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"THE SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN ANNUAL"
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Week ending October 6th, 1923.

The School Friend

Every 2nd Thursday



MARCIA'S DISCOVERY!

(A dramatic incident from this week's new long complete story of the girls of Cliff H-use School.)

"ONE HUNDRED POUNDS REWARD."

"MISSING GIRL."

"To anyone who can give information, the above reward will be paid. Fourteen years of age, fair hair, bobbed, large blue eyes, regular features. A soft and refined voice. Would be shabbily dressed. Lily-shaped birth mark on left arm between wrist and elbow. Write Box Z, Office of this paper."

In this issue:

OPENING CHAPTERS OF A GRAND NEW SERIAL OF SCHOOL AND CIRCUS LIFE:

"THE LITTLE LADY OF THE LIONS!"

EVERY GIRL MUST READ THIS FINE STORY OF SCHOOLGIRL LIFE AND MYSTERY!



THE DAY GIRL'S SECRET!

A magnificent new long complete story of the girls of Cliff House, introducing Polly Vane, the new "day" scholar.

By HILDA RICHARDS.

A Strange Arrival!

"MY giddy aunt! Just look what's blowing up the drive!"

"Who can it be?"
"Hush, girls!"

Clara Trevlyn, the tomboy of the Fourth Form, had been the first of the little group of juniors to see the newcomer, and she had remarked upon the fact in quite her own fashion.

Marjorie Hazeldene and Mabel Lynn, also of the Fourth, had commented, too, though in a fashion rather less slangy than Clara.

But it was Barbara Redfern, the Fourth Form captain, who cautioned them to silence, and there was a warning frown upon her pretty olive face.

"Don't let the poor kid hear you speaking like that!" she whispered. "She may take offence!"

And, silent now, the chums riveted their eyes upon the unfamiliar figure that walked slowly up the drive towards the school house.

It was the figure of a girl of about Barbara Redfern's own age. Although pretty, she was so very shabbily dressed that she made quite a marked contrast to these four girls, who, seated in camp chairs, were watching her approach.

The girl was fair, tall for her age, and slim, but the dress she was wearing helped to conceal that fact, for it was long and bunched about her, and she was wearing a straw hat that, on a less lovely face, would have been actually comical.

Indeed, Clara Trevlyn, the tomboy of the Fourth, was smiling now as she saw this quaint figure come nearer to them.

"Perhaps it's a new servant," suggested Mabel Lynn.

Barbara Redfern, better known as Babs, shook her head.

"No, she isn't, Mabs," she said. "See, she's got a satchel."

"Some satchel!" ventured Clara, with a chuckle. "I wonder who the poor kid is!"

"The poor kid" at that moment paused and looked about her as though uncertain of which direction to take. She seemed just a trifle too nervous to advance towards the four girls and make inquiry of them, and it was seeing this that prompted the generous-hearted Babs to act for her.

Barbara Redfern sprang from her chair and ran towards the girl.

THE SCHOOL FRIEND.—No. 230.

"This is Cliff House School," said the Fourth Form captain. "Can I help you?"

The girl's eyes lit up.
"That's awfully kind of you!" she answered softly, and in a voice surprisingly soft and musical, and so much in contrast with the clothes she was wearing.

Clara, Mabs, and Marjorie, interested, had clustered behind Barbara, and now they could see that shabby dress better. They could see, too, how pretty the girl was.

"You don't seem too sure of your way?" Babs remarked.

"I—I'm not, to tell the truth," said the newcomer hesitatingly. "I am so nervous about coming here. It is an ordeal, going to a new school, isn't it?"

Babs started.
"You're—you're coming here as a scholar?" she said, trying to conceal her surprise.

The girl nodded.
"Yes," she answered, "but not as a boarder."

"Oh!" murmured the chums of the Fourth.

"There are not many day girls at Cliff House, are there?" added the strange girl, conscious, perhaps that there was a different status between day girls and boarders.

"Very few—none at all in our Form, in fact!" replied Babs. "But, I say, you look about our age. Are you to be placed in the Fourth Form, do you know?"

"Yes, the Fourth Form!" answered the new girl simply, looking at Babs timidly.

Barbara extended her hand warmly.

"Then we'll see if we can't be good friends so long as you stay here," she declared. "You'll find the Fourth a very friendly lot of girls on the whole, I assure you!"

"There was gratitude in the new day girl's eyes, and it was evident, as she shook hands all round, that she had never expected such a warm reception.

"You live very near the school, I suppose, as you're coming here as day girl?" Babs remarked kindly.

"Yes," answered the girl, in low tones. "Very near Friar Dale—at Clematis Cottage, just on the outskirts. I wonder if you know it?"

And whilst Babs & Co. chatted cheerfully with the girl who seemed so strange and out of place at the big school, three

Fourth-Formers sauntered up arm-in-arm, to stare stonily at the shabbily-dressed new girl.

Lady Hetty Hendon, the one-time servant-girl at the school, Marcia Loftus and Nancy Bell, had the unenviable reputation of being not only a trio of snobbish girls, but of being the most spiteful and ill-natured girls in the whole of the Fourth Form.

The sallow face of Marcia Loftus wore a bitter sneer as she looked from the shabbily-dressed girl to the captain of the Fourth.

"The dear Barbara has found a new friend," she observed to Hetty and Nancy, in a very audible voice. "See how carefully she chooses those of her own class girls!"

And Hetty and Nancy tittered in due.

"He, he, he!"
Hetty Hendon stepped nearer to the group, and stared at the colouring new girl in a way that was intended to signify withering contempt.

"What's this here school comin' to, I want to know!" she demanded, in her loud voice of her friends. "Pallin' on with every new servant-girl as comes to the school! What next?"

Barbara Redfern spun upon the ridiculous snob of the Fourth, but it was Clara Trevlyn who was the first to speak. Her utterance took the form of a wild yell.

"Look ad, 'Etty!"
Hetty jumped and gazed round in alarm.

"W-w-what's the matter?" she gasped. "Where is it?"

"Sorry, 'Etty!" said Clara, with a chuckle. "I fought the fish and chips was burnin', I did, and you know how the customers carries on if the taters is over-fried, doncher, 'Etty?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Hetty gazed at the grinning Clara, and spluttered. But Babs did not deign to take further notice of the spiteful girls of the Fourth, and she turned again to the new girl.

"Now I think of it, I remember Clematis Cottage!" she remarked. "I fancied it was empty."

She looked carefully at the girl to whom she was speaking, and Babs rather wondered at the flush that again mantled her cheeks.

"It was," answered the newcomer. "But we are there now."

Who "we" was, she did not explain,

and, as though she was anxious not to be questioned further, she added:

"My name is Polly Vane! Oh, I—I do hope I get into your Form!"

As she spoke there came a harsh laugh from Marcia, a sniff of contempt from Lady Hetty Hendon, and a cry of surprise from Nancy Bell.

"My, is that coming to this school?" exclaimed Nancy Bell.

"He don't know what things is coming to at Cliff House!" exclaimed Lady Hetty Hendon, gazing as if petrified at the bustling Polly Vane.

"I—I think I will go on to the school now, Barbara," murmured Polly. "I was to see Miss Primrose at one o'clock, and it is five minutes to now."

Lady Hetty Hendon, Marcia, and Nancy still had their arms linked, and they were obviously barring the way.

But of this Polly took no notice.

"I'll come with you, Polly," said Babs, who had taken an instinctive liking to the newcomer.

"Oh, thank you—thank you very much!" said Polly, real gratitude in her smile.

As though she could not see Hetty, Nancy, and Marcia, she walked round them, and, with Babs at her side, proceeded on her way to the school.

"You mustn't take any notice of those three," said Babs gently. "They are always like that—the least liked girls in the Form."

Polly nodded, but now that the girls were behind her there was a very different expression on her face, it was as though she were conscious of her poor clothes, and perhaps something lay in her eyes, something that was moist.

Inwardly Barbara Redfern was condemning Nancy, Hetty, and Marcia as spiteful creatures, and seeing the look on Polly's face, her heart went out in sympathy to the girl.

She seemed awkward in the long skirt, and Babs was realising that some devoted parent must be making sacrifices in sending the girl to a school like Cliff House. For a moment there was silence as they walked up to the entrance; and not until Babs had shown Polly the door of the headmistress' study did she leave the new girl.

"I shall see you again soon, sha'n't I?" murmured Polly wistfully.

"Oh, rather!" laughed Babs. "Now you are here you will see me a lot, and we must be friends."

Polly clasped her hands.

"I should love to," she murmured impulsively. "Oh, thank you, Barbara."

With a reassuring smile, Babs turned and hurried away; and when she had gone Polly paused before opening the door of Miss Primrose's study.

"Oh, daddy," she breathed, "I wonder will it all come right! I wonder!"

And with that rather mystifying phrase on her lips, she turned the handle of the door, and the next moment was in the presence of Miss Primrose, headmistress of Cliff House School.

Barbara Has a Surprise!

A FEW days had elapsed since the coming of Polly Vane; and her arrival at Cliff House had been signalled by the formation of two very different camps in the Fourth Form, with both of which Polly was indifferently concerned.

A certain section, led by Lady Hetty Hendon, were violently opposed to mixing with so shabby a girl, and especially a cottage girl from Friarcliff Village.

It was too much to expect! Cliff House was coming to something indeed!

They didn't come to the school to mix with servants, etc., etc.

On the other hand, there were Barbara Redfern's friends who, because Babs was genuinely interested in Polly Vane, were ready to be her school companions and make things easier for her.

What her life at Cliff House would have been had it not fallen to Barbara and her chums to befriend Polly, it is difficult to conjecture.

As it was, Polly was by no means ignorant of the remarks that were levelled against her, but she kept herself composed and dignified beneath the hints and obvious sarcasm of Hetty Hendon and her chums.

There was another thing. Miss Primrose, at Barbara's request, had allowed Polly to share Study No. 4 during the breaks in the day, and even in the evening, if Polly wish to stay after the actual lessons of the school had finished.

It was here that Babs found Polly on the third evening of Polly's coming to Cliff House; and, unconscious of Babs' presence in the room, Polly, who was standing by the window, was crying softly.

