

THE
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The Band and the Bandits!

*A Delightful Story of the
Girls of Cliff House School*

BY HILDA RICHARDS



CHAPTER I.

A RIVAL'S TRIUMPH.



IN the doorway of the Junior Common Room at Cliff House School, Barbara Redfern halted, and Mabel Lynn, behind her, followed her

example.

"Oh!" muttered Barbara.

"Um!" murmured Mabel.

Then both of them stared at the girl who sat ensconced in an arm-chair by the fire. That girl was placidly reading, as she had a perfect right to do, but her presence seemed to cause some perturbation to the two who were standing in the doorway.

Barbara's blue eyes clouded for a moment, and she looked inquiringly at Mabel Lynn. Barbara and Mabel were inseparables, and there never arose a difficulty but Barbara looked to her chum for guidance.

As skipper of the Fourth Form, "Babs," as Barbara was affectionately termed, should perhaps not have needed guidance; but evidently at the



present moment she did not know quite what course to take. So she rubbed her nose thoughtfully and tossed back her blue-black hair.

"Just the very girl we didn't want to see, Mabs," she sighed.

Mabel Lynn puckered her brows and nodded in agreement.

"Nowhere else we could go, I suppose, Babs?"

"'Fraid not. Clara and Marjorie will be coming soon——"

"Coming now," added Mabel, as there came the patter of footsteps passing the corridor. One or two of those steps thumped rather than pattered, but they probably were the result of Clara Trevlyn's tomboy hop, skip and a jump.

A moment later, Clara Trevlyn appeared, leading the way, with her study-mates, Marjorie Hazeldene and Dolly Jobling, just in the rear.

"Cheer-oh, kidlets!" cried Clara boisterously. "Where's the secret meet——"

"S'hush!" warned Babs.

Clara halted just outside the door, and looked very surprised that Barbara should put her fingers warningly to her lips, and that Mabel Lynn should frown so darkly and meaningly. Clara was not a girl with the brightest possible understanding, although she had a heart of gold and the courage of a lion.

"What's up?" she asked. "Don't frown at me, Mabs; and what are you making that face for, Babs? You're jolly mysterious, I must say——"

Then, of course, the girl reading by the fire had to turn round, as Barbara, with a backward glance, noticed. That girl's face was not a pleasant one. It was thin, with mean lips and close-set eyes—a face thoroughly to distrust even if one had never exchanged words with the girl.

Barbara Redfern and the others of the Fourth Form had done more than exchange words with Marcia Loftus, and long and bitter experience told them that she was by no means to be trusted.

It was really most unlucky that Marcia should be here, for this affair of Barbara's was very secret. And then, wasn't it just like Clara Trevlyn to blurt out everything?

"Oh, Marcia!" grunted Clara, more or less understanding. "Well, we can go somewhere else, I suppose? What's wrong with your study——"

"Bessie Bunter's there," explained Barbara. "If we talk in front of Bessie we may as well have it broadcast, and——"

She broke off, and nodded in the direction

of Marcia Loftus, plainly inferring that Marcia listening to their conversation would result in the same publicity.

"There's our study," offered Marjorie Hazeldene, in her quiet voice.

"Yours, yes," admitted Barbara, and smiled. "But what about the toffee Dolly was making——"

"You leave my toffee alone!" retorted Dolly, of the round face and blue eyes. "It's jolly nice—or would have been if Clara hadn't shouted just when I was holding the pan. As it was——"

"As it was, it caught light," chuckled Barbara, her eyes dancing merrily. "At least, that's what I suppose happened, judging by the terrible niff and the clouds of smoke that were coming from under your door as we passed."

"It was Clara's fault——"

"Yours, you mean," scoffed Clara. "You always burn something, you do, ducky, really you do. It's lucky, in a way, otherwise we might have to eat the awful tosh you make."

"It isn't awful!" protested Dolly hotly. "Is it, Marjorie?"

Thus appealed to, what was kind-hearted Marjorie to say? Marjorie would not have hurt anyone's feelings for the world, but in very truth she could not pretend that anything Dolly had cooked had proved edible.

"Well," she murmured. "Well—er—you see——"

Wisely then Barbara sprang into the breach, just when Dolly's face was growing red, and Clara was getting into one of her teasing moods.

"If we stand here jawing," whispered Barbara, "we shan't get our business settled before lessons, you know. Come on——"

And Barbara went into the Common Room, followed by the others. Then they halted and four pairs of eyes looked queerly at Marcia.

Most girls would have taken the hint and risen there and then and gone somewhere else. There were heaps of places where one could read in comfort, but there were not many places where one could hold a meeting without causing undue curiosity, or without risking the danger of being overheard. But Marcia was not out to be obliging.

"Don't mind me," she said. "I can read while you jaw."

Anyone could see by the smile on her face she would do far more listening than reading.

"I suppose you couldn't read somewhere

else—just to oblige us?" said Barbara.

Marcia bowed mockingly.

"Quite right, I couldn't," she sniggered. "How clever of you to guess, Barbara."

It pleased Marcia to make herself a thorough nuisance. It was typical of her character.

Now Barbara might have stood that sort of thing, but not so Clara. Clara was of a more strenuous stamp. At once Clara became truculent.

"Don't be a pig!" snapped Clara.

"There's heaps of places where you can read. If you had any manners at all you'd go."

"But I haven't any manners," retorted Marcia, her eyes glittering and her mouth hardening. "And I wasn't aware until now that you were a monitress, Clara. I always thought—though I may be wrong—that this was a public place for all the juniors. You've got your own study; why not go there?"

And Marcia put her head back on the cushion, and started to study her book again. Of course, she was not really reading a line. What she was doing was enjoying the spiteful delight of upsetting Barbara Redfern & Co.; for she knew without the need of

looking round that Marjorie would be edging towards the door, that Clara would be standing there glaring and clenching her fist, and that Barbara would be thinking of some happy compromise.

"Better go," whispered Marjorie.

"Yes—I suppose so," demurred Barbara.

"But I do think—"

"No jolly fear!" exclaimed Clara hotly.

"Anyone but Marcia would have cleared out. We only want the room for a minute or two. Marcia never reads here in the ordinary way. She's jolly well overheard

your asking us to come here—that's what it is, the cat!"

At this accusation Marcia gave a start and looked up.

"My goodness, I believe you're right," said Barbara quickly. "Marcia was close by when I told you. She was talking to Nancy Bell, but I'm pretty sure now that she was listening."

"Of course she was," sniffed Clara. "She always is eavesdropping. And she's come in here on purpose to make herself a nuisance. I dare-

say she thought she could hide herself behind that chair, you know, while we chatted. Luckily we caught her by surprise."

A shrewd guess that was, as Marcia's frown showed, but it did nothing at all to alleviate matters. Marcia, if she wanted to make herself a nuisance, was succeeding, and since they could not very well turn her out of the room they had either to speak in front of her or to go elsewhere.

Barbara and Marjorie and Mabel would have been prepared to go there and then, but Clara still held her ground. Clara had the bulldog spirit.

"Are you going, Marcia?" she fumed. "I mean,


of course, are you going quietly?"

"I am going to stay in this arm-chair and read," answered Marcia, with as much insolence as she could compress into those words. "I don't take my orders from you, Clara Trevlyn. Talk if you want to, or else go. I don't care!"

"Oh, do let's go," whispered Marjorie anxiously, and took Clara's arm.

But Clara was *not* going.

"So you think you're going to sit in that arm-chair, Marcia, and read?" she asked, breathing hard.



ALL THE
DIFFERENCE
By Clara Trevlyn

The year's at its worst,
The morn's jolly cold;
There's—ugh!—porridge for brekker;
I've not done my prep.
French lesson comes first
(My worst point, I'm told!)
Mademoiselle's got a temper
And I'm not her pet!
In a few moments more,
Rising bell will be heard,
And I don't want to get up—
What's right with the world?

It's a wonderful day,
Just pleasantly chill,
And I'm eagerly waiting
To hear rising bell;
I'm feeling quite gay
And full of good-will,
And I'm just palpitating
The good news to tell;
The others don't know yet
What last night I heard—
To-day is a "halfer"—
What's wrong with the world?

"I know it!"

"Suppose we turned you out of it?"

"I'd report you to Miss Steel," shrugged Marcia.

"You'd sneak?" exclaimed Clara.

"Like a shot! Why not? I'm not going to be bullied. I'm in this arm-chair, and in this arm-chair I am going to remain."

Barbara caught Clara's arm and Mabel pulled at her girdle. They did not want their Form-mistress brought into their discussion; far better talk somewhere else—even in the smoke-laden atmosphere of Study No. 7—than risk a hundred lines apiece.

Clara shook herself free in her strong way that brooked of no resistance, and marched up to Marcia.

"You can have your chair," she said. "We won't rob you of that. But you're not going to get out of it; you're going to stay there."

"I don't mind. I want to stay in it," mocked Marcia. "Thanks awfully for nothing!"

"You really mean you want to stay in it?"

"Of course!" shrugged Marcia. "Getting deaf?"

For reply Clara jumped forward and grasped the back of the chair. She was a strong girl, and she moved that chair as though it had been empty. Marcia Loftus, surprised and alarmed, clutched at the arms and yelled, while Barbara, Marjorie and Mabel jumped back just in time.

It was Barbara Redfern who whipped open the door—and only just in time too. Out into the corridor went the chair and Marcia with it.

Bump! went the chair against the opposite wall, and Marcia Loftus' book went scattering down the corridor.

For just one moment Clara stood in the doorway, her anger giving place to triumph.

"You're still in your chair," she pointed out. "You said you wanted to keep in the arm-chair, so you're perfectly satisfied. Don't grumble, will you? And if you report us

to Miss Steel, I'll tell her you said you wanted to stay with the chair."

Slam went the door, the key clicked, and Clara, well pleased with herself, turned back to her friends. A very good piece of work she thought she had done there—oh, an excellent piece of work! Everyone, Clara thought, should be satisfied. Marcia had

her wish to remain in the chair complied with—only the chair was outside the room, and the meeting of five had got rid of Marcia.

"Now," said Clara cheerily as she perched herself on a table, "out with your merry old secret, Babs!"

Barbara Redfern looked at Clara Trevlyn and grinned, whilst Mabel Lynn chuckled. Even Marjorie Hazeldene had to smile.

Clara's way of doing things was perhaps tempestuous, but she got things done, and that was

the great thing. Perhaps it wasn't a diplomatic way, but the end, according to Clara, justified the means.

"Carry on, Babs," said Clara, swinging her legs. "Say on, sweet child."

"Oh, Clara," reproved Marjorie, "what slang!"

