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The FIRE BRAND'S FEUD

Filmland Comes To Cliff House

CRASH!

The door of Study No. 4 in the Fourth Form corridor at Cliff House School flew open.

Barbara Redfern, captain of the Form, thoughtfully examining a book by the bureau, swung round with a start.

Bessie Bunter, fat and bespectacled, in the act of placing the kettle on the study fire, gave such a jump that a good cupful of the kettle's contents spluttered into the flames, and Bessie spluttered with it.

"You—silly chump!" Babs gasped.

"Yes, rather, you know. If that water hadn't been cold it mum-might have scalded me," Bessie complained wrathfully. "Really, Mabs—"

But Mabel Lynn, the third occupant of Study No. 4, only laughed.

Very excited Mabel Lynn looked—and very pretty, too, with her glorious mass of gleaming, golden hair blowing around her oval face.

"Pax! Pax!" she cried merrily.

"Crossed fingers! Don't throw that book at me, Babs. You might hit Bessie. I come," she added dramatically, "with news!"

"You come," Babs corrected, "like a blessed thunderbolt! Well, and what is the news?" she added impatiently. "Somebody sent you a five-pound note?"

"Or a tuck hamper?" Bessie asked eagerly.

"No; better than that."

"Better?"

"Better than a whole day's holiday," Mabs laughed gaily. Deliberately

striding to the fire, she lifted the kettle off. "We shan't need that," she declared composedly. "We're having tea at the Enterprise Studios."
"The fat-film studios?"
"The film studios," Mabs affirmed calmly. "The Enterprise Film Studios."

She laughed at their mystification, and though she felt inclined to tease was too bursting to keep her news any longer. "You know that Primmy sent for me—"

"Well, yes," Babs acknowledged. "How many lines did she give you?"

"Oh, bother! Can't anybody see Primmy unless it's line-giving? She didn't give me lines! She sent for me as chairwoman of the Cliff House Junior Amateur Dramatic Society. Apparently," Mabs added, with relish, "the Enterprise Film Studios are starting work on a new film."

"Well, well, and who would have guessed that?" Babs scoffed.

"No; but listen!" And Mabs impatiently shook her head. "This is going to be a school film—a film, chumpets, in which we take part. Langley Rummian—he's the big producer at the Enterprise, you know—has asked Primmy for permission to shoot backgrounds in the school."

A little flash of excitement came into Babs' own blue eyes then. Bessie blinked.

"Oh, I sus-say—"

"And as the backgrounds will be shot in the Junior School, and as the Fourth is the Form to be represented in the film," Mabs rushed on, "Primmy's left the matter in my hands. I'm to take the committee over to the studios right away, and there we're to meet Mr. Rummian and his big star, Miss Constance Thackeray. Miss Thackeray, apparently, is playing the part of a schoolmistress."

"Oh, my hat! Then—"
"Didn't I tell you not to interrupt?" Mabs asked severely. "Don't ask for



MET once again Diana Royston-Clarke, the Firebrand of the Fourth at Cliff House School—the girl who loves the limelight, whose dazzling but wayward personality makes her so very fascinating. In this new series her reckless behaviour brings her into dramatic conflict with Barbara Redfern & Co.

School Stories, Featuring Firebrand Diana Royston-Clarke

By

HILDA RICHARDS

Illustrations by T. Laidler

details! I don't know them. Those are what we're going to fix up—with tea thrown in, and, incidentally, Primmy's anxious that we ask Diana."
 "Diana?" Babs frowned. "Diana Royston-Clarke? But she's not on the committee."
 "No; but Diana's father has some interest in the studios—he's a director, or something—on the financial side, I mean. Primmy thinks Diana might be hurt if she were left out of it—and, anyway," she went on, "if she only behaves herself we'll be jolly glad to have her. But—Oh, goodness, we'll have to fly! Babs, you might go and warn Lucy Farraday, will you? Bessie, cut off and find Marjorie Hazeldene and Lucy Morgan. Diana and Jean are both in Study No. 8, now, aren't they? I'll go and round them up."

And Mabs, without waiting for a reply, bustled out of the room again. Her eyes were shining. "What a lucky break for the Fourth Form!"
 It was a good idea of Miss Primrose's—leaving all the details to herself and the dramatic society committee, though, to be sure, she frowned a little when she thought of Diana Royston-Clarke.