"Oh, daddy, daddy!" she was whispering. "I am afraid—afraid!"

Babs was surprised as she heard those softly spoken words, and, coughing discreetly, she watched Polly.

Polly Vane swung round, and she had to catch at the window lintel to steady herself as she saw who it was had come into the room.

Polly's face was white, and Babs could see the tears that dewed the girl's eyes.

"Why, Polly!" exclaimed Barbara.

"What is the matter?"

Polly shook her head.

"Nothing, really—nothing, Babs!" she answered, forcing a smile now and regaining her composure.

But Babs was not convinced.

"Tell me, Polly; I am your friend. Has Marcia been saying something that has hurt you?"

Polly looked very pitiful at that moment in her shabby little dress and with sadness in her eyes.

"No, no—really no, Barbara!" she answered. "It is not that—not that at all."

Babs was surprised. She was beginning to realise that there was something of a mystery surrounding Polly, but what that mystery was she could not fathom.

Nor was there time to question the new girl again, for there had come a rush of footsteps in the passage, and the next moment the excited figures of Mabel Lynn, Clara Trevelyn, and Peggy Preston of the Fourth burst into the study.

Mabel, who had come in first, collapsed into a chair, laughing weakly.

"I won that race, at any rate, Clara," she panted. "So poor Bessie won't get her cake."

Peggy was looking at Babs with dancing eyes.

"We challenged Bessie to a race for a cake!" she laughed. "And Bessie actually accepted."

Polly was smiling.

She had met Bessie Bunter, the fattest girl in Cliff House, and the thought of her was enough to make Polly smile.

Distinctly there sounded a series of noises like those a train makes when climbing a steep gradient.

"Bessie!" whispered Babs, glancing at Polly.

Nearer and nearer came the sound, and now Mabs sprang to her feet.

"Quick!" she whispered. "Behind this curtain. Bessie will think she has won!"

They did not hesitate for a moment, but were behind the curtain and waiting, holding their breath, as those noisy sounds came nearer.

"Oh dear! Oh! Oh-h-h-h!"

Heavy feet sounded on the passage, a fat form fell against the door, and the door gave inwards, to deposit Bessie on the floor.

The fat girl's eyes were bulging as she looked about the empty study.

The hopeless expression left her eyes, and they twinkled brightly.

"Mum-mum-my word! I'm first!" she mumbled. "I've won the kik-kik-take!"

Her eyes were roving about the room, and now, scrambling to her feet, she suggested, rather than walked, in the direction of the cupboard, opened it, and, giving a guttural exclamation of pleasure, laid her hands on a tempting-looking cake that rested within the cupboard.



THE ARRIVAL OF THE DAY GIRL! "So you are coming here as a day girl?" asked Barbara of the strange intruder. And as she spoke Hetty Hendon & Co. sauntered up arm in arm.

And as she did so five figures came slowly from behind the curtain.

It was as much as they could do to prevent themselves from laughing, for Bessie was mumbling to herself, and sending a prayer to a wonderful delight.

Slowly she turned, and the awful realisation came to her that she was not alone in the room.

The pleasure faded from her face, and suddenly the cake fell from her nerveless hands.

The next moment, acting on a sudden impulse, she bent down, picked up the cake, and lumbered from the study, with Clara Trevlyn in full cry after her.

Mabs and Peggy were too weak with laughter to follow her, and when Polly, saying good-bye to Babs, left the study, they were still laughing as though they might burst at any moment.

Babs watched Polly go, and there was just a little anxiety in Babs' eyes.

It was slowly growing upon her that Polly Vane was something of a mystery, and what had helped to convince her on that point, was the discovery she had made some little time since.

What was Polly worried about? And now that Babs began to think out things, she remembered that look of nervousness she had seen in Polly's eyes on several occasions.

With a laughing remark to Mabs and Peggy, Babs hurried into the corridor and out into the school grounds, passing Clara and Bessie en route, with Bessie stoutly declaring that she had von the cake.

How the pleasant argument would end, Babs did not know.

She had a wish to see Polly alone, for she felt that Polly needed a friend—someone in whom she could confide, and she liked Polly so much that she would have gladly had the girl make a confidante of her.

In the grounds she could find no trace of Polly, but she was made to realise that Polly could not be so very far ahead by some remark that she heard Marcia make to Lady Hetty Hendon:

"The chum of the cottage girl!"

As Babs heard Lady Hetty Hendon's majestic rejoinder:

"Birds of a feather—that's what His say."

Babs took no notice of them, but hurried on. It was a pleasant evening for a walk to Friardale Village, even if she did not catch up with Polly.

Babs was feeling that perhaps Polly was beginning to fancy that most of the girls were against her because she lived in the village, and in a cottage there.

It was Barbara's intention to disillusion her on this score. Babs was more than convinced that the girl had as much right to be at Cliff House as any girl there, and in every respect.

Live in a cottage she might, but that she was well above the standard of Marcia, Nancy, and Hetty could not be doubted.

In to the road Babs walked, and, turning in the direction of Friardale Village, she sought for some sign of Polly.

There was none.

The road twisted and turned, but, despite that fact, Babs felt sure that Polly could not have got so far ahead as this.

Babs ran now, but there was not any sign of Polly, run as she might, so she fell into a walk again.

Clematis Cottage was in a lane called Rose Way, and thither Babs turned her footsteps.

Rose Way was a turning off to the THE SCHOOL FRIEND.—No. 230.

left, just before Friardale Village was reached and Clematis Cottage was, as Babs knew, the only residence the little lane boasted.

High hedges, covered with honeysuckle and already heavy with cobwebs, towered up to either side of Babs as she turned into the lane.

The air was fragrant with the smell of flower and field, and Babs told herself that here was an ideal spot to live.

And now she caught sight of a sweetly pretty thatched cottage that just showed above the hedge.

A little timidly, Babs approached, and, coming to a small wicket-gate, she looked within the garden.

It was empty, and from the cottage itself there came no sign of life.

Babs waited, and as she stood there a surprising thing happened.

Through a hole in the hedge that separated the cottage garden from the fields to the north of it there crawled a figure.

To say that Babs was amazed would only be mildly describing her feelings at that moment.

There, coming mysteriously into the garden of her own home, was Polly Vane!

And Polly seemed anxious and afraid.

Babs, wondering now if Polly would care to see her here, stepped back into the shelter that the hedge afforded, and from that hiding-place watched her friend.

Polly's face was white and strained, and she was looking anxiously in the direction of the cottage, over which wistaria hung and roses climbed.

As she watched Polly the door of the cottage opened, and a rather tall and thin woman of uncertain age came out into the garden.

Here was yet another surprise for Babs.

She had never fancied that the new girl's mother would be prim and unformed like this.

What could it mean?

"Is that you, miss?"

The voice was respectful, and very different from Polly's own, but it was not the voice that Babs marvelled at, it was the manner in which the girl had been addressed.

Who was this woman who called Polly "miss," and showed her such respect?

It was a puzzle that Babs could find no answer for.

"You're late, miss," said the woman.

"Your dinner is prepared,"

"Oh, thank you, Agnes," Babs heard Polly say. "I am sorry I am late."

Babs watched the girl, so surprised that she had no thought of its being wrong to do so.

"Agnes," whispered Polly nervously, "have there been any signs—anything to make us worry to-day?"

And the woman called Agnes shook her head.

"Nothing, miss," she answered—"nothing at all."

The sigh of relief that came from Polly's lips even reached Babs' ears.

The next moment a strange thing happened.

From where the Friardale Road lay there came the honk of a motor-car's horn, and, to Babs' utter amazement, she saw Agnes grasp at Polly's hand and draw her into the cottage, the door of which was slammed closed and bolted.

Babs stepped back in amazement.

What was the explanation of all this surprising mystery? What could be the answer?

For a moment she stood there, watching to see if Polly would come into the garden again. But no Polly

appeared, and, deep in thought, Babs returned to the school.

She could not fathom all this mystery of Polly. It was so unexplainable, and she was still thinking about the mystery of it all when the bell for afternoon school went.

Babs had been standing at the window of her study, and as she looked out towards the grounds she could see Polly coming slowly up the drive.

What was Polly's secret? Why had she seemed so afraid?

Where would all this end? And Babs was still wondering as she walked below to join the new girl of the Fourth Form.

Polly's Amazing Action!

"WHY, Polly, you look quite nervous! What is the matter?"

Babs looked anxiously at her friend as she voiced the question.

Some moments since the lessons for the day had finished, and now, with the school boys playing, we learned respite in the grounds. Babs had come towards Polly to find her seated in a camp-chair. There was a gloomy expression on her face—a look that Babs could find no explanation for.

Polly forced a smile.

"Do I look nervous?" she said, non-committally.

Babs watched her closely.

"Has Miss Steel been down on you?" she asked, seating herself beside Polly.

"Or Hetty & Co. unpleasant?"

Polly shook her bobbed head.

"No," she answered softly.

Babs smiled into her eyes.

"I hate to see you miserable, Polly," she murmured. "For I am sure that to be happy and jolly is your natural self."

Polly turned away, and for a moment Babs could not see her eyes.

"Look here, Polly," continued Babs, "we're friends, aren't we?"

Polly looked up with that rare smile that was one of her greatest attractions. It was like the sun breaking through a cloud now.

"Of course, Babs," she answered.

"What I should have done without your friendship I do not know."

"That's not," laughed Babs.

"But what worries me is to see you anxious. Is there nothing that you can tell me, Polly? Two heads are better than one, you know."

Polly did not answer. She looked suddenly awkward and ill at ease.

"No, Babs," she answered at last, "nothing."

Babs shook her head.

"I won't press you, then," she murmured. "But I hate to see you looking so sad at times when I know that really you are jolly and happy by nature."

Polly turned away, and tears had come into her eyes.

She had had to stand a lot these days from the girls who were Marcia's friends.

They had done their best to ridicule her, make her feel awkward, and she knew that she could not treat them as she would have wished to treat them.

Polly looked about her and shivered.

"I must be going home, Babs," she said, rising to her feet.

