

# **THE GYMSLIP**

**[Links for The Chumleigh Towers Trilogy]**

by

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# THE CHUMLEIGH TOWERS TRILOGY

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Colchester, Essex CO3 3HU.**

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ISBN 978 1 872475 58 5

Printed and published by  
**SchoolPlay Productions Limited,**  
15 Inglis Road,  
Colchester, Essex, CO3 3HU

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### CAST

<b>Miss Frobisher</b>	<i>The Headmistress</i>
<b>Dimsie Merridew</b>	<i>Tamsin the Jungle Girl / Sureshot Sadie / Maud o' the Mills</i>
<b>Nancy Trefusis</b>	<i>Aloosha the Polynesian Princess / Young Matt / Mill Hand</i>
<b>Betty</b>	<i>Witch Doctor / Cowboy / Mill Hand</i>
<b>Girls</b>	<i>Cannibals / Cowboys / Mill Hands</i>
<b>Mamzelle</b>	





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### FIRST LINK

*Enter HEADMISTRESS, before main curtains. She moves centre stage and is about to welcome the AUDIENCE when DIMSIE MERRIDEW appears indignantly at her elbow.*

**Dim:** Miss Frobisher, "**Jane enjoys her Jodhpurs**" is not in the programme!

**H.M.:** Ah, Dimsie Merridew. Editor's privilege, Dimsie. They couldn't include everything, you know. Now we're rather busy. Off you go.

**Dim:** But none of my stories is in, Miss Frobisher! "**Trixie gets into Trouble**"! "**Hilda holds her Own**"! The prefects have even spiked "**Gertie Lays the Ghost**"!

**H.M.:** Fortunes of war, Dimsie. Tower girls don't make a fuss, do they? Off with you now, and help Matron with the jammy buns.

*(Exit DIMSIE, muttering. MISS F. resumes).*

**H.M.:** Good evening, Governors, Parents - No, don't get up. Now I know you're wondering what to expect. Well, this year the Drama Club have chosen to dramatise some of the stories in the Christmas number of "The Gymslip", our own dear Chumleigh Towers mag - quite an ambitious undertaking, you'll agree, but I know they'll come through splendidly, with flying colours. *(She appears to spot a Latecomer)* Late again, Hilary? Sit down quickly, dear. The editors tell me that this edition is more "ripping" than ever - all our old favourites and some new ones beside. I don't really know what they've been cooking up but they promise it's going to be really "top-hole"! *(She peeps through the Curtain).* Everything seems to be in order. Time for me to hand over to the sixth form who will open the programme with "**A New Girl at Chumleigh Towers**"!

*(Re-enter DIMSIE as TAMSIN, NANCY as ALOOSHA, BETTY as WITCH-DOCTOR, Other GIRLS as CANNIBALS. This Scene is still played on the Apron, before the Main Curtains).*

**H.M.:** Dimsie Merridew, I thought you were helping Matron. Why have you returned and why are you wearing leopardskin underwear?

**Dim:** I just want to show you one of my stories, Miss Frobisher, that they won't let me do: "**Tamsin the Jungle Girl**"! I'm Tamsin and my plane crashed in the trackless jungle when I was a baby and I was brought up by friendly grapes and this is my faithful companion, Aloosha the Polynesian Princess and we've just been captured by cannibals - -

**Girls:** - - We're the cannibals, Miss Frobisher!

**Nanc:** - - And they are going to eat us, but Tamsin looks in her anorak

**A Girl:** - - almanack - -

**Nanc:** - - almanack - -

**Dim:** - - Back, you foolish cannibals, know ye not that I am the Great White Moon Goddess who must be obeyed? Raise but a hand against me and I shall put out the sun. (*All cringe and whimper, except - -*). -

**Betty:** - - Aboonga Majoonga! Massa sun he heap big spirit, he no done gone bye-byes along missie say so! (I'm Gargoyle, the witch-doctor, Miss Frobisher). Seize them, cookie chop-chop!

**Dim:** - - Stay! Great Gold Sun God, Great White Moon Goddess bids ye begone!

(*Lights cut out. ALL "Ayeiee!" and fall on faces*).