"Blow the slang!" said Clara carelessly. "Babs knows what I mean. Hullo—there's Marcia!"

Marcia it was, hammering on the door of the Junior Common Room.

"You just wait, Clara!" cried Marcia fiercely. "I'm going to Miss Steel—"

"Well, go!" replied Clara. "Good-bye-e-e-e!"

"I shall just tell her what you did, and you'll get a hundred lines."

"Splendid!"

"You won't think it splendid when you get lines, and perhaps gated as well for bullying!"

"Stuff!" retorted Clara. "You would not have the pluck to go. Miss Steel would know you meant to listen."

At this Marcia Loftus ceased to hammer on the door, and they heard her footsteps



"Are you going quietly, Marcia?" fumed Clara Trevlyn.
"No!" snapped Marcia. "I'm stopping in this chair!"
And then—

stamp off down the corridor. Marcia Loftus was clearly in a white heat of passion, and in that mood goodness knows what she might not do.

Clara, however, didn't care a "rap."

"She'll report you," sighed Marjorie Hazeldene. "You really ought not to have done it, Clara."

"Oh, stuff!" laughed Clara. "Let her rip. I don't care. Only now she has gone, for goodness sake speak on Babs and tell us the awful ghastly secret."

"Hear, hear," nodded Mabel. "Tell them, Babs, before Marcia has time to come back."

And there they stood quite close to the door, happy in the knowledge that they had heard Marcia's retreating footsteps. She might report them, and it might mean a hundred lines; but they had achieved their object.

At least, that is what they thought. They did not know that Marcia, after a noisy exit, had made a quiet, tip-toed return outside the door, and at this very moment was bending close to the door so that she could hear every single word that passed between the girls inside.

She heard Barbara's voice clearly, and there was a grim smile on her lips.

Barbara was "holding the floor," as Clara would have put it, and it was easy to hear a monologue where a discussion might have been confusion.

"It's the idea of a lifetime," said Barbara Redfern inside the Common Room, and she looked at the girls confronting her. "You've seen the notices in the town—that the local hospital wants funds?"

"It always does," Mabel Lynn nodded. "I wish I could give a lot myself."

"Perhaps we can," said Barbara mysteriously. "I've thought of a way—a really ripping way."

She paused then for that to soak in. Of course, it would not be the first time they had raised funds for the hospitals. Quite often there were concerts at the school in aid of charity, and once there had been a regatta. In the matter of raising funds this was nothing at all new.

"A concert?" ejaculated Clara. "Stale idea," and Clara curled her nose in disapproval.

"Not a concert," smiled Barbara. "This is something heaps and heaps better, you know."

"Let's hope so," was Clara's grudging reply. "I'm bored with concerts, the same girls singing the same silly things. No one wants them, and you'd find everyone would go out—"

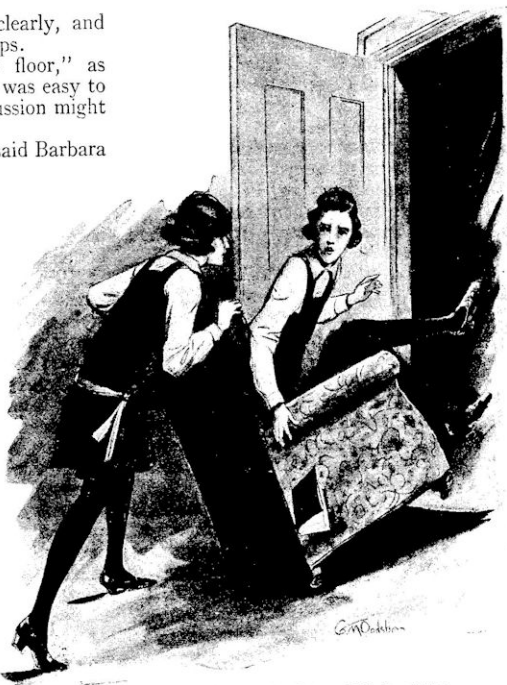
"Yes, but talking of concerts," broke in Mabel Lynn. "I heard that the Fifth are practising something—an orchestra, I believe. Goodness knows who's likely to go and hear Grace Woodfield whine away on a violin, or Flora Cann thump on a piano! I'd pay anything to keep away."

"Perhaps that's the idea," said Clara, with a giggle at her own wit. "Perhaps you know—"

"Perhaps," suggested Barbara wearily. "You might let me get a word in every now and then. I asked you to come here and listen to an idea, not to give an imitation of the parrot-house."

"Well, chat away," said Clara carelessly. "We can stand it, you know."

"A dance," said Barbara suddenly, looking at them in turn. "A fancy-dress dance."



—Out into the corridor went the chair, and Marcia with it!

A dance where everyone had to turn up in fancy dress; get Miss Primrose's permission, charge so much entrance fee and offer prizes."

"A dance!"

"And fancy dress!"

"Phew!"

Eyes shone then, and even Clara, who was prepared to scoff at any idea that came from a member of Study No. 4 looked really excited. Every now and then there were dances at Cliff House; but they were usually rather prim and staid affairs under the direction of Miss Primrose.

A fancy-dress dance, however, was something quite out of the ordinary, something that promised them heaps and heaps of fun. Every girl liked dressing up, and with a prize offered for the best costume there would be excitement all over the school.

"We could illuminate the hall with fairy lights," continued Barbara eagerly. "And hire a band, and get the boys from Lancaster to come along. Wouldn't it be fun? And parents and sisters and brothers——"

"My hat! Stunning!" exclaimed Clara. "A dance arranged by the Fourth in aid of charity. My giddy aunt, Babs, what a score over the Fifth!"

Barbara Redfern nodded and smiled with pleasure. That was how she looked at it herself—it *would* be some score over their rivals, the Fifth—and she really thought it an amazingly good idea.

"But not a word," she whispered warningly. "Not until we get things arranged a bit. Then I'll go to Miss Primrose, and book the hall for the dance, and make all sorts of arrangements. If Marcia had heard——"

"Um," nodded Clara. "We don't want the Fifth to get wind of it, or they'll book the hall for a concert. Couldn't have two things for charity running together, could we possibly?"

That was the difficulty which Barbara had foreseen. A good leader has to look ahead, and Barbara was one born to lead. The Fifth Form and the Fourth were great and tireless rivals, with a long list of victories to one or the other.

For all the Fourth knew Grace Woodfield might have arranged her orchestral concert in advance, so Barbara knew she must get a move on. A fancy-dress dance arranged by the Fourth would be a feather in the Fourth Form's cap.

"We could do a little ballet dancing—at least Marjorie could," said Clara.

"And you could sing a song," said Marjorie loyally. "One of your comic songs."

"Or a ballad," nodded Clara. "I'm rather good at ballads."

"Ahem, I don't think we'd better do that," said Barbara tactfully. "Rather a bore listening to singing in the middle of a dance. But exhibition dancing is different. How about a stunt dance done by Marjorie and Vivienne Leigh? Might call them 'The Masked Dancers of Mystery,' you know."

"Oh, how ripping!"

"My giddy aunt, yes! There's heaps of other stunts we could arrange, too," nodded Clara. "You know the idea they have of marking numbers on the floor, and people have to stop when the band stops?"

"And the one that stands on the winning number, or nearest it, gets a prize," nodded Barbara. "Splendid! Let's jot the things down before we forget——"

She turned to the door, and as she did so there was a slight sound.

"Look out! Marcia coming back!" breathed Clara; and she darted to the door.

But Clara was quite wrong; it was Marcia going, *not* coming. For Clara found only the empty chair, and, wisely, she took it into the room before there was any inquiry regarding it from a passing mistress or monitress.

She had only just got the chair in, when the bell rang for lunch. No time, then, to go to Miss Primrose; so the five of them, in the best of spirits, hurried out of the room. And when Marcia Loftus, in the hall, looked at them, they all beamed upon her cheerily, Clara giving her an extra pleasant smile and Mabel Lynn wafting her a hand-kiss.

"You wait!" muttered Marcia. "You won't be smiling soon!"

"Stuff!" retorted Clara cheerily. "It's worth more than a hundred lines to get rid of you for a few minutes, Marcia."

Marcia shrugged and walked away towards her seat, and the surly expression on her face caused more than one girl to wonder what was wrong with Marcia. Freda Foote, the Fourth Form humorist, thought it likely that Marcia had come suddenly across an unexpected mirror; and Augusta Anstruther-Browne, the rich and exclusive member of the Fourth, suggested that Marcia might have listened to some remarks about herself, and that, naturally, no remark made about Marcia could be pleasant for that girl to hear!

Barbara, Mabel, and the others did not let on, however; nor did they say a word about the dance, although during dinner

they more than once exchanged mysterious glances and made mysterious exchanges of words.

Very pleasantly, too, they smiled upon Grace Woodfield and Flora Cann of the Flora as that pair entered the dining-room. Flora and Grace smiled back and whispered together.

"H'm! They're hatching plots," said

Barbara anxiously. "I'll have to go to Miss Primrose directly after lunch, Mabs—"

"The very moment after, Babs," Mabel agreed.

Therefore Barbara was the first out of the dining-hall—a hurried exit that was destined to cost her fifty lines. But she did not know it then, and did not mind when she did learn it in the Form-room.

Barbara waited close to the door of Miss Primrose's study. As Miss Primrose had not yet left the dining-hall, Babs was pretty certain to be the first one to gain an interview with the headmistress.

Some five minutes later she saw Miss Primrose approaching, and

with her was Grace Woodfield. The headmistress halted just before the corridor and turned to Grace.

"You may come to my room in a quarter of an hour's time, Grace," said the headmistress. "I shall be pleased to hear your suggestion then."

How Barbara's heart beat! She had been only just in time. Grace was going to make suggestions, was she? But, then, Miss Primrose was to hear the Fourth Form's suggestions first.

But suppose—dreadful thought!—suppose Miss Primrose could not see Barbara now? Suppose she said, "Come along in twenty minutes' time"? Such terrible suspense it was then when the headmistress approached her study.

Miss Primrose was a tall woman with white hair and a face that was kindly, despite the hint of austerity given her by the pince-nez worn at a slight angle.

"Well, Barbara, you wish to see me?"

"Yes, Miss Primrose, please; only for a moment."

"I can give you two minutes, and that is all, Barbara."

"Two minutes will be heaps and heaps, Miss Primrose," said Barbara eagerly.

"Very well." Miss Primrose led the way into her study and switched on the small electric fire; then she seated herself at the desk and looked up at Barbara, ready to hear what that girl had to say.