Babs looked up, and Polly did not see what lay in Babs' eyes.

"I'll come a little of the way with you, Polly," she offered.

Polly was glad, but only for a moment; the point she was quite composed.

"I would love you to, Babs," she said.

"You won't mind if I hurry?"

She smiled into Babs' eyes.

"Of course not!" laughed Babs. "I feel like a good stiff walk. Here goes!"

She sprang from her chair, and the next moment the two girls were walking in the direction of the school gates and into the Friarale road.

"There were two girls who watched them go, and they were Clara Trevlyn and Mabel Lynn.

"I say, Mabs," said Clara, "Babs seems to be getting jolly chummy with the new girl. Haven't you noticed?"

Mabs smiled.

"Yes, Clara," she answered. "It's just Babs' way, and I understand her perfectly. Poor kid seems lonely, and Babs is taking an interest in her."

Clara looked keenly at Mabel Lynn.

"Do you know, Mabs," she exclaimed. "I have a feeling that there is a mystery about Polly Vane? I have had that feeling ever since the moment of her coming to the school."

Mabel laughed.

"It isn't like you to scent mysteries, Clara," she remarked.

"Well, anyway, there is a giddy mystery there, I'm positive!" said Clara, as the two girls strolled away arm in arm.

Meanwhile Babs and Polly were walking along the Friarale road.

Babs was sincerely sorry for this girl. Even the shabby clothes that Polly wore did not bring so much pity to Babs' heart as that look of anxiety and sadness that lay on Polly's face.

But it was not in Babs' mind to question Polly, to pry into her business, and, suddenly, it occurred to her that perhaps Polly ought to know what Babs had seen by the cottage.

"Polly," she murmured, "I could not help seeing you in the garden of your cottage to-day, and with someone else, someone who seemed to treat you as though you were not her daughter but that she was your servant."

Polly started back and looked blankly at Babs.

"It was through no intention, Polly!" Babs hastened to say. "And I shall not tell anyone, if you do not want me to tell."

Polly had caught at Babs' hand.

"Oh, Babs," she whispered, "I wish that I could tell you everything, but I can't—I mustn't. One day perhaps I will."

She paused.

"Of course, Polly," murmured Babs. "I wouldn't dream of telling a single person of what I know! I have forgotten already."

Polly flushed, and clung to Babs' arm as the two continued on their way.

Babs was convinced that if only Polly would tell her everything, there was a lot she might do to help her friend.

But there, Polly remained silent.

They chatted about the school, their clothes, the country, and they were so chatting when a sound came which suddenly sent Polly trembling with alarm.

She had caught at Babs' hand, and Babs, wondering, felt the girl's hand shaking like a leaf.

The next instant Babs felt herself drawn back into the hedge just as a car turned a bend in the road.

As Polly saw the car, a cry of dismay came to her lips.

It was bearing down on them, passing them, and, as Barbara Redfern watched it, she heard the brakes being applied; but there was little time to heed that, for Polly was frantically drawing Babs through the hedge.

"Oh, don't wait—don't!" she cried. "Run—run for all you know how, Babs!"

There was no time for Babs to pause and question.

Polly had already commenced to race

across the field, and Babs, who was a good runner, followed after her.

Some extraordinary fear must have been giving Polly wings, for she simply tore along with Babs, finding it no easy task to keep up with her.

And as Babs ran she was asking herself what could be the meaning of this extraordinary happening.

What fear had the presence of that car suddenly brought to Polly?

She turned and looked back by the way they had come.

The car was still in the road—she could see it through the hedge—and, wonder of wonders, a man and a woman had crawled through the hedge and were watching them!

Who were these people? What connection had they with Polly Vane?

It was enough to puzzle an older brain than Barbara's as she raced on, feeling that it must be something dreadfully important that made the new girl as terrified as this.



CONCEALED FROM HER PURSUERS! The strange man and woman stared keenly at the punt whilst Barbara poled. Would they suspect that the girl they were seeking was also in the punt?

Polly was not even glancing behind her.

With her hair streaming in the wind, she was running across the fields, and now from behind Babs there came the sound of a cry, and, turning again, she saw that the man and the woman were giving chase.

Over the field they came and to a stile, across the stile and into a road.

Babs had sprinted, and she was abreast of Polly now.

"Follow me!" she cried. "I know the short cuts here, Polly."

Crossing another stile, Babs ran through some young trees, cut off at the fringe of the trees, turned at right angles, and raced down to where the silvery waters of the Sark showed through the high reeds that fringed the river-bank.

"Oh, shall we escape them—shall we escape them?" cried Polly.

As Babs gave one glance at her friend she could see the fear writ large upon Polly's face.

Polly was trembling, and as Polly spoke Babs could hear the crash of feet behind her, and cries echoing through the young trees.

There was no time to speak words of encouragement to Polly. There was scant time even to act; but Babs knew the banks of the Sark by heart. She had seen a Fowler's ancient punt lying against the bank, and, snatching at Polly's hand, she tore down to the riverside with her.

What matter if they dashed into the mud and the slime at the bank of the river? What matter if they barked their shins getting into the ancient boat?

It were better to have such trivial damage than that Polly should fall victim to some threat that she obviously feared.

These were Babs' thoughts as she paddled the punt out into midstream, and steered it into a fast current that could bear them round the bend of the river.

Polly, hunched up in the punt, was

watching the river-bank with fearful eyes.

"They'll come! They'll follow!" she sobbed.

Babs scanned the banks. There was not another boat in sight, and she breathed with relief.

"No, they won't," she laughed. "We've outwitted them and their purpose, whatever it was. There's not another boat for them."

But Babs could hear the pursuit roaring nearer. Suddenly there came the crushing of boughs being parted vigorously. And then Polly did a most surprising thing.

She flung herself flat in the boat, so that she should not be seen.

And at that moment a man and a woman came tearing towards the river-bank, to see what appeared to be a punt being poled by a solitary girl.

Babs bent to her work, and the punt shot along.

"Have they gone?"

A frightened face was looking up at Babs, and Babs smiled down into Polly's eyes.

"Don't worry now," she answered. "We've beaten them all right."

With a sigh of deep relief, Polly sat up and looked blankly into Babs' face.

"I owe my safety to you, Babs," she whispered. "They would have caught me if it hadn't been for you and your knowledge of the river."

Babs ceased to pole, and steered the punt into the reeds.

"What does all this mean, Polly?" she asked, surprised, realising, now that she had time to, the extraordinary mystery of everything, and especially of the recent chase.

Polly's hands were clasped, and there was still a deep dread in her eyes.

"You mustn't ask me, really you mustn't," she said. "I know that really I owe you an explanation for all this, but, Babs, I can't, I dare not, speak!"

Barbara Redfern shook her head.

"It's all most mysterious, Polly," she murmured. "Don't you think it would be better if I knew?"

"No, no, I mustn't tell you!" sobbed Polly, tears in her eyes now. "If only I could, I could—I only I could explain everything! But I can't—I dare not!"

Polly was sobbing, with her face covered by her hands, and it was evident that the fear, excitement, and the exhaustion had got the better of her.

Babs was wondering now.

Where were Polly's father and mother?

She had never heard the girl so much as mention them openly, although she knew that a father existed, for had she not heard Babs—when sneering the word "daddy" in the study?

It was all very mysterious and somewhat like a dream.

Strange that so much mystery should lurk near this lovely scene! The high reeds, the softly-running river, the clear depths with the waving and coloury grasses seen beneath the surface of the stream.

All was so peaceful, and yet—

What fear lurked so near to Polly—what threat did she seek to avoid?

It last Polly looked up.

Her face was colourless, and her little shoulders were still shaking with subdued sobbing.

"Hadn't we better be going, Babs?" she whispered. "Is it safe now?"

Babs laughed into Polly's eyes.

"One day, Polly," she cried, "you'll tell me, and we'll soon settle all this!"

"If only we could!" murmured Polly. Babs leapt to her place, grasped the pole, and began punting along.

She went carefully, and as she drifted along she scanned the banks for any sign of any suspicious-looking people.

But the banks of the River Sark were deserted.

There was a short cut to Rose Way that Babs knew—a "right of way" across a cornfield and then into the lane.

It would be the safest course to take.

She poked towards the bank, helped Polly out, and, deciding that she would write a note to tell the fowler that she had made use of his punt, she drew Polly on to the river-path and into the cornfield.

They crossed it without mishap, came to the lane, and outside Clematis Cottage they paused.

Polly seemed to have regained her courage now, and there was relief in her eyes.

Suddenly she caught at Babs' hand.

"Babs," she whispered, "promise me that you will breathe nothing of this! Oh, do promise!"

The SCHOOL FRIEND.—No. 230.

Barbara Redfern's eyes were smiling, though a little strangely.

"It shall be a secret, Polly, as you wish it," she answered. "A secret between you and me."

As she spoke there came a rustling sound, and Babs looked about her, but there was no sign of a solitary person.

"Thank you—thank you!" murmured Polly.

The next moment she turned, and was speeding into the little garden as though those strange people were still in pursuit.

Babs walked wonderingly away. As she did so, from the lush grasses nigh to the road, rose the slim figure of Marcia Loftus!

There was a smile on her thin lips.

"What a story for me to tell the Fourth!" she muttered. "What a jolly little mystery story! Ha, ha, ha!"

A Lace Handkerchief!

"If only I could help Polly Vane! If only I could do something to make her happier!"

It was a phrase that Barbara Redfern had spoken many times to herself lately.

She felt so sorry for Polly Vane, and she believed also that, if Polly would only tell all her troubles, that it would so simplify matters, and also make it possible for Babs to help her.

Why the people in the car had chased Polly, Babs could not guess.

Who were those people? Why had they raced after Polly? What made Polly so dreadfully afraid of them?

Somehow, Babs could not take part in the chatting and laughter that echoed about the dormitory whilst the Fourth-Formers prepared for bed.

Vaguely she was conscious of a strange look in the eyes of Marcia Loftus.

Babs did not fail to hear what Marcia was saying to Lady Hetty Hendon.

