusta went her own way, and cared little what she did, and defied everyone!"

They had come on the picture so suddenly that it took the minds of all of them back to those days now happily passed. Even Bessie was silent, and seemed to have forgotten the search for her pictured self. They could understand why the photograph was being shown again;

it was a supreme specimen of the photographer's art.

They knew that. It showed Augusta as she had really been; a fine-looking, imperious girl. It was not a posed effect, but one that showed true character in every shade. The haughty attitude touched many chords of memories in all their minds—they remembered so many things of the rich, purse-proud girl who had once tried almost to rule the school.

"I don't like it," said Babs suddenly.

"Nor do I," nodded Mabs.

"I wish we could ask the photographer to take it out of the window," Babs said. "It's a good photo of what Augusta used to be. But it isn't true now. She never looks like that these days, does she?"

"Hardly!" chorused five voices.

Babs smiled.

"Still, it isn't really necessary for us to discuss Augusta," she said. "The best thing would be to get Augusta to have another photograph taken to replace that one. And then it would never remind us again of those reckless, carrying days—"

"Oh! I say! Did you see that?" squeaked Bessie Bunter.

"See what?" said Babs in surprise.

"That taxi-cab that just passed—"

"I believe one did go past. But what about it, Bessie?"

Bessie Bunter's eyes were dancing with excitement.

"Didn't you see who was in it?" she cried.

"No," said Babs. "And you couldn't, either!"

"Yes I did!" retorted Bessie. "I happened to be looking in that mirror at the back of the window—"

"You would be," said Clara bluntly.

"Oh, really! Anyway, I saw the taxi coming, and I saw the girl who was in it. I say, you won't half be surprised when I say that it was Augusta!"

"Wha—a—at?"

"Nonsense, Bessie!" said Babs. "You're imagining things. You've been looking at that photo—"

"I tell you I saw Augusta in that taxi!" said Bessie Bunter indignantly.

"You look and see!"

They looked along the street. The taxi was already whirling quickly into the distance, and they could only see the outline of the single figure seated in it. But it certainly looked as though a Cliff House girl was sitting in the open vehicle.

"Do you see her?" said Bessie excitedly. "I'm sure it was Augusta! And it's queer of her, having such a little pocket money—"

"Oh, don't, Bessie!" cried Babs. "There's no reason why Augusta shouldn't ride in a taxi if she wants to, and it's no business of ours how she spends her money. Just because we've seen that old photo it doesn't give us any reason for jumping to stupid conclusions! Let's move!"

"And get the embroidery materials for those new Fourth Form badges Miss Primrose has given us permission to wear—one result of our Parliament!" laughed Marjorie Hazeldene.

"Yes, come on!"

And Bessie Bunter went with the others at a speed too rapid for her to be able to express any of the speculations forming in her mind.

Spending Money!

BESSIE BUNTER had been quite right when she said that she saw Augusta Anstruther-Browne in the taxi.

The vehicle in question was just drawing near to the smart little drapery shop, the Cash Trading Store, that had recently changed hands, and was to-day the rendezvous of seven Fourth Form girls.

Augusta had arranged to meet them there because she had had to take a violin lesson; the lesson had been longer

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Next Portrait:

The Irish Girl of the Fourth.

than usual, and it was merely because she was always so punctual and exact about everything that Augusta hailed the cab.

"I shall be in good time, after all," muttered Augusta. "Oh, well, the fare is only one and six—it's a bit extravagant, but it won't break me! Strange, though, that I called this thing so naturally—just as I might have done in the old days. And—my word, I'm there!"

She alighted, stepping daintily to the pavement, and paid the man his fare. The meter only registering one shilling, but she had added a sixpenny tip almost without being aware of the fact. The man touched his cap and drove away as Augusta walked across and looked in the window of the little drapery store.

Augusta lingered, knowing that the six girls whom she had arranged to meet would be there in a few minutes. Her eyes rested on a little article in the window, and it caught her fancy. Acting on a sudden impulse, she went into the shop to inspect the article, and then meet the others inside.

The small bell over the door tinkled its warning to the shopkeeper in the parlour behind. Not knowing the new proprietor, Augusta looked up expectantly. She saw the door open, and a short, oldish woman appeared. Their eyes met, and in that instant Augusta was conscious that she gave a start of surprise.

She had seen that face somewhere before.

The proprietress came forward, hesitated suddenly, and then stepped behind the counter. Her tired eyes were gazing

very searchingly at the girl in her shop. She seemed to brace herself up with a sudden effort, but she waited for Augusta to speak.

"Surely I—I know you?" Augusta said very slowly. Her cheeks curved suddenly into a delicate smile. "Why, of course! Why didn't I see it before?"

The other did not speak.

"Yes, and you know me, too!" Augusta exclaimed. "Why, it is Aunt Sarah! Fancy meeting you after all these years, and here of all places!"

With a quick, impulsive movement she took the wrinkled, trembling hand of Mrs. Sarah Browne in her own.

"Augusta!" breathed the woman. Then she started back again, and a touch of dignity came into her voice. "But I am forgetting. When last we met, you and your proud parents did not know me. I was not good enough, and—"

"Oh, Aunt Sarah, I know—I know all that!" Augusta broke in earnestly. "Yes, what you say is right. I deserve all the reproof that you can give me. But, believe me, I have changed since then. I have thought often of those we used to snub. In those days—"

"Ah, my poor girl, I know, I know!" interrupted Aunt Sarah, all the bitterness gone suddenly from her voice. "Yes, I know your sad, sad story. And, haughty and proud though you were in those days, I have pitied you from the bottom of my heart. I know how your father was ruined, and the home sold over your heads. I know that your parents have emigrated to Australia. But you, Augusta—it is a surprise to find you

here. I did not know where you were. Are you still at school?"

"Yes, thanks to the kindness of Miss Ballantine," explained Augusta. "Things have not fallen out so badly for us as they might have done. Dad and mum are doing quite well now. Dorothea, my sister, has a very good job in the North, and I—well, as you see, I have not come to want, although doubtless I deserve it. But how are all your people and Uncle Charlie?"

"Charlie is dead!" said Aunt Sarah sadly.

"Dead!" repeated Augusta, horrified. "And I never knew!"

"We hardly liked to write to any of you after the crash, my dear," said the woman gently. "We did not know that you had changed—that it had taught you the terrible lesson that some of us have already learnt. Ah, Augusta, I can see the change in you now! What a dreadful time it must have been for you, poor girl! How you must have suffered since—since the last time I saw you!"

Augusta answered with the faintest of smiles.

"Yes. But I deserved it. I can't grumble," she replied. "And, oh, I've been so much happier since! But what are you doing here? Is this your own business, aunt?"

"If I can make it pay," Mrs. Browne answered, and then went on to explain. When her husband had died, he left a little business in the North. Mrs. Browne had kept it on for some time, but the memories had been too sad. She had wanted to make a fresh start, and so she had come to Courtfield, investing all her capital in the little Cash Trading Store. She might have gone into further details, but at that very moment Augusta heard steps outside, and looked quickly up.

"My chums, Aunt Sarah!" she exclaimed, interrupting. "I have arranged to meet them here. Look here! I don't want you to think I'm acting snobbishly," she went on, struck by a sudden idea. "I'm not ashamed to know any of my relations now. But supposing we keep this to ourselves, just for to-day? I've got a reason. I'll tell you it shortly."

"Certainly, my dear!" came the instant response. "As just a little shopkeeper I should not like you to tell—"

There was no time to say more, for at that very moment Babs opened the door and gave a cry of pleasure.

"Why, here's Augusta inside, waiting for us!" she exclaimed. "Hope you haven't bought up the shop, Augusta!"

"Not quite!" smiled back Augusta.

"Good!" said Babs. "Well, if there's plenty of embroidery silk left we can make a start. Oh, and we want some black silk ribbon, too, for the hatbands! Black silk ribbon, madam?"

"Certainly, miss!" said Aunt Sarah. And she hurried off to get her boxes.

Clara Trevlyn perched herself at the counter—purely as a "spectator," she explained.

"Just the thing!" said Marjorie. And they started to make the purchases at once.

Augusta Anstruther-Browne stood watching them, with a half-amused smile on her face.

"There! That will be enough for us to get on with, I think!" Babs exclaimed when the embroidery silks had been chosen. "If you will just wrap them up—"

"You're not going yet, are you?" put in Augusta laughingly. "Come on! While you're here in the shop you might just as well get all you want."

Some of them looked rather curiously at Augusta, for that speech was not quite

PLACES OF INTEREST AT CLIFF HOUSE.

This Week: The Fourth Form Common-room.



The Fourth Form Common-room has been the "scene of action" of as many incidents in our stories as any other place in the building. Why? Well, the reason is not far to seek. It is the "drawing-room," the "parlour," the "retiring-room," or call it what you will, of the Fourth Form girls. The studies are small, and not too amply furnished. Though a crowd sometimes does collect in a study, it is a crowd! In the Common-room there is room and comfort for everyone.

Every Form is provided with a Common-room, but the Fourth-Formers would not be human if they did not think that theirs was just a little better than any of the others. They are always very proud of it when showing visitors round the school, and the remark: "My word! School can't be such a bad place, after all!" is very frequently heard.

With its carpeted floor, cosy easy-chairs and settees, and the old-fashioned curtained window, the general effect of the Common-room is very pleasing. Unlike the studies, it is under the direct care of the maids, and is always kept almost painfully tidy. Those careless girls who leave things about in the Common-room know where to find them—thrown in the bottom of the cupboard! It has become such a practice that careless or forgetful girls, like Dolly Jobling or Agnes White, go first of all to that cupboard when they are looking for anything!

The top of this cupboard, which, by the way, stands in one corner, is reserved for "Form gear." By this is meant all sporting appliances provided for Fourth Form use, such as cricket sets, hockey sticks, tennis racquets, and balls, etc. Most girls, of course, prefer to buy their own things for use, but a good many also use the other things provided out of the school's games fund.

The bookcase that stands in the room was at one time devoted to anything but books. Now, by general consent, it has been made a sort of Form library, and every girl is expected to give one book to it every term. As the bookcase is now full, the oldest ones are removed and given to the maids when fresh volumes arrive.

Those who buy up "cheap" books, which are being sold at a reduction because they are not popular, come in for so much chaff that they seldom do the same thing twice. Recently Marcia Loftus was very badly "had." She complained at great length of the foolishness of a certain story, only to be politely informed, when she had finished, that it was her own gift that she was reading, and everyone agreed with her. Marcia had made her purchase so carelessly that she had even forgotten the title!

Since Christmas the Common-room has undergone still further changes, mainly in the lighting. The two little reading-lamps fitted on each side of the fireplace are very popular indeed—so popular that there is a rush to get by them of an evening. Little does Miss Steel guess that those lamps have been the cause of scamped prep!

The Common-room fills of an evening as the girls finish their preparation. On wet "halfers" and Sundays it is sometimes difficult to find a seat, and some of the large chairs have to seat two. It is the scene of Form meetings and debates. Annabel sometimes borrows the sewing-machine, and brings it to the Common-room, but she is not popular when she does so. Cooking by the fire is strictly prohibited, and even Dolly Jobling is only allowed to bake chestnuts.

Next Week: The Commercial Room.

her usual vein. But she could always carry off a situation well.

"Here's Dolly, who absolutely spoilt her best pinafore with that toffee yesterday," Augusta went on gaily. "Don't you think that one over there would suit her, Clara?"

"I do!" said Clara emphatically. "I'm quite fed up with that old rag that's always lying about in Study No. 7. I've told Dolly plenty of times that she wants a new one."

"Oh!" said Dolly, feeling suddenly awkward. "You see, Augusta, I meant to wait and—have a look round."

"Don't you!" said Augusta, in that tone of voice that was always so strangely compelling. "Why, you wouldn't get a cheaper one anywhere! And I'm sure pink always suits you. Come on, girls, let's make her try it on!"

And before Dolly could think of anything else to say, she was trying the pinafore on and saying that she would take it.

"Good for Study No. 7!" said Augusta. "That's going to put you in the shade, Babs. But, I'll tell you what, you can have your revenge. You want a new tablecloth, I'm sure, and this green baize one here is just the very thing. It would buck up Study No. 4 wonderfully!"

"If—" began Babs. But Augusta was already handling the cloth and commenting on its pattern. It did look rather pretty, too, and the price was very reasonable. Babs, rather surprised at Augusta's keenness, laughed, and decided to buy it.

Just at the very moment that Augusta discovered a really pretty embroidered afternoon tea-cloth, and started to enthuse over that.

A word from Mrs. Browne that the cloth was hand-worked convinced Marjorie that Study No. 7 wanted that cloth.

And then Augusta turned on Clara. "Stockings!" she said gaily.

"Eh?" said Clara, in surprise. "I have some silk ones that are guaranteed not to ladder," said Mrs. Browne tactfully.

"Guaranteed! Why, that's just what Clara wants!" cried Augusta.

And Clara, thus driven into a hole and compelled to admit that she did want stockings, viewed the goods produced, and bought three pairs.

"And now we must be going!" said Babs firmly. "Why, we've spent nearly three pounds between us on these things, and we shall be quite on the rocks if we don't pull up. Can you send these things to Cliff House, madam? Thanks very much!"

"It's the biggest shop that we've done for months," exclaimed Clara, when they were out in the street again. "I'm pleased with those stockings, of course—they are very much cheaper than they used to be. But—Augusta, you've been a proper giddy spendthrift to-day!"

"Have I?" laughed Augusta. "Oh, well, it's just as well to get the things that you want, and really make up your minds sometimes. You're bound to like everything you've bought, and it was very reasonable. I want to meet someone myself now. Do you mind if I dash off for a few minutes and meet you again at tea-time?"

"Not at all," said Babs cordially. "We're going to the Cafe."

"Right-ho," replied Augusta. "You'll be in there in about a quarter of an hour, I suppose? Don't wait tea for me, but I don't think I shall be late."

"All right, Augusta." She smiled at them and went back along the street. It was Dolly Jobling who broke the rather strange silence that followed.

MY REMINISCENCES!

By THE COMMON-ROOM CUPBOARD.

(Assisted by KATIE SMITH, Fourth Form.)

I MAY sway to and fro sometimes (said the cupboard), but I'm solid in the main—a very solid sort of chap, I consider. I'm usually open to oblige you, too, and whenever you do have anything to do with me, you can rely on having a good deal. (Doubtless the cupboard would have gone on to perpetrate further puns, but I stopped him.)

You want some of my memories? Well, miss, the most painful one for me is concerning that top shelf there. You say it looks a bit battered? I should just think it is—and so am I, too! I'll never forget that day!

Yes, Piper put the shelf in. He said it wouldn't take him two ticks to do the job. It didn't! In about a tick and a half he brought the hammer bang!—right on his thumb! You never heard such a noise in your life! After that he banged and banged away until—well, my sides began to split. Then he was a bit more careful, and in the end he got the shelf to stay in—until that day that the home-made jam was made.

Perhaps you remember it? Ah, I thought you would! Yes, pounds and pounds were made in the model kitchen, and it was all brought up here to be stacked on the new top shelf. They got about fifteen pounds on, and the shelf gave way! I never saw such a mess in my life! It went all over Clara's jumper and Dolly's shoes, and a couple of new blouses that Nancy Bell had left inside. Of course, those things shouldn't have been in the cupboard at all, so Clara, Dolly, and Nancy had to smuggle them out and have a private washing-day on their own. I believe they were fearfully indignant about it, too!

And Bessie—my, she was busy! She came along with a spoon, saying that it was a shame to waste good jam, and I really think that she did best of anyone out of it! Of course, Piper had to come and repair the shelf, but no one has ever placed heavy articles on it since. They know Piper too well!

Has anyone been locked inside me? Plenty of times! Why, Bessie was locked inside me once at supper-time, for a joke. She swayed about so much, and got so excited that I fell right over against the wall, and you never heard such a noise in your life. But she stayed until she was rescued.

Three cheeky little Third-Formers were locked up in me, too! They came in, and crept inside me to hide, but I'm a loyal sort of chap to you girls, and when they were closing the door I made it give such a squeak that Clara guessed they were there and turned the key. They were sold, I can tell you!

Oh, yes, miss, I've assisted Bessie's ventriloquism more than once, I can tell you! Dogs and cats and all sorts of things have seemed to come from inside me, and Miss Bullivant got very indignant on one occasion, and kept peering inside me, and shaking me, and darting round to the back to see where the dog was. In the end she gave me such a shake that I fell forwards, and she only just gripped me in time. And she had to stand in that position, holding me, until someone came to her assistance!

Is there a serious side to my life? Well, yes and no! There was a real stir in the school once, when some rather valuable ornaments were believed to be missing. One of the school decorators was blamed, and he might even have been charged with taking them, but at the last moment the things were all found inside me. A maid had put them there to be out of the way, and she had forgotten them. Yes, I was very glad to help in their recovery, as you may guess!

I believe that you've only been asked to write a short article, miss, so I won't tell you more. I'd have loved to give you a full description of how Marcia Loftus once flung open one of my doors in a fit of fury, and it came back and hit her right on her head! And how Bessie yelled that day she banged the door—right on her finger!

"Augusta seems quite different to-day," she said suddenly. "It is queer, isn't it? First the taxi-ride that Bessie thinks she saw her having, and now—well, she seemed to be taking almost a delight in getting us to spend money."

"You wanted a new pinafore!" said Clara rather doggedly.

"And our cloth—well, it is awfully shabby," added Mabel Lynn.

"Yes, but—oh, bother it!" said Dolly. "I know I can't say just what I mean. I don't wish to imply that Augusta's changed at all, but in the old days she used to love to spend money, just for the sake of spending it."

Babs laughed. "You're quite right, Dolly. You don't put it nicely at all!" she said. "And I, for one, am certainly not going to believe that Augusta has got anything of the old spendthrift fever in her again. We all know that she's changed for good, and it's only seeing that horrid photo that has put such thoughts in our minds."