**Nanc:** - - You see, it's an eclipse, Miss Frobisher, and the cannibals make Tamsin their queen - it's really good, Miss Frobisher, isn't it, and it's not too late to put it in - -

**H.M.:** - - That will do, Nancy Trefusis. Put the lights back on immediately, Fiona! (*They come on*). Now, away with you all at once. I like to see keenness but it can be misplaced. You are none of you in the programme!

**Dim:** - - But, Miss Frobisher - -

**H.M.:** - - And if I hear one more word from any of you, I shall be seriously displeased.

(*Exeunt, girls, muttering, through Auditorium*).

**H.M.:** (*Thoughtfully, to herself*). A little wild as yet, but Dimsie Merridew has the makings of a fine girl. I like a girl of spirit.

**Dim:** (*From behind AUDIENCE*). Or there's one where I'm a poor ballet dancer, Miss Frobisher, taught in secret by a lame old Russian countess. That's a good one.

**H.M.:** Go away, Dimsie! (*Collecting herself - to AUDIENCE*). Now perhaps we may begin. Ready girls? The sixth form present:-

**"A NEW GIRL AT CHUMLEIGH TOWERS"**

## SECOND LINK

*At the end of "A NEW GIRL AT CHUMLEIGH TOWERS", BETTY hurries up through the AUDIENCE, looks round, then speaks:*

**Betty:** The coast's clear! Quickly, Monica!

*(MONICA hurries to the piano, starts playing cowboy music and the Apron fills up with DIMSIE'S Friends as Western Stagefolk, stagily going about their daily business. OLD TIMER is holding forth).*

**Old T:** Did I tell you, boys, that this rope is that same rope we used to heng Bill Bevan, time he sold us ter the Redskins fer a couple of bowie knives and a barrel of fire water? And you know what it's made on? The scalps of those same injuns. I hates them reds like the pizen varmints they are - (etc. etc.)

*(Enter young MATT SUTCLIFFE, played by NANCY).*

**Matt:** The Clancy brothers is comin! You all gotta help me. Theyse aint fur behind me! *(General panic).*

**Woman:** You know what they're after, young Matt: What they killed your brother and your daddy for. Give them the gold and they'll ride away peaceful.

**Matt:** And what will Ma do without that gold? How's she to live? Ma paw died for that gold, shot down by them murderin' Clancys. I ainta givin' it up. But you gotta help me. I'm only a boy, I can't take the Clancys on alone. Who's a-comin' with me? *(Silence).* You mean you won't help? You're all yeller? You won't help me fight the men that killed my paw?

**O.T.:** You'se askin' too much, young fella. There ain't a man here fit to take on the Clancys.

**Matt:** Then I'll take them on alone. They killed two Sutcliffes. Maybe they shoulda killed three.

**Man:** You go out against the Clancys, you go alone, young Matt. The Old Timer said it; there ain't a man here fit to take on the Clancys.

*(Dramatic music. DIMSIE as SADIE makes dramatic entrance, poses).*

**Sadie:** No man, maybe. Then what say you to a girl?

**All:** Sure-shot Sadie, the Texan Belle!

**Matt:** You mean you'll help me, Sadie. But there are eight of them and only two of us.

**Sadie:** The Clancys don't bother me none. Whatja got there, Matt?

**Matt:** My daddy's gun-belt. But I guess it's too big.

**Sadie:** Take in another notch, boy. If yoose big enough to take on the Clancys I reckon yoose big enough to tote a man's guns.

*(Enter BOY, rushing up through AUDIENCE).*

**Boy:** The Clancys are comin'!

*(General panic, ducking under tables etc, SADIE is magnificently cool).*

**Sadie:** Ready, Matt?

**Matt:** *(Adoringly).* Ready, Sadie!

*(They stand, shoulder to shoulder, guns levelled down central aisle, up which CLANCYS will presumably enter. To their dismay, however, up marches Miss Frobisher, extremely cross).*

**H.M.:** Dimsie Merridew, what is the meaning of this?

**Dims:** Oh, gosh, sorry, Miss Frobisher! It's just a bit of my story, "Sure-shot Sadie". I'm the mysterious masked girl sharpshooter, pledged to fight for truth and justice and to right wrongs. I was just showing the parents a bit.... Sorry, Miss Frobisher.