"They're getting as thick as thieves!" said Marcia's sneering voice. "Barbara Redfern went home with her to-night!"

But Barbara took no notice of those words of Marcia's.

She fancied that Marcia would soon tire of sneering at Polly Vane, for now most of the Form were inclined to be friendly towards the new girl.

But Babs little knew!

She did not hear those covert whispers that went on between Marcia and Hetty Hendon; she did not know that Marcia Loftus was telling Hetty what she had seen at Clematis Cottage, what she had overheard.

Nor did Babs know that those two girls had decided there and then to probe this secret to the end.

Perhaps, had she been aware of these things, her sleep would have been even more troubled than it was.

Babs slept but poorly, and she was heartily glad when morning came to put an end to vague dreams and alarming thoughts.

"Why, Babs," exclaimed Mabel Lynn, as the two girls began to dress, "you look quite pale! Have you had a bad night?"

Babs flushed slightly.

"I didn't sleep well, Mabs," she answered.

Mabel Lynn looked anxiously at her chin.

"It isn't usual for you not to sleep," she said. "You've no worry, have you, Babs?"

Babs smiled, and shook her head.

The dormitory was beginning to awake to noisy life.

Laughter and gentle horseplay often characterised the early mornings at Cliff House, and at this moment Clara

Trevlyn was doing her utmost to stir Bessie Bunter into consciousness.

Bessie was lying on her back with her mouth open and a seraphic smile on her face.

"She's dreaming of food, Marjorie!" laughed Clara.

Bessie grunted, stirred, but did not open her eyes.

The dream was evidently holding her, and Mabs and Babs, about to leave the dormitory, were perforce held there to watch the slumbering Fatima.

"What a lovely cake!" murmured the sleeping girl. "The largest cake in the world! And it's all mine!"

Her mouth was opened wide, one hand came from beneath the coverlet as though caressing that cake of cakes.

It was at that moment that Clara let a few drops of water from a water-bottle trickle on to Bessie's brow.

"Ugh Gerop!"

The fat girl stirred restlessly.

A few more drops fell.

"Wow!"

Her eyes opened, she looked blankly about her at those laughing faces.

"I sus-sus-say, you girls!"

The seraphic smile had entirely gone, and Bessie's face looked mournful.

"Oh dear!" she groaned. "It—it was only a dream!"

She presented such a comical picture that there was not one girl there but had to laugh as slowly Bessie Bunter crawled out of bed and mournfully began to dress.

"Come along, Mabs!" said Barbara, smiling now.

The two chums linked arms and walked from the dormitory.

Babs was going down to the playground, so at the junction of the stairs and the corridor where lay Study No. 4, the ways of the two girls parted.

But Mabs paused before going down the stairs, and smiled into Babs' eyes.

"If ever you have a worry, Babs," she said shrewdly, "you know you can tell it to me. Don't forget that!"

Babs smiled into her chum's face.

"I know that well enough, Mabs," she answered.

She saw what lay in Mabel Lynn's expression as Mabs turned and walked slowly down the stairs to where they hail lay.

Moodily Barbara strolled in the direction of her study.

It was all very well having other people's secrets to keep, but it was only human that she would have dearly loved to know what she had been able to tell Mabel Lynn of what had transpired last evening.

But there, the fact remained, she could not tell her, and it would have to be left at that.

Opening the study door, she recoiled in surprise at the figure she saw there.

"Polly!"

Little had Barbara expected to find Polly Vane in the study and at this hour.

She walked into the room as Polly spoke.

"Gave you a surprise, Babs?"

"You did," Babs answered. "I have never known you come to the school as early as this!"

"There was a very good reason," Babs said Polly. "I simply couldn't do my prep at home last night after all that fear and excitement, so I came early to school, when the gates were opened. I have done half an hour's work already."

Babs looked strangely at her friend.

"That business was enough to put anyone off their work," she said. "Have you much more to do?"

(Continued on page 605.)

THE DAY GIRL'S SECRET!

(Continued from page 600.)

"Oh, yes?" answered Polly. "But you won't disturb me, Babs."

She was turning to her work again when, a prey to a strange awkwardness that Babs had been conscious of on the moment of entering the room, Polly dropped the lace handkerchief she had been clutching in her hand.

It floated to the floor at Barbara's feet, and Babs bent to pick it up. As she caught hold of the fragile piece of material she saw something on it that positively glared at her—something in red.

It was nothing more nor less than a small crest, and beneath the crest were two letters—"B. W."

White faced and anxious, but making a pretence at doing it lookingly, Polly snatched the handkerchief from Babs' grasp.

The laugh that came from her lips was really the travesty of a laugh and Barbara realised at once that Polly had had no wish for her to see that crest or those two initials.

And Polly evidently had no wish to discuss the matter for she had seated herself at the table, and was beginning to work as though wild horses would not drag her away from her labours.

In blank astonishment Babs watched her bowed shoulders.

She felt that there was more behind this than she could actually understand.

How was it that Polly had come by that handkerchief?

It was not usual for a girl who lived in a cottage, and who was dressed so shabbily to have such a dainty handkerchief with a crest on it.

The more Babs thought about it the more she was convinced that a new mystery lay here, and that Polly had no wish to be questioned about the handkerchief, and one other thing quite obvious was that Polly knew that Babs had been surprised to see the crest and strange initials.

For as the night, Babs could find no explanation for this mystery. It was only one other thing which went to prove that there was not one secret but many surrounding Polly Vane.

Marcia Makes a Discovery!

SOMEONE was evidently burning the midnight oil in Study No. 3 in the Fourth Form passage, at Cliff House School.

It was quite a time since most of the girls left their studies in order to go to their dormitories, but there was one girl who remained up, taking advantage of the last remaining minutes before the vacating of studies became imperative. It was Marcia Loftus!

Marcia's usually colourless face was colourless no longer. Her eyes seemed large beneath the light as she bent over something that was spread out on the table before her.

With nothing better to do, Marcia had been killing time by reading that journal, despite the fact that it was two days old.

And, what was more surprising to relate was the fact that she had never found any paper so profoundly interesting.

At this very moment she was engaged inking a bold black square about a small advertisement that she had found beneath the "Personal" column.

To say that Fate had played into Marcia's hands was yet to be proved, but as she read that small advt again, further conviction was borne upon her that she had made an undoubted discovery.

And, in the advertisement, there was a most flattering offer of a reward.

"One hundred pounds!" she whispered. "Oh, what could I not do with all that money!"

It seemed strange that an ordinary schoolgirl could find an advertisement that offered a reward of one hundred pounds and have in her heart a hope of winning that reward.

But not so peculiar when that discovery in an old newspaper was made apparent!

Slowly Marcia read out what she had marked boldly in ink:

"MISSING GIRL! ONE HUNDRED POUNDS REWARD!"

To anyone who can give information which will lead to the finding of the girl described below the above reward will be paid. For certain reasons the name of the girl cannot be given, but the following description may lead to her discovery. Fourteen years of age, fair hair, very long; large blue eyes, regular features, a soft and refined voice. Would be shabbily dressed. Lily-shaped birth-mark on left arm between wrist and elbow.—Write Box Z, office of this paper."

It had taken Marcia many minutes to form a slowly-growing conjecture.

At first she had dismissed the idea, and had turned to another page, but she had been drawn back again to the advertisement, and slowly the conviction was growing upon her that it would fall to Marcia Loftus to send details of the missing girl.

And the crisp cheque for one hundred pounds already seemed to be in her hands.

Of course it was not entirely proved yet.

But the main points had been thought over and passed.

"The voice, the eyes, the hair, the features!"

They described one person and one alone, as far as Marcia Loftus was concerned.

And that person was Polly Vane!

The age, everything, seemed to tally. What wonder the eyes of Marcia Loftus glittered and her hands trembled as they poised, hawklike, over the advertisement as though it was not a collection of words, but actual money that she had only got to swoop down and grasp.

"It will be mine—it shall be mine!" She sat back and looked before her.

"The birthmark would be the certain test," she whispered. "And I'll see that birthmark—see it, and then—"

How her heart beat, and what a different Marcia, thought Miss Steel, when, surprised at seeing a light in the study, she came to discover what it meant.

Marcia had heard the footsteps, and the paper was folded up and out of sight, and school books were opened on the table.

Miss Steel's eyes showed her surprise as she saw that evidence of industry on the part of Marcia Loftus.

Marcia was evidently changing. Diligence was not one of her chief virtues. Miss Steel was decidedly pleased, and she actually smiled.

"You are the last in the corridor, Marcia!" she said. "Working hard!"

Marcia beamed, and had to conceal a sly smile.

"Yes, Miss Steel," she answered.

Miss Steel nodded.

"I am very pleased to see you taking such an interest in your studies, but now—"

She indicated the time, and smiled into Marcia's flushed face.

Perhaps Marcia's hands trembled as she put out the light, and followed Miss Steel into the corridor.

There was a smirk on her lips when she saw Miss Steel disappear in the direction of her own room, and Marcia paused momentarily prior to going to the dormitory.

The next moment she laughed softly to herself and sped above to find that already most of the girls were in bed.

Lady Hetty Hendon and Nancy Bell were asleep. Marcia did not waste her conversation on Babs or Mabs, who were chatting.

She undressed with most amazing speed, and stole quietly into her bed, and to Babs and Mabs it seemed that Marcia must have gone to sleep at once, for she lay as quiet as a mouse, breathing ever so softly and regularly.

It was not long before the mistress for the night came, and the lights were put out, and silence rested upon the dormitory.

Mabel Lynn had turned over and was sleeping, but not so Barbara Redfern.

This mystery of Polly Vane was beginning to prey upon Babs' mind to the exclusion of most other thoughts, and she was going over all of it again as one does when a fixed series of either hopes or fears get control of the mind.

If only Polly would speak—it only she would tell her all!

That day Polly had seemed more nervous than ever, had acted as though at any moment something of which she was dreadfully afraid, might happen.

Babs had offered to go home with her, but Polly had refused the offer, and Babs had realised that by some strange detour Polly had returned to Clonmatis Cottage. It was as though the girl was afraid of daring the way by the road.