For Diana, the haughty, superior, and often overbearing Firebrand of the Fourth, had a habit on occasions of trying to bag all the limelight and the leadership for herself.

On the other hand, if Diana only subdued her own, more selfish desires and diligently set herself to work for the good of the Form and the film as a whole, there was nobody in the Fourth who help Mabs would have preferred more—always excepting loyal old Babs, of course.

She reached the door of Study No. 8, which Diana was sharing at the moment with Jean Cartwright, and Gwen Cook, her own study, No. 10, being in possession of the workmen, who were doing repairs and renovations to the building. She looked in.

"Hallo, Jean!" she cried.
 Jean Cartwright, the tall Scottish junior, a leading light of the dramatic society and second in acting honours only to Mabs herself, swung round. Quite startled she stared at the interrupter. The worried expression upon her good-looking face made Mabs regard her more keenly.

"Why, anything wrong?" she asked, and her gaze flew questioningly to the letter Jean had been in the act of reading. "No bad news?" she asked quickly.

Jean hesitated.
 "Oh, just a line from home!"
 "I thought you looked worried."
 "Oh, it—it's nothing!" she said, and changed the subject. "You wanted me, Mabs?"

"Yes, rather—and Diana."
 "Oh, Diana went out ages ago!" Jean replied. "She said she was going over to see her father at Lantiaan."

Mabs frowned. She would have liked Diana to be interested from the very start, but, obviously, the visit could not be held up because of her absence. She explained her mission to Jean. The Scots girl's eyes brightened.

"Oh, Mabs, I say—"
 "Have to get along at once," Mabs said tersely. "Get your hat and coat. Jean, meet in Study No. 8 in three minutes. I'll scoot back and see if the others are there."

The others—Babs, Lucy Farraday, Lucy Morgan, and Marjorie Hazeldene—were there, all of them in a state of most intense excitement.

They had all heard of Constance

Thackeray. They had all admired her pictures. It was such a thrill, this prospect of meeting her in the flesh.

Almost at a run they tripped down to the cycle-sheds and wheeled out their machines.

The Enterprise Film Studios—the great block of buildings which had sprung up on the main road between Friardale village and Courtfield—were reached within half an hour.

A gold-braided commissionaire met them at the gates.

"Cliff House?" he asked, with one glance at their hats. "I suppose you are the girls Mr. Runniman and Miss Thackeray are expecting? Come in, please!"

They went in. How enormous the place was! Most of them could remember the days when the Enterprise had been just a small, struggling studio with just one sound stage.

But, with the rise of the film industry, it had grown now to be one of the greatest concerns in the country.

Across the car park they went, into the big, dimly lit silent studios.

Two figures moved towards them as they arrived—one a tall, spare man, in a smartly tailored lounge suit; the other a dainty, graceful woman, in a frilly, white frock, above the fluffy collar of which her delicately beautiful face appeared like an exquisite flower.

An awed little silence fell upon the group as they arrived. At last they

stood in the presence of Constance Thackeray and Langley Runniman.

The star was the first to break it. She stepped forward with a silvery laugh.

"Welcome, girls! Let me introduce myself."

As if there were any need for that! Why, Constance Thackeray was world-famous! But how lovely she was! How pleasant, how extremely understanding and sweet! Completely they fell under her spell.

"And now—tea!" cried the star. "I'm sure you must all be dreadfully hungry. This way, my dears!" And she led them to the back of the set, where a luscious tea was daintily laid out.

Oh, glorious—glorious! Tea in such novel surroundings was a treat indeed for Babs & Co.

The talk, of course, was all of the new film.

"The idea," the star explained, "is this. There's no need to worry you with the whole plot. The film, roughly, is divided into two parts—the first of which takes place in an English school, the second which is supposed to take place twelve years after in France. If you please"—and here Constance dimpled, showing a pearly set of teeth—"I'm to take the part of a Form-mistress."

"Oh, how ripping!" applauded Jean Cartwright.

"My Form is supposed to be rather a worry to me," the star went on. "One girl in particular always does her best to annoy me! We shall want one of you Cliff House girls to play that part, of course, and the girl who does play it—" She smiled at Mr. Runniman.

