

A NEW GIRL AT CHUMLEIGH TOWERS

A Play

by

Alison Davidson

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THE CHUMLEIGH TOWERS TRILOGY

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CAST

Narrator

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 in the School</i>
Madge Merriweather	<i>Felicity's Loyal Chum</i>
Brad	<i>The Handsome Stable Lad</i>
Miss Mountjoy	<i>The Riding Mistress</i>
Polly's Mother	
Miss Fancourt-Favisham	<i>The Headmistress</i>

Girls and Distinguished Parents

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The Scene is the Dormitory at CHUMLEIGH TOWERS. The only scenery required is a Screen to represent the Cubicle Curtains. Narrator is reading schoolgirl comic aloud.

Narr: Up in the dormi of the famous boarding-school, Chumleigh Towers, a frightened new girl was unpacking her trunk.

Poll: Here I am at last, in the dormi at Chumleigh Towers. I do hope the girls will like me. Those I saw in the quad seemed awfully stiff and grand. If only they don't discover my secret. O gosh, someone's coming! I can't face them yet. I'll draw my cubi curtains and they won't see me! *(Adjusts screen).*

(Enter LOIS STANHOPE-LACEY, MONA MURGATROYD, FELICITY FAWCETT-MAJORS, MADGE MERRIWEATHER and OTHERS. All have extremely Public School accents. LOIS has a superior drawl).

Lois: Well, what did we think of the new girl? Seemed a bit of an odd fish, if you ask me.

Fel: Oh, don't be so beastly, Lois. Of course the poor little thing seems strange at first. We must be really chummy to her and help her to settle in. You'll help, won't you, Madge?

Mad: Count on me, Felicity old thing. *(They grip hands).*

Mona: I wouldn't be too chummy if I were you. She didn't seem the Chumleigh Towers sort.

Lois: Why did she call Miss Fancourt-Favisham, "Gov"?

Fel: Did she? How awfully peculiar. I wonder what it means.

Lois: I don't know. But I tell you one thing, girls, I mean to find out.

(They all go. POLLY pushes back the Screen).

Poll: Oh gosh, I must watch my step. I do so want them to like me.

Narr: And for the next few days Polly worked hard to impress her new chums.

Poll: *(To admiring GROUP).* At our family mansion we drink caviare every night.

Girls: Gosh!

Polly: My tennis coach is Steffi Graf.

Girls: Crumbs!

Polly: Our maids are dressed by St. Laurent.

Girls: Ooooooh!

Narr: But somehow the nicest girls held aloof.

Fel: *(To MADGE)*. All that boasting is fearfully bad form!

Narr: And always Lois Stanhope-Lacey and her sneaky hanger-on Mona Murgatroyd watched her through narrowed eyes.

Lois: *(Aside to MONA)*. Our first riding lesson should catch her out. Only a girl of our sort has a really good seat on a horse. *(Aloud)*. Of course you've ridden a great deal, Polly?

Poll: *(Nervous)*. Oh, er, yes, of course.

Lois: Splendid. I'll ask Miss Mountjoy to put you up on Greased Lightning. He's a bit of a handful, but I'm sure you'll cope.

Madg: Not Greased Lightning, Lois! Not the horse that killed three stable-lads and bit Miss Mountjoy!

Narr: But Polly's blue eyes filled with sudden fire. *(They do)*.

Poll: *(Throwing head back)*. Thank you, Lois. I like a horse of spirit. I shall gladly ride Greased Lightning!

The rest of the action is out of doors. If the stage has an apron, the curtains can draw and this can be used but it isn't important. POLLY must go offstage so she can make an entrance but the other girls can just pick up Hobby-Horses.

Narr: Came the day of the riding lesson.

Mona: Double-Dealer looks in jolly fine shape, Lois.

Lois: Yes, I fancy that once again we'll carry off the Colonel's Cup, the-great-race-which-is-the-big-event-of-the-school-year-and-I-always-win, on Saturday.

Mad: I wonder what's happened to Polly.

Lois: Afraid to show her face, after bragging she could ride Greased Lightning.