"Of course," Marjorie began. "I think—"

"Look!" gasped Clara, in an amazed voice.

"Look? Look at what?"

They turned almost simultaneously, for Clara was looking back as she spoke. "Too late—she's gone now," said

Clara. "Girls, I wasn't looking back intentionally to watch Augusta at all. But I did see her. Just as I turned she was darting back into the very shop that we've just left!"

"Gone back," gasped Bessie Bunter. "Oh, I say! Perhaps—"

"No perhaps-ing at all, Bessie!" interrupted Babs firmly. "Augusta may have gone back—perhaps to buy something for herself. It isn't really any concern of ours, and if Augusta didn't say she was going there she had some good reason for it. It's us for the Cafe now—Augusta will meet us there at the time we arranged. None of your silly old theories, Bessie, because I simply won't listen to them!"

And so they went on, not guessing then that were to have cause for remembering that incident later.

Eager To Help!

AUGUSTA ANSTRUTHER-BROWNE was back in Mrs. Sarah Browne's shop, trying to check the flood of thanks pouring into her ears.

"No, I don't deserve your gratitude—it was just a whim of mine, Aunt Sarah," Augusta said smilingly. "I'll admit that I urged them a bit, but I'm

going to tell them the truth, and I know they'll take it as a good joke. You were a jolly good sort to Dorothea and I when we were young. We treated you shabbily. If—if there is anything else that I can do now to show my gratitude—oh, I'd love to do it!"

She gazed round the little shop. "I'm only a schoolgirl, I know. There doesn't seem much that I can do—perhaps nothing at all. But aunt, perhaps I could help you in some way if only you told me all?" She leant across the counter and gazed into the other's eyes. "I want you to tell me everything, if you will, Aunt Sarah. I feel that everything may not be quite as—as rosy as it might be. If there is anything that I could do now—oh, believe me, there is nothing I should like better! Don't you have enough customers?"

"I don't have many," admitted the other reluctantly—somehow she found it difficult to give Augusta any answer than the undisguised truth.

"Well, that might be rectified," Augusta said, her brain working rapidly.

than charity," she said softly. "If I told them that we were related, they would buy all they could from you just on that account—"

"Don't, Augusta, please," begged the aunt. Aunt Sarah had her full share of the family pride. "I—I couldn't stand charity—I've never taken it yet."

"That's why I did not tell them we are related—you understand?" said Augusta slowly.

"I understand—yes," said Aunt Sarah quickly. "Don't let them know—not on any account."

Augusta looked thoughtful. "So I must fall back upon my wits in order to solicit their custom," she smiled. "Of course, I'll tell them as soon as you are established—I may tell Babs and the others now, because they'd keep it a secret." A new thought came to her. "But are you in a position to order a lot of new stuff?"

"I—I don't know," said Aunt Sarah.

"You don't?" repeated Augusta.

"No. Oh, Augusta, that is my whole trouble—that is what worries me so

sorry for the things that happened once, and that I don't forget. If you can let me see your books, aunt, I would like to go through them at once."

There was a tinkle from the shop-bell, and a customer entered. "You will find them in the room just behind my living-room," said Mrs. Sarah Browne.

Augusta went through the shop as her aunt stepped behind the counter to serve her customer. She glanced round at the meagre furnishings of the spotlessly-kept room. Her heart smote her as she thought of the past. In those haughty days how she would have scorned this!

A door gave access to a room beyond. Augusta moved across with her noiseless step, turned the handle, and went inside. An untidy-looking girl, who had apparently been rummaging amongst the papers on the desk, looked up and gave a guilty start.

Augusta stared at the girl in surprise. She saw that she was of about her own age, a tallish, rather slovenly girl. But why she was there was a mystery—one that Augusta approached in her own direct fashion.

"What are you doing there?" she asked curtly.

The girl evidently tried to bluff. "Who are you, anyway?"

"I am a friend of Mrs. Browne," said Augusta shortly. "I was not told that there was anyone in here. Are you allowed to meddle with those papers?"

"I don't see any harm—" "I asked if you were allowed!" interrupted Augusta.

"It's like your cheek to talk to me like that!" retorted the other.

"Never mind about that!" said Augusta, her eyes shining. "You look to me as though you've no right to be in here at all. Do you live here?"

There was something very masterful about Augusta. It had always been admitted. That quality in her was not changed, as the girl's attitude showed.

"Yes, I live with the people on the top floor. My name is Judy Grigg," the girl said. "I help Mrs. Browne sometimes, and—and I am sure I don't know you, or what you're doing here."

"Do you help with the books?" said Augusta.

"No; but—"

"Then you'd better get out of here!" said Augusta. "I want to be busy. Don't stand there trying to argue, because I can't waste the time. You'd better go back to the people on the top floor, if that is where you live!"

Without another word the girl turned and slunk out of the other door of the room.

Augusta watched her go, frowning.

"Poor aunt!" she muttered. "I know that sort of girl, I think. Aunt doesn't like to send her about her business, I suppose, and she noses round just as she likes. Cheek!" And, having said that, Augusta was prepared to forget.

Poor Aunt Sarah was evidently in a bewildering muddle with her figures. Augusta could see that at a glance. She was not a skilful book-keeper, of course, but she was shrewd. She went to work in a business-like manner, concentrating all her attention on the papers she was handling. She was hardly to be blamed for forgetting her promise to join the others at the cafe until it was too late.

"And I'm not hungry myself; I can easily miss tea," she muttered. "I'm sorry I forgot it, but I don't suppose they'd wait too long. I told them to start, anyway."

Augusta knew enough to know that a balance was the first thing to be obtained. She scribbled item by item on



THE PERSUASIVE AUGUSTA! "You want a new tablecloth, Babs, I'm sure," said Augusta. "This green baize one here is just the very thing!"

"My chums have been here to-day for their shopping. They go anywhere. All the girls at school do that, because there is no shop that caters specially for them. My word, I've an idea! Suppose you stocked just the sort of things that schoolgirls are always wanting?"

The tired eyes of the shopkeeper lit with sudden interest.

"Yes, yes—it's a good idea! I see that you understand," Augusta went on quickly. "I could recommend a lot of girls to come here, and if they were satisfied others would come. You know the sort of thing I mean—drill frocks, for which we send to London at present; birthday gifts; pretty made-up curtains for the windows—lots of girls would buy them at once. Yes—you could make it a real shopping place for the girls, and the Danesford Hall girls would come and give you a trial as well if I asked them."

Her eyes were shining now.

"Yes—if you are willing, Aunt Sarah, I'm sure we could increase your trade, and the girls would be delighted. But—but—" A shade crossed her face. "I'm afraid, aunt, that it would be little less

much," said the other, no longer concealing her anxiety. "I was never good at figures. I've tried to keep my books properly, but I—I can't get on with it at all. I don't really know how I stand. I just get straight and then a big bill comes in that I didn't know about, and it takes all my money. I am in such a muddle—"

"The book-keeping is worrying you?" Augusta interrupted. She smiled suddenly. "Then, if you will let me, I can really help you there, aunt! I believe I'm quite good at figures. Will you let me have a look through, just to see how you do things?"

Tears started involuntary to the tired eyes of the proprietress of the little shop.

"Augusta—I never dared to think that you would do this for me!" she whispered. "But if you will—oh, you could not help me in a finer way! If only I knew how I stood I could be so much happier. I could buy better—it would be a wonderful weight off my mind."

Augusta gripped the two trembling, wrinkled hands eagerly.

"I want to do this—I will do it!" she exclaimed. "I want to show that I'm

to a sheet of paper, and worked out the total debts coming due on particular dates. By means of a pass-book that was fortunately up to date, she found her aunt's bank balance. She was just jotting down the figures when her aunt entered.

"Have you managed to find out anything, Augusta?" was the eager question.

Augusta nodded.

"Yes; these are the figures, aunt," she said. "But as far as I can see you have only two bills overdue, and if you pay another five pounds into your account you can meet them both."

"You have found out all that?" exclaimed the aunt delightedly.

Then she sat at Augusta's side, and saw how the results had been arrived at. The ease with which the schoolgirl had tackled the figures seemed to amaze her.

"Yes," she said to one thing, and "Yes" to another. Then, suddenly: "So I can really go on, you think? If my takings amount to forty pounds in the next fortnight I shall be able to meet all further bills?"

"Yes, as far as I can see," Augusta said. "Things are not nearly as bad as they might be, aunt."

Mrs. Browne broke down suddenly and commenced to cry.

"Oh, Augusta, this is too good—too good of you!" she muttered. "I—I must tell you the truth. I've hardly slept for a week. Oh, if we pull right I'll never forget this—never! You offered of your own free will. I can't repay you—"

"Aunt, I want to do this!" interrupted Augusta softly. "I want to show that I can be of use to someone. And it will be interesting, too. I must be going soon, or I shall be late getting back. Now I want to ask you just one thing. Who is Judy Grigg?"

Mrs. Browne explained that she was the stepdaughter of a man who lived at the top of the building, and had proved a source of annoyance on more than one occasion. She nodded understandingly when Augusta described what had happened.

"Yes, she is a nuisance; always interfering down here," said Mrs. Browne. "I've tried to be firm with her, and I'm glad you sent her off. I've helped the girl more than once with her housework when she got in muddles upstairs, but she doesn't show much gratitude. Thank goodness she's applied for a place somewhere as a servant, and seems likely to get it!"

It was an affectionate farewell that Aunt Sarah took of her niece. It was affectionate, too, on Augusta's part. Not for a long time had she been so strangely moved as she had been to-day. She meant every word that she said on parting. She felt the responsibility that had descended on her, and she was not going to shirk it.

Only when she was outside the shop did Augusta realise how late her work had kept her. She struck out for Cliff House, going more at a run than a walk.

She came to Cliff House at last to find the gates shut!

"Miss Steel wants to see you at once, Miss Browne!" Piper said, when he opened them in answer to her ring. "She's been asking for you."

So Augusta went to find Miss Steel—a very frigid and indignant lady indeed.

"A quarter of an hour after locking-up, Augusta, and on a half-holiday!" she exclaimed. "This is most unusual for you, and I cannot accept as an excuse that you forgot the time. You will write two hundred lines!"

Augusta accepted the punishment with-

out protest, and hurried to the Fourth Form passage. Here, quite suddenly, she came face to face with Barbara Redfern.

"Hallo!" said Babs in a rather peculiar tone.

"I'm awfully sorry that I didn't turn up for tea," said Augusta awkwardly. "I hope you didn't wait long for me."

"Oh, not too long!" said Babs, speaking cheerfully. "We guessed that something must have kept you, Augusta. You're not late as a rule."

"Yes," said Augusta. There was a short, rather strained silence. "Yes. I'm sorry, Babs. I really didn't understand that I should be detained."

"That's quite all right, Augusta," said Babs. "We understand."

Augusta went into her study, and dropped into a chair.

"No questions from Babs—no, that's not her way!" she murmured. "They're jolly good chums. Fortunately, in view of what I'm going to do, they can't really guess where I've been to-night."

"The stockings are mine!" said Clara. "Yours! Ha, ha, ha!" pealed Freda.

"Stockings, stockings, and still more stockings. You'll soon be able to open a shop, stocking stockings!"

"Blame Augusta!" said Clara. "She made me buy!"

"They're worth the money, anyway!" smiled Augusta, quick to see her chance.

"The same with Babs' table-cloth. Don't you think it's a beauty, Freda?"

Freda examined it, guessed its price, and guessed too much. She became sure at once that Babs had got a real bargain.

"So has Marjorie!" Freda declared, when she examined the tea-cloth. "That's cheap, too! And a pinafore for Dolly? Not before it's time!"

"There you are!" said Augusta triumphantly. "And you wouldn't have bought anything if it hadn't been for me!"

"We shouldn't have been bankrupt for the rest of the term, either!" laughed Babs.



FACE TO FACE! Augusta stared at the girl in surprise, and approached her in direct fashion. "What are you doing here?" she asked curtly.

But Augusta did not know all. It was a pity that she had decided, after all, to keep her secret to herself.

Judy Grigg's Promise!

AUGUSTA ANSTRUTHER-BROWNE had not forgotten her promise when she woke the following morning—Thursday. She had dreamed of her aunt, and the unhappy position in which she had found her. She was thinking of her as she dressed, and the apparently flippant remarks that she made about garments that required renewal were by no means without object!

Already she was beginning to think seriously about how the volume of business was to be increased, as it undoubtedly must.

When the parcel arrived that day from the Cash Trading Store, Augusta made a point of being present at its opening.

There was considerable interest amongst all the Fourth-Formers who crowded round to inspect the purchases.

"You've been buying all those things, Babs?" exclaimed Freda Foote.

Everyone had to view the purchases, of course. Dolly put her pinafore on, and was duly "inspected." On small provocation she would even have proceeded to cook toffee, but she was not encouraged.

Augusta was very tactful, but she lost no opportunity of singing the praises of the little shop in which she was so interested. She thought that she did it without arousing any comment, but such was not the case.

"Augusta seems very pleased that you've been spending so much money," commented Phyllis Howell, when Augusta had left the study.

"Spending money used to be Augusta's failing," said Gwen Cook. "I hope she isn't going to start again!"

Babs laughed outright. "Don't start being such busybodies!" she exclaimed. "The point that all of you seem to overlook is that Augusta wasn't spending any money at all!"

"Except for the taxi!" said Bessie Bunter.

"Oh, bother the taxi! I don't believe it was Augusta at all—she didn't say anything about it," said Babs. "Yes;

I'm pleased with this cloth, and I'm jolly glad that Augusta advised me to buy it!"

The subject was dropped at that, and Augusta was wise enough not to raise it again when she met the others.

Hard work immediately after dinner enabled her to finish the two hundred lines for Miss Steel, and on production of those she was able to secure a pass to visit Courtfield that evening, providing she cycled.

Without even waiting for tea, Augusta set out for Courtfield when afternoon lessons were over. She did the journey quickly, and was more careful with her time to-day. Aunt Sarah's happy report that the trade that day had improved cheered her considerably, and she tackled the books at once. Starting a new ledger, Augusta wrote her hardest, first entering up all statements, credits, and invoices so that affairs could be seen at a glance. She had not finished everything, however, when a glance at her watch told her that she would have to hurry back.

"I'll come again on Saturday, aunt," Augusta promised, as she was wheeling her cycle back to the school. "I'm trying to get some orders for you, too—no, don't thank me, because I haven't got them yet! Has that girl Judy been worrying you to-day?"

"Not at all, Augusta," came the reply. "I believe that she has at last obtained a day situation, and is starting to-morrow."

Augusta rode back quickly. She had not left much time, but she did not spare herself at the pedals. All went well until she reached Friardale, however, and then came disaster—a puncture in the front tyre!

To stop there to mend it would be worse than useless. Augusta glanced at her wrist-watch, and started to run, wheeling her cycle with her. She was just successful, for she reached the school even as Piper was preparing to close the gates.

Augusta left her machine for the porter to put back, and reported herself to Miss Steel. The mistress looked at her flushed face, but merely nodded. They were more curious in the Fourth, however.

"What! Have you been out again, Augusta?" Babs exclaimed, meeting her in the passage.

"Yes—just to Courtfield," Augusta said, as carelessly as possible. "I had a puncture on the way back, and had to hurry."

"Well, come along to the Common-room now!" said Babs. "Marjorie's served out all the ribbon, and we're just going to start embroidering the new badges."

Augusta hesitated.

"I—I'd rather be excused!"

"You must come—especially after helping us to buy the stuff!" Babs exclaimed, and she would not take "No!" for an answer.

Augusta, however, was not herself that evening. She was conscious that her flushed appearance was attracting a lot of attention to her, and she could not quite ignore the curious glances. But she had too many other thoughts to think seriously of the curiosity of the others.

Preparation started at the usual time, and Augusta tackled it with energy.

Lady Hetty Hendon, who was her study-companion, but her companion in nothing else, worked in her usual moody and discontented silence. Augusta and Hetty were not very friendly, and seemed never likely to become so. There was little in common between the titled upstart and Augusta, a "charity" scholar.

THE SCHOOL FRIEND.—No. 142.

Tap, tap! came from outside when nearly an hour had passed.

"Come in!" called Augusta.

Barbara Redfern came into the study with Mabel Lynn and Phyllis Howell.

"Sorry if we're interrupting, Augusta," Babs apologised. "We've just come to remind you that your sports sub is due. Can you pay it to-night?"

Augusta looked up uneasily.

"The fact is, until another post or two has arrived—"

"Oh, there's no hurry if it isn't convenient!" said Babs hastily.

Lady Hetty Hendon raised her head.



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NOTICE.—A registered letter, jingling with coins, and addressed to "Miss Elizabeth Bunter," has been received, but has not yet been claimed.—Apply to Head-mistress.

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FOUND.—A real, live ghost, complete with jingling chain and other necessary hair-raising appliances.—Apply to Gwendoline Cook if you have mislaid such a household pet or companion.

"Ow much is it?" asked 'Er Ladyship of the Fourth.

"You've paid, Hetty," pointed out Babs.

"I know," said Hetty loftily. "But as Augusta hasn't got any money, I don't mind advancing a bit. I had a fiver again only this morning!"

"There is no need for you to change it, Hetty," said Augusta briefly.

"Oh, I know your pride!" said 'Er Ladyship. "Five shillings, is it? If you just reach me my handbag, Barbara—"

"When I want a loan I shall not come to you!" interrupted Augusta angrily. "Please take 'No' for answer, Hetty!"

"Oh!" gasped Hetty. She coloured. "Well, you won't have the chance again. I don't make two offers!"

It was quite 'Er Ladyship's fault. She had asked for the snub, and she had merely got what she had asked for. Babs knew Augusta well enough to know that she was proud and scrupulously exact in money matters. She sought to change the subject.

"Never mind subs now," she said. "I suppose there's no need to ask whether you'll be free to play on Saturday afternoon, Augusta?"

Augusta looked up almost guiltily.

