

**LAST TERM
AT
CHUMLEIGH TOWERS**

A Play

by

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THE CHUMLEIGH TOWERS TRILOGY

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LAST TERM AT CHUMLEIGH TOWERS

CAST

Polly Brown	<i>A Scholarship Girl</i>
Lois Stanhope-Lacey	<i>The School Snob</i>
Mona Murgatroyd	<i>Her Sneaky Hanger-on</i>
Felicity Fawcett-Majors	<i>The Nicest Girl on the School</i>
Madge Merriweather	<i>Felicity's Loyal Chum</i>
Brad	<i>The Handsome Stable-Lad</i>
Miss Fancourt-Favisham	<i>The Headmistress</i>
Narrator 1	
Narrator 2	
Umpire	
Girls	

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The Scene is a Tennis Court. The AUDIENCE can see half, only. The Net runs down the Stage, by the wings S.R. from front to back. POLLY and MADGE are playing as partners on the half we can see. SCHOOLGIRLS sit along the front of the stage, watching the match, the ball is, of course, imaginary. Two GIRLS, one extreme SR, one extreme SL, bang the floor of the stage with their hands to simulate the sound of the ball landing. Two more clap cupped hands to simulate sound as the ball is supposedly hit. Two NARRATORS, slightly aside from the action are eagerly reading a schoolgirl comic.

Narr 1: It was the finals of the inter-house tennis match and excitement was at fever pitch! Polly Brown....

Polly: *(She turns her head as she plays, to address AUDIENCE).* - - The Scholarship Girl - -

Narr 1: - - And Madge Merriweather - -

Madge: *(Turns head to AUDIENCE).* - - Her Loyal Chum! - -

Narr 1: Were playing up like the True Sports they were. But it seemed that victory must fall to Lois Stanhope-Lacey - -

Lois: *(Offstage S.R.).* - - The School Snob - -

Narr 1: - - And Mona Murgatroyd - -

Mona: *(Offstage S.R.).* - - Her Sneaky Hanger-on! - -

Girl 1: Lois has five indoor hard-courts at Stanhope-Lacey Hall!

All Girls: Gosh!

Girl 2: And a tennis pro to coach her, every hols!

All Girls: Crumbs!

Girl 3: It all depends on this last game!

All Girls: Oooh!

Umpire: *(As MADGE misses ball).* 30 - 15. Lois to serve.

Madge: Sorry I missed that one, Polly. I somehow ricked my ankle.

Polly: It's swelling up, Madge. You can't play on!

Madge: *(Heroically).* I'll be all right. *(The ball is evidently hit towards her; She runs for it and falls, crying out in pain).* Ooh!

Umpire: 40 - 15. Match point.

Madge: It's all up with me now, Polly. But you can do it, old thing! *(Limps off).*

Mona's Voice: *(offstage R).* Do you wish to concede the match, Polly Brown?

Lois' Voice: *(offstage R).* After all you've done frightfully well to get this far. For

a scholarship girl.

Narr 2: Polly's blue eyes flashed sudden fire. *(They do).*

Polly: Concede? Never! This is for you, Madge!

The next section is taken in fast motion. POLLY races from side to side as she receives, then serves. All her returns win. All her services, until the last are aces, so she gets to match point as quickly as possible.

Umpire: 40 - 30.

Girls: Ooh!

Umpire: Deuce.

Girls: Gosh!

Umpire: Advantage Polly!

Girls: Crumbs!

Umpire: Game to Polly.

Girls: Hurrah! *(They clap).*

Girls: Polly to serve. 15 - Love! 30 - Love! 40 - Love! Match Point!

(POLLY looks up as realisation hits her. Everything now goes into slow motion. She bounces the ball once, throws it into the air, hits it, runs forward to the net to receive the return, smashes it and turns, raising her arms in delight, to the wildly applauding GIRLS).

Girls: Game, set and match to Polly Brown. Hurrah!

(The action returns to normal speed).

Polly: Thank you, partner. *(She goes up to net, extends hand).* Jolly fine game, Lois and Mona.

(LOIS and MONA come on to the stage. They do not shake hands with POLLY).