"It's a suggestion for raising money for the Cottage Hospital, Miss Primrose," blurted out Barbara. "I was thinking that we

might hold a dance—a fancy-dress dance—and charge admission, and offer a prize for the best fancy dress and—"

Miss Primrose gave a slight start, and the look on her face caused Barbara to stop.

"Dear me, this is most extraordinary!" said the headmistress. "Most amazing! Obviously a case of association of ideas." Then she said, half to herself, "An excellent suggestion for which I thank you, Barbara; but, strangely enough, I have already made arrangements for a dance. I was just

PURPOSES I SERVE

By the Common-room Screen



I BELIEVE I was intended, by whomsoever placed me in this room, to serve as an obstruction for whatsoever draughts might invade the Common Room through the cracks in the door. I repeat, I believe so. So far as I can remember, I have served every possible purpose—except that!

If a girl wants something to dodge round when she is being chased, she dodges round me. If a misguided girl wants something to push on top of another girl, she pushes me. If a girl wants something to use in lieu of a blackboard, or an artistic girl wants a cheap easel, they both use me.

I have been used for a remarkable number of other purposes—except, of course, screening the draughts. The nearest approach I had to participating in my true vocation was when I was used as a fire-screen, when the fire-screen itself was being used as an imitation scrub-board.

But my most popular purpose I have yet to mention. It is nothing less than that of screening girls who wish to escape observation! Suppose a girl from another Form wishes to overhear a discussion of Fourth Form plans, she hides behind me for the purpose. This is because I have the advantage of being situated—usually—near the door, thus making her escape, should her presence be suspected, an easy matter.

By the way, I hope the fact that I am usually near the door does not suggest that I am placed there to keep out the draughts! I am there merely to be out of the girls' way.

Most of the Fourth Form information which Ida Jackson takes to her sister Connie she obtains by eavesdropping behind me. Marcia Loftus and Nancy Bell use me for the same purpose.

going to affix a notice on the board. Perhaps now you will be kind enough to pin it up. Here is a pin, and there is the notice."

Barbara took the notice and the pin. There were heaps of things she wished to say, but words would not come.

"It is very kind and thoughtful of you to have made the suggestion," said Miss Primrose, as Barbara still stayed on. "And I am glad that the idea seems likely to have popular support. Pin the notice in a prominent place, please."

Miss Primrose looked down at her desk, and Barbara, realising that to say anything else was futile, went out of the door. But in the corridor she halted to look at the notice, and as she read it she nearly collapsed.

In Miss Primrose's neat writing the notice ran :

"A FANCY DRESS DANCE.

"A Fancy Dress Dance, organised by the Fifth Form in aid of the local hospital, will be held in the school hall on Friday next.

"Prizes will be given for the best costumes, and there will be various forms of entertainment. All suggestions must be made to the organiser, Grace Woodfield, from whom tickets, price 2s. 6d., may be obtained.

"The Blue Domino Masked Band has consented to appear, and will play throughout the dance. It is sincerely hoped that every girl will give Grace Woodfield and her co-operating members of the Fifth Form every encouragement in their commendable enterprise, in order that as large a sum as possible may be handed over to the treasurer of the Cottage Hospital.

"(Signed) PENELOPE PRIMROSE,
"Headmistress."

That was the notice that Barbara read, and at which she blinked and stared and blinked. Mabel Lynn and Marjorie Hazeldene met her halfway down the corridor, but her emotion did not allow her to speak; she could only wave the notice feebly in the air.

So they followed her to the board, and there in company with half a dozen others of the Fourth, they read that notice through and through.

Clara Trevlyn's eyes seemed as though they might drop out, and Mabel Lynn looked on the point of collapse. There was the notice, and there was no mistaking that it said "Fifth" and not "Fourth" Form.

Clearly the Fifth had stolen a march on the Fourth!

"Oh, the awful cheats!" breathed Clara.

"And the mystery band! We know who those marvellous players are," fumed Mabel Lynn. "Grace & Co., of course."

"I'll give them Grace," cried Clara furiously. "I—I'll smash their instruments. The cheek, you know!"

"Can't do that," said Barbara shortly. "We've got to back them up. It's Miss Primrose's wish, and we've got to abide by it. Still, it's pretty awful."

Furious they stared at the board, and when some girl gave a short, unpleasant laugh they all wheeled round in indignation. It was Marcia Loftus who had laughed, and she stood just beside Miss Steel, who had wandered up to read the notices. Quite safe Marcia was then—safe from everything but their looks, and if looks could have had effect Marcia would have caused no further trouble.

How their splendid plan had leaked out the Fourth had no idea, and all that was necessary to complete their chagrin was the kiss that Grace Woodfield blew to them as she went to Miss Primrose's study to give more suggestions for the great dance—their dance by rights, but now the property of the Fifth, thanks, without a doubt, to Marcia Loftus the Fourth Form traitor!

CHAPTER II.

WHAT TO WEAR!

THE fancy-dress dance was the talk of the school. There were dances from time to time, of course, and they were quite interesting, for on occasions, boy friends and cousins appeared, and brothers and sisters too; but a fancy-dress dance promised to be far more exciting, and everyone's mind immediately ran upon the matter of costumes.

Everyone was eager to win the prize, of course; not so much by reason of its monetary worth—which was not known, but rather on account of the honour.

In spite of their chagrin, Barbara Redfern & Co. simply had to admit that it was going to be a gay dance, even though the Fifth were in charge of it. Yet secretly they had hopes that things might go wrong so that at the last minute their aid might be invoked.

Freda Foote, never able to be serious for more than a moment at a time, had pictured Miss Primrose, her hair turning whiter and whiter and falling out from sheer anxiety, begging the Fourth on her bended knees to save the school from the horrible predicament the Fifth Form's lack of organisation had brought about. She pictured for them, did Freda, a deputation of mistresses

implored the Fourth to do their best to make the dance a success.

Unfortunately that picture never became more than a figment of Freda's imagination.

"One thing," Barbara remarked anxiously when they were talking over things in the Junior Common Room, "it's up to the Fourth Form to lift the prize for the fancy dress."

"Hear, hear."

"Faith," broke in Bridget O'Toole, "an' it's me that'll be after doing it entoirely. I'm going as a colleen, as a beautiful Irish colleen—"

"My word!—who's going to do the making-up?" asked

Freda Foote, with her tongue in her cheek. "Or are you going to wear a mask, Bridget?"

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

Bridget snorted. Perhaps she was not exactly beautiful; still, she was far from being plain, and she pointed that out to Freda.

"It's you that'll be the laughing-stock of the place," she said wrathfully. "You'll go as a donkey, then your costume won't cost you anything."

"Or as a monkey," nodded Freda with glimmering eyes. "Then all I'd have to do would be to cover up my face and just give a passable imitation of you, Bridget."

"Joking apart," yawned Augusta-Anstruther-Browne in her languid way. "I do think my costume ought to take the prize. It's Egyptian."

"Oh, Augusta—do show us!"

"Where is it?"

And Augusta, to her immense delight, was surrounded in no time by a crowd of



"Oh!" exclaimed Clara. "The Fifth Form cheats! They've stolen a march on us!"

curious, eager girls. Augusta always had plenty of money to spend, and most of it was spent in self-adornment.

True she knew how to dress, and her taste was excellent, but money was a help. Girls who had not much money claimed that if they had they could look three times as well dressed as Augusta.

Still, Augusta held the money, and she had the taste, so her costume ought to be well worth seeing.

"Cleopatra," she smiled. "I shall look really well. I shall get a stuffed snake, or possibly a real one—"

"Ooooh!"

"Not a real one," gasped Marjorie Hazeldene. "How awful. You mustn't do that, really, Augusta—"

Augusta, of course, had no intention of doing that. But what she did like was to get them to look at her in admiration, to think her daring. Not but that she might have carried out her scheme had she been told she couldn't or were she dared to.

Augusta was reckless enough for anything.

"I shall have a wonderful jewelled head-dress," she explained. "Mother wore the costume at the Albert Hall—the Chelsea Arts Ball, I think it was, and everyone in the place was looking at her. There were photos in the papers—"

There was a general nod, because everyone had seen the photographs of Mrs. Anstruther-Browne that had appeared in the papers. Augusta saw to that.

"Well, if that's the costume you're going to wear," said Barbara, "you really ought to win the prize. The Fourth must win it, you know. It would be a tremendous score, as it's the Fifth's dance."

"Ra—ther!"

"Although," pointed out Clara Trevlyn, "some stranger might win it. Nothing's been said whether the prize is for girls or boys, or whether there's one for each."

"Well, what could one expect with the Fifth Form managing things?" Augusta asked in the lofty tones that she could so well assume.

"H'm," remarked Mabel Lynn. "It's quite possible the Lanchester boys will be coming."

Lanchester—or rather, the temporary building that housed some of the boys from Lanchester school—was quite near to Cliff House, and provided Miss Primrose sent the invitation there was no reason why they should not appear on the dance night.

"I've written to Jack Tollhurst, and had a reply," said Barbara.

"Oh good—he's coming?" asked Mabel Lynn eagerly.

"And Ginger?" asked Clara. "Of course, boys can't dance," she supplemented to hide her excitement. "But a dance is rather dull without boys to argue with."

Quite a merry laugh there was then; for dances, strictly speaking, were not organised in order that girls and boys might argue! Clara, however, could seldom keep off arguments on such occasions, Clara being a girl with the fixed impression that girls were better at any sort of game than boys—an impression that she tried unsuccessfully to pass on to the boys concerned.

So Clara looked at Barbara for reply, and they all did, too. For if Jack Tollhurst, skipper of the Fourth, came, he might bring a whole party with him, and a Lanchester party would liven things up enormously.

"Well, he's not sure," mused Barbara doubtfully. "Of course, he wants to come, and halt his Form as well; but he wonders what is the best way to arrange the invita-

tion. Perhaps it would be better to go to Miss Primrose."

"Or Grace—as she's the organiser," said Clara, rather bitterly. "Must appeal to Grace in everything about the dance."

"Pooh! Not likely," Barbara scoffed. "I'm going to see Miss Primrose—now, too."

And Barbara, who never left until tomorrow what could conveniently be done to-day, went off at once to Miss Primrose, and returned some minutes after, beaming so brightly that it was perfectly obvious what the result had been.

"Yes, we're to give a list of names of the boys we'd like to come, and the list will be sent on to their headmaster. If they merit the felicity of a fancy-dress dance—Miss Primrose's words, not mine," Barbara explained hurriedly as Freda Foote made a clasp at her chin. "If—they—what Miss Primrose said—then they can come."

"In fancy dress?"

"Of course."

Mabel Lynn clapped her hands and Clara nodded in huge approval.