"Well, I—I meant to speak to you about that," she apologised. "You see, I may—may want to go out on Saturday."

"But it's the match with the Danes—twice postponed on account of the fog!" said Mabel Lynn, in bewilderment. "You don't want to cut it, do you, Augusta?"

"No, I don't want to," answered Augusta. "Still, I—I'm rather afraid that I shall have an appointment that I can't break. Try and put me down as a reserve, just for Saturday. Katie Smith deserves a game!"

"We shall miss you," said Phyllis Howell bluntly. "I'm not going to make an alteration now, Augusta. Think it over, and see if you can't manage Saturday. You know how we depend on you for the Fourth Form team!"

Augusta went on with her work, after that, in a slightly troubled state of mind. She had not thought of the hockey match until then. Saturday afternoon, however, with such arrears of work awaiting her attention, she could hardly miss such an opportunity. Surely even the call of hockey was not strong enough!

She decided to think it over, and did so that evening. She reflected upon it in bed. But the conviction had grown in her mind.

In the interval after breakfast on the Friday morning she made her way suddenly to the Fourth Form passage, intent on seeing Phyllis and tending her resignation from the team. A girl was in the passage, wielding a polishing mop. Augusta gave her a glance, and something suddenly caught her attention. She looked again, and stopped dead in her stride.

The maid, who had also stopped, and was eyeing Augusta, was new to Cliff House. But the Fourth-Former had seen her face before.

"Judy Grigg!" muttered Augusta.

The girl gave her not a very pleasant smile, but said nothing.

"I heard that you had obtained a new situation as a day girl," Augusta went on, "but I didn't know you were coming here. Look here, Judy! I want to say something to you."

"Yes, miss?" said the maid, in a perfectly deferential tone.

"I was sharp with you yesterday. Not that you didn't deserve it!" said Augusta, firm, in spite of the fact that she was going to ask a favour. "Now you're here, however, I want you to forget that, and forget that you've ever seen me. Do you understand? There's no need for you to talk about having seen me in Mrs. Browne's shop."

"Certainly, miss! That's all right," said Judy Grigg. "I quite understand."

"Thank you!" said Augusta. "I sha'n't forget it."

She went on to Phyllis Howell's study, but Phyllis was not there, Augusta hesitated. Her mind, already running on thoughts of Courtfield, had been sharpened by the meeting with Judy. An idea came to her so suddenly and unexpectedly that she smiled. She went out into the corridor again.

"Judy!" she said.

"Yes, miss?" came the deferential answer.

"You go to Courtfield at night, don't you?"

"Yes, every night, miss. I'm only a day girl."

"Then would you mind doing me a favour—for a small fee?" Augusta asked. "There may be a parcel to take to Mrs. Browne to-night. Will you take it if I get it ready? I don't suppose that you'll mind doing Mrs. Browne a good turn?"

"Oh, delighted, miss, I'm sure!" Judy said.

"Thanks very much!" Augusta answered. "I'll have it ready and leave it, addressed, just outside the Lower Hall."

Judy watched her go, and the expression on her face slowly changed. It was a very crafty smile that lit her features.

"You'll leave it there?" she muttered. "Yes, and there it's going to stay, too! Carry parcels for you, indeed, after what you said to me yesterday! I should just think so! Oblige Mrs. Browne! Pooh! I'm not likely to say where I've seen you before, Miss Proud, because if you talked about me 'aving a look round, it wouldn't be a good testimonial in the school here. But I can have a little lapse of memory. And I shall, too!"

But Augusta was nowhere near to hear those words—to understand how this stranger to Cliff House had deceived her. She was to find out that at some time later!

A Perfectly Natural Mistake!

THERE was rather a crowded attendance in the Common-room after dinner that day, because of the faint drizzle that had come on and spoiled outdoor games, and many conversations had taken place before Augusta Anstruther-Browne appeared.

One of them followed the indignant remarks that Lady Hetty Hendon had been making about Augusta. 'Er Ladyship still clung to the belief that hers should be a place of honour in the Fourth, and she was not at all agreeably surprised when Barbara Redfern told her that she had well deserved the snub that she received the previous night.

Nor was Babs alone in that opinion, by any means. But the conversation languished as Augusta entered.

"Hallo, Augusta!" said Clara, in that colloquial way of hers. "You're looking chippy!"

"Am I?" said Augusta. "Well, I'll tell you what, girls. I've just had an idea. This is a jolly suitable time for it. What about spending a few minutes on the all-important subject of smartening things up?"

"Eh?" said Clara, in astonishment.

"I'll tell you what I mean," Augusta said. "Perhaps you've seen a new daily maid about the school to-day? Well, by a curious chance—she comes from the Cash Trading Store—the little place that we went to on Wednesday. Her name is Judy, and she's an obliging sort of girl. She told me this morning that if we wanted anything done, or wanted to get anything, she could do it for us."

There was a strange silence in the Common-room, and Augusta was aware of it. But she went on boldly enough.

"Don't look so surprised," she said. "I think that all of you thought the things that Babs and the others bought the other day were jolly good value. Well, I've rather taken to that little shop myself, and I don't see why we shouldn't shop there. The proprietress, Mrs.—Mrs. Somebody-or-other"—Augusta showed no sign of the slip she had nearly made—"is a widow woman, and she was very obliging. She does

sewing, and anything like that, I believe. I told Judy I'd see if I could make up a parcel if any of you want anything done—dresses altered, embroidery worked, or anything like that."

"It's a rather nice idea of yours, Augusta," said Babs cordially.

Augusta went on to name other of those "suggested" repairs and alterations that usually fail to be done through lack of time.

She remembered that the curtains in a certain study had been due to be



THINGS NO ONE CAN ANSWER!

An Outburst by Minnie Jerome of the Third Form.

I'm accused of asking questions, but I always have a reason for doing so. I don't consider that the manner in which I am treated is at all fair, and I am taking this opportunity of saying so.

Take Miss Steel, for instance. The Fourth-Formers ought to know a lot about her, and I'm burning with curiosity to know myself. What is her age? Has she any brothers or sisters? Are they school-masters or schoolmistresses, like she is? Where was she before she came to Cliff House? Does she ever smile? Where does she live? Does she always go abroad for Christmas? I think that all those questions should be answered, but they never are.

Then there's Bessie Bunter. What, exactly, is her weight? Is she really seventeen stone? Won't she be weighed? Why won't she be weighed? What is her waist measurement? Has she ever made a satisfactory garment for herself? Has she really had lessons for her voice? Has anyone seen Bunter Court? Is it such a nice place as she always tells us? Can she really drive a motor-car? Has she been up in an aeroplane, and was it a very big one? I don't see why any of these questions shouldn't be answered, and I should be much wiser; but as soon as I start to speak the girls laugh and walk away.

There are several things I should like to know about the school. Was Miss Primrose the first headmistress? Where was she before she came here? Do you think she would like to go to a new school? Was it her idea to start the school? Why is she so fond of her garden? Did she choose all the fruit-trees to be planted? Are there any more secret passages to be discovered in the school? Who decides when we are going to have a half-holiday? Why don't the girls in the Third have studies? Will they ever be granted studies if the school is extended? Is it likely? Does anyone know when it is going to be done?

I think that all these important matters might be dealt with in an article or two in the "Weekly."

(So sorry that we beg to differ!—Barbara Redfern.)

shortened for some time. An embroidered handbag belonging to someone else wanted some bead trimming. Then there were silks and cottons required to match lengths of stuff that the girls had by them. It was really surprising how many things Augusta could think of.

First Meg Lennox went, and then another, to contribute something towards the parcel. Bessie Bunter appeared with a grimy piece of stuff alleged to be the start of a knitted white jumper, but which she thought might now be converted into a tea-cosy or anything like that—with a little care!

And what a sensation there was when Augusta turned at last to Lady Hetty

Hendon, whose nose had been tilted haughtily at the very idea of giving human consideration to anyone "in trade."

"How about you, Hetty?" Augusta asked. "You were promising yourself some stockings the other day. Wouldn't you like some sent up on approval?"

"When I want stockings I will buy them myself," said Lady Hetty, with supreme frostiness. "I always go to the biggest shop in Courtfield, or else send to London. I am having no dealings whatever with friends of yours!"

It was meant to be a snub, and Augusta knew it.

They saw just a tinge of colour creep to her pale cheeks.

"Just as you like," she answered carelessly.

Babs made a tactful interruption at that moment, knowing that Lady Hetty was only waiting for a chance to say more. But the mistake had been committed. Everyone saw that.

Why had Augusta asked Hetty at all? She must have swallowed some of her pride to do so. It was more intriguing for the curious than all the rest of Augusta's unusual behaviour.

"Absolutely asked for it!" said Dolly Jobling, when she was outside.

"Yes; when she might have known that Hetty would be only too pleased to take such an opportunity!" sighed Marjorie Hazeldene. "It's very nice of Augusta to take such an interest as she is showing, but—but—"

"Only it's unusual of her!" said Clara gruffly.

"Yes. But you saw her go back to the shop yourself on Wednesday evening!" Dolly Jobling protested. "Augusta hasn't told us why she went back, has she?"

"No reason why she should!" said Clara. "It seems to me that she's trying to do someone a good turn, and I like her for it. Don't you?"

And with that blunt question Clara swept all the other ground from Dolly's feet, as she intended to do.

That afternoon Augusta was nearly late for classes, having stopped behind in her study to pack the two parcels of things for alterations and repairs, and scribble notes. But she was quite self-possessed during lessons, and gave no cause for comment.

Augusta ate her tea in quite her customary manner, little guessing the surprise that was to await her.

Remembering Judy's promise that morning, she had thought no more about the parcels. It was with a real shock that she found them still where she had left them in the afternoon.

Gripped by the thought that had not come to her mind before, Augusta hurried off to see the matron. She asked if Judy, the new maid, had gone.

She had been gone more than half an hour!

"Oh, it's quite all right, Mrs. Towle!" said Augusta. "It—it doesn't matter."

Augusta walked slowly back along the passage, understanding at last. She had been tricked, of course. The girl had never intended to keep her promise.

And Augusta had told the girls that some of those things would be done if they called at the shop to-morrow—Saturday!

She felt suddenly sick at heart, utterly disgusted after all her efforts.

She had known that her action had caused comment in the Fourth, but she had not minded that.

The idea was a start. It would almost surely lead to other things.

And now—this!

"They must go, somehow!" Augusta

muttered. "I wonder— My word! Perhaps Boker would take them?"

She hurried to find Boker, again to come to a blank wall. It was Boker's night off duty. Boker was already away from the school.

"And yet they must go, somehow!" Augusta muttered. "It's giving aunt the chance she wants. I won't be beaten like this—I won't! After I've got all the things together, that girl sha'n't trick me in this manner!"

Her mouth had set as it used to in the old days. She was furious, and knew it. Those two parcels must be got to Court-field somehow.

nights, and being late on one. But Augusta had nerve. She put her request to the mistress, and was surprised at the ease with which she obtained her pass. In another minute or two she was in her hat and coat, and, as soon as she felt that she was unobserved, slipped out of the door with the parcels, and hurried for the gates.

It looked, too, as though Augusta would accomplish her mission without it becoming known. For, although her name was being mentioned in the Fourth Form just at that moment, no one knew that she had any intention of leaving the school.

"What on earth—"

"She crept out of the gates, thinking that no one could see her," rushed on Bessie, in a thrilling voice. "And what do you think she was doing? She was carrying those two parcels she packed up!"

"What?"

"You've made a—mistake, Bessie," said Babs disbelievingly.

But Bessie knew that she had created the sensation she expected.

"I haven't made a mistake, Babs! It was Augusta! I could see her as clearly as I see you, because the light shone on her. And she carried both those parcels!"

Mabs looked quite bewildered.

"Augusta told us that that new maid was going to take them," she said. "To—to think of her taking them herself, after all!"

"I've got it! I know!" put in Bessie excitedly. "It came to me all in a flash, you know. Augusta's going to get a commission for taking things there. That's why she got us to buy so many things in there the other day. She's doing it because she's hard up!"

"Oh, I can't believe that!" said Babs. "Augusta spends her money very carefully. She wouldn't want to do a thing like that."

"That taxi ride the other day—"

"A shilling or so!" said Babs scornfully. "I know Augusta hasn't paid her sports sub, but she will when she gets her next remittance, and it's due very soon now. Why should she get us to trade at a certain shop, so that she could get money that way? There's no reason at all. And Augusta wouldn't do such a thing!"

"We'll wait and let Augusta explain it herself, I think," said Phyllis.

"Yes. Not a word to anyone, Bessie, until Augusta has had an opportunity of explaining," said Babs.

It was more than an hour later that Augusta appeared in the Fourth Form passage again. She came to Study No. 4 to speak to Babs. But the message that brought Augusta was not the message that Babs had expected.

"I'm sorry I can't play to-morrow, Babs," she said. "I've thought it over, and I must keep my other engagement. I hope you don't mind? I'm sure Katie will play well in my place."

Babs, quite taken aback, managed to stammer a protest.

"I don't like to feel that I'm letting the Form down, but I'm sure you'll understand," Augusta went on. "I don't mean to miss another match if I can help it."

And with that she vanished, little guessing the utter bewilderment she had left behind her in Study No. 4.

Augusta's Secret Heroism!

"SO you really won't play, Augusta?" "No, thanks! I'd love to if it wasn't for the fact that I—I've promised to go somewhere else."

Augusta Anstruther-Browne herself realised the tension when she made that last definite refusal to play for the Fourth on Saturday afternoon.

Barbara Redfern nodded her head. "Well, you know your own business best, Augusta," she said. "You're not the sort of girl to cut hockey if you could help it, and I suppose we shouldn't press you. Come on, girls, and we'll have a little knock about before the Danes arrive."

Augusta watched them go, a curious light in her eyes. She was an excellent



CLIFF HOUSE EXPERIENCES!

What it is like to be a Needlewoman.

By MARJORIE HAZELDENE.

WHO would think that the life of a needlewoman is full of interesting experiences? Nobody—but a needlewoman! It is, indeed, full of experiences—some of them pleasant, but some very annoying, indeed.

How unpleasant it is—for two distinct reasons—to have one's knitting mistaken for a floorcloth! The damage to the knitting constitutes one reason, and the implication that the knitting resembles a floorcloth the other. Clara Trevlyn, who knows remarkably little about knitting, has often mistaken my finished articles for floorcloths.

And Dolly Jobling, she seems to think I turn out nothing but different kinds of kettle and saucepan holders! Anyway, that is the purpose I too often find her using my work for.

My most exciting experience, of course, was the occasion on which I suspected Dolly of unpicking my knitting, and the pair of us—alas!—fell out for the first time. I will not go into details, for you know how Marcia Loftus, the culprit, was found out. But this is my most exciting, and most unpleasant, experience connected with needlework.

Among my most amusing experiences is one you have never heard of. We girls had often heard Auntie Jones, who keeps the tuckshop, refer most affectionately to "baby," her niece. And she had just mentioned that, in a few weeks' time, it was the baby's birthday, and for once in a way she—the baby—was to be brought to her auntie and stay a few days.

That set me thinking. It struck me that it would be a splendid idea to make a winter dress for the baby, and offer it as a surprise birthday present.

So I set to work, and I made the sweetest little woollen suit, with socks and mittens, that you could possibly imagine. It was a delightful mixture of blue and white, picked out with pink ribbon.

It was finished well before the great day, and I intimated to Auntie Jones that I had a mysterious present for her baby niece. And when the great day arrived, I had the dress nicely packed in a box, and, taking fully a dozen girls with me, we invaded the shop.

Auntie Jones was looking just a trifle confused, but she beamingly showed us into the parlour. And here I was presented to the baby, and presented with a shock!

For the "baby" was five years old! A very pretty little girl indeed, but not a baby!

Like most very busy people, whose time passes all too quickly for the work to be done in it, Auntie Jones had overlooked the fact that years alter babies. Her niece had been a little tot of a few months when Auntie Jones had last seen her, and that is the picture she had always carried in her mind.

How the girls laughed—and Auntie Jones, too, though she apologised! But, like the dears they are, they instantly became penitent when the thought struck them that I might be disappointed. But what worried me was—what would the little girl think of her present?

She was overjoyed! She thanked me and kissed me for bringing the present "for her baby," and gravely informed me that the dress would just fit. Indeed, we tried it on her doll there and then, and it fitted to perfection—or nearly!

Several of the things had been given on the condition that they should be finished in time to be worn on Sunday, and this was Friday. She would have to give them back. The other girls might change their minds as well. It was just the opportunity her aunt wanted. Augusta could think of nothing but getting those parcels to Courtfield.

"There's only one way," Augusta muttered at last, as she passed in her walking up and down the passage. "If I could get a pass I could go myself. We're allowed to be a bit later on Fridays. I'll try it, anyway."

It needed some "nerve" to go to Miss Steel for a pass after being out two

"I haven't seen Augusta, Phyllis," Babs answered, in reply to the hockey vice-captain's question. "I don't think she can have come up yet. But don't worry about to-morrow. I think Augusta's certain to play."

"She hasn't given me an answer yet," Phyllis replied. "Augusta usually sticks to her word. I can't help feeling that she's interested in something outside the school, and won't play to-morrow."

"Yes, Augusta's got something," Babs nodded. "But I don't think we want to make a lot of mystery about it. I expect—"

"Babs!" Bessie Bunter hurtled herself into the study. "I've seen Augusta. She—"

hockey player, and knew her worth to her side. She was making a sacrifice, although they did not know it.

"No! Courtfield it must be!" she muttered, stifling the longing to change even now and follow them. "Aunt would be so disappointed if I didn't go. It's the only thing!"

She put on her hat and coat and left the school, still sorry that she had been so secretive. But it was not entirely Augusta's fault. A loyal and ardent supporter of all Form enterprises, she had never chosen a "particular friend" since the going of Lorna Grey. There was no one to whom she could turn instinctively, as Babs and so many of the others could do.