"Shall I tell them?"

"Why, of course!"



WITH flaming eyes Diana scanned the notice. Then, with a single swift movement of a hand, she ripped it from the board. Now to see what Babs & Co. would have to say.

"The girl who plays it," Constance went on, "will receive two hundred pounds and a contract!"

There was a gasp. Jean's face suddenly twitched. She leaned forward with more intense interest.

"It's to be a big part, of course—hence the reward," Constance went on. "We've not made up our minds about the girl yet, although—" And here her eyes fastened speculatively upon Mabs and then upon Jean, whose face turned fiery crimson. "I am afraid I shall have to get you to help me in that. Meantime, Mr. Rummman is anxious to start shooting what he calls backgrounds as soon as possible. School scenes—you know, girls at tennis, girls at play, girls in the dormitory. I have a list of the scenes somewhere. I'll give it to you before you go. That is where I want your help. Naturally, you know more about the school and the girls than I do, and if you would organise these groups and stage some preparatory rehearsals—you see?"

They did see. Faces flamed with enthusiasm. Oh, this was good—good!

More details of the film they learnt as the star went on. Constance herself was to take the part of the Form-mistress in the school scenes. The girl who was the rebel's leader of the Form was, although she did not find it out until afterwards, her own daughter.

"Meantime," Miss Thackeray put in, "as the committee, will you get one of the scenes arranged and rehearsed as soon as possible? The dormitory scene first. I think—you'll find details on the papers I'll give you. Get as many girls into it as you can. I'll come along tomorrow afternoon and see the thing run through."

With the script in Mabs' possession, the chums left the studios, thrillingly discussing the new excitements.

"We'll have to have a meeting at once," Babs said—at an announcement which was met with a hearty, "Hear, hear!"

Then, as most of the grouping and preliminary rehearsal work would fall upon Mabs' shoulders, Marjorie Hazeldene suggested—hadn't Mabs better be relieved of the duties of chairwoman, so that she could concentrate upon the acting side? Apart from which, there was every possibility that Mabs would get the part of Constance's daughter.

Jean, unseen, winced a little at that. For some reason she sighed. But she applauded the suggestion most heartily.

On the ride back Jean was unusually silent—so much so, indeed, that Babs, eyeing next to her, ralled her out of her mood with a laugh.

"Well, Jean, you haven't a lot to say."

Jean smiled a little constrainedly.

"I was thinking," she said, as she pedalled thoughtfully onward.

"About the film?"

"Well, yes," Jean paused. "And—about the rebel schoolgirl's part. Two hundred pounds!" She sighed the words, almost as if speaking a thought, and then, seeing Mabs eyeing her, flushed a little. "Oh, Mabs, that will be a splendid part for you!"

Mabs laughed.

"We all seem to be counting our chickens before they're hatched," she said. "Of course I'd like it—not so much for the money as for the honour, you know. But what about yourself, Jean? Don't you think you stand as good a chance as anyone?"

But Jean rather mournfully shook her head. Again Mabs saw that little shadow come to her face again; noticed and vaguely wondered at the uneasiness, the sudden strain which appeared in her

features. Something was upsetting Jean, that was obvious.

Mabs shook her head. Rather puzzled was the glance she flung at the Scots girl.

And Jean, as if wishing to avoid conversation, dropped behind a little, and Mabs pedalled on. They whizzed round the corner which led into Friardale village. Then—

"Look out!"

Just in time! Squeak went the brake, pulling her up with such force that she almost shot over the handlebar. The boy in the Friardale cap, who was dreamily crossing the road with his hands in his pockets jumped back convulsively, then looked up with a start.

"Oh, Mabs, I—I'm sorry!" he stammered, and stepped back as the rest of the party, in a body, swept round the corner, too. "Whoa, there!" he cried.

"Half a minute! Why, Jean—"

Jean Cartwright stared.

"Lister!"

In a moment they had all dismounted. Lister Carttermore, Jean's half-brother at Friardale School, was well known and well liked among them. But for once Lister seemed to have no eyes for them. His glance, agitated, fastened immediately upon Jean.

"Jean!" he cried. "I—I was just going to Cliff House to see you! You've heard from mother?"

"Lister, yes. But—"

"She told you the news?"