Nothing stirred in the dormitory.

Just the sound of regular breathing, the monotonous ticking of the clock, and the beating of Babs' heart.

She was beginning to feel the fears that swayed Polly.

It would never do to give way to their hold, though, and she meant to fight them.

Not for one moment did she wish that she had never become involved in friendship with Polly. Just the opposite. She was beginning to value the companionship of the shabbily-dressed girl, and she knew that Polly had won the hearts of Mabel, Clara, Marjorie, Dolly, and popular Peggy Preston.

The clock ticked away, the minutes came and went, and still Babs did not sleep.

Try as she might, close her eyes as she did, slumber did not come.

—And there was another girl who did not sleep—Marcia Loftus!

She lay awake, thinking of when the great moment would come that should find her possessed of one hundred pounds of her very own—a small fortune!

Marcia's Clue!

"NO, Babs, I couldn't play another game of tennis if you begged me to."

Polly Vane yawned, and threw her racket into the hammock that was slung between two trees near to the hard tennis court.

"I'm so tired," she added. "Well into autumn though it is, the sun seems as hot as ever."

Babs laughed.
She was not feeling in the least tired, although she had slept but little during the last two nights.

Somehow tennis helped her to keep her mind off the worry that she had on Polly's account.

"All right, Polly," she laughed. "You have a jolly good rest in the hammock. I'll take Clara on and see if I can beat her this time."

Babs linked her arm through Clara's and drew her back to the court as Polly, taking the racket from the hammock, swung herself into the restful affair.

The quite warm sun of an Indian summer was stealing through the trees, and had it not been for the fallen leaves and the chrysanthemums, one would have fancied that the year was not so late as October.

But October it was, and the girls of Cliff House were getting in as much tennis as they could before the fine weather broke and the rain and the wind came to finish off the sunny time of the year.

Drowsily Polly turned on her side, one arm hanging over the side of the hammock. A few moments later Polly had fallen asleep.

She did not hear the cries of the girls as they watched a ding-dong battle between Babs and Clara.

Clara's superior skill had been making itself felt, but Babs had rallied, and the game was waxing most interesting.

Babs, lost in her desire to snatch at least one victory from Clara, was fighting gallantly amid the cheers of her supporters.

It was this excellent, almost unbelievable chance of making a certain discovery, that Marcia had taken.

She had come silently through the trees to watch the tennis, and, not much interested in either Clara or Babs, her eyes had strayed about her.

And Marcia had seen.
Her keen eyes had witnessed Polly getting into the hammock. She had seen how tired Polly looked, and now, wonder of wonders, Polly was asleep.

Her fortune had conspired to assist Marcia, it could not have stage-managed things better.

There was not a soul by the hammock, Polly was asleep, and now Marcia could find out whether or not there was a birth-mark in the shape of a lily on the left arm of Polly Vane.

If Marcia trembled, such a fact was not to be wondered at.

To Marcia, one hundred pounds represented a world of things.

And upon this discovery, the obtaining of that reward would most certainly depend.

Marcia looked carefully about her.

Easy as it seemed to advance towards Polly, examine her arm and hurry away to write the all-important letter, Marcia was finding that her fears of discovery were making it harder than she had fancied it would be.

She felt as though every eye was on her as she stole in the direction of the hammock; but in reality, there was only one person who saw her going, and on that account lost a hardly-contested game.

Somehow Babs had fancied that Marcia was taking an unusual interest in Polly,

and she was so intent on watching Marcia that she entirely missed the last ball of Clara's love service game, which also constituted the winning of the set when a moment since the games had been evenly divided.

Girls clustered towards Clara as Babs, stepping aside, hurried across the lawn and watched Marcia as furtively she approached Polly's side.

Marcia had not the slightest idea but that Babs was still on the tennis-courts surrounded by her friends.

Babs stole into the shadow of some small trees, and here she could see Marcia's actions with ease.

Marcia's sleuth-like activities were most certainly surprising.

She had crept towards the hammock, and now she was looking down at Polly as though fearful lest that girl should awake and find Marcia here.

And now, to Babs' utter amazement, she saw Marcia lay her hand on the sleeve of Polly's left arm.

The next moment Marcia had raised the sleeve, and Babs could see Marcia start, and she saw upon what Marcia's eyes were focused.

There, on Polly's left forearm, was a birth-mark in the shape of a lily.

It is true, Babs knew then the meaning of Marcia's quick intake of breath, the reason for her suddenly darting away in the direction of the school.

But Babs' suspicions had been roused.

Why, she asked herself, was it that Marcia had done this thing so secretly? What did she want to see that birth-mark for? What new mystery was this?

It was in Babs' mind to go and rouse Polly, to tell her what had happened; but, as quickly as the idea came to her, she dismissed it.

No good purpose could be served by unduly alarming Polly, and it were better to act alone where Marcia was concerned, for things so quickly spread about the school, and Marcia had ears to hear most any gossip that was going the rounds.

Babs had a habit of acting quickly in a crisis.

She saw Marcia darting back towards the school, and she decided at once to discover what was Marcia's intention, for, whatever that intention was, it certainly concerned Polly.

And there was yet one other thing!

In a flash Babs had turned and was racing off in the direction of the servants' entrance.

She saved moments by doing this, and Babs knew she had to hurry.

Alas for her hopes!

Marcia had hurried also, and when Babs came into the corridor, it was to see Marcia running into her study, and Babs heard the key turn in the lock.

It had been Babs' intention to stop Marcia, face her, and demand an explanation of this; but now she knew that such a course was out of the question.

What was Marcia doing? What had she discovered that had caused all this hurry?

If only Babs had known!

Strange Visitors!

MARCIA LOFTUS was flushed and excited.

The door was closed safely behind her, and now she was free to write that all-important letter that would bring her the reward.

Seating herself at the table, she drew out paper and ink and found the advertisement.

"We shall know your secret now, Polly Vane!" she whispered. "You are the girl they want; I am sure of that.

And I am sure also that you are wanted for something dishonest that you have done."

Now and with great care, she wrote the letter in reply to the advertisement.

How her cheeks glowed as she addressed the envelope and sealed it! When that was done, she picked up the paper with the advertisement in it, and, tearing the advertisement out, she bore that and the letter from the study and out into the corridor.

Down the drive she ran, and a few moments later the letter was in the box.

Marcia's gloating look suddenly faded, and a puzzled expression took its place.

"The advertisement—where is that?" she murmured.

She thought for a moment, and as she did so a slow smile passed over her calm face.

In her excitement she had no doubt posted it with the letter.

That would make no difference.

The advertisement had served its purpose, and it was not of any further use.

Marcia felt that she was walking on air as she made her way back to Cliff House.

And if her thoughts were filled with optimism, there was one girl whose mind was uneasy—uneasy for the sake of a friend.

Babs had paused in her study a while; but then, wishing to find Polly, she had hurried down the stairs and into the grounds, and she had been a witness of Marcia posting that all-important letter.

As she had seen the action she had realised only too well that the letter that had been posted must concern Polly!

There was a sinking sensation in Babs' heart. She felt that, from the distance, some grave danger was coming towards her friend—and what that danger was she could not foresee.

Coming into the drive, she watched Marcia re-enter the school building; and, gloomy and a prey to worry, Babs walked slowly down the drive.

She had almost come abreast of where Polly had been seated, when something on the gravel of the drive attracted her notice.

Babs saw at once what it was, and now she bent and picked it up, wondering who had dropped it.

Instinctively she read what was written there, and as she read—as she saw those particulars; the offer of a one hundred pounds reward—a cry came to her lips.

"Polly! It's Polly!" she whispered. "It must be Polly Vane!"

And now the colour drained from her cheeks, for she had become conscious of Marcia's urgency, of Marcia's flushed face.

Babs could see it all now. She saw Marcia's anxiety to win that reward. That keenness to see the mark on Polly's arm had been to ascertain if that birthmark was there.

"Oh, what can I do? What can I do?"

Frankly she thought; but, try as she might, she could not determine what she should do.

Mystery was being piled upon mystery. This advertisement added to the problem of Polly and the strange happenings that had occurred with Polly's coming to Cliff House!

What was it? Polly must be told—told quickly!

Babs turned and looked in the direction of the hammock.

It was empty.

The next moment she saw Polly standing amid some trees, and she was just about to dart across to her friend

to tell her of all she had discovered, when a voice fell on her ears—a soft and nicely modulated voice.

Babs swung round, to see that a man and a woman were standing near to her.

In that instant she realised that they were well-dressed people; but those eyes that glanced into her own were not altogether kindly.

It was the woman who was looking at Babs, and the woman had spoken. The man seemed to be looking about the grounds and up at the school with evident interest.

"My dear child, could you tell me if permission is given to go over this school?" said the woman softly.

Babs flushed, but why she flushed she could not tell.

"I do not think that there would be any difficulty, but you would have to see Miss Primrose," answered Babs.

"Of course," came that soft voice again. "But I don't know where the headmistress is to be found. And I want to see her. I have a daughter of your own age, and this would be an excellent school for her to come to."

Somehow Babs did not like the look of the woman's face, and there was too much of a purr in that evenly modulated voice.

The man—middle-aged, tall, slender, and dark—appeared to be silent in the matter, although he was looking questioningly at the lady he escorted.

"If you will come with me I will show you Miss Primrose's room," said Babs politely.

Inwardly she was longing to get this little duty done, for it was urgently necessary for her to see Polly and tell Polly of all she had discovered and what she had done.

"If you will lead—"

The woman beamed at Babs, and the Fourth Form captain walked ahead of them and into the school building.

Turning to the right, she conducted them to Miss Primrose's study, tapped softly on the door, and when she heard the "Come in!" opened the door for them to pass by her and make their own request of the headmistress.

Both the woman and the man thanked Babs with their eyes, although Babs hardly waited to see it, so keen was she in seeking out Polly.

Upstairs she ran and into her study, thinking that perhaps, as was Polly's wont, she would come here to find Babs.

But the study was empty!

Babs was just turning towards the door to go out into the grounds in search of her friend, when suddenly there came a rush of footsteps, a startled cry; and as Babs looked at the door in blank amazement it burst open, to reveal a frightened and white-faced girl.