Aunt Sarah was delighted to see her, and it cheered Augusta to know that nearly all the work for the Fourth had been done. She congratulated her aunt, and tackled the books with a good heart.

It was while she was rummaging through old papers that she came on several documents that had evidently escaped the other's notice. They related to orders for quite large amounts that had been transacted when the business was in the old hands. She called Aunt Sarah excitedly.

"Do you do business with the people at Ivy Lodge?" was her eager question.

Aunt Sarah could only shake her head. "Or Melsham Towers? Or the Red House?"

They were two of the most imposing residences in the town.

"Nothing at all!" said Aunt Sarah.

"Then we can!" Augusta exclaimed.

"The other people here used to supply all the domestic linen. I've found it out from this book. They used to call for orders. As far as I can see, they supplied it very cheaply; but it paid, because the orders were big ones, I know!"

Augusta rose, and started quickly to don her hat and coat.

"What are you going to do?" asked the bewildered Mrs. Browne.

"Something quite new—for me,"

Augusta laughed. "I'm going to look them up and—call for orders."

"Augusta! Oh, it is good of you to offer this, but I—I can't let you!" quavered Mrs. Browne. "You, a Cliff House girl! What would all your friends think if they knew?"

Augusta hesitated.

"No one knows me at those houses, and in any case I should only have to see the housekeepers," she said. "I tell you what, aunt. You can lend me a different hat; one that will hide my face a bit. Yes, that's the idea!"

The adventure of it appealed to all that was daring in Augusta. But there were deeper motives. She had set herself this task of increasing the results of a failing business. Few obstacles were likely to check her when once she had made up her mind.

And the upshot of it was that she left the shop a quarter of an hour later with a neat little envelope of samples and prices that were certainly "competitive" and likely to secure orders if there were any to be had.

She was gone for nearly an hour and a half. But when she did return, it was with a radiant face that told plainly of success.

"They've given me the order at Melsham Towers, aunt!" Augusta exclaimed delightedly. "At the Red House they're going to think it over and let us know. But I think we shall get that, too. I didn't know I was such a sales-woman!"

"Augusta, you must be teasing me!" said Mrs. Browne faintly.

"I'm not. There it is in black and white!" said Augusta triumphantly.

"Look! Two dozen yards of calico, three dozen Turkish towels, sheets, and heaps of other things!" She laughed again. "My word, it is funny! I simply made them buy the stuff! I believe I quite forgot my real position, and simply talked to them!"

Aunt Sarah gazed at the list with quivering lip.

"Such an order! I've never had such a big one in my life before!" she muttered. "And to think—"

"The profit won't be a big one, but it's going to pay handsomely, for all that," Augusta put in. "And now—No, don't try and thank me, aunt. The way I went about things, I really deserved to be put outside again. It's just luck!"

Augusta hated praise, and checked the a burst of gratitude that constantly threatened to come from her aunt. They sat together over a cosy little tea in the living-room, and discussed fresh schemes for the future.

won't stop it! Burnt out! And I'm not insured, Augusta!"

Augusta hardly heard.

She could not take her eyes from the licking flames on the tablecloth, and the blazing drips that fell to the floor.

"Beat it out!" she muttered.

In that next second she acted. With one whirl the coat was wrenched from her back. She flew forward, and flung it on the table, beating with her hands, stamping the floor with her feet.

"Something thick, heavy—anything!" she panted, over her shoulder.

Aunt Sarah seemed to recover her nerve from her niece's action. She snatched a sack from the floor and beat upon the table.

Choking clouds of smoke rose to Augusta's nostrils. The lamp had been the sole illuminant. Now the room was almost in darkness, save for a red patch where the furious flames tried to fight through once more to obtain a mastery.



THINGS WE COULD DO WITHOUT!

(Everyone is economising these days. MABEL LYNN shows new ways.)

Exercise-books for Preparation.
Miss Bullivant's cane.
Soft slippers for monitresses. (Ho! ho! would give us warning of their approach, and thus be far more serviceable!)
Toffee made in No. 7.
Unnecessary ladders (especially in stockings).
Meg Lennox's worrying fashion-books.
Bessie Bunter's new songs.
A mistress to supervise us in the Model Kitchen.
"Impossible" contributions to the "Weekly."
Hundreds and hundreds of lines.
The Detention-room. (Quite unnecessary heating is wasted!)
Instruction in physical drill.
Examinations that find out what we don't know.
The "carpet" which some of us frequently get "on."

Monitresses wasting their time in "getting us up" in the morning. (It would be much better if they brought an early cup of tea!)

Grammar-books on "dead languages."
Bridget O'Toole's jokes.
Many of those told by Freda Foote as well.

Porridge every morning. (Bacon and eggs would save the porridge bill!)

Elsie Brane's "statistics."
Minnie Jerome's questions.

Marcia Loftus's schemes and Nancy Bell's laziness.

Bessie Bunter's parrot, cage, seed, and—melody.

"Repair parades" of mended clothing for the benefit of a matron who thinks we don't do it.

The trimming on Annabel's new Sunday hat, and—

Any more of this article!

When it was time to return to school Augusta rose and donned her hat and coat. She kissed her aunt, and promised to come again as soon as possible.

"And do a good evening's trade!" she said, as she was leaving. "The street looks very empty at present, but I expect they're all at tea. Good-bye!"

She walked through the shop, and paused in the doorway as she heard a tinkling sound from the living-room that she had just left. She would have gone on again. But, in that very instant, something happened. It seemed to freeze her blood.

She heard a scream in the terrified voice of a woman.

"Fire!"

The dreadful, unnerving cry caused her to whirl round. And there, looking back through the shop, she saw a sight that seemed to cause her heart to stop.

Leaping flames and a red glow!

"Fire! Oh, help!"

In another instant Augusta was tearing madly back through the shop. She nearly crashed into the figure of her frightened aunt in the doorway of the living-room.

"The lamp! Oh, Augusta!" cried the woman, in the grip of panic. "It overturned. We shall be burnt out. Water

"Something else—a mat, if you can!" Augusta panted. "Bang it over there! It's trying to break through!"

She felt that the choking fumes were stealing her consciousness. Her coat, of course, was ruined beyond repair, but she had hardly thought of that yet. The fire was nearly muffled, thanks to the quick action taken.

A thick coco-mat thudded on the table, and the red glow died away at last. Augusta stood trembling. She stamped out a last blazing drip with her daintily-shod foot, and waited. Would the fire break out again? Was it finally subdued?

Two eerie moments passed.

"It's out—out!" muttered Aunt Sarah, with a hysterical sob. "Oh, Augusta, you've saved me from ruin! If my shop had been burnt I—I should have had nothing left!"

"Don't, aunt—don't!" said Augusta unsteadily. "It's over. Thank goodness we were just in time!"

"We? Oh, Augusta, you have done this!" quavered the other. "It was my flustered hand that upset the lamp. And—and I lost my nerve, too—"

She broke off with a violent start as a



FIGHTING THE FLAMES! Augusta acted rapidly. With one whirl she wrenched the coat from her back flung it on the table, and beat it with her hands.

white light flashed on them from the direction of the shop.

"Gracious me!" exclaimed a pleasant, girlish voice. "Has there been a fire here?"

They wheeled together, to see that a stylish-looking girl, carrying an electric motor-lamp, had come through the shop.

"Hope I didn't startle you!" went on the stranger. "I am Anita Colley, from Melsham Towers. I came just to confirm a little order that the housekeeper has been giving. I heard sounds from here and hurried through."

"It is awfully good of you!" quavered Mrs. Browne. "But the fire has been extinguished."

"By you two? Wonderful! And—Oh, look out!"

Augusta had reeled dizzily. A strong, protecting arm held her, and the newcomer gazed into the smutted face.

"Why, a Cliff House girl!" exclaimed Anita. "I recognise your badge, of course! And you dashed in here to put out the fire? That is your coat on the table? What a ripping, brave thing for anyone to do! Can you get her some water, madam?"

"I—I'll be all right in a minute, thanks!" muttered Augusta, trying to pull herself together by an effort of her strong will.

"I'll bring some water!" said Aunt Sarah.

She returned with a glassful, and Anita raised it to Augusta's lips. She was better when Mrs. Browne brought a bowl of water, soap, and a towel.

"There, a little splash will completely revive you, I'm sure!" said Anita. "The horrid fumes must have nearly choked you, but—she was flashing the light up and down—except for the loss of your coat, I don't think you've suffered in any other way."

Augusta washed the blacks from her face and hands, and when she had dried, Anita dabbed the smuts from her woollen jumper with the damp towel.

"You must let me congratulate you on what you have done, dear," she said. "And now, as I can see that you are still feeling shaky, I am going to insist on

giving you a lift in my little car outside!"

"A lift?" repeated Augusta.

"Yes; back to Cliff House, as I am going that way," said Anita. "I know that you have to get back by a certain hour. Come on, and I will wrap you in a rug, so that you won't miss your coat."

Knowing how late she would otherwise be, Augusta accepted the offer of a ride gratefully. She could see, in the long shop mirror, that she bore no traces of burns. Her appearance was just a little disordered. And so that was how it came about that Augusta returned to Cliff House in a car, although she had set out on foot.

The Blow Falls!

THERE was discontent amongst the Fourth Form hockey-players when they had left the hockey-field earlier that afternoon.

They did not mind their defeat so much as the nature of it.

Through Augusta's refusal to play, the team had had to be reorganised. It was that reorganisation that had cost them the match, which had ended in a victory for the Danes by 3 goals to 1.

"It's our own fault, I know," was how Gwen Cook put it. "It was a fair game from the start, but Augusta shouldn't treat us like that at the last moment. There would have been all the difference in the world if Augusta had played."

"But she had to go out," said Babs, rather shortly.

"Yes; but where?"

"Oh, bother where!" said Babs. "That's Augusta's business. She wouldn't let us down intentionally!"

It might have been dropped at that, but for Angelica Jelly of the Fifth.

Angelica had just returned to the school when the Fourth-Formers were coming into the building. She paused to giggle, a thing that Angelica frequently did. Then she hailed Babs.

"You didn't tell me that Augusta had broken out again, found some more rich friends!" she exclaimed. "He, he, he! I've found it out for myself!"

"It's the warm weather!" said Clara, touching her forehead significantly.

"Warm weather!" repeated Angelica. "Oh, I suppose you're trying to hood-wink me, and keep it to yourselves. But I saw Augusta going into Melsham Towers, so there!"

"Melsham Towers?" repeated Babs.

"Yes; and with a different hat on to hide her face!" chuckled Angelica. "They're jolly rich people who live there, those Colleys, but I wasn't deceived! Take more than a different hat to take me in!"

And then Angelica, having certainly aroused curiosity, told the rest of her story.

She had seen Augusta, and watched her go to the front door. They had let her in. It was enough to excite the imagination of the Fifth Form girl, who always loved a sensation.

Her queer story, as might be expected, created a sensation in the Fourth as well.

"Oh, you must have been mistaken!" said Babs, after her first surprise. "Augusta would never disguise herself and go visiting to a large house like that without saying a word to us! I won't believe it of her, so there!"

And Babs, supported by Mabs and Bessie, the chums of Study No. 7, and several others, stuck to that view.

But the story that Angelica had told caused a lot of comment amongst several members of the Fourth, who were already sore about the hockey.

Babs caught snatches of the new speculations several times, but although she was puzzled by many things about Augusta's recent behaviour, she sturdily refused to believe anything that came from such unfounded suspicions.

Babs was not thinking so much about circumstances as about Augusta, and the sort of thing she was likely to do.

They had tea, but Augusta did not appear. Locking-up time drew near and she was still absent. The interest of those who were ready to think that Augusta might, after all, have lapsed into the old ways, grew apace.

Babs, remembering that Augusta had been out every night, and had been late on one occasion, began to get worried. But, even so, she was not prepared for the dramatic news that came.

"Girls! Girls! Augusta's back!"

It was that dramatic cry from Lucy Morgan that made Babs hurry into the passage.

"Thank goodness for that—she won't be late, after all!" she muttered. "But where is she, Lucy?"

Lucy looked excited.

"Just coming in—I saw her from the quadrangle," she said. "But you don't know how she's come back, look you! She's come in that car with the girl who's always driving about in Courtfield—Anita Colley!"

"Lucy—you're joking!" said Babs disbelievingly. "You heard Angelica say that she had been to Melsham Towers, where the Colleys live—"

"I'm not, indeed to goodness! I've just seen her!"

There was a quick step on the stairs, and a figure swung into view at last—Augusta!

"Hallo, Babs!" she said.

Babs stared, wondering at the disorder of Augusta's hair and the ruffled state of her dress—both of them so unusual in her.

"I'm glad you're back, Augusta," she said. "I was afraid you were going to be late again. But where's your coat?"

"My coat? Oh!" Augusta had not thought of that, but she realised suddenly that she could not explain without telling of her own bravery. "My coat? Oh, I—I've lost it now, Babs."

"Lost it?"

"Well, left it behind," said Augusta lamely. "I—I'm going to get another one."

Babs stared. She put quite a wrong construction on the obvious hesitation with which Augusta answered.

"Left your coat behind, Augusta?" she said. "But it was such a nice one. Surely you don't mean that you won't get it again?"

"It's all right, Babs. It—it was getting rather shabby," said Augusta, as though anxious to change the subject. "But how did the team get on. You won, I hope?"

"No. We lost—3—1."

"Oh, what a pity," exclaimed Augusta. She was puzzled at the curious way in which the girls were staring at her, but tried to think nothing of it. "I suppose the Danes had a rather strong team out? I hope none of you are going to say that you think I let you down, because I'm only one member, and I really had to go out!"

"We take your word for that, of course," said Babs quietly.

"Thanks." Augusta looked more curiously than ever at the staring girls. "I'm glad you don't think that I—Bessie! Why, whatever's the matter with you?"

Bessie Bunter had approached very close to her and had given a sudden sniff.

"Ooooh! I know where you've been, Augusta! I was Bessie's dramatic answer. "I've guessed it!"

"Whatever do you mean?" said Augusta, looking startled.

"I can smell smoke—I was jolly well right after all!" declared Bessie Bunter. "Augusta, you've been smoking cigarettes this afternoon!"

There was a silence so startled that a pin could have been heard to drop.

The interruption came from Augusta. She suddenly flung back her head and burst into a peal of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I sus—sus—say, Augusta—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Oh, Bessie, you're the fun in chumps!" laughed Augusta. "You think I've been smoking cigarettes! Ha, ha, ha!"

And, to the absolute amazement of the others, Augusta turned into her study, closed the door, but still it sounded as though she was still laughing.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" muttered Clara.

"Bessie, you're a duffer!" said Babs angrily. "Fancy saying such a thing to Augusta! It's a jolly lucky thing for you that she took it as a joke!"

"But I smelt her of smoke!" said Bessie pathetically. "You know what a keen smense of smell—I mean sense of smell—I've got! I'm sure—"

"You're a chump!" said Mabel Lynn.

"Oh, really—"

"The outside-edge in bungle-chumps! Fancy accusing Augusta of smoking cigarettes!"

"But we know she's been with that girl Anita—"

"B—r—r—r!" said Babs and Mabs together, and they led Bessie Bunter into Study No. 4 before her views could be further explained.

Babs and Mabs absolutely refused to believe in the evidence of Bessie's sense of smell that Augusta had dropped back to one of the most undesirable of all her old reckless ways.

But others were talking and wondering at the fact that the girl who had deserted the team had offered no explanation at all.

Augusta, still smiling, sat in her study, ignorant of the speculation she was causing in the Fourth.

Little did she guess then that the Fourth Formers knew so much of her movements. She was not even aware that her return in the car had been observed.

If she had she would more than probably have explained to Babs and some of the others how matters really stood.

But she was further from explaining than ever. She hated the idea of getting girls to trade with her aunt just because she was her aunt if the matter could be done differently.

Then there was the affair of the fire, which her modesty bade her keep dark. Lastly, her aunt had been more pressing than ever for her to keep the whole matter a secret until their finances were better—in case a whisper got about.

She had to smile again when she thought of what Bessie had said. It was so utterly unexpected that it still only moved her to mirth. She little guessed that Bessie's strange surmise had been prompted by the chatter that was already growing in the Form.

Several times that evening Augusta was given opportunities to explain if she had wished.

But she said nothing and took little notice of the coldness that she saw shown on several faces. Augusta judged that some of them were feeling offended with her because she had not played hockey that afternoon. "They'll soon get over that," she said to herself.

Sunday passed very quietly at the school, but Augusta, with only one rather shabby coat to her name, missed the usual attendance at the village church with the others. She spent the afternoon and evening writing letters, and did not see a great deal of the rest of the girls.

It was with surprise that she noted on Monday that she was still "out of the good books" of some of the members of the Fourth. And when, after dinner, she sought to recommend the Cash Trading Store to some of the girls, with quite her customary tact, she was altogether astonished at the blunt refusals she received.

Little did Augusta guess there was already a belief in the Form that her interest in the store sprang from a desire to increase her pocket-money—for a purpose that many of them could guess.

She applied for a pass to leave the school that evening, and was disappointed, but not surprised, when it was refused. The letter in her aunt's handwriting, that came for her late that even-

ing, she put to one side to read after supper.

She had just opened it, and was about to read it, when there came a quiet tap at the door, and Babs and Mabs looked in. They had at last made up their minds to speak.

"Oh, Augusta—if you're not busy?" Babs said quietly.

Augusta smiled.

"No. I was just going to read a letter," she said, opening the sheet on her lap.

"Well, we've just dropped in for a little chat," said Babs quietly. "You see, Augusta, to be quite frank, you have really been so mysterious lately that those—"

And there Babs broke off, knowing that Augusta had not heard a word.

She was sitting bolt upright in her chair, her cheeks very pale, gazing with wide eyes at the letter she had received.

"Augusta, I hope it isn't bad news that you've had!" Babs said anxiously.