Fel: You beast, Lois. You know that horse is a killer! What if something's happened to her?

Narr: Lois' chiselled lips curved in a cruel sneer. *(They do)*.

Lois: What if it has? She'll never make a Chumleigh Towers girl.

(Enter POLLY, very splendidly, on Greased Lightning).

1 Girl: Polly!

2 Girl: Gosh!

3 Girl: Crumbs!

4 Girl: On Greased Lightning!

Miss M: Get cracking, Gels. No time to waste.

Fel: Miss Mountjoy, look at Polly!

Miss M: Great Heavens, what hocks, what withers! The gel is a natural. She shall ride in the Colonel's Cup. I must phone my bookie. *(Exit)*.

(Enter Pathetic Woman, from Audience. She limps across in front of the stage extending her arms imploringly to POLLY, bowing her back, turning her head to gaze soulfully at the Audience, as the NARRATOR indicates. She exits as the NARRATOR finishes).

Narr: But as the girls clustered admiringly round the laughing Polly, a shock was at hand. Towards them limped a shabby woman, her hands rough and red with honest toil, her back stooped, her blue eyes faded, but nevertheless glowing with love and pride.

Lois: What a disgusting old beggar! Tell the stable-lad to kick her out. She shouldn't be allowed near Chumleigh Towers!

Fel: Poor woman. She has a sweet face. I must find her twopence.

Madg: And I will find some soup to throw her.

Mona: *(Maliciously)*. She seems to know you, Polly.

Poll: I've never seen her before in my life. *(She bursts into tears, runs to side of stage, S.L. The GIRLS shrug, go off. Enter BRAD:)*.

Brad: Oooooarr, Li'l Missie, whoi be yew a weepin'?

Poll: Who are you?

Brad: *(Poses, for Audience)*. I be Brad, the 'ansome Stable-lad.

Poll: *(Throws herself into his arms, weeping)*. Oh, Brad, I'm so unhappy. I must tell someone. Brad, I am not rich and upper-class. I am a Scholarship Girl. My father was a rag-and-bone man and I learnt to ride on his pony. That poor woman was my mother. The others must never know.

Miss M: *(Off)*. Polly Brown!

Poll: It's Miss Mountjoy. You won't say a word, will you.

(BRAD goes off. POLLY talks to MISS MOUNTJOY, S.L. POLLY expresses rapture "Oooh!". Simultaneously the GIRLS return, gather round MONA, S.R. A beat behind POLLY, they chorus [delighted malice] "Oooh!". POLLY rushes up to them).

Narr: Miss Mountjoy told Polly that she had been chosen to ride in the big race. But when Polly rushed to tell the others, a shock was in store.

Lois: Only a Scholarship Girl. And we're expected to associate with her. My parents will take me away when they know!

Poll: You mean - Brad told you!

Mona: And well he did. There's no place for Board School brats at Chumleigh Towers!

Poll: (*Desperately*). Felicity?

Fel: You lied to us, Polly. We really nice girls wouldn't have cared that you aren't as good as us. We'd have helped you. Taught you the things that really matter.

1 Girl: What glass to use.

2 Girl: How to address a bishop.

Fel: But you're a coward, Polly Brown. There's no place for cowards at Chumleigh Towers! (*All stick noses in air, Exeunt, S.R.*).

Poll: (*Runs back to Stable Area, S.L.*). Oh, Brad, how could he? I'll never speak to him again. (*Enter BRAD*). Brad! You told them! But why, Brad, why?

Brad: (*Nobly*). I 'ad to, Polly. Yew wos livin' a Lie. Yew can't cheat your way into friendship, Polly. True Friends accept yew for what Yew Are.

Poll: Oh, Brad, I know you're right. But it's too late now. I'll have to run away; I can never face them again.

Brad: It's never too late, Polly. Felicity called yew a coward. Show 'er she be wrong. Ride in the Colonel's Cup on Saturday and beat 'em all!

Poll: You're right. Gosh, Brad, what a true friend you are. I'll show them what a Scholarship Girl can do!

