



CHAPTER I.

AN EXCITING SOUND WAVE

"BESSIE! Look out!"

"Keep back, duffer!"

"Hi! Mind where you're a-goin'!"

a boy's frantic voice added to the sudden outcry.

"Oh, you— Yoop!"

Clatter-clatter!

Crash!

Bessie Bunter, the fat girl of the Fourth Form at Cliff House School, blinked about her in short-sighted amazement.

Quite a large crowd of girls, chiefly Fourth Formers, had collected about the woodshed near the porter's lodge, and were staring upwards. Bessie Bunter, whose curiosity was, next to her appetite, her strongest point, rolled rapidly towards them, with the object of ascertaining what was "up."

The short-sighted junior did not notice the ladder which reclined against one of the elms a short distance from the shed; nor did she notice the round, youthful form of Boker, the page, in the act of descending the ladder.

One of Bessie's ample feet collided violently with the foot of the ladder, and she jumped with amazement as both Boker and the ladder prostrated themselves before her.

"I sus-sus-say, you girls!" she exclaimed.

"Where's young Boker just come from?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Boker, unhurt but ruffled both in body and in temper, scrambled to his feet furiously.

"There you go, clumsy!" he spluttered.

"Eh! What's that, Boker?" exclaimed Bessie indignantly. "Why, I'll jolly well box your ears!"

"Pax, my infants!" cried Clara Trevlyn, the tomboy of the Fourth, stepping between them

laughingly. "'Tis sad to see such wrath in ones so young. Desist!"

"But he jolly well insulted me!" spluttered Bessie indignantly.

"She came along and knocked me off the ladder," Boker exclaimed bellicosely.

"Well, let bygones be bygones," said Clara cheerily. "Don't dig up the dead and buried past. Behold, Fatima! Herbert Wireless Boker has just finished putting up his aerials!"

Bessie Bunter blinked upwards through her thick glasses in the direction indicated by Clara's sweeping hand. And then she saw at what the crowd of girls had been so interestedly staring.

From one of the branches of the tree to the roof of the woodshed stretched two parallel lengths of wire—"aerials" which the enterprising Boker had just erected, with the rather unexpected climax provided by the blundering Bessie Bunter.

Boker had spared no pains to make his aerial of a business-like nature, for he had fixed "insulators" at the end of the aerials, from which points the joining wires passed down and through an open window of the woodshed.

A friend of Boker's had lent him a wireless set for a short time, and the enthusiastic page, troubling neither to obtain permission from the headmistress nor the Postmaster-General—two exceedingly important points—had commenced to experiment right away.

"Now then, fair Boker," said Clara Trevlyn, as the page, mollified by the attentions paid to his labours, was beginning to look very important indeed. "Let's see what messages you can pick up in the woodshed!"

Nothing loath, Boker led the way to the woodshed where, on a rough table, was set out his receiving set, at which the girls gazed, somewhat impressed by the mysterious jumble of wires, switches, "valves," and electric bulbs.

Bessie Bunter, in fact, began to bubble over with the new excitement.

"I sus-sus-say, let me have a go, Boker," she exclaimed, as the page importantly commenced to fix the receivers over his head and ears. "I'm

a dab at wireless—I once sent a telegram to dad in the City, about a remittance, and he got it! I may pick up all kinds of mysterious messages and things. Gangs of burglars nowadays send all their messages by wireless so that nobody will know about it! They call it broadcasting.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Look ‘ere, Miss Bunter, you clear hoff!” said the page emphatically. “I don’t want this ‘ere set broke by you before I’ve started with it.”

“Half a minute, Boker!” It was Clara Trevlyn who again interrupted, and there was a twinkle in her merry eye.

Clara had noticed that, on the table, lay coiled a lengthy piece of old gas tubing, which Boker might, or might not, have intended to use in connection with his wireless operations. The sight of that, together with Bessie’s fatuous remarks concerning “messages” and “burglars,” had suggested an idea to the joke-loving Clara.

She whispered a few words in the page’s ear, and that youth’s face relaxed and then grinned broadly.

“Right-o!” he said, dragging the receivers from his shaggy hair. “Let’s see what Miss Bunter can do!”

“Hurrah!” chirped Bessie delightedly. “You girls just watch me listening-in. You just put those things over your ears, and—er—there you are!”

“There you are!” agreed Clara, with a wink at her chums. “Come on, Miss Wireless!”

And Clara arranged the ‘phones over Bessie’s large ears. Perhaps even Bessie would have been suspicious had she perceived exactly how the japing junior arranged them, for between Bessie’s right ear and the receiver she inserted one end of the piece of old gas tubing. But Bessie was far too excited to take heed of that little detail.

“Hullo, hullo!” she cried, at the jumble of wires and switches before her (Bessie, however expert she might be, had apparently overlooked the fact that the wireless set was merely a receiving, and not a transmitting, apparatus). “Hullo, hullo-a! Exchange, please! I mum-mum-mean, is anybody there?”