"Three thousand cheers," smiled Dolly Jobling. "What fun! I wonder if I could go as Queen Elizabeth? I'd like to wear a ruffle, and I think there's a costume in the shop at Courtfield—"

"Too late," said Cissy Clare. "I've bought that already."

And Dolly Jobling's hopes all went with a bang.

"I've heard," Gwen Cook intimated mysteriously, "that Miss Primrose is going in some extra special costume. And you know what the rumour says about Miss Steel—"

"No, what?"

"Going as Joan of Arc."

"Oh, crumbs."

There was some laughter, for Miss Steel, the mistress of the Fourth, was not exactly the replica of the Joan of Arc the history books painted, or even the Joan of Arc one imagined.

"Oh, really," piped Bessie Bunter, the fat girl. "I went as Joan of Arc once. That's cheating. I made a jolly good Own of Jark—I mum—mean Joan of Arc."

"You ought to be a Falstaff," chuckled Freda Foote. "First to the feast and last to the battle—"

"Oh, really—"

"Or a Glaxo baby with pink bows," said Barbara Redfern merrily.

"Oh, yes—how splendid!"

"Do, Bessie."

But Bessie was going to do nothing so

stupid as that. In any case, Bess'e would spend most of her time in the refreshment room, so all she would need was something in which she could sit down in comfort.

Then, of course, everyone started suggesting costumes for everyone else. It ended when Freda Foote suggested that Dolly Jobling ought to go as King Alfred, who burned the cakes. Since Dolly always burnt the cakes she tried to bake, the remark caused a merry peal of laughter from all but Dolly.

But though they planned and discussed and argued, they could not get a costume better than Augusta's—Augusta's with the real jewelled head-dress of priceless worth.

"Of course, my mater will be there," said Augusta. "To keep an eye on the jewels—"

"And a private detective," murmured Katie Smith excitedly. "Oh, you must have that!"

"I shouldn't wonder," drawled Augusta, delighted at the impression she was making.

She loved to parade the wealth of her parents, which perhaps wasn't in the best possible taste; but it was the way Augusta had been brought up. Certainly the head-dress was worth a great deal, and but for the fact that her people would be in attendance, she would not have been allowed to wear it.

Augusta, however, could "twirl her mother round her little finger." Her father probably had demurred a great deal, but Mrs. Anstruther-Browne was quite as keen as her daughter that the first prize for the

fancy dress should be in the family, so her husband had capitulated.

"It isn't fair, really," sighed Dolly Jobling. "We can't all afford to have jewels—"

"But we can afford to have brains," pointed out Phyllis Howell. "The prize

is for the best, not the most expensive dress. Someone who chooses a funny costume like Influenza might get the prize."

"Perhaps," scoffed Augusta. "Time, however, will show. I rather think I know who is going to win the prize."

To which more than one girl replied, sotto voce, "Ahem!"

All the same, no one could deny that Augusta did stand an excellent chance of winning the prize. Still, there were several girls who hinted at possessing costumes about which they said nothing. Fifth-Formers in particular were being mysterious, and it was quite possible that they had, as the expression goes, "something up their sleeves."


This secrecy, however, only made things all the more exciting, and the enthusiasm ran fever high. Whoever won the prize, the dance was booked to be a

success, and it looked very much as though the Fifth would score, unless—well, unless anything happened.

CHAPTER III. THE REHEARSAL.

"THAT final?"

It was Marcia Loftus who asked the question, and she had a most



OUR LEADING LIGHTS
By the Cliff House Rhymester

Babs Redfern is our form captain
Of credit and renown,
A real good sort in class or sport,
She'll never let us down;
The staunchest chum that anyone
Could find throughout the town.

Reformer of the mighty Bard
Is clever Mabel Lynn;
In any part of drama's art
She's always sure to win.
The bosom chum of Barbara she
Has been through thick and thin.

A dainty lass is Bessie B.
Of postal-order fame;
But as a cook one cannot brook
Her right to use the name;
And though she's much too fond of food,
We like her, all the same!

No girl in grace could e'er excel
Gazelle-like Clara Trevlyn;
On hockey field she'll never yield—
The hottest scrums she'll revel in—
We don't need rollers on our lawns—
She's fine at daisy levellin'!

Now Marjorie Hazeldene's her chum,
She's great at needlework;
Most trim and neat, with temper sweet,
She's ne'er been known to shirk.
She tries reforming Clara T.—
Marjorie likes hard work!

Dolly Jobling likes to cook—
She does some things quite well,
Though Bessie B., in rivalry
Gives forth derisive yell.
But—here's a secret I'll divulge—
She can't make jelly jell.

unpleasant gleam in her eyes. There was really nothing at all unusual in that; rather would it have been a matter for comment had she looked agreeable and nice.

"Yes, final," retorted Grace Woodfield shortly—more shortly than might otherwise have been the case had Marcia not looked so unpleasant.

Grace of the Fifth was a tall girl who had rather an exaggerated opinion of herself, but she was no fool, and certainly not one to be gulled by a girl like Marcia, or to be intimidated by subtle threats.

"A couple of pounds means nothing to you," pointed out Marcia bitterly. "You've bought your costume, so you don't need that extra two pounds."

Grace Woodfield looked surprised. She had been about to walk off and leave Marcia standing in the corridor, but she stopped now, her interest compelled by the girl's last remark.

"What on earth do you know about my costume, or about my money?" she demanded.

Marcia shrugged.

"That's beside the point. I do know, which is what matters. I happen to know a great many things—"

"Finding them out," said Grace sharply, "by spying and eavesdropping!"

"Possibly."

"Then you're a contemptible little outsider," returned Grace hotly, "and I don't want anything more to say to you, or to do with you!"

She turned then and made to stride down the corridor. Marcia, however, plucked her by the sleeve and held her back, resisting all efforts to throw her off.

"Steady," said Marcia, her eyes glinting. "You're very high and mighty now, Grace, but you were more than ready to listen to me when I told you about Barbara's dance idea."

Grace flushed.

"What do you mean?" she fumed.

"Oh, don't pretend! I told you about Barbara's idea of getting up a dance. I gave you all sorts of tips, and you were only too pleased to act upon them, weren't you?"

This was so undeniable that Grace was momentarily floored. Marcia rattled on triumphantly.

"You can pretend, if you like, that you had already thought of the idea. You can pretend anything you like—"

"You didn't tell me that it was Barbara's idea," Grace said sharply. "You're trying to make out that I'm your sort, Marcia.

Well, I'm not. You came to me with an idea for doing down the Fourth. You didn't put it quite like that, but you said you'd got a ripping idea which you weren't going to give to Barbara, because you'd quarrelled. I bought it from you—"

"For ten shillings," shrugged Marcia, holding out her hand. "I want two pounds now."

Grace drew herself up. Never before had she experienced this kind of thing. It was barefaced daylight robbery!

"Go away!" she exclaimed, and waved her hand in angry impatience. "I don't want anything to do with you!"

"Two pounds," repeated Marcia, in measured tones; "that's all. I want a certain costume. I suppose it's worth two pounds to you that the school doesn't know the identity of the Masked Players?"

Grace started then, and broke her vow not to say another word to this girl.

"The Mystery Players—so you've raked that out?" she said, in surprise. "My goodness, you'd make a fine spy, Marcia; really you would! But tell the school, if you want to. Don't you think they already suspect?"

"Probably."

"Well, tell them, then, and be blowed!" Grace flared. "Tell them everything you can; I don't care. I'm certainly not going to give you hush money; that's what it amounts to, anyway."

"I'll tell them where you go and play, shall I?" breathed Marcia.

But Grace Woodfield had walked away, and that last remark was either not heard or not heeded.

With hands clenched and eyes shining venomously, Marcia Loftus stared after the Fifth Form captain for a moment, then turned abruptly on her heel.

Without the slightest hesitation, she sought Barbara Redfern and found her; but she did not go straight up to Barbara in an abrupt way. Barbara was in the concert-room with half-a-dozen other girls, trying the effects of various make-ups before the mirror there. In the most casual way possible, Marcia joined the group.

"Oh, very pretty!" she commented, when Barbara had altered the tone of her eyebrows. "That will knock the Fifth right flat. You're bound to win the prize, Barbara."

Barbara smiled.

"I wouldn't mind winning it," she admitted. "But what chance do we poor mites stand when you're competing?"

"None," sighed Freda Foote. "Marcia

will just walk in as the Three Graces—or four including W. G. Grace, complete with hat—and everyone will be carried away—in an ambulance!”

“Maybe,” shrugged Marcia, unperturbed by the laughter that followed Freda’s remark. “But I’m thinking of the Fifth. The Fifth will pull off the prize. Grace’s costume will beat everything.”

“Even mine?” ejaculated Augusta involuntarily.

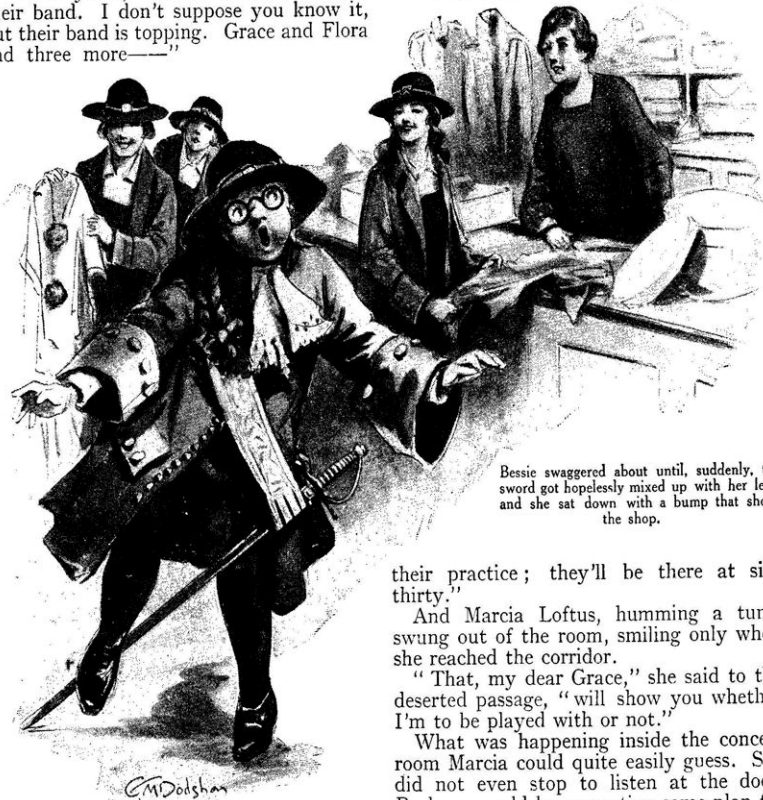
“Even yours,” nodded Marcia. “Then their band. I don’t suppose you know it, but their band is topping. Grace and Flora and three more—”

amazed. “We shouldn’t be like’y to miss them.”