Augusta looked up with a start. "Oh, no; not bad news, Babs!" she said, in a plainly forced voice. "I—I wasn't expecting this, that's all. Do you mind if—if we have our little chat some other time?"

"Not at all," said Babs quickly.

"Thanks!"

Augusta looked back at her letter, and Babs and Mabs, puzzled beyond measure, went from the study. But Augusta was hardly conscious of the fact that they had gone. She was gazing at that letter with dazed, disbelieving eyes. It seemed to rob her of strength, to shake everything. Whose neglect it was she could not tell, but it was a staggering blow to all the dreams she had dreamed, and all the resolution she had shown.

"My dear Augusta," ran the letter, "I hardly know how to start, but I must tell you the truth. I must have lost one letter that you ought to have seen, and now it seems too late. To-night I have had what is called a final demand from the hire-purchase firm from whom I am buying the counter, desk, and other fittings in the shop. The instalment of £5 is due to-morrow, and unless I pay it they are threatening to come and remove



WILL SHE SUCCEED? With feverish haste Augusta worked at the scattered papers, whilst her aunt watched. Would she find it—the one document that would save her aunt from ruin?

all the furniture in the shop. I have paid away all I had. What ever can I do? I can think of nothing. Do let me have your advice. I am worried out of my life.—Your loving, AUNT SARAH."

The bell went for bed, but Augusta hardly heard it.

She was gazing ahead of her with sightless, unseeing eyes. It had seemed to stun her at first. Such a disaster, such a foreclosure on the part of a firm would spell ruin—nothing else!

"Augusta, are you coming to bed?" asked Babs' quiet voice from the doorway.

"Yes," Augusta forced herself to say, and she rose. £5 was wanted. How could she get it? Could she borrow? Augusta dismissed the thought almost at once. Only from Lady Hetty, or by a general collection in the Form, could such a sum be raised, and in either case it would mean telling all. That, of course, was impossible.

Augusta walked along the corridor, unaware that she was the object of many curious looks, and went up the stairs. And as she walked an idea, a resolution came to her. It was the only thing she could see to be done. It offered the only way out of the dilemma without borrowing money.

She turned in at the same time as the others, but not to sleep. Augusta intended merely to wait until the others were wrapped in slumber.

Some of the Old Recklessness!

ONE figure moved in the dormitory as the clock in the tower was booming forth eleven. It was the figure of Augusta Anstruther-Browne.

Augusta was going to break out of the school! She was going to Courtfield during the night!

She understood the risk of the sudden resolution that had come to her. She knew that discovery might mean expulsion. But it did not shake her determination. Quick decision had always been typical of Augusta. The letter she had received stung her to a recklessness of which she had not thought herself capable. She was thinking of the frightened, helpless woman in Courtfield—her Aunt Sarah. It was a call from the weak to the strong, and Augusta was going to answer it!

She dressed with silent haste, pulled on her warmest jumper, and finally laced up her boots. She knew that her hat was on a convenient peg, and could quickly be got. Coat she had none, save the shabby one too deeply buried in her trunk for her to risk getting it now.

More than once she glanced around her, but she saw nothing to alarm her.

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[ADVT.]

The one other girl who was awake was too interested to betray the fact that she was watching!

Augusta was dressed at last. She hunched the bedclothes in her bed, as though there was still a figure beneath the sheets, then stole from the room. By the dim glare of the passage lights she was able to find her hat. Then she made her way, with extreme caution, to one of the box-rooms, and softly opened the window.

It was easy for an active girl to slither across the short, sloping roof of the out-buildings outside, and let herself to the ground. Augusta accomplished it without mishap, and reached the quadrangle at last.

Her heart was beating fast as she crept across in the shadow of the elms. Would anyone appear to stop her now? She thought not. The night was dark, but not inky. There was sufficient light for her to see her way.

She shivered a little as she felt the cold, and knew the lack of her warm coat that was now gone beyond recall. Little, however, did she dream of the sharp face and excited eyes at the window she had just left. Little did she know that it was mean-spirited Nancy Bell, of all people, who had watched her go!

She came to the wall, and fumbled for the spot where it was rough and there were two missing half-bricks. She found the place, and leapt. Her hands held. She made a scrambling climb and was over. At last she was in the lane. She had broken out of the school at night, and now she knew that she had burnt her boats.

But Augusta's resolution did not waver. She was a strong-minded now as she had been in the old days, but with a vastly different motive.

She ran along the road to Friardale, and then took to a side-path. When she heard the steady tramping of the village constable she drew into the shadows and waited until he had gone by. Then she ran on again.

It seemed an endless journey. The night was very still, and the owls hooted eerily.

Courtfield—at last! Augusta saw a few scattered lights ahead of her, and slackened her pace. She wanted to arouse no suspicion if she met any pedestrians. If she were taken for a school-girl running away from her school she would be in a most unenviable plight.

But luck seemed to aid her. She turned this way and that, and, without adventure, came to the little shop owned by her aunt. The shutters were up, but a faint gleam of light showed her that her relative had not yet gone to bed. Augusta could guess why.

She rapped smartly on the door, and waited. After a long while the blind was pushed to one side. She heard a gasp of surprise and the grating of a key. Her aunt stood before her, almost speechless with astonishment.

"Augusta!" was all she could exclaim.

"Let me in, please, aunt!" said Augusta breathlessly. "I'll explain in a minute. I got your letter, and I simply had to come and see you."

"Like this? At night?" quavered Aunt Sarah. "But, my dear, dear Augusta, the risk—"

"Let us close the door, and then it will be less!" said Augusta. "That's better. Yes, aunt, I got your letter. I think I understand the position. But it mustn't happen; it can't happen!"

"But, my dear, we can do nothing—nothing!" choked the other, wringing her trembling hands. "I've tried to think of everything. Five pounds! I took that amount to-day, but I have paid it away again! At such short notice. And nothing worse could happen, Augusta, than the loss of my shop furniture!"

Augusta took the trembling woman's arm, and led her to the living-room. She saw at once the scorched, blackened surface of the once spotless table, but otherwise the room showed no sign of the fire on Saturday.

"There may be a way, aunt, and that is why I have come," Augusta said quietly. "Anyway, it is our only hope of raising money by the morning. If these people won't wait—"

"They won't, I know!" quavered Mrs. Browne.

"Then I must go through the papers that I only glanced at the other day," said Augusta quickly. "I've had the idea all the time that there was money owing to you. I want to make sure now. Will you let me see if I can find anything, aunt?"

And that was what Augusta was doing as the neighbouring church clock chimed forth the hour of midnight. Very calm and composed outwardly, she worked with feverish haste at the scattered papers whilst her aunt watched. Clearly she had little hope. But Augusta's nimble fingers never hesitated as she checked item against item, hoping that her first thoughts were to be justified. It needed strong nerves and a cool head to find, perhaps, the only one irregularity that might exist, the one document that might save her aunt from ruin.

"What's this?"

Her aunt was at her side in an instant as Augusta examined the last paper of all.

"The account of the Courtfield Club. I think it's paid," she quavered.

"But it isn't!" said Augusta. She whirled open the ledger left by those who had been at the shop before. "Here are the items ticked off, one by one. That last one isn't. It's never been paid, as far as I can see, aunt. Perhaps they've forgotten. We've got to find that out. It's for £5 17s. 6d. If—if that is owing—"

"Oh, my dear! Can it be possible?" gasped Aunt Sarah.

"I don't know, but I believe so," said Augusta. "But we can find out. When will they be open?"

"The club will be open now. There's a grand dance on to-night," said Aunt Sarah.

Augusta snatched a bill-head, and wrote quickly on it. She made a copy of the items that the ledger showed as unpaid. Blotting it, she handed it to her aunt.

"Take it round, aunt. See them at once!" she said. "Tell them you must have the money to-night or the first thing in the morning. If it has been paid they will soon be able to produce the receipt. But they may be waiting for the bill. It seems quite possible."

It seemed a never-ending vigil, waiting

ANSWERS
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for Mrs. Browne to return. Augusta went on with the books, but she was too keyed up to be able to do much work. Again and again she glanced at the door. It seemed the only outstanding account, their only hope. And if that failed—

She heard the grating of a key and running steps. Her aunt stood before her. Her radiant joy seemed to have robbed her of speech. With an infinitely pathetic smile she drew from her pocket a little packet, and Augusta's wondering eyes saw a five-pound note and seventeen and six in silver.

"Then—then you've got it!" Augusta breathed. She hugged the excited woman in a sudden embrace. "Oh, auntie, how splendid!"

"Thanks to you, Augusta—oh, thanks to you!" muttered Aunt Sarah brokenly. The tears were running down her warm cheeks. "But for you—"

"I am as happy as you are, aunt!" Augusta cried. "But the money! Put it in some safe place at once, won't you?"

"Yes. I—I will hide it now." She was crossing the room when Augusta suddenly looked tensely round.

"Did you hear anything?" was her quick, whispered question.

"Hear anything?" said Mrs. Browne agitatedly. "What—what sort—"

"Could anyone be about in the house?"

"Not at this time of night."

Augusta nodded, but although she listened, she heard no further sound to alarm her. The money was hidden in a spot that certainly looked a most unlikely one for an intruder to search.

And then—well, it was over.

The crisis had passed. Augusta knew it, and she sought to get away again as quickly as possible. The grateful woman was reluctant to let her go, but understood well enough the risk that Augusta had taken. And so they parted at last, with a final kiss, and Augusta started the journey back to the school.

She was very cold now, and glad enough to run. But it was a journey full of alarms. Once, indeed, a policeman on a lonely beat saw her, and called on her to stop. But she ran her hardest, and in the darkness out-distanced his clumsy pursuit.

Cliff House at last! How homely looked the faint outline of the old building against the night sky. Augusta heaved a sigh of gratitude as she scrambled over the wall and was once more within the friendly quadrangle.

"Cliff House—dear old Cliff House!" she muttered. "Yes, I can appreciate you after a night like this. How different I feel now! And once I hated you so much!"

She clambered the sloping ledge to the box-room, and found the window still unfastened. With silent steps she made her way back to the Fourth Form dormitory, and tiptoed to her bed. In spite of her hurried journey, she still felt the chill of the night air.

She was soon in bed and curled beneath the blankets, and sleep was already coming to her mind. She dozed off at last and slept, and there was a sweet and peaceful smile on Augusta's face. A tranquil smile, because she did not know. Nothing warned her that her alarm in Courtfield had not been groundless. She did not know that even at that moment the sputtering light of a match illuminated the living-room of the shop at Courtfield. She could not guess that, had she been there, she would have recognised the cunning face of Judy Grigg.

Theft!

"WAKE up, Augusta!" Augusta Anstruther-Browne gazed sleepily round the dormitory the following morning.

"What ever's the matter with her, girls?" exclaimed Nancy Bell's voice. "Why, she's so sleepy that anyone would think that she had been out all night!"

"What is that?" Augusta sat upright in her bed, and stared at Nancy.

"And her boots!" Nancy went on. "Just look at them, girls! They're simply covered with mud!"

The sensation that went round the dormitory at that was profound. For what Nancy said was true. Never had



IN THE COSY CORNER!

By Cissie Clare
(FOURTH FORM).

The Cosy Corner, at the end of the Fourth Form passage, although neglected in summer, is a very popular place in winter. There are never any draughts there, and the big fire quickly warms the "corner" and the air about the old-fashioned wall-seats.

Often it is warmer around the Cosy Corner than it is in the Common-room; sometimes, too, it is easier to get a seat near to the cheerful blaze. The Cosy Corner has its regular "patrons," as it were.

Nancy Bell, for instance, is frequently to be seen there—with a novel. There are reasons. Annabel Hichens does not keep a good fire in Study No. 1, saying that a girl should always move about if she wants to get warm. There is truth in what Annabel says; but Nancy doesn't like moving about. What is more, she is usually even too lazy to make up the fire in Study No. 1. To save any argument, and to be out of Annabel's way when doing her customary "cleaning," she adjourns to the Cosy Corner with a novel and thoroughly enjoys herself.

Lady Hetty Hendon is often to be seen by Nancy's side. They share a common taste for reading, and are frequently to be heard discussing the books they have read.

Two other girls frequently to be seen are Agnes White and Gwendoline Cook. Gwen is very improvident with the coal, and frequently burns the whole of her supply. And then—well, it's the Cosy Corner, of course, until fresh coal is due to be supplied to the study!

Once, when three girls in a study were saving up for something special, they sold their whole coal supply for a week in three-penny lots. For a week their study was empty; they did everything at the Cosy Corner! No, I'm not going to give their names!

they seen any boots in such a disreputable state as were those that belonged to Augusta, which were usually so trim and clean.

"Oooh! Just look!" squeaked Bessie Bunter. "Augusta, did you really break out last night?"

"Bessie, don't say such horrid things!" cried Babs.

But it was too late then; for everyone could now see how strange was Augusta's manner that morning. She still looked tired and drowsy.

"I—I don't know what you're talking about, Nancy," Augusta said, trying to get her tired brain to grips with the situation to which she had awakened so suddenly.

"Oh!" It was not entirely by chance that the ever-suspicious Nancy had been awake the previous night. "You didn't think we knew that there was a party at Anita Colley's house—eh?"

"Who—who is Anita Colley?" said Augusta unsteadily.

And then Lady Hetty Hendon interrupted with a laugh.

"I never could stand these poor girls as try to copy the rich," she declared. "But it's about time that— Oh!"

Augusta leapt from the bed and seized Hetty's arm. But at the same moment Babs stepped forward to Augusta's side.

"Augusta, don't make a scene, please!" she said. "You're late already. Surely you don't mind what Hetty says?"

"I don't know what she's driving at," Augusta answered.

"Well, don't worry—we'll have a chat about it later!" said Babs.

From Hetty Hendon and Nancy Bell came sneering laughter, and it was only in that moment that Augusta realised that there was a feeling in the Form that, in her preoccupation, she had not noticed before. She turned to Babs.

"What do they mean?" she questioned. "What are they driving at?"

"Some of us thought that Olive Wayne wasn't going to last for ever!" sniggered Nancy.

"What!"

But it was Clara who poured oil on troubled waters, as it were, in a particularly forceful manner. She grabbed Nancy Bell by the scruff of her neck, and Nancy's irritating laughter turned to shrieks of alarm.

"Why—why is that name, Olive Wayne, dragged up, Babs?" Augusta persisted.

"It's just because there are horridly suspicious girls in the Form, Augusta," said Babs quietly. "Don't take any notice of them!"

The appearance of Miss Steel at that moment deterred Augusta from making any further remarks. The order to hurry was given, and Miss Steel saw that they hurried.

But Augusta had seen enough. More, she could read a certain distrust in many faces as she glanced round. Nancy had said little, but it was enough. Many of them, it seemed, were willing to believe from that bare suspicion that she might have been out of the school during the night.

Why? Why?

A week before this they would have laughed at such a suggestion. Her good name had been fully regained. Anyone would have pooh-poohed such an idea against her!

A thought came. She remembered the cowardly trick that Judy Grigg, the daily maid, had served her over the parcels. Had she also been telling stories—perhaps false ones? Augusta remembered the sneering remarks of a few, concerning the Cash Trading Store. The conviction strengthened in her mind. She recalled what Hetty Hendon had been saying.

Immediately breakfast was over, she set out to seek for Judy Grigg. The new maid had been taking scrupulous pains to avoid meeting Augusta as much as possible, but this morning she was soon cornered unexpectedly in one of the passages. Augusta approached her at once.

"I want to speak to you, Judy!" said Augusta.

And then she stared in bewilderment. For Judy had suddenly covered away from her. Her face had coloured.

"What—what do you want?" Judy muttered, in a strangled sort of voice.

"Good gracious! What's the matter with you?" ejaculated Augusta. "I've got a few questions to ask you. When you came here, you promised to say nothing of where you had seen me before. You've broken one promise. Have you broken that as well?"

Judy seemed to recover her self-possession.

"Oh, no, miss!" she said, in a relieved voice.

"You are sure?"

"Oh, yes; positive. I haven't said a word about you to any of the girls. You can ask any of them, miss."

There was a ring of truth in her words, in spite of what Augusta had already found out about her.

"Well, there's something jolly queer going on," said Augusta. "I shall find out soon. I hope you've told me the truth this time!"

She strode away, too puzzled to wonder about the unexpected alarm that she had seen on Judy's face when she spoke to her. She started to make her way to Study No. 4 to see Babs, but as abruptly changed her mind.

Augusta had had such a shock that morning that she wanted to think things over. And so she made her way to the attics and paced up and down, wondering what, besides the hockey match, could have caused her to fall into such obvious disfavour with certain members of the Fourth.

No solution came to her; it would have come if she had spoken to Babs and explained the true meaning of the things

that had puzzled the chums of Study No. 4. But if Augusta had one fault still, it was that she was secretive, and in the habit of going her own way about things when she had made up her mind.

During lessons that morning, Augusta read the unmistakable signs that she would have seen before had she not been so deeply immersed in her own thoughts. It caused her to wonder more than ever. Babs was still pleasant to her, of course, but that was a cheery way that Babs always had. Slowly, but surely, Augusta came to the only conclusion; the scene that had started in the dormitory must come to an end. She must find out why they were all so ready to credit a sneering suggestion from Nancy. She would speak to Babs.

But she did not.

The bombshell came to Augusta in a second note from her aunt in Courtfield. The very writing on the envelope told Augusta that something had happened. She retired to a quiet corner as soon as the envelope was handed to her after dinner that day, and slit the flap.

The first words told her the dreadful truth. She read the others like a girl in a dream. Her mind refused, at first, to cope with the enormity of what had hap-

pened. But those opening words were burning relentlessly into her brain:

"The five-pound note has been stolen from where I hid it . . ."

Her head was swimming. After all the efforts that she had made to get that money the previous night! Stolen! Someone had baffled them, after all!

"The man will call again this afternoon, but I can't hope to take enough money by then, and he seemed eager to act on his orders and remove . . ."

Augusta could not read that part of the letter a second time.