Polly Vane, trembling in every limb, and with her eyes large with fear, was standing on the study's threshold.

In the Nick of Time!

"HIDE me! Hide me! For pity's sake, hide me, Babs!"

Polly Vane had staggered forward, and was clasping Babs in a desperate embrace, as though terrified to act by herself.

Her appeal was heart-rending in its intensity, and for a moment Babs was nonplussed.

Polly had come so suddenly into the room, and in so strange a manner, that Babs had been metaphorically lifted off her feet by surprise.

But one glance at Polly's face was

enough to convince Babs that there was some very real reason for this look of fear and these words that were spoken so despairingly.

"Polly, what is the matter? Why must you hide? Tell me—tell me!"

But Polly did not seem capable of replying.

Her lips were trembling; and Babs had never in all her life seen a face so pale as this distraught girl's.

"Don't ask me anything—not yet, not yet!" sobbed Polly. "Oh, Babs, where can I hide?"

As accompaniment to her words, footsteps sounded in the corridor, the faint murmur of voices penetrated into the study, to set Polly trembling anew.

Babs realised now that there was no time to ask any questions of Polly; there was only time to act. And act Babs did at once.

She ran to the study cupboard, threw

How sincere those glances were Babs could not tell, but there was something about this visitor that was not altogether oppressing.

What that something was Babs would have found it difficult to explain, but she felt an instinctive antipathy towards both the woman and her husband.

"This is Barbara Redfern," said Miss Steel, nodding in Babs' direction. "She is captain of the Form, and no doubt your daughter would soon make friends with her."

The woman nodded, and smiled again. "I am sure that my daughter could not have a nicer friend," she said in that purring voice of hers.

But it appeared that she was not thinking so much about what she was saying as taking in the details of the study.

Babs, watching her face, fancied that something had caused her irritation.



ALMOST DISCOVERED! Even as Babs was in the act of concealing the day girl in the cupboard, Miss Steel, accompanied by the visitors to the school, entered the study.

open the door, and, drawing Polly forward, secreted her in the cupboard.

Babs was almost panting with excitement as she stood with her back to the cupboard.

She had been wondering all along from whom it was that Polly wished to hide, and now, as she heard those approaching footsteps, she waited with an interest that she could ill conceal.

"This is the study of the captain of the Fourth Form. It would be your daughter's Form if she came to Cliff House."

Babs wondered even more now as she heard Miss Steel's voice, and she was utterly amazed as she saw who it was came into the study.

Accompanying Miss Steel was the very woman whom Babs had conducted to the headmistress, and with the woman was the tall and somewhat saturnine-faced man.

"Why, if it isn't the girl whom we spoke to in the grounds!" murmured the woman, her strange eyes filled with darting smiles.

And in a flash she wondered whether the woman had expected to find someone other than Babs here.

A momentary flush came into Babs' face, her heart-beats quickened.

Had these two people come to find Polly Vane—to search through the school for her?

Babs was beginning to be afraid of those keenly-penetrating eyes, for they were turned upon her now, and Babs felt that they could read her inmost thoughts.

They seemed to say: "You know something that we want to know—something that we mean to find out."

It was only natural that, served up to help Polly as she was, she should feel like this.

Usually Babs was a model of composure under the most trying conditions; but now she felt awkward, ill at ease.

"And what nice cupboards the studies have!"

The woman's words seemed to thunder in Babs' brain and instinctively she

stepped back in the direction of the cupboard.

Whether these people were searching for Polly or not made not the slightest difference. To find Polly in the cupboard would mean explanations, and those explanations might lead to awkward questions that Polly could not, dared not, answer.

Babs' face was white and anxious, and those eyes were so keen, so penetrating. There was terror in Babs' heart now—terror lest the woman should want to see the cupboard opened—fear that Miss Steel might actually open the cupboard door herself, and show how much space there was for books, clothes, etc., and, incidentally, show that pale and frightened figure who was concealed in the cupboard.

But Miss Steel made no movement, although the woman came nearer to the big place, what time she looked rather suspiciously at Babs.

Babs felt that she dared not move. To protest against the opening of the door would be to arouse instant wonder in Miss Steel's brain.

She was realising that the moment was approaching when Polly must be revealed—and what then?

The woman's hand had fallen on the latch. The next moment—

"Ah, you are here, Mrs. Ingestre!" The clear tones of Miss Primrose rang through the study, and, as a shade passed across the woman's eyes, she turned.

The tension had been almost too much for Babs, and, where she had not been able to act before, she acted now.

As the woman walked into the centre of the study, she interposed herself between the cupboard and this Mrs. Ingestre.

It was an unnecessary precaution, for it was patent to Mrs. Primrose, had come to conduct the visitors to another part of the school; and it was obvious, also, that these people felt none too much at ease with the headmistress of Cliff House.

Miss Primrose was talking animatedly to them, and now she was opening the door for them, and perforce they had to pass through it and walk away down the corridor.

And when at last that study door was closed, weak and panting, Babs fell into a chair, and looked at the cupboard door as though she hadn't the strength to tell Polly that for the moment the strange danger had passed.

Only a second kept her in the chair. The next moment, springing to her feet, she ran to the study door, locked it, and then released Polly from her temporary prison.

"Have they gone?" Polly's eyes were wells of terror, and she was looking about the study as though she expected to see some figure materialise itself from the shadows.

Babs was slowly recovering herself. "Phew!" she whispered. "But that cupboard door was nearly opened, Polly!"

"Polly trembled. "They nearly found me," she breathed.

Babs nodded. "Nearly, but not quite," she laughed, seeking to put Polly at her ease. "But why should you have been afraid? They were only the parents of a new girl who is coming here."

Babs looked intently into Polly's face as she spoke.

Polly's lips were trembling. "That's what they said," she murmured. "It was not true! They came here for a special purpose, Babs."

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"What special purpose, Polly?" asked Babs, wondering.

"To find me," answered Polly at once. "That was why they came."

"But, Polly, how—how do you know that?"

Babs was frankly amazed. The next moment Polly had sunk into the chair, and, covering her face with her hands, had burst into a flood of tears.

"If only I could tell you—tell you all!" she sobbed. "But, Babs, I can't. All I can tell you is that those people are impostors—that they have no daughter who is coming to Cliff House. They came here for me!"

She looked up through her tears. "You will never know what you have done for me to-day—never, Babs!" she sobbed.

Babs knelt down beside the chair, and slipped her arm about Polly Vane's shoulders.

"There, there!" she coaxed. "They've gone, and you're safe, Polly."

"But for how long?" whispered the distraught voice. "They will try some other means, and—and I am afraid, dreadfully afraid!"

Babs did her best to comfort Polly, and at last she succeeded in stilling the sobs and drying the tears.

For some moments they did not speak; but when at last Polly broke the silence it was to look pleadingly into Babs' face.

"I must stay here until it is dark," she whispered. "They will be lurking about, waiting. I must go when it will be difficult for them to see me."

Babs nodded. How difficult was Barbara's position at that moment!

She was realising only too forcibly that Polly was afraid for some very real reason, and it was worrying not to know the reason.

Babs felt that she could have helped Polly so much more if she had known what all the worry was about. But there, Polly would not tell, and Babs was too considerate to question her further.

Babs did her best to take Polly's mind off her troubles, and she had almost succeeded when there came a tap at the study door.

There had been no footsteps to announce the coming of any visitor, and for one startling moment those two girls looked with frightened eyes in the direction of the door.

Neither of them spoke nor rose to open the door, and as they watched it they saw the handle slowly turn, as though, whoever the furtive interloper was, she had counted on finding the study empty, and had come to make investigations.

The next moment Babs was on her feet, and as she unlocked the door, Polly, overwrought, ran with a cry in the direction of the cupboard.

And the eyes of that newcomer were not looking at Babs so much as at Polly Vane.

"What do you want, Marcia?" Babs did not conceal the suspicion in her tones as she scanned Marcia's shifty face.

"I was looking for Mabel Lynn," said Marcia, not in the least convincingly. "But I see she is not here."

The next moment Marcia had turned and was hurrying away into the gloom.

Babs stood there, a prey to apprehension.

What if Marcia knew why it was the Ingestres that strange man and woman were named—had come?

Was she acting as their assistant? Had she come back to see if Polly was in Study No. 4?

It did seem so, and Babs was more

worried now than she had been since the commencement of this peculiar series of incidents.

She came back into the study to find Polly—a relieved Polly—who was condemning herself for having shown fear.

Some moments since it had been on the tip of Babs' tongue to tell the girl of the discovery she had made as to Marcia—the advertisement, and how Marcia had written in reply to it—but she had not the heart to tell her now.

Polly had gone through enough for one day, and the danger had been stayed; the thing would wait.

"Only Marcia Loftus," breathed Polly Vane.

The girl did not see what lay in Babs' eyes at that moment as Babs nodded.

"Yes," she answered, "only Marcia Loftus."

But there was a wealth of meaning in that "only."

The Shadows in the Grounds!

"WILL it be safe to go?"

Polly Vane was looking out of the study window, and she trembled as she spoke those words to Babs.

Evening was approaching, but it was still very light, and Polly's fears were not without reason.

She had argued the matter out with Babs.

If these people had gone so far as to come and visit the school, they would probably wait and try to intercept her homeward way.

"Look here, Polly," said Babs, "you stay here, and I'll go and scout around to see if they are anywhere about."

With a caution to Polly that it would be wiser to lock the study door, Babs hurried down the corridor and so into the grounds.

Marcia had watched Babs' going with not a little interest.

Indeed, Marcia had decided in her mind that there was a mystery to plumb in Study No. 4, and that there was no time like the present to solve it.

She had put two and two together, and had made more than four of it.

In the first place, it was decidedly unusual for Polly to stay so late at the school, and, in the second place, it had been obvious to Marcia that Polly had been very much afraid about something or other.

Ever since she had gone furtively to the study, intending, had Babs been absent, to make a thorough search of the room for clues, Marcia had been pondering over the matter.