“No, not here at all. Right away from the school. In the woods, if you want to know. In the old barn there; and they’ll score a giant success. Good luck to them, that’s what I say!”

At once everyone told Marcia clearly what they thought of her; but Marcia did not care. She just smiled in that unpleasant way of hers.

“If you don’t believe me, go and hear



Bessie swaggered about until, suddenly, the sword got hopelessly mixed up with her legs, and she sat down with a bump that shook the shop.

their practice; they’ll be there at six-thirty.”

And Marcia Loftus, humming a tune, swung out of the room, smiling only when she reached the corridor.

“That, my dear Grace,” she said to the deserted passage, “will show you whether I’m to be played with or not.”

What was happening inside the concert room Marcia could quite easily guess. She did not even stop to listen at the door. Barbara would be suggesting some plan for “doing down” the Fifth. Certainly someone would suggest their going to listen.

Marcia was right.

It was Mabel Lynn, though, who suggested going, and there was a chorus of approval when she made the suggestion.

But obviously they could not all go.

“Three or four then,” said Mabel. “I’m dying to hear what the band’s like.”

“Wish we could pinch their instruments

“I should say so,” chuckled Clara. “Any band including Flora will be pretty funny!”

“Screaming!” agreed Mabel Lynn. “Anyway, I don’t suppose you’ve heard them, Marcia.”

“Oh, haven’t I?” shrugged Marcia. “Well, there you’re wrong, as it happens. I have heard them practising—”

“What—here?” asked Clara, quite

or something like that," said Gwen Cook. Barbara, however, shook her head.

"Wouldn't be quite playing the game," she pointed out. "We can't honestly do that, Gwen. We've got to make the dance a great success, and if we spoil the band the dance would be a frost."

"Be a frost anyway with Grace's band," was Clara's opinion.

But that, as Barbara indicated, was Miss Primrose's "funeral." As she was willing to have Grace's band she must take the consequences.

"We might," said Dolly Jobling excitedly. "We might make up a band of our own, Babs. How would that be? Marjorie can play the piano, you've played the jazz outfit before now, and Clara's not really too bad with the banjo—"

Clara was most enthusiastic over the idea, and Barbara, too, was rather excited at the prospect of replacing Grace's band with one of the Fourth's composition.

It was so easy, too.

"They'd be masked and in dominoes, and no one yet knows who's going to be the band," pointed out Mabel Lynn. "What fun if we could take their place, and make the Fifth cheer us, and clap encores and shout for us, the band, to unmask!"

A picture that was to make any Fourth-former's mouth water, and there were literally shouts of appreciation.

"Oh do, Babs!"

"Just imagine their faces when we unmask!"

"But how about getting Grace & Co. out of the way? Suppose the Fifth come to talk to us—"

Such and other objections Barbara raised in her far-seeing way.

It would never do to have any sort of scene on the dance night, and what Miss Primrose would say if the Fifth started making trouble about the band—and the Fourth to blame—did not bear thinking upon.

"Oh, that'll be all right," said Clara confidently. "It's only a question, Babs, of working out the details, that's all."

"M'yes," said Barbara. "Well"—she thought for a moment and then, bobbing up, commenced to wipe the black from her eyebrows—"if we're going we may as well go. You're coming, I suppose, Mabs, and you, Clara—"

"Rather," was Clara's response. "Like a bird, Babs!"

"And me," added Bessie Bunter eagerly. "I'm a good judge of music; I shall be able to tell you if they're flat or not."

"Well you aren't, anyway," consoled Freda Foote. "You're anything but flat, Bessie."

And before Bessie had done pointing out to Freda that she had really a fine figure which was not of the skinny scarecrow variety, Barbara, Clara and Mabel slipped out of the way.

"Caution is the word," advised Barbara. "First we've got to get there before them, and then—"

"Then we've got to watch," nodded Clara. "There's just time if we cycle as fast as we can. They've gone, I know, because I heard Flora's voice a minute or two ago."

Clara was right, and the three girls scurried down to the gates with their bicycles and rode through them before Piper, the porter, had seen who it was. Dusk was falling, and actually there was little enough time before locking up and calling over. So, clear of the school, they put on a spurt and then cut off down a narrow path that led through the woods.

The barn which Marcia had mentioned they knew quite well, and so found it without difficulty. Very bleak and deserted it looked at this hour, and they carefully extinguished their lamps and rested their bicycles out of sight behind a hedge.

Mabel Lynn was given the task of sentry, while Barbara and Clara explored.

"The instruments are in there," said Barbara thoughtfully, as she tried the door. "But no hope of getting in."

"There's a hole in the roof," Clara pointed out.

"Not big enough to get through."

"Perhaps not—but big enough to see through, and that's what counts. Flora will be funnier to watch than to hear," Clara chuckled. "Give me a lift, Babs."

Barbara gave Clara the required "lift," and that girl scrambled up somehow to the roof. Clara really could scramble up anywhere which offered the slightest foothold. Of course, she tore her dress and laddered a stocking, but little things of that sort did not really worry the tomboy of the Fourth very greatly.

Perched on the roof, she edged her way along until she came to the point where a tarpaulin had been flung across a hole. That hole Clara knew by reason of the fact that one rainy day she and Dolly had scrambled through it into the dry seclusion of the barn.

The tarpaulin was dirty, but Clara did not mind. She pushed it aside and lit a match, which she held well down into the dusky interior. A flickering shadowy light

it gave, but a light sufficient to reveal the presence of several instruments necessary to a band.

There was a jazz outfit covered by a waterproof sheet, and there was the outline under a blanket of an instrument that wise men had called, amongst other things, a saxophone.

Who was to play the saxophone, Clara did not know, but it might conceivably be Geraldine Wake, Geraldine being a member of the Fifth Form who had developed musical tendencies.

Grace 'scraped' a violin now and then, and occasionally dabbled with the banjo. A banjo case was visible, and a violin case, too, so the band was likely to be a pretty mixed affair. No piano was in sight, but then, no girl was likely to drag a piano all that way when she could practise the pieces required at Cliff House.

Long before the match had burnt out, Clara had seen all that she wanted to, and she bobbed back.

"Anyone coming?" she called.

"Yes," whispered Mabel Lynn. "I think I hear footsteps."

Clara considered the situation.

"Can you two girls get up here?" she breathed.

There was no answer, but a second later Clara heard some noises which told her Mabs and Babs were making the attempt. The attempt was successful, and very soon the three were perched on the roof.

"Here they come!" chuckled Clara. "Now for the rehearsal and—noises without."

A light suddenly flickered below, and, peeping through the hole, they saw the band assembling.

"It's the last night, remember," they heard Grace Woodfield say.

"The last night, yes," boomed Geraldine Wake in her deep, rather mannish voice.

"But we certainly need a little more practice. Providing you keep your instrument quiet to let the saxophone give full blast to its beauty——"

"Provided the saxophone doesn't make a mess of things," exclaimed Flora Cann. "The important thing in the band is the drum——"

"Nonsense, the violin leads!" scoffed Grace.

"It's the banjo," broke in the quiet voice of thin-faced Maggie Day.

They wrangled for some minutes as to which should be the predominating instrument. Then Grace settled the dispute by ordering the rehearsal to begin.

Maggie Day picked up her banjo and twanged it. Grace found her violin, and Geraldine nursed her beloved saxophone.

Screech——

Twang, twang——

A horrible noise it was, and Flora put her hands to her ears.

"Goodness! Tune them up!" she exclaimed. "They're flat or sharp or something. The damp's got to them."

"Sound much the same as usual to me," shrugged Geraldine loftily. "All stringed instruments are toneless and devoid of sympathy. Now, the saxophone——"

"Bother the saxophone!"

SOME HINTS ON RUNNING

By PHYLLIS HOWELL, *Our Running Enthusiast*



To my mind, and to the minds of a good many other girls, running is one of the jolliest of sports imaginable. The delightful feeling that you have when you have gained your second wind is almost of being someone else—someone stronger and fitter, and able to go on for ever. That, of course, is if you take it moderately.

I don't advise any girl, unless she is wonderfully brilliant, to think of going in for championships. The girl I am writing this for is the girl who enters for her sports, practises moderately for them, and does her very best for her own sake, and for the sake of the form or school she is representing.

SPRINTS.—Fairly tall girls, with a turn for speed, but not too much staying power, will be advised to limit themselves to the 100 yards race, and, at most, the 220. There are other things for which they can enter, of course—the relay and similar races require sprinters. It is only an exceptional athlete who can hope to carry off prizes for both long and short distances.

Take your training moderately, whatever you do. Keep as healthy as you can by sleeping with open bedroom windows; have a cold bath in the morning, if you can stand it; don't attend stuffy cinemas. "Dieting" sounds a pretty awful word, but no girl need make herself a martyr. It means eating the simplest and most nutritious food to do you as much good as possible, and avoiding pastry, potatoes, and other starchy and "stodgy" things.

When practising for the quarter-mile, don't just run the bare distance, but practise 500 or even 600 yards. Just take it moderately until you can do the distance. Then practise with a sprint at the start, for the quarter always starts fast. Do this until you can finish easily at a more moderate pace. Finally, learn to sprint at the start, and also for the last hundred yards.



After that, of course, there was nothing for Geraldine to do but sit in indignant silence, nursing her beloved instrument, until the violin and the banjo were more in keeping with proper tone. But without a piano tuning was not easy.

"Ah!" quavered Grace.

"Flat," said Maggie. "It's Ah!"

"No, Ah!" rebuked Flora. "If it's 'A' you're trying to get—"

"It isn't!" snapped Grace. "This is it—Ah!"

For ten minutes they tried to tune, while the three Fourth-formers watched them joyously. It really looked as though there might be serious trouble, and even when they did settle down at length with some show of amiability, Geraldine shuddered at every stroke Grace made, and Grace shuddered at Maggie's awful twanging.

It was a slight hamper the violin being sharp and the banjo flat, but Geraldine reckoned she could carry off a little thing like that, and Flora thought she could drown them all into oblivion.

"Now," said Grace, in lordly manner waving her bow. "Now—'Tea for Two.'"

Then came the well-known opening notes.

But the following notes were not so well known—indeed, they were quite new ones, and were supplied by Clara, Babs, and Mabs from the roof. Clara imitated the saxophone; Babs the banjo; and Mabs the drums. The only thing they did not imitate was the tune.