Perhaps her aunt had had dealings with a firm whose practices were very sharp. She knew that such firms existed. But to think of it—the shop emptied of its counter, and chairs, and fittings!

A startling thought sprang into her mind.

Judy Grigg!

She remembered hearing a noise the previous night, and commenting on it. If someone had watched, if someone had been peeping about the place, who more likely than Judy?

Something else prompted the thought—the girl's agitation when she had spoken to her that morning. It was only suspicion, but it was enough for Augusta. Crumpling the letter in her hand, she fled for the servants' quarters.

She met Judy almost immediately. Her hand closed on the untidy girl's shoulder like a vice. She looked into her eyes.

"I want to speak to you!" said Augusta, in a low voice.

She thought she read instant alarm in the small eyes that blinked at her.

"I want to give you a chance!" Augusta went on, receiving no reply.

"Perhaps you would like to tell me something? You might like to give something up? Do you understand?"

Judy licked her lips.

"I—I don't know what you mean, miss!" she muttered.

"You don't? Then why are you trembling so?" said Augusta.

The girl drew back, pulling herself together with an obvious effort.

"I—I don't understand!" she panted. "If—if you look at me like that, I shall ask for someone to help me!"

"Is that all you want to say? I promise to be silent on the matter!"

"I—I've got nothing to tell you!" the maid answered desperately.

"All right!"

Augusta waved her away. She wanted to think. It had been a blow at venture—a sudden suspicion, and a bluff that had failed. But she felt sure, by some intuition, that she had read guilt in Judy's eyes, for all her apparent failure.

Then another thought came to her. Augusta was in the mood for rapid thinking.

She followed along the corridor, and, looking cautiously round the corner, saw Judy Grigg ahead of her. The girl was trembling as she went up the flight of stairs, and casting frightened looks on each side as she went. Augusta was sure at last—and followed!

To the Fourth Form passage!

Accusation!

THE passage was deserted. All the girls seemed to be out in the quadrangle. A rustling sound came to Augusta's ears, and she tiptoed forward. Through the crack in the door she was able to peep into the



A CLIFF HOUSE SCRAP-BOOK.

Compiled by PEGGY PRESTON (Fourth Form).

BESSIE BUNTER'S fountain-pen came back with her after the Christmas holidays. It was given to her by a relation, who enclosed a note: "I hope that you will often send me a line with it." So far, Bessie has confined herself to sending lines to Miss Bullivant—a hundred at a time!

But that is getting away from the subject. The great thing is that the fountain-pen is not a success. Worse than that, it is a positive nuisance! Bessie left it on the common-room table, and the ink oozed out and spoiled Marcia Loftus' scarf—greatly to Marcia's indignation. It is an expert at making blots. Babs and Mabs can prove it by exercise-books plentifully adorned. Bessie sought to prove how easy it is to fill. "It's a self-filler!" she explained proudly. But when she jerked at the little lever that is supposed to fill it, it didn't fill at all. It emptied itself right on Dolly Jobling. Dolly, unfortunately, always seems to get in the way of anything like that.

The worst of Bessie's pen is that it is unbreakable. Clara put her foot on it—quite accidentally. I assure you!—but the pen didn't break. Clara says it made a dent in her shoe instead, but Clara always says that sort of thing. Polly somehow got it in his cage, and tried to bite it, but he's been sharpening his beak ever since.

I believe now that the pen is to be bought from Bessie Bunter by public subscription in the Form. Those who have already suffered are contributing liberally!

Elsie Brane, the wise girl of the Third, has turned her attention to dancing.

She is compiling figures that seek to prove all sorts of things. One of her statements that I have seen is this: "Bessie Bunter, when waltzing, covers approximately seventy-five yards on her feet for each complete circle of the Hall." Unfortunately, Elsie doesn't go deep enough. She should say how far Bessie travels on the feet of her partner.

Elsie has also been working out what she calls "strains and stresses," and says that 517 girls of Bessie Bunter's weight, if dancing a one-step in unison, would probably cause the floor to give way. She doesn't tell us how we should manage to get 517 Bessies into the hall, or how we should get partners for them!

Angelica Jelly has been japed by the members of the Second Form.

It was really Angelica's own fault. She has many hobbies, as you know. She can't interest us in them any longer, and she knows it. So, thinking that with younger girls she certainly should make better progress, she tried the Second.

I don't think that she'll do it again.

For quite half an hour she lectured them upon the beauties of collecting things. She spoke of her stamps and her postcards and her Goss china and her relics, and all sorts of things, and she was listened to with respect—or as much respect as one expects from the Second!

Imagine her joy when, on the following evening, Bunny, Pip, and Teddy Bear came rushing to her study.

"Oh, Angelica, there's such a famous collector in the quadrangle!" Bunny exclaimed.

"You'll love to meet him, I'm sure!" Pip added.

"We'll introduce you, if you like. We happen to know him," Teddy Bear added. Angelica, greatly flattered, offered to come at once. She patted her dress and patted her hair, and followed them down eagerly. With Bunny, Pip, and Teddy Bear leading, she hurried to the back of the school, and there came face to face with the collector.

Perhaps you can imagine Angelica's feelings when I explain that her three converts, at that moment rushing away with squeals of joy, had led her to the man who collects—the dust!

study that she shared with Lady Hetty Hendon.

The sight that met her eyes, amazing though it was, caused her little surprise. She had almost expected it.

Judy Grigg was holding a five-pound note in her trembling hand! Judy was the culprit after all!

Augusta stepped towards the door, and then suddenly paused.

Seeing that the note was being put into a book that stood on the shelf she knew that she could get it again. That was enough. It was what she wanted—not the disgrace of Judy. Judy could be spoken to afterwards. All she wanted now was the note that meant everything to her aunt.

And so, obeying that sudden impulse, Augusta tiptoed away from the study and hid in No. 4. Then she heard the shuffling step of Judy, and knew that the girl had escaped.

Augusta emerged again. She was in her study in a flash, running quickly through the books to find the missing note. She came on something suddenly—a piece of paper that crackled at her touch.

A five-pound note!

It was recovered, after all! And now she must obtain a pass from Miss Steel, and cycle to Courtfield as hard as she could.

But she wasted five minutes in looking for Miss Steel, finally running her to earth in Miss Bullivant's study.

"A pass—now?" said Miss Steel. "But this is most unusual Augusta. You are always asking for passes, and your preparation has been very neglected for the last week. What is your reason?"

"It's a question almost of ruin for someone, Miss Steel!" Augusta said earnestly. "I must go! I have just found something—"

And there she stopped dead at the wild, dramatic interruption that came.

Hetty Hendon, with no preliminary knock, came flying into the study. Her face was twitching. She was trembling. She blurted out her message as she passed through the doorway.

"Miss Steel, I—I've been robbed! A five-pound note has been stolen!"

Augusta's heart seemed to miss a beat at the startling words. But her amazement was only momentary. She knew Hetty, and her careless ways with money—just the ways that she had once had herself.

"Hetty, you are surely not serious about this?" Miss Steel ejaculated.

"If you please, Miss Steel—" started Augusta impatiently.

"Just a minute, Augusta!" said the Fourth Form mistress. "You have had a thorough search, Hetty? You are sure that you have not mislaid a note yourself?"

"No!" Hetty was almost beside herself with anger, though the loss of the money was little to her. "It came this morning in a letter. I left it in the study in a secret place. Now—now it's gone!"

Augusta was looking at the clock. Her peculiar detachment, and her indifference to those she did not like, were well known. She was not interested in Hetty or interested in her loss; that was the simple and plain truth about Augusta.

"Do you mind if I have permission to



FRANCIS BARRETT AND THE BALL!



By CLARA TREVLYN (Fourth Form).

THIS is really a very serious subject. Frances told me so herself when she caught me laughing about it. So I hope that you'll take it just as seriously as it deserves to be taken.

Frances had an invitation to attend a grand ball at Courtfield. She was the only member of the Sixth to receive such an invitation, and she made a special point of telling everyone that!

She started practising—in school!

Now I know that it's a misfortune for Frances, but she has rather large feet. I don't say it spitefully. I'm built the same way myself. I merely mention the fact because it explains why she became so unpopular in the Sixth Form.

It was all through the practising.

In the morning we saw Stella Stone limping. In the afternoon, Shireen al Raschid was talking wrathfully of a child of clumsiness, and Pauline Wilson was hopping painfully. By the same evening the Sixth-Formers had vowed, in a body, that none of them were going to be practised on by Frances any more.

So Frances had to find someone else.

She found Professor Lightfoot, of Courtfield, was willing to give lessons. Professor Lightfoot, being of the stuff of which heroes are made, went through it three times.

The first time his feet suffered severely. The second time he kept Frances at arm's length all the time. On the third occasion he was unaccountably tripped up, and for the rest of the week wore sticking-plaster on his head.

There were only three lessons.

Frances returned to Cliff House, and tried a new method of practising. She had, for her partner, a chair. It seemed, at first, that such a method could not possibly be attended with any disastrous results, but that was only because we were forgetting about Frances.

Two pictures went the first evening.

A vase went the following morning.

At dinner-time Miss Bullivant was floored in the Sixth Form passage. She shrieked for help, under the impression that a girl had gone mad, and was rushing about with a chair. But it was only Frances, one-stepping!

It only wanted a week to the Ball when Frances paid another fee, and became a pupil to Professor Vecce, who also teaches in Courtfield.

The professor was made of stern stuff. He explained to Frances that it was for her to meekly obey her partner, and do what he wanted her to do—not what she wanted to do herself. Then he explained that there were only three dances "done" by the best people, and if he cut out the waltz—which, he said, was dangerous—it only left two. He set himself steadily to teach Frances to fox-trot and to one-step.

Frances Barrett acquired the correct steps slowly and laboriously, but very much better than we expected to see. When she gave a demonstration in the school everyone was quite surprised. Frances became enthusiastic once more about the fine time she was going to have at the Ball.

I must describe one more incident.

Behold Frances in her finery. She had paid a flying trip to Friardale in the dinner-hour to have her hair dressed. She was more than an hour assuming her frock, and attending to all the minor details. She nearly slipped down the stairs. But she was off in her cab at last.

Courtfield Town Hall looked very dark when she got to it. In considerable surprise Frances alighted, and spoke to the commissionaire at the door.

"Ball?" he repeated. "Ball, miss? Why, that's to-morrow night! You've made a mistake in the date!"

But that's Frances all over!

There was pandemonium the following night, and once more Frances Barrett set out. She did not return immediately, but was away from the school for about an hour. When she did come back she was simply boiling with rage.

"Disgraceful!"—was all she could say at first.

Then, bit by bit, she told the story.

It seemed that the people who had invited Frances had known that she was clumsy in her ways, and had reckoned that she would not do very much dancing. So they had chosen for her partner a young gentleman whose ways were also clumsy and inelegant like those of Frances.

"Trod on my toes! Stamped on my foot! Told me he'd never had a lesson in his life, and laughed about it!" Frances explained, her eyes flashing. "And when it was a fox-trot he was one-stepping, and when it was a one-step he was fox-trotting! Disgraceful!"

As I said at the beginning of this article, it is really a very serious subject.

Frances told me so herself, so there can be no doubt about it!

go out, Miss Steel, please?" she put in quickly.

"Augusta, just a moment, please! I must first— Yes?"

That was to Boker, the page, whose red face had just appeared round the doorway.

"What is it?" said Miss Steel in her brisk way.

"Just a bangle that I saw Miss Browne drop when she left her study a few

minutes ago, Miss Steel," Boker explained, laying a glittering trinket on the table. "I've been looking for her everywhere."

"Very good. You can go, Boker."

The door closed. As it did so a wild ejaculation left Hetty Hendon's lips.

"You were in the study a few minutes ago!" she cried to Augusta.

THE SCHOOL FRIEND.—No. 142.

Augusta faced her, calmly and proudly.

"Yes. What of it?"

"I only put that note there after dinner, Miss Steel!" Hetty cried in a sudden, wild rush of words. "Augusta must be the girl who's taken it!"

"Hetty!" gasped Miss Steel.

"But there's a reason why Augusta should have it, Miss Steel! Everyone in the Form knows that she's been chumming up with a rich girl and going out to special things! It's common talk! She can't pay her sports sub! And we know that she's been trying to get money all ways—taking things to a draper's shop to get commission—"

"Hetty!" cried Augusta, bewildered and horrified. "These absolute falsehoods—"

"Silence—both of you!" cried Miss Steel, rising to her feet. "We have all heard an absolute reckless charge, and I will not allow such a thing to pass. You will be most severely punished, Hetty, if I prove that you have allowed your tongue to run away with you in a purely spiteful manner. Augusta!"

"Yes, Miss Steel?" Augusta had coloured, but she was perfectly calm.

"You have heard what Hetty said. Now I want you to submit to a search. It is to clear your name, and I must insist on your doing so. According to Hetty's own words, there has been no time for you to dispose of a note."

Augusta coloured awkwardly.

"You understand?" said Miss Steel. "Especially in view of your eagerness to leave the school—"

"I have a five-pound note on me, Miss Steel," Augusta said at last.

"What!" came a startled chorus.

"But I can prove that it belongs to a friend!" Augusta went on. "If Hetty has the number of her note—"

"I have! It's here!" interrupted her ladyship, brandishing a letter. "My father, the earl, sent me this letter with it, and he took care to write the number of the note that he sent!"

Miss Steel took the letter.

"And that is the note you have lost, Hetty?"

"Yes, Miss Steel."

"Very good. Augusta, show me your note."

Augusta produced the five-pound note. She felt perfectly confident. It was fortunate that Hetty had the number. Otherwise, it certainly might have been difficult to explain.

"Augusta!"

Augusta's heart leapt at the deadly chill that was in Miss Steel's voice. She gazed into eyes that were bright, and piercing as gunlets.

"Yes, Miss Steel?" She could feel her heart thudding with a sudden fear.

"I think, Augusta that you would do best to make a clean breast of the whole matter," said Miss Steel very slowly. "This is a terrible thing; but Hetty was right, after all."

"Right?" Augusta repeated. Her voice sounded like a thin little echo in the room.

"Yes. The note you have given me bears the number of the note sent to Hetty this morning, Augusta. It is clear proof, absolutely. I can—"

"Oh, Miss Steel! Then it's a mistake—a mistake I have made!" Augusta burst out, light dawning on her at last.

"I'll tell you how it happened. But I am innocent of this. You can soon prove that it's all a mistake. Hetty, you hid your note in a book, didn't you?"

"Yes," said Hetty.

"Then that explains it!" Augusta rushed on. "Miss Steel, someone—I don't want to mention a name—someone

hid my note in a book in my study as well. I must have mixed them up. I must have come down with the wrong one. But it's all a mistake—I vow that! If you look—"

"This is a most unusual story, Augusta!" said Miss Steel grimly.

"But it is true! Oh, I can see you think I am guilty of this awful thing!" poor Augusta cried beseechingly. "Help me to prove that I am innocent—that it is all a mistake! If you search in the study—amongst those books on the shelf by the door—you will find another note—the one that really belongs to me. For my sake, Miss Steel!"

Miss Bullivant rose.

"I will proceed to test this defence at once, Miss Steel!" she said. "Common justice demands it. I will find a monster to act as witness."

"Thank you!" said Miss Steel.

The Bull disappeared. The seconds that ticked by seemed like years to Augusta. But her confidence was return-

Headmistress immediately, and I must charge you with attempting to steal five pounds from Lady Hetty Hendon!"

The Order of Expulsion!

THE members of the Fourth Form were puzzled at the absence of Augusta Anstruther-Browne and Lady Hetty Hendon from class that afternoon. But quickly their surprise turned to alarm and dismay when Miss Primrose came to them, her very expression and voice portending something of an unusual and most alarming nature.

She asked questions—about Augusta! They were curious and intimate questions, and although the Fourth did not know it then, they came from all the wild statements that Hetty Hendon had made when accusing Augusta of stealing her note, and justifying the accusation.

Taken unawares like that, how was there any chance even to give Augusta the benefit of the doubt?

First, Phyllis Howell had to make the admission that her sports sub was not paid. Then Eabs was compelled to tell, in detail, how Augusta had urged them to buy things they did not actually need. Others told of her efforts to get them to take all sorts of work to the Courtfield shop. Poor, stumbling Bessie blurted out how she had seen Augusta taking the parcels herself—to "get the commission," she added, before she knew what she was saying. One thing led to another—word by word everything came out. Miss Primrose's searching questions, first one, and then another, told of the suspicions of which even Augusta did not know. Her suspected friendship with a rich Courtfield girl. Her return in that girl's car. The suspicion that she must have gone out at night to attend a party. Even Miss Primrose's questions as to whether Augusta had been suspected of smoking there was no denial.

Then—worst of all—an admission that came from the spiteful tongue of Marcia Loftus. She had been to the Courtfield shop, and there seen a coat hanging up—a coat she recognised as Augusta's. To give Marcia credit where it is due, she had honestly been unaware that there were burns in the coat she had seen. But there were girls to confirm that Augusta had spoken of "losing it" and "having another"—plenty of confirmation for the suspicion that she must have sold even that in her efforts to raise money!

The interrogation lasted for nearly half an hour, and with each passing minute poor Babs saw how a case was piling up against Augusta—a case that seemed to prove that she had been returning to her old ways. But Babs could never believe that. Unable to bear it, she at last leapt to her feet.

"Miss Primrose, please will you tell us what has really happened?" she begged. "These things all sound strange, I know. But I'm sure there is some explanation of everything that we've told you!"

And then Miss Primrose told the truth—that Augusta had been accused, and was believed to be guilty, of attempting to steal a five-pound note!

Augusta accused of theft!

The girls did not even think of tea. They gathered in the Common-room for a rapid discussion of the position. And the end of it was that a deputation, led by trembling Babs, went to see Miss Primrose.

But to what little purpose!

They learnt, then, the rest of the story. Augusta had been found with the note in her possession. She had been trying to get out of the school with it. The explanation that she gave was wholly unsatisfactory.