As yet, she had come to no conclusion, but, hearing in the study door open, she had carefully opened her own door, and, peering through it, had watched Babs with cat-like eyes.

So Polly was still in Barbara's study!

It was Polly whom Marcia was watching, and Polly was still there, so that was all right.

And what part had Babs in all this mystery?

It was occurring to Marcia that there might be some chance of lowering Barbara Redfern's prestige with this matter of Polly Vane.

Therefore, Marcia waited, and watched Study No. 4 through the opening in her own door as Babs hurried out into the darkening grounds.

Some late tennis players were idling back to the school—Mabel Lynn, Marjorie Hazeldene, Clara Trevlyn, and Dolly Jobling, their arms linked, came through the shadows.

"Hallo, Babs! Where have you been all this afternoon?" asked Mabel, looking intently at her chum.

Barbara flushed.

"In the study, Mabs," she answered.

"Why?"

Clara laughed.

"Not book-worming, surely, Babs?"

she exclaimed.

Babs felt awkward.

She did not know how to explain to these chums of hers; but the secret that had kept her in the study was Polly's, and not her own. Her lips had to be sealed.

Marjorie Hazeldene unlinked her arm and shook a finger at Babs.

"I believe that Barbara is going in for some secret exam or other," she said, with a smile.

Babs shook her head.

"Wrong again, Marjorie!" she answered.

"We missed you on the tennis-court," exclaimed Clara. "We wanted a four badly. Blessed if I can see what there is in stewing in a giddy study on an evening like this!"

With a parting salutation in the form of a swing of their rackets, the four girls walked on, and Babs continued on her own way.

Marjorie was looking somewhat strangely at Mabel Lynn.

"Babs seems very quiet these days, Mabs," she said. "I—I suppose you know of nothing that might be worrying her, dear?"

Mabs slowly shook her head.

"Babs seems to have something on her mind," she said. "I expect it is someone else's trouble, though! You know what Babs is like; she's never happy unless she's helping someone or sharing their worries."

And Babs' thoughts as she hurried along?

Fortunately, they had not asked her what she was doing out in the grounds at this hour, and for that fact she thanked Providence.

Near at hand she could see some girls of the Third Form tempting Bessie Bunter with buns as though she had been a bear.

Babs passed along on her way to the entrance gates.

She had decided to work back through the grounds from there, and make certain that the Ingestres were not lurking about.

Coming to the gates, she looked carefully about her. But she saw no one, and now the cries of the girls had died away, and all was still and quiet.

Babs wondered if all Polly's alarms were groundless; but even as she wondered this she was conscious of a movement amidst the trees that let off the drive.

Stepping back into the shadows by the gate, she saw a man and a woman creep across the drive and disappear in the undergrowth on the left of the school.

They were moving in the direction of the road, and now that Babs had located them, now that she was convinced that they were lurking in the grounds to cut off Polly as she walked towards the road, she felt she could act in safety.

It would be wise to get Polly out of the school at once.

At least ten minutes must elapse before the Ingestres could work round to the back of the school, and Polly must make her escape through the fields that lay in that direction.

Babs was a prey to great excitement as she cautiously stole back through the grounds, careful to use the utmost discretion.

One false step might alarm these people, and then they would know that Polly was indeed here.

Babs was still hoping that they were

not certain of their quarry's presence in the old place.

Once, in pausing by a tree, Babs saw Mrs. Ingestre pass by her like a wraith; and how the woman did not see her was nothing short of a miracle.

When the strange intruder had gone Babs raced away by a familiar path, and she was panting with excitement by the time she reached the back entrance to the school.

Into the school and up to her study she sped. She could hear laughter coming from the study that Clara, Marjorie, and Dolly shared, and Mabs' voice came to her ears as she ran softly in the direction of Study No. 4.

Just a discreet knock on the door, and the key was turned.

"Quick!" whispered Babs. "Come at once whilst the coast is clear behind the school."

and the tree-tops were bending beneath the full force of the blast as those two girls prepared to make their way towards Clematis Cottage.

Polly was trembling visibly, and to her fevered mind the grounds seemed thronged with people who had come to prevent her escape from the school.

Babs could understand what was passing through the girl's mind, and she heartened her by catching hold of her arm and drawing her quickly away.

"It's all right, Polly," she whispered. "They're in the front part of the grounds. You're safe here."

But it was no easy matter to still Polly's alarms.

The girl had experienced terrors enough to have unnerved an older girl than herself, and she was a prey to worries she could not still, try as she might.



BARBARA'S DRAMATIC ANNOUNCEMENT! "Oh, Polly!" cried Babs, pointing to the road. "Three people have captured Marcia Loftus and taken her away in your father's car! Oh, what is to be done?"

Taking Polly's hand, she drew her into the corridor.

And as they disappeared, Marcia Loftus stepped stealthily from her study and followed!

Feet That Followed!

"QUICKLY, Polly—quickly!" Whispering the words, Barbara Redfern led Polly along the corridor and down the stairs.

At the foot of the staircase they paused for a moment, and the next turned off abruptly at right angles in order to get to the back of the school via the servants' quarters.

They were unobserved.

Most of the girls were in their studies or in the Common-room, and they did not see either a servant or a mistress as they ran out into the gloom to look about them with anxious eyes.

But there was no one to be seen. Autumn had brought the cold winds,

Out across the playing-fields the two girls hurried, with their heads bowed to the wind, which was beginning to blow great gusts.

And as they walked sharply along, that furtive figure of Marcia Loftus followed them.

Marcia did not give them a chance to get out of her orbit of vision.

Inwardly she was telling herself that the moment of discovering the mystery of Polly Vane had come at last.

Her eyes glowed, and there was a feeling of triumph in her heart, a glowing feeling of success already half attained.

Babs purposely doubled on her tracks, and made by a different path for the River Sark.

It was Babs' intention to find the fowler's punt, and to take the course she had taken before.

Such a way would certainly put any pursuer off the track—or so she imagined.

Through trees, through little glades, THE SCHOOL FRIEND.—No. 230.

spinnys and copes, they made their way; but there was one pursuer they did not shake off.

Marcia hung on their tracks. When they paused she paused. She hugged the shadows, stole into the darknesses and followed, always followed, wondering whether the two girls were going.

At last Babs and Polly broke from the shelter of trees, to find that the river-bank was before them; and along this they ran rather than walked, with Babs glancing anxiously behind her. For Babs felt certain that she had heard the crackle of disturbed undergrowth; but as she turned to look back the sound could no longer be heard.

On she went again, and now she had found the punt and was helping Polly into it.

Springing after her friend, she poled out into the midst of the dark waters.

The wind was making the water choppy, and it was beginning to rain, which helped to add to the discomfiture of this adventure.

As Babs poled away from the bank she fancied that she saw a figure break from the undergrowth and commence to run down the river-bank, but she could not be sure of this.

Fancy called up all sorts of imaginary figures, and no doubt this was but some creation of the mind rather than any actual follower.

The night shrouded them in, and how Babs blessed the fact that she was not being pursued, that had she been pursued, they had shaken their pursuers off, lost them in the dark.

Not so, Marcia's lynx-like eyes could still keep that punt under observation, and she knew the river almost as well as Babs knew it.

She smiled as she watched the punt turn into the backwater, for she realised that it would help her to catch up with it. The punt would make a detour and meet the broader stream higher up, and by the time it did that she could either be ahead of it or at least abreast of it.

Into the darkness she hurried as the punt made its silent way through the stream and into the broader flood beyond the backwater.

Now Marcia was into the shadow of the hedge, and she was filled with wonder as she saw the punt come inshore.

Where were these two girls bound for? She fancied that it was curious that they had gone such a roundabout way, and she clucked to herself as she watched them land and set out across the cornfield.

Babs was holding Polly's arm. Somehow, she still fancied that eyes watched them as they sped along, and it was this fact which prompted the sudden thought that came into her mind.

Once they were in Rose Way, where lay Clematis Cottage, she would stop and let Polly go on alone.

Anyone who came up then would have to face her, and Polly would have time to get to safety.

She did not tell Polly her plan for the moment, and she had no intention of letting Polly know the reason for it, for, if she did so, she felt sure that Polly would not consent to leave her.

It was just as they came to the lane that Babs stopped, and Polly, surprised, turned.

"Now I shall return, Polly," whispered Babs. "It would be better for you to go on alone. You will be safe now."

"Oh, Babs," whispered the white-faced girl. "I don't know what I can say to

thank you! You have got to go all that long way back, and alone!"

Babs laughed softly. "I'm not afraid, Polly," she murmured. "Now, you hurry and get safely back to the cottage. Good-bye, dear!"

Polly caught impulsively at Barbara's hand, and then, turning, she walked down the lane.

Babs waited. A few moments since she had fancied that the sound of footsteps had come again, but she couldn't be sure.

Scanning the fields, she saw no one, and looking down the lane, she could only see the misty figure of Polly.

Were all her fears imaginary? But at that very moment she realised that they were not.

Someone had risen from the ground, and was running down on the field side of the hedge that divided the corn-field from the lane.

A cry came to Babs' lips as she saw that speeding figure.

To her it seemed certain that, from the attitude and the position of the figure, it was someone who was keeping a watch on Polly.

After all that had been done to ensure Polly's safety, Babs had no intention of being defeated at the eleventh hour; and now, turning at right angles, she sped after that flying figure she could see vaguely in the gloom of the night.

Whether it was Mrs. Ingestre or her husband she could not tell yet, but she fancied that it must be one or the other of them, for who else would have tracked them in this fashion?

Babs' feelings can be imagined as she tore along, finding it hard to keep that figure in view.

Only moments were passing, but they seemed like so many hours, for each moment was filled with such tense apprehension.

The safety of Polly was in question, and Polly's safety had become very dear to Barbara Redfern.

Suddenly the moon, hitherto concealed behind dark and ominous clouds, came to give its light to the world below, and, as its rays streamed down, Babs saw a white-faced girl turn as she sped along.

Babs was just in time to drop down into the shelter of the hedge, so that the girl could not see that she was being followed, and, as Babs ran into safety and sped along, screened from view by the darkness beneath the hedge, she was in the throes of excitement and amazement.