(*Exeunt S.L. The Curtains open to reveal girls and enormously rich PARENTS, strung out across Stage - or they come on, spread across Stage*).

Narr: The day of the big race dawned bright and clear. The course was lined with distinguished parents, whom Miss Fancourt-Favisham greeted with a few gracious words of welcome.

Miss F-F: Welcome, welcome

(*As NARRATOR speaks, the COMPETITORS come forward one at a time on their Horses and line up Front Centre Stage, as though to gallop off S.R. The Narrator pauses to allow for each competitor to arrive, pose, crowd reaction before announcing the next. FELICITY and MADGE are cheered, LOIS and MONA clapped. POLLY is booed*).

Narr: The competitors lined up at the start, Felicity Fawcett-Majors, the nicest girl in the school, on Mother's Pride, - Madge Merriweather, her loyal chum, on Second Fiddle, - Lois Stanhope-Lacey, coldly elegant on the fabulously expensive Double Dealer, - Mona Murgatroyd, more rat-like than ever, on

Foul Play, - and, pale but resolute, the frail form of Polly Brown on Greased Lightning.

(During the Race the final flag is held up Front Stage R. But the Participants gallop on the spot until they begin to lose. Then they gallop backwards, off and out of sight. If Scenery or Curtains permit, the DISTINGUISHED PARENTS, simultaneously, move across the stage SR to SL, disappear round behind scenery, out of sight, reappear SR to do it all again. They progress by shuffling their feet whilst keeping the rest of their bodies as motionless as possible, frozen in attitude of Race-goers [looking through binoculars, shading eyes, cheering etc.] The effect should be like that of an old film in which the Horseman gallops on the spot whilst a back-projection moves behind him. Everything speeds up during the race. The end is as frantic as possible).

Narr: And they're off and moving into an early lead is the favourite for this event, Double Dealer, closely followed by Mother's Pride, Second Fiddle and Foul Play. Bringing up the rear at present is the outsider, Greased Lightning.

Poll: *(To AUDIENCE).* Oh gosh!

Narr: And it's still Double Dealer. - Second Fiddle is moving up into second place, Mother's Pride, Foul Play, Greased Lightning is still the back marker.

Mona: *(To AUDIENCE).* That common little upstart is still hanging on. I'll swerve in front of her and catch her off-balance.

Poll: She's swerving in front of me! Come on, Greased Lightning!

Mona: *(Falls)* Aaaarrggghh! *(She crawls off to SL, backwards).*

Narr: And Foul Play is down and Greased Lightning is moving up to press the leaders. Second Fiddle is beginning to fail Greased Lightning is past him

(MADGE gallops backwards).

Poll: Golly!

Fel: *(To AUDIENCE).* That new girl is really showing some pluck, perhaps we misjudged her, after all.

Narr: Double Dealer, Mother's Pride, Greased Lightning. And Mother's Pride is in trouble!

Fel: Oh no! Mother's Pride has spavined her foreleg! Go it, Polly, it's up to you, now! *(Gallops off backwards).*

Poll: Crumbs! Come on, boy, we can do it!

(POLLY and LOIS now gallop frantically, and do now move towards the Flag, SR.).

Narr: And Greased Lightning is moving up - he's on Double Dealer's shoulder - and Lois is lashing her mount unmercifully but he's spent - Greased Lightning is past - and it's Greased Lightning! Greased Lightning is the winner!

All: Hurrah!

1 Girl: Oh, Polly, you are wonderful!

Girls: Oh, Polly, we're sorry we despised you. Will you be our friend?

Poll: Of course I will. *(BRAD turns unobtrusively to leave).* Brad! Brad, where are you going?

Brad: You don't need oi now, Miss Polly. You've plenty of friends.

Poll: I shall always need you, Brad. *(Takes his hand).* I know now who my Real Friends are! *(Takes FELICITY'S hand with her other hand).* Felicity Fawcett-Majors, the nicest girl in the school, and you, Brad. You may be only the handsome stable-lad, but you're the best chum a Scholarship Girl could have!

All: Hurrah!

Lois/Mona: Curses!

Narr: The End.

CURTAIN