Look Out for this Cover
Next Week!

"Earning Her Living!"



Order your copy in advance.

ing. Of course, a mistake had been made. Through her charity to Judy Grigg this mistake had occurred. But it would all be cleared up now.

The door opened.

Miss Bullivant, followed by Pauline Wilson, came into the study. Their faces were grave and ominous. Augusta's heart bounded at the awful but seemingly impossible thought that sprang to her mind.

"You have searched, Miss Bullivant?" said Miss Steel.

"Yes!" The other's voice was harsh and grim. "I have searched, with Pauline's help. We have found no note. There is nothing in the books at all!"

"Nothing!" Augusta cried. "Oh, but that is false! It is a mistake! I—I am sure! I saw it put there—"

"The books have been tied up for further examination if necessary!" interrupted Miss Bullivant gruffly. "And now—"

"Yes," Miss Steel nodded. "I hoped that I should never have to do this whilst I was at Cliff House. It is inevitable. Augusta, you will come with me to the

They tried to see Augusta after that, but it was not to be. She was in the punishment-room, and monitresses guarded the door. Not a word were they allowed to exchange with the accused girl, so suddenly snatched from their midst.

And so followed an evening, tragic and dreadful. The suddenness of it all was the most awful feature. They had come to love Augusta, and admire her strong, but kindly and helpful, ways. They had never suspected this. Most of them would not believe it now. It seemed incredible that Augusta could ever become a thief!

A second deputation there was to Miss Primrose, and a second failure. They begged, in vain, to be allowed to speak to Augusta. And then—gloom and much sadness in the Fourth! They began to guess what was going to happen; they began to understand to the full the terrible position in which Augusta had so suddenly found herself.

A terrible position indeed!

Augusta knew that as she sat in the dreaded punishment-room, dry-eyed, her lips set in a thin, hard line.

She had told her story; she had sought to prove her innocence. Book by book she had examined the volumes from Hetty's study, hoping yet to find the real note. She had failed. And then she had realised the great and terrible mistake she had made—the mistake of trying to be merciful to Judy Grigg. For Judy must have changed her mind at the last moment; she could not have hidden the note at all! And that was how Augusta had come to make such a terrible mistake!

Judy—against whom there was not a single witness, not an atom of proof! No one had believed the true story that Augusta had told. Shameful and cowardly they had said it was, to try and throw the blame on a girl just because she was new to the school!

Only one hope remained for her—that

her aunt might manage to exonerate her!

How quickly that hope was shattered after poor, frightened Mrs. Browne had been to the school!

It was Miss Primrose herself who came to report the interview to Augusta.

"I have seen Mrs. Browne," she said, her voice stern and hard. "I have questioned her, Augusta, and received a contradictory statement that does little or nothing to explain anything. She may be your aunt, but what she has told me cannot alter the strong suggestion that you have been returning to those old ways that once caused you to be sent from this school. Although I have tried to forget that, it must count against you now!"

And to that Augusta made no reply at all.

She understood, of course. Her aunt had not known the truth. She had probably tried to shield Augusta, thinking that for a Cliff House girl to work for a Courtfield shopkeeper would be considered a grave offence, and her very reticence had only made things worse. But Aunt Sarah could not be blamed for that!

"And this note to which you referred," Miss Primrose went on—"the one you say was your aunt's!" Mrs. Browne stated that she could not believe that it was in your possession here at all. She could give no number for it. And, in any case, Augusta, no second note has been found, or even seen by anyone, to prove the story that you tell."

"But it is true!" said Augusta huskily. And then she raised her proud head and resolved to pour no more denials on disbelieving ears.

"Augusta, this is very sad, but I have a still more definite reason for coming," Miss Primrose said heavily. "Yes. I cannot attempt to disguise that there is only one penalty for theft, or attempted theft, at Cliff House School. You will have to leave to-morrow. I am writing to Miss Ballantine to-night. To-morrow

morning, before the girls are about, you will depart from this school, never to return, and you will go to join your sister Dorothea, who is at present living with your nearest relatives in England. Expulsion from Cliff House is the only punishment I can award!"

Augusta was again like a girl dazed for some minutes after that. She was to go—without even seeing the others again. It was intended to be merciful—to spare her the disgrace of public expulsion. But was it really merciful?

"And I am innocent!" Augusta groaned, as she dropped suddenly to the hard bed. "Judy Grigg is the thief whose action caused that suspicion to fall on me! She is still a thief! Somewhere in her possession she still has that stolen note—my aunt's money! And aunt? If she hasn't paid—as she can't have done—why, they will already have taken away the shop furniture! Oh, it is too awful—this ending, when I have really tried so hard!"

Her grey face set suddenly in hard lines. Her eyes flashed as though with fire. She sprang to her feet, her hands clenched. They heard the echo of her voice in the passage.

"I won't go—I won't!" she vowed. "They can expel me from here, but I won't go to Dorothea! I'll stay in Courtfield and work for my living. I'll help aunt—try to rebuild her business, even though it does seem ruined! I won't go from the district! I know the girl who has caused me to suffer this! I'll stay—yes, and I will still prove my innocence in the end!"

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

(Next Thursday's issue of the SCHOOL FRIEND will contain "Earning Her Living!"—a magnificent new, long complete story of the girls of Cliff House, by Hilda Richards—a splendid instalment of "Joan Haviland's Silence!" and numerous extracts from the "Cliff House Weekly." Order your copy at once!)

YOUR EDITOR'S CHAT.

My Dear Readers.—The order of expulsion! This is Augusta's reward, after working so nobly for her aunt's benefit. Next week the order is carried into effect, and Augusta Anstruther-Browne, for the second time in her career, is expelled from Cliff House. Unlike the last time, however, the hearts of Barbara Redfern and her chums are with her, and it is in spite of their strenuous protestations that Augusta leaves. What will the expelled girl do? Knowing Augusta's plucky nature you will not be surprised at the answer supplied by the title of next Thursday's magnificent, long, complete story of the girls of Cliff House school:

"EARNING HER LIVING!"

By Hilda Richards.

Never, perhaps, has Augusta shown herself in a more praiseworthy light than that in which she appears in this story. Undoubtedly she is buoyed up by the knowledge that her chums at Cliff House still loyally believe in her, and are striving their utmost to prove her innocence. Babs & Co., indeed, think of nothing but the vindication of their chum. One point may give you the clue as to how they will proceed. Judy Grigg, the culprit, still has to get rid of the five-pound note without drawing suspicion upon herself. She finds this surprisingly difficult, and her efforts make very interesting reading indeed.

There will be another enthralling long instalment of our new serial,

"JOAN HAVILAND'S SILENCE!"

By Joy Phillips

in our next issue. Joan's path at Greyhurst School is far from being strewn with roses, but the spirit which enabled her to keep up hope at Brick Row is by no means broken yet.

"THE CLIFF HOUSE WEEKLY!"

will be well up to its usual standard next week. The humorous and popular "My Reminiscences" will be supplied this time by Piper's Spade, "assisted," as usual, by Katie Smith, Fourth Form. The Cliff House Debating Society makes a welcome reappearance, and the subject under discussion is most interesting—"Should Games be Compulsory?" "A Guide for Shoppers!" is a humorous contribution from Freda Foote, of the Fourth Form; and there will also be "The Queerest Things at Cliff House!" by Marjorie Hazeldene, "Extracts from Miss Chantrey's Autograph Album," and many other attractive features.

A GREAT NEW PAPER!

It is my duty this week to draw your attention to the fact that on Wednesday, February 1st, the first issue of the "GIRLS' FAVOURITE" will make its appearance on the market. This new paper will contain four magnificent stories, one of which is

written by Joy Phillips, whose serial, "Joan Haviland's Silence!" is making such a strong appeal to you all. "When the Heart is Young!" is the title of the story, and it deals with very fascinating characters in Edna Hope, the woodman's daughter, and Dick Westaway, the heir to Hayland Hall.

There is a grand story of office and home life, entitled "In Friendship's Name!" This story is written by Ida Melbourne, whose Girl Guide stories in the "Schoolgirls' Own" are so popular.

All lovers of romantic stories will thoroughly appreciate "A Queen Against Her Will!" an enthralling serial by Stacey Blake, which will be found in the first issue of the "Girls' Favourite." A girls' paper would hardly be complete without a school story as one of its features. Therefore, a fine series of school stories, introducing the girls of the Sixth Form at Dorminster and the boys of the Sixth Form at St. George's, will appear in this new publication. "The Head Girl of Dorminster!" is the title of the first story in the series.

The "Girls' Favourite" will not be short of articles, ten of which are included in the first issue of the paper. The list of titles appears on the back page of this number.

With No. 1 of the "Girls' Favourite" on sale next Wednesday, a superb coloured plate, entitled "Sweet Seventeen!" will be given free, and there will be a grand competition, in connection with which £150 in prizes will be offered.

Your Sincere Friend,

YOUR EDITOR.

THE SCHOOL FRIEND.—No. 142.

The Opening Chapters of a Magnificent New School Serial!



JOAN HAVILAND'S SILENCE!

By JOY PHILLIPS

(Author of "The Girl Who Chose Riches!")



THE LEADING CHARACTERS.

JOAN HAVILAND a poor scholarship girl, who formerly lived in Brick Row, in a London suburb.

RUBY HAVILAND, her sister, whose sudden accession to riches completely spoiled her.

ELSIE DAINTON, the friend of Joan.

HILDA HEATHCOTE, an excellent girl, and captain of the Fifth Form at Greyhurst School.

SYBIL SARDONE, **CLARICE CHOANE**, **OLIVE COURTNEY**, and **PHYLLIS FRANKLIN**, four "cronies," who formed a "set" at Greyhurst, and were bitterly opposed to Hilda Heathcote and her friends.

Joan and Ruby Haviland arrived at Greyhurst School separately—Joan with Elsie Dainton, Ruby with Sybil Sardone. Ruby had previously pressed Joan to keep silent as to their relationship.

On her very first day Joan was accused of stealing a brooch from Miss Merrick, an old Greyhurst scholar. It had, in reality, been placed in her pocket by Clarice Choane. Joan took the brooch to Miss Merrick's house, and the old lady believed her story implicitly.

On her return to the school Joan was suddenly seized by Sybil Sardone and her friends, and locked in the woodshed.

(Now read on.)

Out of Bounds!

BURR-R! I don't like this horrid mist!"

Sybil Sardone took a few stamping steps as she made this resentful remark about the white night-mist which encompassed her and her chums.

"What's wrong with it?" retorted Clarice Choane lightly. "Helps to make our little spree all the safer!"

"Hear, hear!" agreed Phyllis Franklin. "Some of us are nerry enough as it is, I fancy! Olive dear—"

"Ooo, noo!" protested Olive Courtney. "I'm enjoying things offy!"

"Ruby, then—how about you, Ruby?" Phyllis asked, with a teasing laugh.

Before Ruby Haviland could answer, Sybil spoke in that girl's defence.

"It's not fair to tease Ruby!" Sybil protested.

With a little skip, she came round to Ruby's side, brushing close to her as they all footed it briskly along the mistbound road from Greyhurst School to the village.

"Remember, girls," Sybil said, "Ruby is a new recruit! There was a time when we felt just a bit squeamish about slipping out after dark, to go to the cinema. Ruby, I won't let them tease you!"

And she took Ruby's arm and gave it a friendly squeeze.

It was one of those little demonstrations of affection which always sent a thrill through Ruby's heart.

A moment since, she really had been feeling very unhappy about this reckless act into which she had been enticed by her

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friends—these girls who seemed to take a delight in flouting discipline. Now she felt ready to risk any disgrace for the sake of retaining Sybil's esteem.

"You won't find me turning tail," she assured all her so-called friends. "You know I always follow your lead."

Sybil's comment on this was a purring laugh. She kept close to Ruby still, finding a delight in making a fuss of her.

Not that Sybil had any sincere affection for Ruby; Sybil, indeed, was incapable of any sincere affection for anybody. But it was a part and parcel of her nature to enslave those around her by little endearments, little caressing-actions, finding her reward in the homage which she got in return.

So presently, when the party of girls had come in sight of the village lamps, she even slipped an arm about Ruby's waist.

"Are you warm enough, Ruby—quite sure?"

For the girls were none too well protected against the cold night mist.

They had only been able to smuggle rolled-up wraps with them when they stole out of the school-house. These wraps were now draped about their heads and shoulders; and Ruby, for one, did feel glad of Sybil's encircling arm.

She felt cold, seemed to be all of a tremble, and she would not let herself believe that it was fear which had left her in such a state. But it was!

Were these companions of hers really enjoying the misdeed? She supposed they were, in their own wayward fashion. As for herself, she wanted nothing better than to be safe inside the school again.

What foolishness it was—how stupidly reckless—this breaking bounds simply for the sake of slipping down to the cinema!

The first house had begun by the time the girls passed through the curtained entrance of the newly-opened picture-palace and took their seats in the darkened hall. A comic film was flickering on the screen, and Ruby, finding no interest in it, peered about her in the gloom.

What if somebody else from the school should be here to-night—somebody with full permission! A mistress or so, or a couple of prefects!

Hers was a pounding heart until she had made quite sure that she and her companions were the only persons from Greyhurst School mixing with the audience.

Sybil, sitting next to her on the left, pressed an open box of chocolates into her lap.

"Help yourself, Ruby! This stupid film is nearly over, and then I expect the picture comes on that I so wanted you all to see."

So Ruby took a chocolate, and, after passing on the box, nibbled the confection with very scant relish.

The alarming moment came when all the lights went up and she and her schoolgirl companions were stared at by the village folk. Sybil and the others carried it off with laughter and talk—to show off in front of people like this was just to their liking! But Ruby felt utterly confused.

"Now!" whispered Sybil, leaning a little

sideways against Ruby, when the next film had started. "You'll see my own people in a flash!"

The topical pictures were being shown, and suddenly the scene switched to some social event at which members of Society had been present.

It was a wedding, and when the picture showed the happy couple leaving the church, Ruby at once picked out Mr. and Mrs. Sardone amongst the guests.

"There! How lovely!" Sybil exclaimed, clapping her gloved hands softly. "Wasn't that worth coming to see, Ruby darling?"

"Yes, I—I can understand now how you felt tempted to slip out," faltered the ill-at-ease girl. "And if we get caught, Syb, perhaps it will be some—some excuse."

"Caught! We sha'n't get caught, trust me!" Sybil laughed softly. "Ask the others if they would like to stay any longer. I'm game!"

The others said "no," however.

Their stated opinion was that the pictures were too tame an amusement for them, and that they had only come to see the topical one, showing Sybil's parents mixing with people in Society. But in the heart of each girl was there not, perhaps, just a little of that guilty uneasiness which was troubling Ruby?

Perhaps!

Stealthily they scrambled out of the dark hall, emerging upon a very foggy street. The few shops were now closed, and Greyhurst village—at the best of times no brilliant community—was depressingly dark and forsaken.

Sybil led off with a scampering run, but checked abruptly when she and her companions suddenly found themselves rushing upon somebody in the fog.

It was the vague figure of a woman whom the girls had blundered upon like this, and there were audible gasps of relief from Sybil, Clarice, and Phyllis when they found that the woman was only a villager.

As for Ruby, she had felt utterly panic-stricken.

Supposing—oh, supposing this passer-by in the fog was mother!

That was the agitating thought that left her all of a shake, after the woman had gone by in the fog.

Mother was living in the village now—the mother about whom these girls knew nothing, absolutely nothing! And what if that woman had been she!

Even now Ruby was not certain. What with the fog and the haste with which she had darted past the wrapped-up figure, she had not noticed the woman's features. It might have been mother—and mother might have recognised her!

Ruby could make no pretence of light-heartedness after this. All the way along the dark, misty road to the school Sybil was close beside her, talking vivaciously. For once, however, the charmer could not charm away the new recruit's heaviness of heart.

This was one of Ruby's moments of extreme compunction.

She felt sorry—oh, sorry for everything she had done and was doing. It was all

wrong—selfish and despicable! What would become of her unless she took herself in hand?

It might have been mother back there in the village, and how mother would grieve to know that one of her daughters was breaking the school rules in this way.

Then there was Joan, her sister. The girls were even now talking about Joan, little dreaming that she was the new recruit's sister—a sister who shared none of the wealth that was hers, Ruby's.

They were chuckling about the way they had locked Joan in that shed in the school-grounds, so that she would have to return indoors when they returned, and be involved in any punishment which they might drop in for.

It was a shame—oh, it was not playing the game at all!

So Ruby was thinking to herself, miserably, now that remorse had seized her.

And suddenly—not for the first time, by any means—she felt her better nature struggling to the surface; felt something urging her to have done with all this selfish deception. Yes, even at the cost of her having to be done with Sybil!

She must own her sister; must take her stand beside Joan—Joan, who had been so willing, when she was asked, to keep silent about their relationship!

The other girls went first through the gap in the boundary-hedge, and then Ruby followed, feeling half crazy with what she felt impelled to do in the next few moments.

They were going to let Joan out of the shed now. They would start mocking at her, and she—no, she would not stand by, a silent witness to her own sister's humiliation! She had done it too often already. Never again—never!

"Quiet!" cautioned Sybil, tiptoeing towards the locked-up shed.

But the other three tittered. The fun of having a game with the prisoner in the shed was going to be the crowning enjoyment of the whole daring exploit!

Sybil stooped down in the darkness and groped about for the key of the shed, which she had left in a certain hiding-place at the foot of the wooden wall.

She was a few moments searching for the key, and then suddenly she straightened up, giving a gasp of dismay.

"It is not here!" she panted. "Queer! I left it—oh!"

And in a frightened manner all five girls now huddled together as they beheld the shed door suddenly swing open, and a girlish figure stand forth.

"Joan—is that you, Joan?" panted Ruby excitedly.

"No; it is I," said Hilda Heathcote.

And she, the Fifth Form captain, stood looking grimly at the spellbound group.