A tittering arose among the girls, but Clara suppressed it with a warning look.

“Let’s get outside, everybody, while Bessie’s at work!” said Clara briskly—and as she spoke she pushed the disengaged end of the gas tubing through the open window of the woodshed. “Can’t you see you’re all standing in the way of the ether waves?”

“Yes, that’s it—that’s why I haven’t already got a message!” Bessie cried indignantly. “You make them all get outside, Clara.”

Needing something of an effort now to suppress their merriment, the girls trooped outside the

shed. Once outside, however, Clara hurried to the spot beneath the window, from which protruded the length of gas tube—the other end of which, of course, was in close proximity to the unconscious Bessie’s ear-drum.

Placing her hand round the end of the tubing and placing her mouth against her hand, Clara spoke in a low and altered voice.

“Hul-loo-ah! Is that Station Double X, One, Two, Three?”

“Hurrah! A message!” came an excited cry from Bessie within the shed. “Hul-loo-ah! What—what’s your message? Fire ahead!”

“Do you speak on behalf of the Chief of the ‘Conspirators?’” spoke Clara again, in the same low, strange voice.

There sounded a loud gasp from the inside of the shed.

“Wer-wer—what was that?” stammered Bessie’s voice.

“Ah! I recognise the voice! You are the secretary of the Chief of the Conspirators! Does my voice carry, Miss Grubbins?”

“I—I—Y-yes! I’m—I’m Miss Grubbins all right! Tell us all about it!” exclaimed Bessie, her voice quivering with excitement.

“It is good! We have robbed the duke’s mansion as arranged—”

“Mum-mum-my hat!”

“This is no time to discuss hats, Miss Grubbins,” said Clara, her voice deepening. “Restrain your feminine instincts! The duke’s golden plate, the family jewels, the precious water-colour paintings—they are all ours!”

“Mum-my word! Then—then you’re a bib-bib-burglar!” chattered Bessie.

“I am, of course, a loyal servant of the Conspirators!” said Clara deeply—and in a voice which, to Bessie, seemed very far away. “We have hidden the swag in the old hut in the woods near Cliff House School. Do your men know the place?”

“Y-y-yes!” cried Bessie, almost dancing now with delight. “I’ll get it myself, you burg—I mum-mum-mean—”

“It is well, Miss Grubbins!” replied the deep, far-away voice. “I must now ring off, as the Exchange are asking for more pennies! Don’t fail to tell the Chief of the Conspirators that I have rung up!”

In a second Clara had dropped the tubing, and the whole party of girls, almost convulsed with laughter, were rushing back to the entrance of the shed. There was a violent collision in the doorway, for Bessie, radiant with joy and excitement, was already rushing forth, the receivers cast, as it were, to the winds.

“Hurrah! I told you so—I’ve got a message! I—”

"What is it, Bessie?" asked Clara gravely.

But Bessie suddenly became mysterious.

"Never you mind! You leave it to me!" she said, with a wink. "I'm going off to see about something now!"

"But what about tea?" Barbara Redfern now asked. "It's already laid on the table——"

"Bother tea, Babs!" ejaculated Bessie.

"Bother tea!" repeated Babs faintly.

"Some girls have more important things than eating to think about, if others haven't!" said Bessie stiffly. "There's such a thing as saving a fortune that's been stolen from a duke——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The girls had to let themselves go at that. But Bessie, with her snub nose elevated high in the air, ambled rapidly away, leaving her chums convulsed.

CHAPTER II.

A DUKE'S FORTUNE!

"So this is where they've left the swag, as they call it!"

Bessie Bunter had taken a short cut—or what she fondly imagined to be a short cut—to the disused hut in Friardale Woods. Little did she know that a small party of girls had, setting off shortly after her, taken a short cut that really was short, and had reached and left the hut just before her!

Bessie blinked eagerly around, and then she literally jumped for joy. There, in a corner among a lot of old brushwood, lay a well-filled, bulging sack!

"The duke's golden plate, and—and things!" she gasped excitedly. "My wuw-wuw-word! I ought to be a lady detective, or something! Fancy me taking the message in such great style!"

The bag was well tied at the mouth, and Bessie dragged it into the centre of the shed. Something rattled even as she let it sag down, and Bessie's eyes gleamed triumphantly.

"It's the old duke's property, right enough!" she muttered. "What had I better do? Those—those bib-bib-burglars may have got that wireless message as well as me, and—and they may be here any minute! I—I'll jolly well drag it to the school at once!"

And, grasping the tied mouth firmly, Bessie dragged the heavy sack out of the shed and through the wood.

It was hard work to reach the lane at the end of the footpath, but Bessie did it with much tugging, gasping, and perspiring. And then came the long, long journey along the lane.