"Yes!" Jean looked confused. "But, Lister—"

The boy smiled bitterly.

"I'm sorry, old girl! I wish it were me, and not you! I get all the blame!" He frowned bitterly, conscious of the wondering looks upon the faces of Jean's friends. "I suppose Jean hasn't told you? She wouldn't, of course!"

"Lister—please!" Jean begged.

"Well, what's the odds?" the boy asked. "They'll have to know—soon enough!" he added bitterly. "They might as well know now!" He faced them, while Jean, crimson and confused, fell back. "Jean," he announced, "won't be with you after the end of this term!"

"What?"

"Mother's lost her money—practically all of it! And poor old Jean has to bear the brunt," he added, "because her school fees are only paid up to the end of the term, and mine are paid until the end of the year."

"Jean!"

"Oh, Jean, why didn't you tell us?"

And they flung round, staring in startled consternation and sympathy at the Scots girl.

Jean bit her lip.

"Well, I—" she said, and shook her head distractedly. "There it is! It's true. I didn't intend you to know until the last moment!"

"But, Jean, what will you do?"

Jean shrugged.

"Work, I suppose. I'll have to find some sort of a job."

"What as?"

Jean shook her head.

"Well, whatever's going," she said wearily. "Typing, secretarial work—something. I'd like to—and for a moment her eyes clouded with vague yearning—to get on the films. But that's hopeless, of course. Still, don't worry yourselves with my troubles."

But they did worry themselves with her troubles. They liked Jean. She was one of the Co.—always had been one of the Co.

They left Jean in the village with her brother; but when they had all arrived back in Cliff House, and were foregathered in Study No. 4, Mabs resolutely faced them.

"We've got," she announced, "to help old Jean!"

"Yes. But how can we?" Lucy Morgan asked.

"I've got the idea," Mabs shook her head. "The opportunity's here; we won't allow Jean to go! Remember what Miss Thackeray said this afternoon—that the girl who got the part in the film will have two hundred pounds and a contract."

They stared.

"There's no reason," Mabs said levelly, "why Jean shouldn't have it. We can arrange it between us so that she does get it. We've got to push Jean forward. If I keep in the background, Jean's got no other serious rival in the Fourth Form. Are you all with me?"

And with her they all vere—to a single girl.



Diana Is Furious

"HERE!" Diana Royston-Clarke ordered loftily, and descended from the car which had brought her from the home of her father, the Mayor of Lantham, to the gates of the Enterprise Film Studios. "And wait for me!" she instructed the uniformed chauffeur. "I shall want you to take me back to Cliff House."

"Yes, Miss Diana!"

Diana nodded distantly. Jarvis, the chauffeur, eyed her a little uncertainly. All Diana's servants eyed her uncertainly, never knowing the mood of that imperious young mistress until the mood was flashed upon them.

But Diana for once was feeling well pleased with herself—very, very pleased—for, in the first place, Diana Royston-Clarke well named the Firebrand of Cliff House, was looking and feeling her best.

The new, expensive creation which she had ordered from London—a smart afternoon frock in cream linen—fitted her to perfection. The new hat of the same material, designed by Diana herself, with its linen crown and its wide, sweeping cellophane brim—the very, very latest thing in the London shops—had already provoked admiring comment.

Even the gloves and shoes she wore were brand new, and made of the same material as her frock, giving to her ensemble the last touch of that smartness which became the most expensively groomed girl at Cliff House School.

Pleasant the emotion engendered by the wearing of good clothes; but how much more pleasant the emotion inspired by the object of her visit!

For Diana, having seen her father, one of the financial pillars of the Enterprise Studios, was in possession of all those facts with which Babs & Co. had left the studios half an hour earlier. And Diana, with no thought of Babs, had come with the firm and fixed intention of taking the Cliff House rehearsals into her own slimly elegant hands, and of appropriating the juvenile lead which went with them.

She felt entitled to it. Her father, after all, was one of the Enterprise's largest shareholders. He was director on the financial board of directors, and it was his money which had enabled the Enterprise to expand to its present and still growing proportions.

Haughtily elegant, she strode to the studio entrance.

The page at the door regarded her in awe.

"Yes, miss?"

"Is Miss Constance Thackeray in?" Diana asked.