Mona: Well, you would think so, Polly Brown. Personally, we aren't used to playing on potty little courts like these. I was quite put off my game.

Lois: But of course they must be heaven for you, Polly. What do you play on at home? The local refuse-tip? *(Exeunt LOIS and MONA).*

Felicity: Well, of all the unsporting beasts!

Polly: Oh, never mind Lois. Time for my piano practice.

(POLLY, FELICITY and MADGE move to piano).

If possible, the next small section is played in the auditorium so the main stage can be prepared for the Beach Scene. If the play is being staged in the school hall, there is probably a piano POLLY can go to. If not, a keyboard on a table will be adequate, but it must be possible for POLLY, sitting at the "piano" to pull on a plaster cast, out of sight of the AUDIENCE.

Polly: Oh, Felicity, we'll soon be leaving the dear old school for ever. I've learned so much here, even though I'm not specially good at anything. *(She begins to play. At once a magnificent [tape-recorded!] piano solo is heard. POLLY plays for a few seconds, smiling dreamily).*

Madge: I think your piano playing's come on jolly well.

Polly: You only think so because you're my chum. Though it will be better when the doc. lets me take off the plaster. *(She holds up arm in plaster-cast, whilst executing a superb run on the piano with the other hand).*

Madge: How is that kiddie whose life you saved?

Polly: *(Deprecatingly).* Hardly that, Madge. If I hadn't pulled her out, someone else would have come along. *(Pause).* I expect. Anyway, let's talk about dear old Chumleigh Towers. It's given me so much, I'd really like to do something in return before I go.

Lois: *(Enters with MONA SL).* Better do it soon, Polly. The "dear old Towers" won't be here much longer. Didn't you know the Governors haven't the funds to keep it open?

Mona: *(Spitefully).* Perhaps you could find Black Jasper's long-lost treasure.

Lois: Or better still, have a whip-round among your slum chums. I'm sure they can raise a few thou. *(Exeunt, laughing).*

Madge: What a cad Lois is!

Polly: She is rather beastly sometimes. And yet I feel that deep down there is good in her.

Felicity: But how awful about Chumleigh Towers! What did Mona mean about Black Jasper's treasure?

Madge: *(To AUDIENCE, as much as to POLLY and FELICITY).* It's the old legend about Jasper Gresham who owned the Towers in the eighteenth century. It's said he made a fortune from smuggling, but when he died it couldn't be found!

Polly: *(Also largely to AUDIENCE, spelling it out)* So if we found it, we could save the school. Oh, Madge, if he was a smuggler, perhaps it's in one of those caves on the sea-shore. Let's take a look at the sixth form picnic, this afternoon!

(The scene shifts to the main acting area where the sixth form picnic is taking place.

Centre, near the front, is a large rock upon which LOIS is sun-bathing. The other GIRLS are paddling, throwing balls, frying sausages, etc. A long strip of blue crepe-paper is stretched S.R. to S.L. across the front and waved to suggest the sea. Some girls are behind it, 'paddling', others are in front of it 'on the sand'. LOIS' rock is, of course, behind it).

Narr 2: The day of the picnic dawned bright and clear, and soon the beach was filled with laughing girls.

Girl 1: Come on, Polly! It's too dangerous to swim, but Miss Fancourt-Favisham said we might paddle. She's such a sport!

Girl 2: Have a sausage, Polly. They're simply delish!

Polly: Gosh, thanks, Maisie, how super! I say, who's out there on those rocks? Doesn't she know how quickly the tide comes in?

Felicity: It's Lois. We told her how awfully dangerous it is, but she wouldn't listen. I hope Miss Fancourt-Favisham doesn't catch her. *(Largely to AUDIENCE, spelling it out)* Those rocks look quite near the shore, but the light is deceptive. They're really a jolly long way out!

Girl 3: *(Rushes in, very excited).* Miss Fancourt-Favisham says there's a storm blowing up and we're to run back to school along the cliffs at once. We're to leave everything and Brad, the handsome stable-lad, will bring it.

Girl 1: And there's a prize of a super box of chocs for the first girl back!

Girl 2: What fun! Come on, Polly!

(GIRLS begin to run excitedly off).

Polly: *(Gazing worriedly at LOIS, who has not moved).* Won't be a minute.