At first Grace & Company were not aware there was anything wrong. They were too intent on the particular noise their own instruments were making to trouble about the general effect. Suddenly, however, one of the strings of Grace's violin went, and Grace stopped to repair the damage. Then of course, she noticed things.

"Stop! Stop!" she yelled. "It's awful!"

"Awful!" echoed the orchestra indignantly. "What d'you mean?"

"What I say—awful, dreadful, terrible! You're either all out of tune or else you're playing wrong notes. Stop, I say!"

At this they obeyed; but as Babs & Co., above, also stopped, the Fifth-formers suspected nothing.

For fully five minutes the orchestra wrangled; then once more "Tea for Two" welled forth, with variations from the Fourth-formers.

"Hopeless! Hopeless!" cried Grace. "It's more like torture for two than tea for two."

At this Clara Trevlyn could contain herself no longer, and her loud

"Ha, ha, ha!" gave the whole thing away.

"What's that?" ejaculated Grace.

"Hark, someone's on the roof! Girls, we've been joked Quick, capture them!"

But although Grace & Co. were quick the Fourth-formers were quicker. They were off the roof like a streak of lightning, and the only thing Grace Woodfield saw of

them was their vanishing forms amidst the trees.

"Go on—"

A medley of sounds there was, but Ba bara, Clara and Mabel Lynn did not wait to hear them. They had attended one rehearsal of the band, and if that rehearsal were anything like what the real performance was destined to be, then it would be worth watching.

Like hares, Babs, Mabs and Clara ran, grasped their machines, and without bothering to light lamps, pedalled back to Cliff House.

And that evening, many and many a peal of laughter was heard to come from the direction of the Fourth Form corridor; laughter which, reaching the ears of Grace Woodfield & Co., caused those young ladies to wear the crown that won't come off.

"Oh, my word!" murmured Barbara, as she paused in the middle of writing the lines that she had earned for being absent



The "Limpet," Jack Tolhurst and "Ginger."

from call-over. "Do you know, Mabs, I really think it would be an act of kindness to gag Grace and her band on the night of the dance."

To which the others returned a unanimous "Hear, hear!"

CHAPTER IV.

COSTUMES GALORE!

EVERYONE seemed to have received one; Fourth and Fifth alike, and of course, there was a flutter of excitement. Quite late the small envelopes had arrived; but there was one for most of the girls in the school.

How they had arrived or had been handed round on one knew, but Gwen Cook said she had seen Marcia Loftus with a bundle under her arm.

But as Marcia was opening her envelope with every show of surprise, that theory did not find general acceptance. For after all, what had Marcia to do with Mrs. Parsons, a wig-maker and theatrical outfitter?

"She may be cheaper than the other people," mused Barbara.

"Yes," nodded Mabel

Lynn. "Although I don't approve of a person stepping in and stealing another's trade, yet Old Wiggy has put up his prices in a scandalous way now he knows we all want to hire fancy dresses. It's turning out a gold mine to him."

"Gold mine," frowned Phyllis Howell, "is about the word. He's charging most colossal prices. Girls who've waited until the last minute have to pay pounds and pounds. I'm sure he's holdin' back the best things just to get a good price for them."

That in itself was more than likely. The theatrical costumier in Courtfield, referred to flippantly as "Wiggy," was reaping a rich harvest, thanks to the dance.

Naturally girls had to go to him for their costumes. Some of the richer had written

to shops in town; some had persuaded their fond parents to accept all the responsibility of ordering costumes. It was the greatest majority who favoured the local shop, however, and now it seemed that "Wiggy" had a rival.

"Mrs. Parsons?" said Phyllis. "Never heard of her; but if she's got the costumes, I, for one, am willing to go there. What say you?"

"Hear, hear! Me for Parsons," nodded Clara Trevlyn. "I haven't got my D'Artagnan costume yet. You'll be the third, Phyllis? Marjorie won't come into it. She wants to go as grandma."

"Early Victorian," smiled Marjorie. "The dressing then was so perfectly sweet. I'd loved to have worn a crinoline frock, and curls and silk mittens, and carry a fan."

Marjorie sighed rather wistfully, but Clara shook her head. Clara preferred something much more masculine, so she had decided to be one of the three musketeers, leaving the other two to those who cared to have them.

Dolly Jobling said she'd be one, and Phyllis Howell agreed to make the third.

With the three in combine the effect would be rather good, and Clara was quite pleased.

"Wiggy's" price being what it was, they decided to patronise Mrs. Parsons. Certainly if she lived up to the rather flaming announcement on the slip of paste-board sent to every girl, her shop was obviously stocked with every conceivable kind of costume. Augusta was, perhaps, a little supercilious; still, she was willing to give advice, even though no one particularly wanted it.

So she condescended to accompany the small party as adviser-in-chief, when, hockey being temporarily abandoned for the afternoon, they started off for the new costumiers.

"I might get what I want there," said



Clara, Babs and Mabs.

Katie Smith. "Mind if I come along, Babs?"

"More the merrier," replied Barbara. "And if there is really a good costume we ought to corner it, so that the Fifth don't roll in——"

"Oh, the Fifth!" cried Clara scornfully. "They're probably practising their bandpieces."

And Clara, buttoning her gloves, strode cheerily down towards the gates. As they might be returning with bundles, they were not taking their machines, but going by train from Friardale Station.

Eight of them in all there were, and Freda Foote waved them a fond farewell. What Freda was going to wear no one knew, but she seemed to be chuckling a great deal, which showed promise.

A merry party it was that went by train, and when at the last minute a crowd of Fifth Form girls had cycled up to the station entrance—just in time to see the train steam out, the party became merrier and merrier and merrier.

Such a wealth of kisses were blown then, and such a waving of hands on the one part, and waving of fists on the other.

For once the Fourth had got in ahead, and by the time they had had the pickings of the costumes there would be very little left indeed!

They patted themselves on the back all the way there, and when they reached Mrs. Parsons' little shop they pretty well filled it.

The place was not really a shop, in the ordinary sense of the word. There was just a little brass plate outside the door, and a room or two at the head of a narrow winding flight of stairs.

Into these rooms they were shown—rooms littered with top-boots, spurs, velvet coats of all descriptions, swords, daggers, brocades and laces. There were enough things there to gladden any heart, and there was a rush immediately for the most promising costumes.

A stout woman introduced herself as Mrs. Parsons with much bowing and much hand-washing with imaginary soap.

"Good afternoon, young ladies, and what can I do for you——"

"Fancy costumes!" chorused the girls. "Ah, yes. You are from Cliff House," smiled the woman. "Now—any young lady wish to be Dick Turpin?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Me!"

"Just the thing——"

And had every girl had her wish studied, there would have been quite an army of

highwaymen at the dance. Clara fondled an old pistol lovingly and made the clicking sound of galloping hoofs.

Of course Clara won—trust Clara to bag a good costume when she had the chance!

"But what about D'Artagnan?" asked Phyllis Howell.

"Oh, same thing," said Clara carelessly. "They looked much the same, you know. I shall stick that blue feather in my hat, and I can be whichever I like. Pity I can't paint Bessie black—and ride in on her——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really. You're jolly well not going to paint me black," protested Bessie. "I'm going as something else. I'm going as Mary Queen of Scots."

"What?"

"Mary Queen of Scots," said Bessie loftily. "She was the most beautiful woman in history, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I should go as Simple Simon, if I were you, Bessie," said Mabel Lynn.

"Oh, really, if you mean I'm simple, Mabs," snorted Bessie wrathfully, "you're jolly well wrong."

"Not at all," said Mabel, her eyes twinkling. "But Simple Simon met a pieman, and what better end to an evening could you hope for than that? I ask you!"

"Oh-h!" murmured Bessie. "I say, someone be the pieman, you know, and bring in a great fat pie. And I'll eat it—that'll cause a great sensation."

"A bigger sensation if you didn't eat it!" In the meanwhile Mrs. Parsons was bustling about, advising this and advising that, and clearly what she did not know about costumes did not seem worth knowing. Whence she had obtained all the things they did not know, but there was an amazing stock of attire all ready to be worn.

"A very excellent dance it should be," she nodded. "I have heard rumours in the town. There is to be a mystery band?"

"Rather," Clara chuckled. "A very mystery one!"

"Perhaps the young ladies here——" murmured Mrs. Parsons interestedly.

"Possibly," said Clara, and there was a general chuckle then.

Mrs. Parsons nodded and smiled, as though enjoying their high spirits, and thoroughly appreciating the way in which girls raked over the things and tried them on, and strapped swords about their waists.

Bessie Bunter had found a fancy dress of the Georgian period, donned it, and had girt a very long sword upon her like the Minstrel Boy who went to the wars. Only

Bessie was not able to manage her sword in the same way as the Minstrel Boy.

Up and down the room she swaggered, hands locked behind her back and a ferocious scowl upon her face.

"I'm Nelson," she exclaimed. "Pacing the upper deck——"

"Oooch," gasped Agnes White. "Mind that sword—that's my shins you're knocking!"

But Bessie continued to swagger about the shop until further proof of the well-known saying that pride will have a fall was supplied. The sword got hopelessly mixed up between her legs and, with a yelp, she crashed to the floor.

"Oh! Oh!" she cried, as Mrs. Parsons darted up to see what had happened.

"What is it? What is it?" she exclaimed. "Oh, the sword—it is bent."

"Oh, gracious!" cried Barbara in dismay. "That's going to cost something. Sorry, Mrs. Parsons. It was just our Bessie doing a sword dance, you know——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But Mrs. Parsons was not in a mood to laugh; nor did she even consent to smile until the sword had been paid for in full.

"The dance will be a great success, I hope," she said. "Especially the band."

"Oh, especially the band," nodded Clara. "Oh, rather."

By this time everyone had more or less secured the costumes they required, and the merry party hurried back to the station. It was, of course, quite dark when they arrived at the school; but though pressed for time, they lingered outside the gates for a few moments to watch a party of four

men pass along the road. Each of them carried a musical instrument, and obviously they were that old-fashioned and almost obsolete institution known as the "waits."

"I shall lay awake and listen for them to-night," said Mabel. "I love to hear them—it's such a Christmassy touch. Reminds me of stockings and turkeys and puddings and things."

"Well," grunted Clara, "so long as they don't remind you of Grace Woodfield's orchestra it'll be all right. Still, I don't reckon they'll serenade the school."

But in that Clara was quite wrong. At midnight they were distinctly heard tooting away at the "Mistletoe Bough" and "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing" for all they were worth.

Which was really rather curious, considering that if they had come round to collect money on Boxing Day, as the custom is, everyone would be away on holiday.

"I expect they know their own business best," said Mabs.

Which was probably the case.

CHAPTER V.


ON WITH THE DANCE!