In a flash she had recognised that keen and crafty face.

The girl who had been following was none other than Marcia Loftus!

"Marcia," Babs whispered the name of that girl she darted into the opening that gave on to Rose Way.

It would be safer to get into the lane so that Marcia should not know who followed after her, and, although Polly was in no danger from Marcia, it was Barbara Redfern's firm intention to see that Marcia was doing here, why she had followed them.

Distantly now Babs could see the lights of Clematis Cottage—and Polly Vane.

Polly seemed tired out, for she was not hurrying, but appeared to be too fatigued to go any faster than she was going.

Babs was still clinging to the shadows, and she was watching Marcia's caution with all the scouting craft she had learnt as a Girl Guide.

And as Barbara stole forward she became aware of distant headlights at the end of the lane.

A sudden memory of that car that had

stopped when abreast of Polly and herself came to her, and the blood drained from her cheeks at the thought that perhaps these were Polly's enemies.

She hurried forward, resolved, should her conjecture be right, to do her utmost to prevent them carrying out any purpose they had in view.

But, to Babs' dismay, the car was almost up to the cottage entrance, and nearly abreast of Polly, and there would be scant time to help.

The next moment an amazing thing happened.

As she saw the door of the car flung open, saw an elderly gentleman step from it, and the next thing that Babs saw was Polly in the arms of this new arrival.

She was near enough to hear that cry of delight.

"Daddy! Daddy! Oh, how glad I am that you have come! I have been so afraid—so very afraid!"

"Beryl, darling!"

Babs recoiled in amazement.

She had never expected this—never. As here was a well-dressed man and an expensive car, and Polly wasn't really Polly at all—her real name was Beryl!

This was indeed "mystery upon mystery!"

Babs could see how changed Polly's expression had become.

The fear had gone now that she was in the sheltering arms of her father.

He was looking down into that face with a wealth of affection, and anxiety as well.

"You will have to be brave, darling," Babs heard him say. "It may not be long, but can't you trust my little girl to be brave, can't it?"

He was leading her tenderly through the little gate now, and the echo of their feet came back to Babs' ears.

She could see them no longer, and she began to wonder what Marcia had seen, if she had overheard the conversation between father and daughter.

There was an angry look in Barbara's eyes now that she thought of that sneaking figure.

Marcia had helped to add to the mystery of the night, and Babs was asking herself what right had Marcia to sneak after them and eavesdrop in this fashion.

It was no easy matter to understand all this. Why was Polly at Cliff House under an assumed name? Why was she living in this tiny cottage when her father was obviously rich?

They were questions that Babs could not find the answers to as she hung back in the shadows, too surprised to return to the school although she felt that her guardianship of Polly, as she still had to think of her, was over for the moment.

There could be no danger to the girl now that her father was here.

Where was Marcia?

Babs looked keenly about her, and as she did so, she saw that white and cunning face looking through the hedge.

Babs shrank back into the darkness beneath the trees, and now, as she watched, Marcia came stealing through a gap in the hedge.

What was she about to do?

Babs' heart was beating fast, and she thanked Providence for the fact that she had stayed to make sure of Marcia's movements.

Furtively Marcia was creeping across the lane in the direction of Clematis Cottage.

With svelt cunning, Marcia had stolen into the garden, and, crossing the road, Babs watched her carefully.

Marcia had evidently come to spy, but what her object was it was difficult to gauge.

Babs wondered if she ought to follow and tell Marcia how despicable such an action was, but, on second thoughts, she fancied that it were wiser to match cunning with cunning, so she waited and watched.

Marcia had stolen towards one of the little windows, and as Babs watched, her heart thumping with indignation, she saw Marcia endeavouring to peer through the window.

Apparently the girl could not see into the room, for she had turned back and walked behind the cottage, as though intending to investigate there.

Babs waited!
She fancied that she heard sounds in the lane, but so much had happened that she could not convince herself that the sounds were real. There was fancy and mystery abroad in the night, and everything was conspiring to make Babs feel that this was all a dream and not real at all.

It seemed that Polly was playing a part, just as Marcia was playing one now!

Marcia's figure, revealed by the moonlight, could be seen stealing round the cottage, and she was coming back down the path, as though abandoning hope of discovering anything further.

The night seemed filled with sound, the rustle of leaves flung about in the wind, the creak of the boughs above Babs' head.

Babs saw Marcia open the gate and come into the lane, saw her go towards the car and examine it carefully.

She had barely had time to bend over it when something happened that Babs had never expected.

Two figures came rushing from the concealment of the darkness.

One was a woman and the other was a man, and Babs felt sure that it must be the Ingrestes.

Before Babs had even time to cry out, let alone act, the woman had wound a veil about Marcia's head, firm hands had picked the girl up and borne her into

the car, and a third figure, springing into the car, had started the engine, and the car was being turned.

Barbara's surprise had gone.
In a flash she realised what had happened.

Polly's enemies had taken Marcia for her, and Marcia was now their captive!

Marcia Loftus—instead of Polly Vane! Her own mysterious actions had been responsible for this, but, after all, Marcia was a Cliff House girl and fellow Fourth-Former, and something must be done.

Babs darted forward, a cry on her lips, but, even as she did so the car, gathering momentum, sped away, and Babs was left standing in the lane watching it go.

Marcia was a captive, taken prisoner by people whom Polly had described as being desperate. Oh, what was to be done? What could be done?

Babs turned frantically to the gate, and, throwing it open, ran up the little path that led to the cottage.

"Polly! Polly!" she cried. "Quick, Polly!"

Her cry was evidently heard, for the cottage door was opened and Polly herself came to the threshold of the cottage.

She was holding a lamp in her left hand, and as the rays fell on Babs, and she recognised her, the colour faded from Polly's cheeks.

"What is it, Babs? What has happened? Why are you here?" she cried, amazed.

Babs pointed to the road.
"Oh, Polly!" she cried. "I saw you meet your father, and then Marcia Loftus came into the lane! She had been following us, why, I do not know; but now—now three people have captured her, taking her for yourself, and they have taken her in your father's car! Oh, what is to be done?"

Polly seemed to be unable to speak.
Babs caught at her disengaged hand, and clung to it.

"There is some mystery here, Polly!" she cried. "And you can solve it! You can save Marcia! You must save her!"

Tears had welled into Polly's eyes—tears of hopelessness.

"Oh, Babs," she moaned, "I can't—I can't! My lips are sealed! I can't tell you, and—and I do not know what can be done! It is terrible—terrible!"

The next moment, as though a prey to some abiding fear, Polly turned and ran sobbing into the garden of the cottage.

Babs did not wait.
Turning, she sped down the Friarale Road in the direction of the school, and fear for Marcia's safety gave her wings.

Her every thought was devoted to Marcia now. Much as she despised Marcia for the part she had played, she could not leave the girl to any dangerous fate.

Many were the plans that were formulating in Babs' brain.

She would tell Miss Primrose—rouse the school.

But there was no need, for, as she came abreast of the school gates she recoiled in amazement.

Marcia herself was entering the grounds, and on Marcia's cunning face there was a look that did not bode well for Polly.

Where had Marcia been taken to? What had Marcia told to those enemies of the mysterious Polly?

Those were the questions that Babs asked herself as she saw that furtive figure steal into the school.

What did Marcia know?

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

(Many strange developments in connection with the mystery of Polly Vane, the new "day" girl, will take place in next Thursday's magnificent new long complete story, of the girls of Cliff House, entitled: "The Girl They Doubted!" By Hilda Richards. Don't miss it on any account.)

Your Editor's Corner.

MY DEAR READERS.—Of all the girls one might term "mystery" girls who have arrived at Cliff House in the past, there has perhaps never been one so shrouded in provoking mystery as Polly Vane proves to be. Barbara Redfern is the last girl to poke her nose into other people's business, and well-wishers of the girl would not, in Babs' position, be rendered curious by having her adventures intertwined with the strange ones of Polly Vane, as Babs have been in this week's absorbing story. There is yet a lot to be learned about Polly Vane, as you will see when you read next Thursday's magnificent new long complete story of the girls of Cliff House School, entitled:

"THE GIRL THEY DOUBTED!"

By Hilda Richards.

Why should Polly seem to be so poor, when Babs has good reason to believe that she has rich parents? Why is she masquerading under the name of "Polly Vane," when there is such an excellent reason for believing her real name to be another? And—most significant of all—who are those strange people who, in the motor-car, who seem so anxious to get the mystery girl into their hands? What will be their next move in this direction? And, almost as important, what will be the next Marcia Loftus will take after what has happened to her on account of Polly? Vital questions all, and questions which are destined

to be answered in the most dramatic manner, as you will see next week.

It seems strange to think that such a charming and sweet-natured girl as Marcelle Ross could ever arouse the enmity of anyone, and cause such a person to direct an act of spite against her. An enemy of Marcelle! All readers of our absorbing new serial,

"THE LITTLE LADY OF THE LIONS"

By Mildred Gordon,

must feel, I am sure, that nothing could be more delightful than to have the friendship of such a sterling and golden-hearted girl. And yet what are we to make of the actions of the mysterious foreign girl, Hester Kampf? Does she feel the warm friendship towards Marcelle that practically every girl the little lady of the lions meets feels towards her at once? A very great surprise awaits you next week in this direction, when you will also learn a good deal more of school life at St. Jude's—Marcelle's new school.

There will, as usual, be another grand long instalment of

"IF HER SCHOOL FRIENDS ONLY KNEW!"

By Joan Inglesant,

together with a further superb number of

THE CLIFF HOUSE WEEKLY

Edited by the Chums of the Fourth Form at Cliff House.

There is one great item of news which I simply must not omit to mention, and that is that TWO NEW MEMBERS of

"The Schoolgirls' Own Library"

are on sale to-morrow. They are entitled: "The Fisherman's Daughter;" by Mildred Gordon, and "The Island Feud;" by Gertrude Nelson—a pair of stories which cannot fail to enthral you from start to finish. Make a firm point of securing both.

I must also say one more word about that wonderful production of ours,

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