"Yes, miss. I dunno where she is, but I'll go and find her, miss," the page-boy said, and darted off, while Diana disdainfully stepped into the long, dimly lit studio.

The studio at the moment was deserted except for one girl who was sweeping up on a lighted set near by. Diana frowned at her, noticing the shabbiness of her clothes, the worn, pinched appearance of her cheeks as she worked in the hot glare of the arc lamps.

The girl, in her turn, stared at Diana with wide, fascinated eyes.

Diana turned, caught her glance, erased the forbidding frown which came to her features, and smiled back. The little girl coloured.

"You seem busy," Diana remarked pleasantly.

"Yes, miss," the girl answered. "I'm sweeping," she added, in unnecessary and embarrassed explanation. "I—I help my mother, you know. But miss— And she looked up. "I did hear you asking for Miss Thackeray, didn't I? She's in the costume-room." She blinked, seeming to quail at her own temerity. "I say, miss, are you a film star, too?" she added shyly.

Diana laughed amusedly. Her vanity was flattered.

"Not quite," she replied. "But some day, eh? Now, what's your name? Nellie Sharpe? No, Nellie, I'm not a film star. Much bigger and much more important than a film star. You see, my father owns part of these studios, and—well—" She smiled. "But where is the costume-room? Take me to it!"

"No, miss?"

"Yes, of course, silly!"

Little Nellie gulped. Her glowing face showed plainly how irresistibly she had fallen under the Firebrand's spell. Never had Nellie been spoken to in such a friendly way by such a beautifully dressed lady as this before. She almost quivered with eagerness.

"This—this way, miss!"

Diana followed her. Across the studio she swept, carefully picking her way among the coils and cables that snaked sinuously over the floor.

A door at the farther end of the studio was pushed open, and Nellie, admiration in her eyes, nodded.

"This is it, miss."

"Thanks," Diana nodded. "You're a nice kid," she said patronisingly. "Here, take this!"—and pressed into the gaping little one's hand a shining half-crown.

She smiled serenely at the crimson-faced youngster, and with a nod whisked into the costume-room.

Constance Thackeray, hanging up a frock on a peg, swung round.

"Why, Diana!" she cried.

"Afternoon," Diana casually nodded, although her face flushed a little at sight of the star. "Busy?" she inquired pleasantly.

"Well, no—not row," Constance Thackeray laughed.

"What about coming and having tea with me?"

But the film star shook her head.

"Had tea," she replied, "with friends of yours."

Diana stared.

"Barbara Diferen & Co.," Constance explained. "They came to discuss the backgrounds."

"They came over—to what?" And Diana's eyes widened with incredulity. For a moment she stood rigid, looking

like a girl dazed, and then, as the full significance of those words came to her, her eyes gleamed.

Babs & Co. interfering again! Babs & Co. trespassing upon her preserves! Just like those girls to try to cheat her of this chance! But they shouldn't—they shouldn't!

The film star was eyeing her curiously. "Nothing wrong, Diana?"

"Oh, no, nothing wrong!" Diana

to say about that. Just wait till she got back to Cliff House!

"Oh, well, of course I'm on it!" Diana said. "Didn't I say that I was doing the organising? Still, I think Babs & Co. might have told me they were coming. Did you fix anything up with them?"

"Oh, yes, practically everything!"

"You gave them the scenes that are to be shot!"



"GO back to Babs and Mabs—go back and whine to them!" Diana stormed. Beside herself, she snatched up a magazine and flung it at Jean. "Go on—clear out!"

laughed shortly. Fury had her in its grip, but she was mastering it. Some inner sense of caution warned her to go warily. "Well, I didn't know, of course," she announced. "I had no idea. There must be some mistake!"

"Mistake?"

"Well, yes. Because, you see," Diana explained, "I was given the job of arranging this thing." She did not consider it necessary to add that she had given the job to herself. "I can't just see how Babs & Co. came into it."

"But I understood"—the star paused—"that they were the dramatic committee, or something. They did mention you were on it."

Diana's lips compressed.

"Apparently," the film star went on, "it was Miss Primrose's idea to hand the arrangements over to this committee. Miss Primrose, I understand, made it known that you should be included."

Diana smiled. It was a dazzling smile which hid completely the fury she was feeling. But she saw now, and her heart was bitter.