"LEND me a hand, someone——"
"Someone do me up at the back, please!"

"Oh dear—where's the shoehorn? This button won't fasten!"

Never had there been such a commotion in the Fourth Form dormitory. Work had been impossible that afternoon, even though it followed so closely upon a half-holiday. Even on the previous day, Thursday, little enough work had been done—but to-day only dance work had been accomplished.

Fourth, Fifth, Third and even the lofty



A FORM-ROOM
BALLAD

A form-room is a hateful place, I think,
All books;
And ink;
Black frowns on every face,
And baffled looks,
And leaden hearts that sink
At problems full of twists and turns and crooks.
Ah, if I had my way,
Form-rooms would be abolished from to-day!

And yet, at times, it isn't half so bad.
Some days
I've had
Quite happy times in ours,
In many ways;
For instance, when Miss Ladd
Said I had really worked and earned her praise,
And when—I'd tried so hard to win first place
For Maths, and lost it after all to Grace,
But, swallowing envy, smiled—she said she
thought
I ought to win first honours as a sport!

And so it seems to me that, after all,
If you
Recall
The golden hours you have
And not the blue,
And try to gild them all,
You'll come to love form-room and mistress, too,
And wonder why you once disliked them so;
It's just the way you look at things, you know!

Sixth had joined hands to help with the decorations.

And it must be admitted that Grace Woodfield had done her work extraordinarily well. There were streamers of every type; there were lanterns to be lit when the excitement grew keener, and there were balloons to bob about near the ceiling far from the pins with which mischievous girls would be longing to prod them.

A bright idea Grace Woodfield had of a special dance in which a balloon was tied to every girl's foot, and the one coming through the dance with the balloon intact would win. If more than one they would have to dance a final.

Actually it might degenerate more into a battle royal and skirmish than a dance, but Grace had not thought things out so far as that—she had reckoned without Clara.

Not that Clara was thinking of any such thing at the moment; Clara just now was particularly busy in the dormitory affixing her costume.

Bessie Bunter, in some elaborate garb which represented nothing in particular except perhaps Bessie herself, was going round worrying people to tell her how she looked, and then being highly offended when she was told.

"It's only jealousy," she snorted. "I shall be the belle of the ball."

"Yes—the dumb-bell—and a jolly heavy one at that," laughed Freda Foote.

Freda Foote herself had caused quite a sensation with her costume. Freda Foote's arms and neck were a dull crimson, but her face was jet-black. Her dress was black too, and there were horizontal red lines upon it. Her shoes and stockings were white, and the effect was extraordinary.

"Oh, my word, what next?" asked Clara. "What are you supposed to be? Rouge et Noir?"

Freda only smiled as she affixed her head-dress, a cardboard hat on which was written: "Whispering in Class."

"Oh!"

"Fifty lines," shrieked Mabel, who was close enough to see that the red lines numbered fifty.

"Splendid!" chuckled Barbara. "But why the red arms and neck?"

"To show I'm going hot all over, having whispered in class," explained Freda with a broad grin. "Also when a girl has whispered in class she gets hot, because it isn't an-ice look out."

"Don't!" implored Phyllis Howell.

"But why the black face?" demanded Dolly Jobling.

"Case of a black look-out," chuckled Freda. "And white shoes because I've got cold feet."

For a moment or two they just gasped at Freda. Never had they seen a human being so entirely enveloped in "puns." Barbara said so, too, but Freda had a reply.

"Well, it is meant to be a pun-nish costume," she pointed out. "See, it's written below, and it's on my ticket I'm sending in."

Certainly Freda was not likely to go unnoticed, and though she might not win a beauty prize she certainly deserved some prize for her ingenuity.

But there was little enough time to admire costumes then, if they were to be ready in time to greet their guests. Some mothers and fathers and brothers and sisters had already arrived, and there was much excitement down in the school hall.

One could hear the sound of revelry and laughter already, although the dance itself would not be starting for well over half an hour.

How eagerly they rushed down into the hall, and admired costumes and criticised costumes and talked and chatted incessantly.

"Any news of the band?" asked Clara anxiously of Barbara.

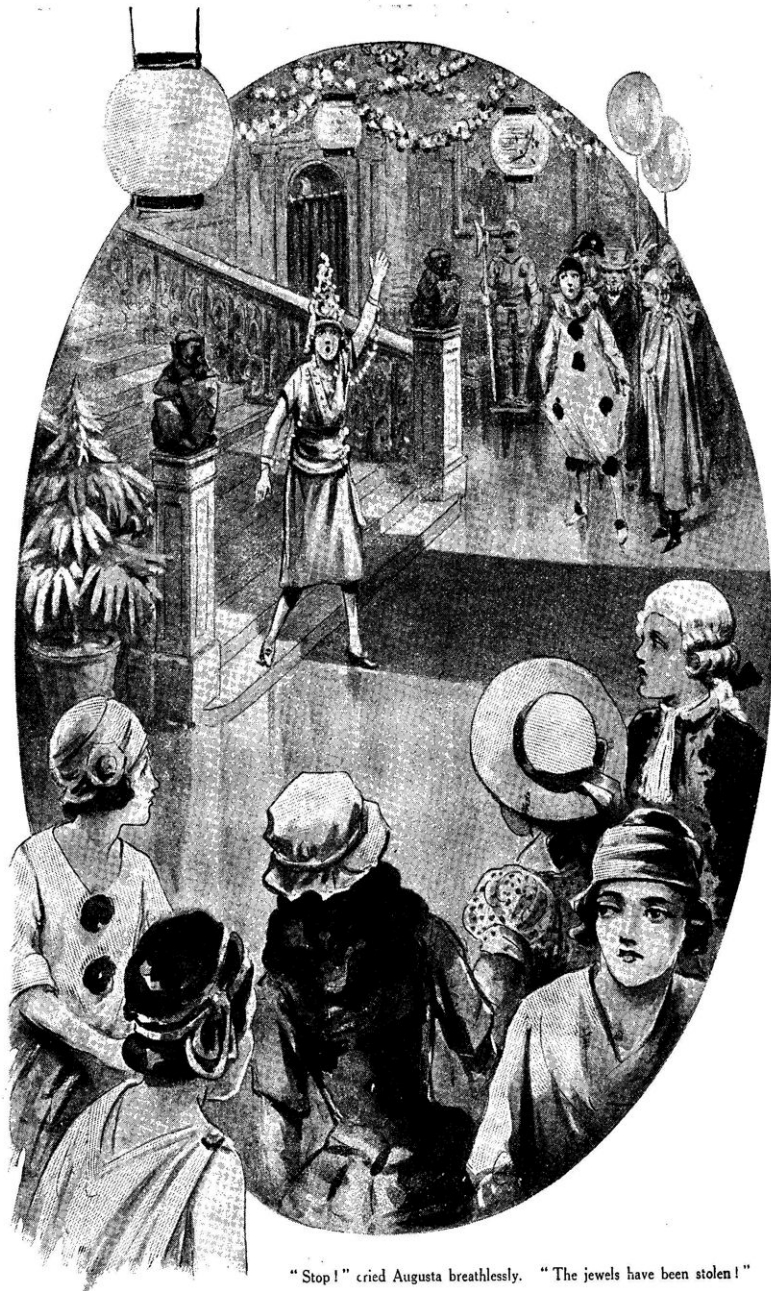
"No; they're lurking about somewhere, no doubt," replied Babs. "P'raps they'll funk it at the last moment, and get someone to play the piano. Hope so. I don't look forward to dancing to their music. Ah, look! There come the Lanchester boys!"

Everyone glanced towards the door, and saw three boyish figures enter. One was obviously Marshal Ney, resplendent in green coat with tails, white tight-fitting trousers, gleaming top-boots, a sword, and a Napoleon hat cocked at the right angle. Most elegant whiskers the famous general had, although his face was rather youthful if one looked very closely through the make-up. This was Ginger.

Behind him stood Jack Tollhurst, in the elegant court costume of the time of George III. The third member of the party was "Doctor Johnson," well stuffed out with cushions, and complete with a wig and everything. He wore a far more amiable smile than the celebrated dictionary-maker was addicted to.

"Hallo! Hallo!" exclaimed Barbara.

"Three cheers!" echoed Clara. "And who's your fat friend?"



"Stop!" cried Augusta breathlessly. "The jewels have been stolen!"

"Meaning me?" drawled Doctor Johnson. "Well, well. The inexplicable hysteria of modern young females coinciding as it does for this one occasion with that medley of sound and raucous laughter which we have, through experiences down the length of years, come to associate with all forms and expression of lighter mirth, seems——"

But Doctor Johnson's speech came to a sad conclusion when Marshal Ney gave him a nudge in one of the cushions that nearly sent him spinning.

"You look ripping, Jack," said Barbara. "That costume's perfect."

"He thought so himself," nodded Doctor Johnson.

He beamed around, and then admired Barbara's costume and Mabel's. Both their dresses were extraordinarily pretty and rather exceptional in that they did not try to be striking.

Barbara had chosen the fashion of the late eighteenth century, and, standing side by side with Jack, holding her fan, she looked extraordinarily well.

And then entered Mrs. Anstruther-Browne. She had not come to win a prize, but she was most charmingly attired in an Old English costume. The costume was so well designed and so well made that it was the centre of all eyes. And how it pleased Augusta! How delighted she was to announce that lady was her mother!

Mr. Anstruther-Browne, however, was not in fancy dress. Rather a let-down Augusta felt that was, but her father had been persuaded only after long argument to come to the dance at all.

"I have the head-dress," he said to his daughter.

"Oh where, where?" exclaimed Augusta, clapping her hands.

In full attire she was save for that head-dress—a most marvellous attire that caused murmurs from everyone.

How eagerly and excitedly Augusta unwrapped the head-dress, with a crowd of girls gathering round. Groups of people there were all across the hall, and Augusta knew only too well that she was being watched. Otherwise, why did she linger so in the unpacking when she was so excited, save to keep them tantalised till the last moment?

Then——

Out came the head-dress! And how it flashed and how it gleamed! There were emeralds, there were diamonds, and all were set in platinum. A wonderful thing it was of gold. Perhaps it was a little too

ornate; perhaps, the whisper went round the room, it had a flavour of vulgarity in it. Still, it was very wonderful.

Mr. Anstruther-Browne braced back his shoulders as though he had actually made it. And Mrs. Anstruther-Browne smiled charmingly upon her daughter's flushed face and sparkling eyes.

"And don't you leave it about, Augusta," warned her father.

"Trust me, daddy," was Augusta's rather peevish reply.

How she hated being treated as though she were a child, and before all the other girls, too!