**H.M.:** Dimsie Merridew, let me make myself quite clear: there is no room for you in the programme. If I see you again this evening, you will be in very serious trouble. Is that understood?

**Dims:** *(Subdued whisper).* Yes, Miss Frobisher. *(DIMSIE and her Supporters trail off).*

**H.M.:** Thank you, sixth form, we'll be seeing more of you later in the programme. *(To fourth year Orchestra, who now arrive and set up by stage).* Come along girls, and settle yourselves comfortably. *(etc., etc. ) - (to AUDIENCE).* And now we shall take a short musical break.

*(The 'ORCHESTRA' now play one or more items, as excruciatingly as desired. The HEADMISTRESS stands to one side, trying not to look too pained).*

**H.M.:** Thank you, girls; that was an experience for all of us. After the next item we shall take a short break and the Tuck Shop will be open but now the sixth form presents:-

**"RETURN TO CHUMLEIGH TOWERS"**

### **THIRD LINK**

**H.M.:** Welcome back, everyone. Just two more items and then it will be time for our grand finale. I don't know exactly what the girls have been cooking up but I don't think I'm giving away too many secrets if I just hint that Miss Cardew and the synchro swimmers have been working on something really special.

*(Enter DIMSIE'S Crowd in Millworkers/Miners clothes with placards: Down with Tyranny, Workers Unite, etc. They mob the Stage).*

**H.M.:** Girls! Girls! What is the meaning of this?

*(GIRLS storm around shouting incoherent hostilities. Enter DIMSIE as MAUD, in elegantly upper class Edwardian evening dress. She flings herself heroically in front of MISS FROBISHER).*

**Maud:** Back, you cowards! Think not to touch a hair of my father's head. You have me to deal with first!

**1st Man:** Get you back to London, Miss Maud. Our quarrel's not wi' you, tes wi' your father, the brutal mill-owner. Get ye back to your grand society friends. What has ye to do wi' the likes of us?

**Maud:** Ay, what should Miss Maud know of you, Jem Hardacre, or of your ailing wife and starving bairns? What has Miss Maud to do with you, Annie Prescott, or your man who cannot find work since he cursed foreman? What should Miss Maud know of - - *(Accent changes).* - - trouble at mill? *(Lifts shawl to become headscarf)* But happen li'l Maggie may know somat o' such things. Do you ken her, John Ludgate, who came to ye when ye were sick?

**John:** *(Gasps with amazement).* 'Tes li'l Maggie, the Fairy o' the Mills!  
*(General gasps of awed recognition, all round).*

**H.M.:** *(Icy fury).* Dimsie Merridew! Leave this stage at once.

**Dim:** But there's a super part for you, Miss Frobisher! You are the harsh mill-owner and I am Maud o' the Mills and the only thing your proud heart loves. And I visit the workers secretly and bring them comforts and when they storm the great house I save you - - -

*(Enter hysterical WOMAN through AUDIENCE).*

**Woman:** There's trouble at the pit! A fall in the old mines and ten men trapped below.

**Dim:** This is a really good bit. You are the first man down with the rescue party and then there's another fall and you are trapped too, but you keep up the spirits of the men, singing hymns, and there's a gap big enough only for a slip of a girl and I crawl through - - -

**H.M.:** Silence! Listen to me, all of you. Return to the main school and write out one thousand times, I am not part of tonight's programme and must learn to accept this. You, Dimsie Merridew, I will escort myself to the sanatorium where I shall place you in the charge of Mamzelle, who is supervising the costumes for the water spectacular finale. You will remain there in disgrace until I send for you tomorrow morning. I shall then decide what your punishment is to be. And now for the penultimate item. *(Consults her programme).* Ah yes, the third year entertainment.