So that was the scheme! Somehow, Babs & Co. had got to hear of this project. Babs & Co., anxious as usual to do the leading, had gone to Primmy and pressed Primmy to hand over the reins of organisation to them.

Right! Well, she'd have something

"Yes."

"And"—Diana paused—"you selected the girl who is to play the part of your daughter?"

"Oh, no, not yet!" the star laughed. "We'll have to arrive at that, of course, by a process of elimination," she said. "I should like your opinion on those points, Diana. What do you think of Mabel Lynn?"

"Not bad."

"Or Jean Cartwright?"

Diana repressed a scowl.

"Oh, she's all right!"

"I rather fancied the looks of those two," Constance went on musingly. "But still"—with a laugh—"the proof of the pudding is in the eating—or in this case," she added, with a smile, "in the acting. Diana, I'm frightfully sorry if there's been any misunderstanding!"

But Diana smiled again. She smiled bitterly. Her heart was seething now, seething! Babs had been supplied with all the details, had she? Constance Thackeray already had her eyes upon Mabs and Jean for the part she had planned for herself. Right!

She said inconsequently:

"And when's the first rehearsal?"

"Well, Barbara said they would have a run through to-night," Constance replied. "To-morrow afternoon I'm coming over to the school just to see how everything's going. I'll have tea

with you then, Diana," she promised, perhaps feeling that Diana was suffering disappointment because of her earlier refusal. "How's that?"

"Right!" Diana laughed. Well, that was something, anyway. It would show Cliff House whom the star favoured! Most of the girls there would have given a term's pocket money to have a job alone with Britain's most famous film star. In the meantime, she'd get this other matter right.

She left the studios. Her eyes were gleaming as she crossed the untidy floor. She did not see the adoring gaze which wistfully followed her—the gaze of little Nellie Sharpe, who almost held her breath when Diana, with never even a look in her direction, passed her by.

Down the drive she flounced, to where Jarvis was waiting beside the car.

She stepped in, flinging herself on the cushions. "Cliff House," she rapped, "as quickly as you can."

The car hummed along the road. Diana gave herself up to thinking. Babs—Babs—and now, with no need for concealment, the mask came off her features.

A scowl of fury flamed in the pretty cheeks. The red lips curled back in a bitter sneer. They would burge in, she told herself bitterly! What the dickens had they got to do with it? She was running this stunt! She meant to run it! After all, wasn't she entitled to? For wasn't it her father's money which had helped to make the Enterprise what it was?

Well, they should see! The car pulled up in the drive. Diana got out, slamming the door behind her. Stormily she strode across the quadrangle, careless for once of the admiring looks and nudges of other girls who spotted her new cream linen outfit.

In quite a paddy she flung herself into Study No. 3, deserting a sigh of relief when she found it deserted.

Off came the linen gloves, to be carelessly tossed aside on the armchair. Flop, went the priceless hat! Savagely she seated herself at the table, drew paper and ink towards her and commenced to write:

NOTICE.

A meeting will be held in the Fourth Form Common-room at 7 p.m. prompt to decide the composition of a committee to be formed for the purpose of organising rehearsals in connection with the shooting of film scenes by the Enterprise Studios.

In the chair—Diana Royston-Clarke.

"There!" Diana thought.

She read it through. That would show Babs & Co. she was going to stand none of their nonsense. She blotted it, and with the notice in her hand, rushed off down the Fourth Form passage.

She reached Big Hall, was about to pin her notice to the board when another, already posted there, caught her eye. Diana's face flamed as she read it. She scarcely noticed the other girls who were there.

NOTICE.

The following girls are asked to augment the committee formed in connection with the shooting of school-life scenes by the Enterprise Film Studios:

Clara Trevlyn, Jemima Carstairs, off.

Lola Carroll and Diana Royston-Clarke.

A full committee meeting will be held at seven o'clock in the music-room.

Signed Barbara Redfern.

Diana flamed up at that. The cheek of it! The utter preposterousness! Barbara Redfern, eh? Her name there just as one of the odds and ends! Well, she'd show Babs what she thought of that!

Up in a flash went her hand, and down, conveyed with a ruthless tearing sound, came the notice from the board.

In her hand she crushed it and stamped savagely upon it as she flung it to the floor.