But her father continued to watch most anxiously as his daughter dashed up the long, broad stairs, with a trail of other girls behind her, to affix the head-dress. A long time it took Augusta to put that on, for Marjorie wanted to see what she looked like in it, and Gwen Cook was busy persuading herself that such a thing was wasted on Augusta when one—Gwendoline—was about.

Yes, a long time it took, so that when Augusta descended again, she found the band playing, and a number of couples dancing.

There was Barbara dancing with Jack, and Clara dancing with Ginger, and Doctor Johnson fox-trotting with Dolly Jobling.

But the surprising thing was—surprising at least to Babs & Co.—how well the band was playing. It wasn't quite first class, but it was streets ahead of the rehearsal they had heard.

Still, they were too keen on dancing to trouble about the band, although it must be confessed that the Fourth were just a trifle disappointed that it did not break down, or break up, as they expected it to do. One or two peered at the masked four in their long dominoes; but they found it impossible to identify any of the musicians.

"Why, that's Mrs. Johnson, I do believe!" cried "Doctor Johnson."

And he pointed to Bessie Bunter, who was leading a stout youth with a red face towards the buffet.

"That's our Bessie," giggled Dolly Jobling.

"Is that really all her!" murmured the "doctor." "Or is it padding?"

"All her," Dolly assured him. "Come on, let's dance."

So they danced amidst the medley of chattering girls and their partners. The band played louder and louder, and the Fifth-formers applauded them loudly and long. It was certainly a great triumph for

the Fifth—one of the greatest they had ever scored. Yet Augusta's head-dress rather spoilt it. They couldn't beat that. Here, certainly, the Fourth had the best of it.

But what a splendid time it was with merry laughter everywhere. Then the interval came; but just as the band retired, Babs, Mabs, Clara and Phyllis Howell swiftly followed in their wake. No one but Jack Tollhurst saw them go; but he only smiled, for he had been let into the secret that some jape was afoot.

But neither he nor anyone had seen Marcia Loftus sneak away a few minutes earlier.

CHAPTER VI. BEATING THE "BANDITS."

"WELL, what have you girls done? You're back jolly quickly."

It was Jack Tollhurst who spoke, and the girls he addressed were Babs, Mabs, Clara and Phyllis Howell.

"We've done nothing," replied Babs. "Simply because the door's locked and we couldn't get in. They must have suspected we might be out to jape them."

"We knocked," added Mabel Lynn. "But they wouldn't answer."

Marcia Loftus, who happened to be standing within earshot, looked rather puzzled at this last piece of information. And well she might, for the band had had no hand in the locking of the door—that had been Marcia's little act of revenge on Grace Woodfield, and she was greatly surprised that the Fifth, on hearing the knock, had not instantly set up an outcry to be released.

"Funny!" she ruminated.

At this point Miss Primrose clapped her hands and called out:

"Line up everyone, please."

Whereupon the chatter died away and there was complete silence.

Behind Miss Primrose was the chief of the hospital committee, dressed in a cavalier outfit and looking extraordinarily well-pleased with himself.

Particularly had he been pleased with

Freda, while he had cast more than one admiring glance at Augusta Anstruther-Browne. Augusta at the present moment, was up in the dormitory to see that her wonderful head-dress was still all right.

Everything was quiet, and everyone was wondering who was going to get the prize after the parade, when Augusta came down the stairs two at a time, heedless of her costume and of everything.

"Stop—stop," she panted excitedly. "The diamonds—"

In a moment there was a buzz of excitement, flurry and movement everywhere. What had happened? What was

wrong? Why was Augusta calling out about her diamonds?

Mr. Anstruther-Browne hurried forward to his daughter.

He stared at the head-dress, and everyone followed suit—crowding round in their excitement. Glittering stones were there still gleaming in the light, but where was the big one that had been in the centre? Where were some of the priceless emeralds so beautifully cut and so well matched?

CLARA'S DIARY



JANUARY 1ST.—I am going to start a diary, because it's rather ripping being able to look back and see what you've done after you've done it. I'm writing this last thing at night in the dormitory. I shall write my diary every night regularly, if they let me. Oh—Bother! That's a blot. It was Barbara's fault, she threw a pillow at me.

But they won't stop me. Stella Stone's coming to put out the lights.

JANUARY 2ND.—Got twenty lines for not being in bed when Stella came. That's the way monitresses go on these days. It's perfectly sickening. Had a ripping game of hockey. One girl made an awful fuss because I swiped her ankle with my stick. She shouldn't have had her silly ankle there. A girl who does that simply asks for trouble. I think the modern girl is getting very namby-pamby.

JANUARY 3RD.—Not much has happened to-day. Usual things. Getting up in the cold, breakfast off an egg and toast and marmalade, lessons, lunch, lessons, tea, prep. We had a cycle race in the lane, which I won. I can smell bacon. Fancy bacon for breakfast! Topping!

JANUARY 4TH.—It wasn't bacon for breakfast at all. Not for our breakfast, anyway. Miss Steel had bacon. Our porridge was burned. So I gave mine to Bessie Bunter. What that girl manages to eat is simply astounding.

JANUARY 5TH.—Haven't time to write much to-day, but the same old things are happening. Got fifty more lines

JANUARY 6TH.—Got a hundred more lines for checking Miss Steel by saying that I didn't think Algebra was much use to a girl after she'd left school. I don't, so there!

JANUARY 7TH.—Got two hundred lines for banging my desk in class. It's really getting sickening. But, thank goodness, a halfer to-morrow.

JANUARY 8TH.—Am writing this during history—
(At this point the diary ends, Miss Steel having robbed it from posterity.)

Gone—all of them gone!

"I—I missed them"—gasped Augusta, white-faced and frightened—"when I went to alter my make-up just now."

"Did you take the things off?" thundered her father. "Those jewels are priceless!"

He wheeled, then, struck by a sudden thought:

"Miss Primrose, see that the doors are all locked, please!"

It was a high-handed way of doing things, but Miss Primrose, troubled beyond measure, fluttered away to give orders. Piper the school-porter was on the doors, also some of the chauffeurs, and all of them promptly closed the doors and stood with their backs to them.

"I—I got my head-dress caught up in something close by the band," said Augusta. "Someone in the band helped me to take the thing off."

"Search the band," exclaimed Mr. Anstruther-Browne. "Where are they—hey?"

"I think," returned Miss Primrose, "that the band is above suspicion. The band consists, I must divulge it at last, of Grace Woodfield of the Fifth Form and her friends."

"Well, where are they now," said Mr. Anstruther-Browne huskily.

"They should be in one of the small rooms at the back," answered the headmistress. "Please follow me."

Everyone waited silently whilst Augusta's father and Miss Primrose retired. A minute went by. Then came a furious knocking, followed by Mr. Anstruther-Browne's voice yelling:

"Everyone come and help open this door."

What a scramble and a dash there was to the scene of action. Outside the door of the room where the band was locked in they gathered, and then Piper and the chauffeurs put their shoulders to the door and burst it open.

Mr. Anstruther-Browne strode into the room first, and there gathered at the far end were four huddled figures still wearing their purple gowns, masks, and head-dresses.

"Now then, young ladies," ordered Mr. Browne. "Take off those disguises."

There was a moment's hesitation and then they tore off their masks, and disclosed not Grace Woodfield & Co., but four strangers. Three were men; the fourth a woman.

"Mrs. Parsons, the new costumier!" cried Babs.

Mrs. Parsons spread out her hands.

"Afraid the game's up," she muttered. "Just a little bit of fun. My friends here bet me we couldn't take the place of the

masked band and give you all a little surprise, you know."

"Ha!" said Mr. Anstruther-Browne grimly. "We will talk about fun and surprises after you have been searched."

"Where are the jewels?"

At this Mrs. Parsons & Co. realised the game was up.

"Yes, yes—jewels," said Mrs. Parsons hurriedly. "They fell off one of the young ladies while she was dancing. We were going to give them back only someone locked us in."

"Half a minute," said Babs. "Five minutes ago we came to this door and knocked. Why didn't you answer?"

This was a facer for Mrs. Parsons, and she had not a word to say.

"One minute," broke in Miss Primrose. "What have you done with the genuine band?"

"Yes, where are they?" boomed Mr. Anstruther-Browne. "Look here, I don't believe a word you've been telling me. You're a gang of—of—bandits! You men there—come forward and seize them."

Headed by Piper, the chauffeurs darted at the "bandits," and they were secured.

"D'you recognise Mrs. Parsons' companions," whispered Mabel Lynn. "They're the waits we saw outside the school."

"Why, so they are!" breathed Babs. "Ah! I begin to see. They simply disguised themselves as waits so that they could find out the lay of the land. They knew there'd be a lot of things worth stealing to-night, and so—"

"They collared the Fifth Form band, took their costumes and locked them up," exclaimed Mabs. "Poor old Grace! We must find her."

But this thought had come to others, and already various search parties were going on a tour to discover the missing band.

Eventually they were run to earth in one of the outhouses to the rear of the school building—quite unhurt, but bound hand and foot, and gagged.

"It was dreadful!" spluttered Grace Woodfield. "A woman and three men sprang out from the shadows, and we hadn't a chance from the beginning—and what about the dance? I suppose as you didn't have a band—"

"Oh, we had a band right enough," cut in Mr. Anstruther-Browne grimly. "Quite a good band as far as playing went: but not so good in other things."

Then Grace was told what had happened.

Well, the police were telephoned for and



"Now then, young ladies," snapped Mr. Anstruther-Browne. "Take off your disguises."

Mrs. Parsons and her accomplices were handed over to their care, and the police took such care of them that none of the four had to trouble about lodgings for a couple of years.

But for every one else all ended happily. Grace and her musicians performed for the remainder of the evening, and if they did not altogether agree on either the time or the tune they were playing, no one minded. As Freda Foote said :

"Better a Fifth Form Band than a Band of Bandits."

Only fair it was that Augusta after the worrying time should get first prize.

"Played Fourth," shrilled Clara.

"And well done Fifth," added Barbara. "Three cheers for a most excellent dance."

Cheers upon cheers they gave, for the

Fourth, for the Fifth, for the dance, and for Jack Tollhurst. And when it was whispered that Mr. Anstruther-Browne had made a handsome contribution to the hospital funds as recompense for the unpleasant break in the evening, there were cheers again.

Only one person was really dissatisfied, and that was Marcia Loftus. She did not like things to end happily, and that both the Fourth and the Fifth had won distinction caused her no pleasure. Besides, she wasn't able to take any credit for locking up the bandits because she could not think out any plausible story that would satisfactorily account for her action.

All she could do was to hint at possessing some dark secret ; but as no one showed any interest, the part Marcia played remains a secret to this day.

THE END