*(An agitated HEAD sticks through curtains).*

**Head:** We're not quite ready, Miss Frobisher! Could you just keep talking.

**H.M.:** What? What am I supposed to say?

**Head:** Anything - just give them a bit of patter.

**H.M.:** *(Stunned).* Patter?!

**Head:** You know, tell them a few jokes, bit of razzmatazz - just vamp along for a bit. *(HEAD disappears).*

**H.M.:** Vamp along?! I'll speak to you afterwards, Agnes. *(Turns to AUDIENCE).* I'm sorry, ladies and gentlemen, there seems to be a small technical hitch. *(With some sharpness).* Still, we're used to that from the third year, aren't we? *(Raising her voice so that she can be heard by the CAST behind the curtain, and imparting a considerable edge to it).* I'm sure none of us has forgotten last year's effort, "Peer Gynt on Ice"!

**Head:** *(Reappearing, breezily).* Ready, Miss F.!

**H.M.:** Thank goodness. Ladies and gentlemen, The Third Form.

*(The THIRD FORM present a song or other musical item, again to a standard of the Director's choice).*

**H.M.:** I'm sure you all appreciated that insight into the future of the school's remarkable music department. And now, the sixth form are going to show you "**Last Term at Chumleigh Towers**" - Doesn't that sound exciting!  
**"LAST TERM AT CHUMLEIGH TOWERS"**

## FINAL LINK

**H.M.:** And now, ladies and gentlemen, for our grand finale. The swimming team have been working very hard on this and I know they can count on your full support - -

*(Enter MAMZELLE, blackened and tattered, followed by DIMSIE).*

**H.M.:** Mamzelle! But you are blackened and dishevelled! What can this mean? Great Heavens!, What has happened to you?

**Mam:** Zut alors, I am bombed! I am blown up, n'est-ce-pas! I am, 'ow you say, exploded! *(She continues gallic lamentations).*

**Dim:** She isn't really, Miss Frobisher, it's just that the fireworks the stinks department made for the finale went off too soon and the san has fallen into the sea.

**H.M.:** Again? And it's only just been rebuilt since the last time. Do pull yourself together, Mamzelle.

**Dim:** Don't be too hard on her, Miss Frobisher, - she is foreign. Anyway, I put Mamzelle out - lucky I know a bit about bomb disposal - but I'm afraid all the costumes have gone.

**H.M.:** Good gracious! But Tower girls can cope. Tell the cast to get on stage as they are.

**Dim:** Unfortunately they were all on their way to get changed and got buried by the rock fall. I fished them out and bandaged them up - lucky I took a correspondence course in brain surgery - but they've all had to go to hospital.

**H.M.:** But this is terrible. What shall we do for a finale?

**Mamzelle:** We must cancel the finale. 'Ow can we 'ave a finale with no cast and no costumes? 'Oo could produce a finale in two minutes with no re'earsal? Only a girl with infinite resource and flair, oo la la, tiens, mon dieu, and where can we find such a girl?

*(Both look despairing and then, on MISS FROBISHER, a great light dawns. Meanwhile DIMSIE expresses elaborate nonchalance).*

**H.M.:** Great heavens, Dimsie Merridew! Dimsie, can you do it, child? Can you put on a finale and save the reputation of Chumleigh Towers?

**Dim:** Leave it to me, Miss Frobisher. Lucky I'm a Girl Guide and always prepared. *(To AUDIENCE).* It's up to us now, everybody - they can't

manage without us. We'll show them, won't we! Turn to the back of your programmes and you'll find the words for the finale I prepared earlier. Come on, Nancy and Bets! Aggie and Mab, take over down here! Right, Miss Frobisher:-

### **THE FINALE!**

#### ***AUTHOR'S NOTE:-***

*Our Production was a Christmas one and the finale was an arrangement of the Twelve Days of Christmas, starring DIMSIE as the Partridge. The Audience sang the words and the huge cast came on as the various Gifts. This worked well but any jolly ending would do as long as it can end with all the Cast piling on stage and DIMSIE lifted shoulder high, showered with Bouquets, signing Autographs, etc. etc., clearly the star of the Show.*

**A. D.**