And then—"Diana," a quiet voice commanded. "put that back!"

And the Firebrand, wheeling, stared in sudden startled dismay as she found Miss Primrose regarding her, and by Miss Primrose's side Barbara Redfern herself!



Storm in Study Eight!

A MUTINIOUS flush tinged Diana's cheeks.

If Miss Primrose had been angry, if she had been biting or condemnatory, all Diana's most tempestuous instincts would have flared up. But the very restraint, the very tolerance of the mistress was disarming.

"Put that back, Diana," she repeated, and added, "please," she Diana bit her lip. She was furious—furious! She picked it up, she stood for an instant savagely debating whether she should tear it up there and then. But she didn't.

"Give it to Barbara."

Sulkily Diana handed it over. Babs, with a swift glance at her, smoothed it out and pinned it back on the board.

"Thank you," Miss Primrose nodded. "That was a very petulant thing to do, Diana," she said moderately. "However, I am not going to punish you. I realise, perhaps, that you have been under some misapprehension." She glanced at the Firebrand keenly.

"Miss Thackeray has just been on the phone to me," she added. "She was anxious to clear up a misunderstanding. The misunderstanding, I gather, was your idea of your own importance on this committee."

Diana threw Babs a bitter look. "Diana," the headmistress went on quietly, "let us have no more of this. It is at my wish that Barbara and Mabel are making themselves responsible for the rehearsals. It was at my wish that you were included on the committee. I should advise you to work in harmony and in friendship with the others. In fact, I want you to do that, Diana."

"Oh, flushed.

"So please," Miss Primrose added, "let there be no more of this. Barbara, I believe your meeting is due."

"Yes, Miss Primrose."

The headmistress nodded very kindly. With great dignity she strode off. Diana set her teeth.

"Diana," Babs muttered.

"Oh, shut up!" Diana snapped.

"Babs—"

"Rabbits!"

"But the meeting," faltered Babs.

"Bother the meeting!"

And Diana, in high dudgeon, flounced

Her scheme had failed. Babs & Co., backed up by the authority of the headmistress, had succeeded in wresting from her hands the reins of the leadership she coveted.

They were to arrange things. They were to help pick the girl who should play opposite Constance Thackeray in the big film, while she—she—she—A bitter sneer twisted her lips. She was graciously granted a place on their silly committee! She could sit around there listening to their burbling.

Not she!

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"Changed your mind, then?" Babs asked pleasantly.

"Well, thank goodness for that. We were just raising the question of whom we should invite in your place. Still, if you're going to be sensible about it—come in! Now," Babs went on, referring to the papers she had brought from the film studios, "about this dormitory rehearsal—"

"Who says we're going to have a dormitory rehearsal?" Diana wanted to know.

"Miss Thackeray asked for it."

"But why? Why shouldn't we do something else—a class-room scene, for instance?" Diana asked, determined to obstruct.

"Look here," Babs cried distractedly, "Diana—please! For goodness' sake pay attention. The idea," Babs went on, "is that girls in the dormitory are having a midnight feed all sitting round on beds eating and talking and generally enjoying themselves. One girl is standing on a bed, a glass of ginger-beer in one hand, a cake in the other. This is the rebel of the Form."

"You mean," Jemima Carstairs asked, "the girl who will finally be selected to play in the film?"

"That's right. Well"—Babs referred to her script again—"the rebel is making a speech—an impassioned speech on—"

"And who's going to play that?" Diana asked.

"Well, we thought Jean—"

"Oh," sneered Diana jealously. "I see, got it all planned out, as usual. One of your own precious pals to collar the kudos. Yoicks! Isn't that just typical of your crowd? Supposing," she suggested insolently, "you gave somebody else a chance for a change?"

Jean Cartwright flushed painfully. Perhaps a little guiltily she bit her lip. Jean wanted that part—goodness knows—she wanted it when it might mean so much to her now.

She had rejoiced when at the preliminary informal meeting in Study No. 4 she had been selected, Mabel declaring that she had so much work to do with the grouping, etc., she preferred to play in the chorus.

There was no doubt in the mind of the committee that next to Mabs she was the best qualified to play. But—

"I thought," Diana added sneeringly, "that the part was to go to the best girl. If you ask me," she added, "I don't think Jean Cartwright is a bit suitable to the part. What you want is a girl with verve and gusto."