The Price of Loyalty!

IN a moment Sybil's stupefaction had given place to fury.

"So it is you!" she burst out fiercely. "Meddling as usual!"

"Come indoors!" the Form captain said quietly.

"We are to have you meddling in everything, as was the case last term!" Sybil rushed on.

"Come indoors!"

"Under orders from you—is that it?"

"Really," Hilda said then, still unruffled, "are you not all wanting to get indoors safely, whether I advise it, or order it, or not?"

"I'll see you ordering me about!" Sybil said, placing no restraint upon her anger.

"Where is Joan Haviland?"

"Where you should be," was the cool answer. "Indoors!"

Sybil looked like displaying another outburst of rage. She was the last girl in the world to relish being humiliated—by the Form captain, too!

But Clarice Choane now intervened, making a feeble attempt to laugh things off.

"Ha, ha, ha! How lovely! One girl in the school has found a use for Form captains, anyhow! Joan Haviland must be thanking her stars that Hilda came to her rescue! Poor Joan, all alone in the dark, cold shed!"

Hilda Heathcote turned her back to the party of girls, and began to lock up the shed. Her action was the signal for Sybil to stride away furiously, making a bee-line for the School House.

"Come on!" she needlessly urged her fellow misdemeanants, for they were hurrying after

her. We are not going to be taken indoors in custody!"

"Ooo, noo!" agreed Olive Courtney. "But Hilda is coming, all the same!"

Yes, the Form captain was coming after them now, and when they were all close under the back wall of the great School House she suddenly placed herself amongst them.

"Excuse me!" she said, with that urbanity which was an added exasperation to her standing enemies. "I think you slipped out through the music-room window, just here? I wouldn't try to get back that way."

"We shall do as we please!" snapped Sybil.

"Very well," smiled Hilda, "do as you please; but the passage door is unbolted—or was half an hour ago."

There were a few moments whilst Sybil & Co. stood hesitating.

Another humiliation, if they took Hilda's generous advice and went by the simpler way indoors! Sybil drew a harsh breath, and shook her head. She stepped closer to the window; but once again her cronies deemed discretion the better part of valour.

"Oh, make it the door, Sybil!" pleaded Clarice, with affected nonchalance. "We can't bother now! Besides—"

"All right! And if we walk slap into a trap set for us by that meddling girl, don't blame me!" muttered Sybil.

panted, flashing round upon her fellow culprit. "It's a trap!"

She gave her friends no time to respond. Casting a spiteful glance at Hilda Heathcote, she drew herself up defiantly, and boldly walked on.

The crowd of a dozen girls parted in two. Straight past them Sybil went, her lips curling with a scornful smile as she felt herself to be the object of disgusted stares.

Luckily, she and her companions met nobody else during the hurried rush upstairs. Reaching the study which she shared with Ruby, she signed to the other girls to come inside.

Then slam went the study door, and Sybil stood looking from one to another with blazing eyes.

"What do you think of it?" she panted furiously. "You see, don't you? Meaning to entice us to slip in at the back door, Hilda Heathcote gave the tip beforehand to all the Form!"

"She is a beauty, that captain of ours!" said Clarice, sinking into a basket-chair. "How a girl can use her captaincy for such sneaking and trickery beats me!"

"But are you sure?" Ruby faltered. "I mean—"

She got no further. The others' eyes were upon her, fixing her with stony looks.

"You had better be careful!" Sybil said at



"Joan—is that you, Joan?" panted Ruby excitedly. "No; it is I!" said Hilda Heathcote. And she, the Fifth Form captain, stood looking grimly at the spellbound group.

"I'll go first, shall I?" suggested Hilda.

"No, you won't! I will go first, then we shall be sure of your not having a chance to bring all the school to look at us!"

Ruby darted a glance at the Form captain. The utterly unfair sneer had left that girl with her underlip caught between her teeth. But in a moment Hilda had mastered her indignation.

"Very well!" she shrugged, and stood back.

Then Sybil crept on tiptoe to the door, and turned the brass knob.

Inch by inch she opened the door. No light streamed forth, for the passage inside was one little used after dark and it was never lit.

After listening keenly, she gestured, "All right!" and then tiptoed into the house.

Clarice followed next. Olive and Phyllis crowded eagerly upon Ruby's heels, and so they all five got within doors, and swiftly, silently took off their wraps, and rolled them up.

Hilda came in, last of all, and closed the door without the slightest sound. The coast seemed to be clear, and Sybil led on again; only to stop dead, with a loud gasp, as she suddenly beheld a whole mob of Fifth Form scholars swarm into view at the lighted end of the passage.

"There! What did I tell you!" Sybil

last, with a queer little laugh. "Remember, we know Hilda Heathcote; you don't!"

"I—I'm sorry!" gulped Ruby quickly.

"But I won't let things rest as they are!" Sybil burst out fiercely, addressing all her friends. "The whole Form knows that we have been out of bounds. Well, the whole Form shall know something else besides!"

With these words she whirled to the door and flung it open.

Still smarting with the sense of having been humiliated by the Form captain, she strode along to that girl's door.

It was wide open, and Hilda was at the doorway, talking quietly with a number of girls who had evidently followed her up from below.

Sybil thrust herself through the throng, and then turned upon them all.

"You can stay—I want you to," she said, with all the insolent hauteur she could command. "I want you to hear my side of this affair!"

"I think you would do far better to go back to your study," advised Hilda. "Anyhow, I'm not going to enter into any squabble."

"If they don't hear me now, they shall another time!" panted Sybil, standing tight-fisted and rigid. "Listen to me, all of you! I have done a terrible thing, haven't I, to slip out of bounds?"

"The whole lot of you are a disgrace to the school!" spoke up Joyce Carroll frankly. "That is all I have to say!"

"Hear, hear!" chorused others weightily. "What about Joan Haviland, then?" retorted Sybil, quite unabashed. "She can be out of bounds after dark, and that is no disgrace—oh, no!"

"Ooo, noo, not at all!" chimed in Olive Courtney.

For she, like Clarice, Phyllis, and Ruby, had come along to join the crowd.

Sybil saw the captain's supporters raising their brows in great surprise, and she smiled triumphantly.

"You are surprised to know that the scholarship kid has been out of bounds this evening? Exactly!" she cried. "Hilda Heathcote was not going to invite all of you to come and see that girl creep indoors!"

"You know very well, girls," Hilda spoke up dispassionately, "I did not tell any of you that Sybil Sardone and the others were out of bounds. If you were downstairs just now—"

"That was our own doing, yes!" Joyce declared. "The rumour got round that Sybil and her friends had gone to the village. The door downstairs was found unlocked, and we thought we would let them see that their goings-on were known."

"Who started the rumour?" demanded Sybil.

broke bounds to go on some jaunt or other. Joan never broke bounds at all—"

"Rubbish! Any excuse—"

"I am speaking the truth," said Hilda, whilst she gave Joan a glance beseeching that girl to keep silent. "Joan Haviland went out with full permission this afternoon. She should have been back earlier, it is true, but she got delayed."

"Has she told you why?" sneered Sybil.

"Yes."

"And will you tell us—everybody present?"

"No!"

Another sensation!

Hilda Heathcote certainly was shielding the scholarship girl!

"That is enough!" Sybil commented triumphantly. "Now I hope the Form sees! If I and my friends get into a harmless scrape, nothing is too bad for us; but when the captain's favourite kicks over the traces—oh, nothing must be said!"

Uttering a scornful laugh, the speaker was starting to push her way out of the throng, when Joan suddenly cried:

"Stop! I want to speak!"

"Joan, you had better not!" Hilda exclaimed sharply. "You know what I advised. Silence is best!"

"Not now!" cried Joan, standing forward, her pretty face deeply flushed. "Silence means that the girls will misjudge your reason for being ready to shield me. And I can't bear—"

There was some louder-tittering this time. "So it amounts to this," Sybil Sardone remarked gaily. "We can break bounds as much as we like, so long as we are pauper kids, with mothers in the village who take in mangling!" The captain doesn't mind!"

"Shame, shame!" cried out Elsie Dainton, her clenched fists raised to her shoulders. "Oh, you snob! Hilda—Joan—no more of this! I can't bear it!"

Hilda Heathcote, very white in the face, but wonderfully composed, gestured to the crowd to disperse, and slowly the girls passed away, breaking into excited talk about this latest scene.

Ruby got detached from Sybil and the others, and suddenly she found herself drifting with scholars of whom she knew nothing, except that last term they had all been staunch supporters of the captain.

Now their loyalty was certainly waning. And why?

Simply because the captain was standing by Joan, whose life at the school had made such a bad start. That was the reason.

Hilda Heathcote had stood up for Joan over the matter of the lost brooch yesterday; this evening she had done her best for the girl when the innocent reason for being out of bounds had been divulged.

Such was the price which even Hilda Heathcote was paying for her loyalty to Joan. And Hilda was the captain!

What, then, would not she, Ruby—only a new girl as she was—have to suffer at the Form's hands if ever she stood up for Joan?

It was a thought that dispelled in a single moment all the longing she had felt to own her sister and defend her.

No—oh, it was out of the question! She could hear some of the girls laughing about the "char-lady" in the village. Still worse, she could hear others muttering bitter things about the captain's constant championing of Joan, how "unfair" it was.

The passage cleared at last. Back into their various studies all the girls had gone, and now Ruby was alone.

She looked along the passage to that door behind which, she knew, Joan was alone with cousin Elsie.

Then, heaving a despairing sigh, she turned to her own door, and rejoined her so-called friends!



Neither Joan nor Ruby heard the girl who came creeping up the stairs, and, stealing to the closed door, stood there listening.

"I did not start it, anyhow," answered Hilda. "I will explain. I found that you had all gone out. I hastened away, hoping to overtake you, and then I heard a girl trying to get out of the shed. I let her out, of course, and told her to slip back to her study. How she got locked up in the shed she would not tell me. But I can guess!"

"So can most of us, I fancy!" spoke up Elsie Dainton, standing close beside Joan.

"Anyway," blazed Sybil, "my point is that Hilda favoured the scholarship kid—and not for the first time! The kid has been out of bounds this evening, and nothing is said!"

The words were telling here and there. Once again there were girls whose loyalty to the Form captain was being taxed by this evidence of apparent favouritism.

"Question is," exclaimed one such girl, "were you going to hold your tongue, Hilda, about Joan Haviland?"

"I was, certainly."

There was another minor sensation.

"At the same time the Form captain was going to report us!" asserted Sybil.

"I was not!"

"You were!"

"And even if I had felt tempted to report you," Hilda continued, amidst a dramatic silence, "there was ample justification. You

oh, I can't have girls turning against you, their captain!"

"Loud cheers from the gallery!" said Clarice Choane sarcastically. "Ear, 'ear! Bruvvo!"

"Limelight, please!" added Phyllis Franklin. "This is where the heroine speaks her part. Ha, ha, ha!"

Joan waited, breathing quickly, until some tittering had died away. Then she spoke out with perfect frankness.

"When I went to Miss Merrick's this afternoon about the brooch, she gave me a reward. My mother is living in the village—"

"Oh, is she?" remarked Sybil, grinning.

"My mother is—she is not well off. In fact—"

"She takes in washing, is that it?" chuckled Clarice.

Elsie Dainton stepped forward, laying an entreating hand upon Joan's shoulder.

"Joan darling, come away! Do, dear! If you can stand it, I can't! These girls—"

"No! I'll say the rest," Joan persisted, giving a stamp of the foot. "I knew my mother would be glad of any help I could give her, so I ran to the village to—just to see her. That is why I was late back."

"The kid helped with the washing, you see!" said Clarice. "Devoted child! Of course, that excuses everything!"

Is the Secret to be Known?

AFTER school next day Joan and Elsie indulged in a little hockey practice.

Elsie Dainton was a brilliant hand at the game, but Joan, of course, could make no better showing than any other beginner. Until to-day she had never once handled a hockey-stick.

The forty minutes of brisk practice enabled her, all the same, to be regarded as a young hopeful by Elsie and the rest. These were girls who had been above being influenced by yesterday's flare-up—girls as loyal as ever to Hilda Heathcote, and as nice as ever to Joan, even though it had "come out" that her widowed mother was a poor seamstress, lodging in the village.

So Joan, with Elsie's arm flung carelessly and lovingly about her shoulders, went indoors at last, feeling very happy. In the twilight entrance-hall the two girls saw a notice freshly pinned upon the board, and they stopped to scan it.

The sheet contained a list of names for the Fifth Form team in Saturday's match against another school.

Joyce Carroll came up behind the cousins, and took a look at the list.

"A strong team—the very best, picked without fear or favour," was her satisfied comment. She tugged Joan playfully by the hair. "What's that sigh for, Joan?"

"Thinking how proud you would be, to see your name in that list?" hazarded Joyce. "Well, some day!"

Then Joyce suddenly spurted away.

"Someday!" echoed Joan, laughing, as she and Elsie went up the stairs together. "A far-off someday, I fancy! But you'll be in a team next week, I'm sure!"

"It's an away match on Saturday; but we'll go," said Elsie. "I suppose one can do it by walking. Anyhow, we'll have to walk, Joan! No motor these days!"

Then a little silence fell between them—not a gloomy one, however. Elsie was even humming lightly to herself as she and her cousin stepped along the Fifth Form corridor, passing the various study doors.

They reached their study, and were soon settling down for the evening.

Presently there was a step outside the half-open door, and Hilda Heathcote looked into the room.

"I can come in?" she smiled. "It is only to ask you two girls about Saturday's hockey match."

"Hard up for a pair of crack players?" jested Joan, pulling forward a chair.

"I'm hard up for players of any sort," was Hilda's amazing answer.

She spoke with sudden gravity, and seemed too troubled to bother about sitting down.

"Why?" exclaimed Elsie, jumping up. "But we saw the team-list on the board just now!"

"I put it there, less than an hour ago," Hilda said quietly. "And it has not taken some of the girls long to cry off the match."

"What?"

"I have had several notes in the last half-hour. It leaves me short of five players altogether," the captain went on. "Joyce will play, I know, instead of Edith White."

"Edith White!" echoed Joan and Elsie both.

They knew that Edith White was one of the girls who had turned against the captain.

"Who are the rest?" Elsie asked.

Hilda gave the names. They were all girls who had taken umbrage over her defence of Joan, deeming it favouritism.

"But don't look so upset," the captain said, forcing a smile. "It is my trouble, not yours. And I can pull through, I fancy. As I say, Joyce will gladly play when she sees how I am placed. I can find two other good substitutes besides."

"But—"

"So if you, Elsie will play, and Joan, too—"

"Me!" gasped Joan. "When I only had my first bit of practice this afternoon! Oh, Hilda, how I wish I could play! It is no use, though!"

"I shall put you both down," declared Hilda calmly.

She stepped to the table, and made the pencilled adjustments of her list.

For a few moments not a word did Joan, Elsie, or the captain utter. Each knew the other's thoughts.

Slowly, but surely, the captain's position was being undermined. Slowly her once staunch following was being lured away!

"Even if Joan and I play on Saturday, this leaves you still one player short," Elsie said, at last.

Hilda nodded, folding the slip of paper.

"Yes. It can't be helped."

"This comes of your doing so much for me!" Joan exclaimed, in great distress. "Oh, Hilda—"

"I have only done what was right towards a new girl," Hilda broke in, turning towards the door. "Don't worry; I have come through stiffer trials than this."

At that instant a loud burst of laughter came from Sybil Sardone's study.

"Hilda," said Joan, in sudden excitement, "if I get a girl to play on Saturday—a girl who is no better than myself at hockey, very likely; but—"

"If she will only do her best, of course I'll be ever so grateful!" Hilda hastened to say. "But of whom are you thinking, Joan?"

"You'll see," was the answer. "Will you wait a bit?"

So saying, Joan darted out into the passage, whilst the captain turned back and sat down with Elsie.

A few quick steps brought Joan to the study which Ruby shared with Sybil Sardone. Inside the room everybody was apparently talking at once. To Joan, ready to rap upon the panel, it seemed like standing outside a house where a birthday-party was in full swing.

Should she go away—leave it till later? No. Why? she asked herself, and next moment she knocked.

The talk and laughter subsided.

"Who is there?" cried Sybil Sardone. In a silvery voice.

Joan's only response was another tap at the door, and now somebody got up from a chair, and turned back the key.

The door flashed open, and Sybil stood revealed, her handsome face filling with a resentful look as she caught sight of Joan.

"No, no washing to-day!" she snapped, causing a shriek of laughter from Clarice and a few others.

Joan did a bold thing then. She pushed past Sybil, and stood looking straight across at Ruby, who had jumped to her feet.

"Ruby Haviland," Joan said. "May I speak to you privately for a minute?"

"I—yes, I'll come!" Ruby stammered, in great confusion. "But what do you want?"

"She wants a bundle of washing for mother! Ha, ha, ha!" pealed Clarice, lolling in an armchair.

Joan backed out of the room, and Ruby followed her into the passage, pulling the door shut quickly.

Then they met each other's eyes.

Both girls were realising that this was to be the first talk of a private nature that had passed between them since they came to the school. And each knew that the talk must not take place here in the passage.

Without speaking, they went by a mutual impulse to the stairs, and so up to one of the deserted dormitories overhead.

Faintly from below there came the music of Joyce Carroll's violin. Joyce was a capable violinist, and was playing some slow, plaintive melody. Joan and Ruby stood listening after they had shut themselves in for the private talk. But they never heard the girl who, in a minute or so, came creeping up the stairs, a smile of deep cunning at her lips!

The girl stole to the closed door, and stood there, listening.

Joan and Ruby were talking now.

And all the time, like the slow music to some dramatic scene upon the stage of a theatre, the strains of the violin flowed on, rose and fell plaintively, as if to make its own sorrowful accompaniment to what was passing between these two girls who were sisters in secret.

(Who is the eavesdropper? And what does she overhear? There will be another long instalment of this enthralling serial next Thursday. Order your copy now.)

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