Girl 3: } *(They link arms to pick up the injured MADGE).*

Girl 4: } Come on, Madge, we'll take you. Hurrah!

Madge: No, stop, I'll stay with Polly. Oh crumbs! *(They carry her off).*

(LOIS is now standing and miming shouting for help. Slow motion is effective).

Polly: I'll soon catch you up. *(Shouts).* Lois! We're going back! *(LOIS waves her arms, agonisedly. POLLY, cheerfully).* Oh, she's waving, that's all right then. Still, the tide's coming in awfully fast. Come on, Lois! Oh dear, she's not moving and the water's rising. What shall I do? If I go out to her, we'll both be cut off. Why doesn't she come? *(Horried).* Gosh, I don't think she's waving at all! Hold on, Lois, I'm coming! *(POLLY wades laboriously out to join LOIS on the rock).*

Lois: Oh, Polly, I slipped and sprained my ankle on the rock. But why did you

come? The water is rising and now we'll both be drowned. Oh, Polly, we're going to die!

Polly: Pull yourself together, Lois. Lean your weight on me; I'll help you back.

Lois: It's too late! Polly, what shall we do? I'm frightened!

Narr 2: As Polly Brown looked at the great waves crashing against the rocks, her eyes were very grave. Death stared her in the face, but Polly Brown had always played a straight bat in the Cricket Game of Life, and now she threw back her head and turned with a smile on her lips to the sobbing girl beside her.

Polly: Chin up, Lois. Whatever happens, we can take it. Remember we're Chumleigh Towers girls!

Lois: Oh, Polly, I'm not ready to die. You are brave and good - - and poor. I am shallow and selfish and vain and enormously rich!

Polly: (*Hesitantly at first*). Lois, don't think I'm preaching, but I've often thought that when we're really in a fix, it helps to remember that there is, in every girl's life, something greater than herself. Lois, let us join our hands together, and sing to that greater power.

Lois: Oh, Polly, you mean....

Polly: (*Taking her hand*). Yes, Lois. Let us sing the Chumleigh Towers school song.

CHUMLEIGH TOWERS

(Tune: *Gaudeamus Igitur*)

Polly / Lois: *Chumleigh Towers, O Chumleigh Towers,
Blessed by the Eternal Powers,
Sweetly fleet our girlhood hours
Drinking deep of Learning's flowers.
After sun may come the showers,
But when Life's Great Tempest lours
Though the craven shrinks and cowers
We'll be true to Chumleigh Towers.*

(*As they finish, BRAD appears on the shore.*)

Brad: Miss Polly, Miss Polly, there 'ee be! Thank heaven I've found 'ee!

Polly: Why, it's Brad, the handsome stable-lad. What are you doing here, Brad?

Brad: I came to look for 'ee, Miss Polly. But you're cut off by the tide. Wait, I'll save 'ee. (*He prepares to dive in.*)

Polly: But, Brad, you can't swim! No, Brad, no! (*BRAD forward rolls over the*

crepe-paper strip and lies down so he disappears completely from view).

Oh, Brad! How could he? I'll never see him again!

Lois: How lucky he was only the handsome stable-lad. But what shall we do now?

Polly: There's only one thing to do, Lois. One of us must dive in and save him. (*LOIS looks appalled*). I know you're a stronger swimmer than I am, and I've one arm in plaster (*LOIS looks more appalled*). but he's my chum and I won't let you do this. (*LOIS is extremely relieved*). I'm going. Don't try to take my place.

Lois: (*Fervently*). No, Polly, I won't. Oh, Polly, be careful!

Narr 2: As Polly prepared to plunge into that raging sea, she took one last look round. (*She does*).

Polly: We had some good times, didn't we, Lois old girl?

Lois: (*Doubtfully*). Did we?

Polly: Oh yes. And remember, Lois, Nil Desperandum! (*POLLY dives in. As LOIS says the next speech, we see POLLY, appearing above the crepe-paper, swimming towards BRAD*).

Narr 1: Lois stared after her with straining eyes.