How Bessie's unmuscular arms stood the

strain she never knew. They were aching unbearably by the time the gates of Cliff House came into sight. Outside the gates stood a party of Fourth Formers, looking as if they were expecting someone—as indeed they were!

"What's that, Bessie?" hailed Babs. "A stock of provisions!"

"Grooh! Never you mind!" puffed Bessie, dragging the heavy and dusty sack through the crowd of girls. "Don't any of you dare to touch this! You'll get a shock later when you learn that I've saved a duke's fortune from burglars!"

"Is this the Duke's fortune, Bessie?" asked Babs gravely.

Bessie stopped to blink at the leader of the Fourth Form.

"How on earth did you guess that, Babs? I mean, never you mind what it is! I'm jolly well going to drag this up to the study, and go straight to Miss Primrose! I'm a girl the Fourth's going to be proud of jolly shortly!"

"Going to win the eating championship of Kent for us?" asked Freda Foote, the humorist of the Fourth.

Bessie ignored the question, but Clara Trevlyn, with a wink at the smiling, surrounding girls, came forward.

"These are the things we were expecting for our studies, aren't they, Babs?" she asked, prodding the sack.

"Leave it alone, Clara!" yelled Bessie frantically. "This swag—I mean this sack is mine——"

"Your mistake, Bessie—it's ours, a good share of it, anyway!" said Barbara Redfern. "We may let you have one or two things. Lend



"Don't you dare call me clumsy!" exclaimed Bessie indignantly.

a hand, girls! It'd take Bessie all day to draw this to the study!"

"Otherwise we'd let her!" chuckled Freda Foote.

Bessie spluttered as the girls lifted the heavy sack between them and carried it into the school, and she spluttered still more as Barbara cut the string that tied the mouth.

But Bessie was all curiosity as she peered into the interior.

Then her jaw fell, and her eyes gaped behind her thick glasses.

"All our things, as we said, Bessie," remarked Barbara Redfern calmly, drawing forth a large frying pan. "Your old frying pan, Bessie!"

"I—I—I—" stuttered Bessie.

"And your Mrs. Beeton!" added Babs calmly.

"You—you spoofers!" shrieked Bessie, even her dull brain beginning to get something of a grasp of the situation at last.

The girls chuckled merrily as Babs drew forth the articles from the bag. There were pans and kettles belonging to various girls, and the rest of the contents of the sack of "swag" were in the form of old books!

"I know—I know what you've been up to!" spluttered Bessie furiously. "You heard me taking that message and you deliberately left these—these things for me to find!"

Bessie blinked furiously as a great peal of laughter went up.

"Look here, I'm jolly well going to get into touch with those burglars again, find out where they live, and jolly well give their address to the police! That's what I'll do!"

And, with a glare that almost cracked her glasses, Bessie rolled out. But she did not go alone. The whole party of girls accompanied her blandly. If Bessie were to receive any message, only Clara could supply it.

Boker was not in the shed at the moment, or perhaps he would have objected to Bessie using his set for a second time. As it was, Bessie picked up the receivers and dragged them over her head. And as she did so, Clara obligingly helped—and incidentally inserted the end of the gas tubing again!

Then Clara tiptoed out, leaving Bessie to receive "messages."

"Hullo—hullo!" cried Bessie importantly. "Anybody there—anybody there?"

"Pennies, please!" sounded a faint voice.

"Eh? What do you say?" asked Bessie, blinking. "Is—is that the gang of b-b-burglars who—"

"Ah! That is Miss Grubbins again!" said the deep voice, sounding clearer. "Did you locate the valuables?"

"No, because it jolly well wasn't there!" said Bessie emphatically. "What I want to know is—I mean what the chief wants to know is—who are you, and where do you live?"

"My name you should know!" returned the deep voice. "As to my residence, I live at Cliff House—"

"Cliff House!" exclaimed Bessie.

"And in Study Number Seven!" went on the voice cheerily. "Fancy you not remembering my name, Fatima!" And Bessie jumped up now, and, spinning round, blinked towards the window, where Clara's smiling face had appeared. Clara was still speaking with her mouth to the gas tubing. "Do you mean to say you've forgotten your dear old Clara, who gets you out of bed in the morning?"

"Clara!" shrieked Bessie.

"What's that?" asked Clara blandly. "Are you there?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" pealed the girls.

"Kik-kik-Klara!" stuttered Bessie Bunter. "You—you were speaking all the time. There, there aren't any bib-bib-burglars at all!"

"Go on!" said Clara.

"Ha, ha, ha!" pealed the girls again.

For Bessie's expression was too funny for words. She tried to speak, but her voice failed her. The sight of Clara and the gas tubing, the other end of which Bessie now dragged from between her ear and the receiver, were too much for the fat girl of the Fourth. And the girls left her blinking and gasping, and certainly not in a mood to receive more wireless messages—from Clara!



"Bessie—here's your old saucepan!"