Lois: Come on, Polly, you can do it. What a fine girl she is. And I despised her because she is only a scholarship girl. She is worth ten of me. Well, maybe two or three. Oh, Polly, do be careful! If I ever get out of this, I'll be different. I'll forget my money and pretty clothes and beautiful face - what do they matter? I'll forget how much better I am than other people. I'll be simple and true and plain, like Polly Brown. Look out, Polly! (*POLLY disappears*). Oh, no! She's drowned! What shall I do now? What would Polly have wanted me to do?

Narr 2: And with a voice that trembled, but eyes in which there shone new determination and courage, Lois turned her face to the heavens and began again to sing the Chumleigh Towers School Song.

Lois: *Chumleigh Towers, O Chumleigh Towers,
Blessed by the Eternal Powers,
Sweetly fleet our . . .*

(However, after a couple of lines of it) -

Polly: (*Surfacing*) Lois, help!

Lois: It's Polly and Brad! And they're alive!

Polly: Quickly, Lois, throw us your scarf!

Lois: But it's cashmere! The water will ruin it. No, I mustn't think of that. Here you are, Polly. (*With a grand gesture, she throws her the entire scarf*).

Polly: *(Throwing it back).* Hang onto the end! *(LOIS now pulls them up onto the rock).*

Narr 1: Inch by inch the exhausted pair were pulled to safety.

(They stand, exhausted, side by side on the rock. Brad is strangely swollen [balloons in his clothes]).

Polly: I thought it was all up with us then. And then I seemed to hear a voice singing the Chumleigh Towers School Song, and that gave me the strength to carry on.

Lois: But what's happened to Brad?

Polly: Just a tip I learned in survival swimming. Air trapped in clothing helps you float - I knotted his trouser legs and inflated him!

Lois: But the water will soon be over these rocks - we're going to die!

Polly: I'm not giving up now! Isn't that a gap in those rocks there? And, gosh, isn't that a tunnel? *(Producing them).* - Lucky I brought these candles and some matches! Are you game to follow me?

Brad: I'd follow 'ee anywhere, Miss Polly!

(They all disappear behind the rock and into the wings and during POLLY'S speech make their way round behind the AUDIENCE to the back of the Auditorium).

Lois: But where do you think this tunnel leads, Polly?

Polly: By my reckoning I think we must be in the caves that run under the hockey pitch. I say, someone's left a lot of untidy oilskin packages all over the floor. What litterlouts some people are. I'll just bring them along. Yes, I shouldn't be at all surprised if we came up in Chumleigh Towers itself. Probably somewhere near the Hall.

Brad: By gum, Miss Polly, you're right! And there's Miss Fancourt-Favisham and the sixth form about to send out a search-party for us.

(MISS FANCOURT-FAVISHAM and the GIRLS appear on stage. POLLY, LOIS and BRAD are now at the back, behind the AUDIENCE. As they come forward to join the others).

Girl 1: Miss Fancourt-Favisham, look!

Girl 2: Gosh!

Girl 3: Crumbs!

Girl 4: It's Polly Brown!

All Girls: Hurrah!

Madge: And Brad, the handsome stable-lad!

All Girls: Hurrah!

Felicity: And Lois Stanhope-Lacey!

(Silence).

Miss F-F: Thank God you're safe. But Polly, what is that you are carrying? Great Heavens, those are the oilskin packages in the picture of Jasper Gresham in the Great Library. You have found Black Jasper's treasure! The school is saved!

All: Hurrah!

Polly: Gosh, how super, Miss Fancourt-Favisham. I did so want to do something for the dear old school.

Lois: And so do I, Miss Fancourt-Favisham. Polly saved my life and I shall ask Daddy to create the Polly Brown Scholarship. Then more girls like Polly can come here from the slums and show us what true worth really is.

Miss F-F: Thank you, Lois. But during all this excitement, did I hear the bell ring for prep? We still have our examinations to take! But always remember, girls, success in examinations is not what really counts. We cannot all be brainy, but we can all try hard. It is those girls who buckle down and do their best who are the real successes. It is their names that are writ on the Honours Board of Life!

All: Isn't Miss Fancourt-Favisham super!

Miss F-F: Now off with you all. And as it has been rather a special day, I might arrange for cocoa and biscuits in the dorm.

All: Hurrah!

CURTAIN