"Meaning?" Babs asked.
 "Well," Diana shrugged, "I'm not as modest as you, of course, but what about me?"

"Oh, cut it!" cried Clara Trevlyn.
 "The committee's decided on Jean—"

"But look here—"
 It looked for a moment as if those two time-honored enemies were about to break into open hostility again.

But Babs, cutting in, put an end to the meeting there and then by declaring it closed. Up to the dormitory they trekked then, where the rest of the Form, in a state of great excitement, were already forgathered, having been warned.

Diana, defeated for the time being, but by no means accepting defeat, followed them.

"Well, here we are," Mabs cried. "Now, everybody, listen." And she explained briefly what they were to do.

"Now, Bessie, and you, Clara, you sit here. You, twins, and Lucy Faraday and Elsie form a group on the floor there. Keep as near the door as possible—just one or two of you in the background. Now, this is the bed on which the rebel of the Form delivers her speech."

"Thanks!" Diana said.
 And she stepped calmly forward, climbed on to the bed, and stood there. "Friends, Romans, countrymen," she announced.

Mabs stared.
 "Diana, that's not your part."
 "No?" Diana's look was challenging.

"Well, wait a minute—wait a minute!" she cried. "This is the Form, not the blessed society of Babs Redfern's friends who call themselves the committee. Listen to me, everybody!" And while the girls stared up at her she flamed upon them. "You all jolly well know that there's a fat part going for one girl with these backgrounds. But you don't jolly well know that Babs & Co. are bagging that part in advance for Jean Cartwright!"

"Diana!" Jean cried.
 "The affair's supposed to be open for fair competition," Diana went on. "Right, well let's have it. Jean Cartwright isn't the only actress in the Fourth Form—"

"Oh, get down!" cried Clara Trevlyn.
 "I won't!"
 "Won't you?" And Clara made a rush. But just in the nick of time Babs pulled her back.

Very warning was the glance she gave the Tomboy.
 "Girls, please listen to me," she cried. "You know the details as well as I do. It is true that the part is open to any girl, but the committee's been appointed to decide things. Diana wants the part for herself—"

"Well, and why shouldn't I have it?" Diana flamed.

"Because— Oh, goodness! Look here, are we going to rehearse, or aren't we?" Babs cried desperately. "All right, Diana, just to satisfy you, let's put it to the vote. Girls, the committee has decided, until Miss Thackeray gives a decision, that Jean plays the part. I put it to you—shall Jean or Diana play it now?"

There was a moment's pause. Then Peggy Preston, in that slow, decisive way of hers:

"Well, I don't see what use it's going to be having a committee if we're going to reverse their decisions at every rehearsal. I understand that what the committee decides should go with the rest of the crowd."

"Yes, rather!"
 "Well, vote. Hands up for Jean!" Mabs cried.

A forest of hands shot in the air at once. Only Lydia Crossendale & Co.

abstained. The result was obvious. Diana scowled.

"Well, there you are, Diana," Babs said. "Are you satisfied now?"

"No," said Diana between her teeth. "The Form's on your side—as usual. Go on," she cried, "get along with your beastly silly rehearsal. Do what the dickens you like. But I'm through—I'm finished! This was supposed to be my job," she added bitterly. "I suppose my father's position in the studios counts for nothing!"

Jean's face turned quite white.

"Diana!" she cried.

"Bah!"

And out of the dormitory stormed the Firebrand, slamming the door behind her.

Furiously she strode off. She was shaking with the anger upon her. She was also telling herself, scornfully, that she had behaved like a fool! Yes, a fool! And a perfectly childish little fool at that. That stuff about her father—

Rage against Babs, disgust against herself put Diana in one of the most tempestuous moods which even her tempestuous nature had ever known.

Quiveringly she flounced into Study No. 8, took a turn up and down the room.

Oh, yooks! What a smashing setback to all her fine schemes for ruling the roost here! Babs & Co. were pushing the Scots junior for all they were worth. Babs & Co.—oh, to the dickens with Babs & Co.

A step behind her, Diana swung round and her eyes narrowed.

"You!" she breathed.
 "I—Diana." And Jean, looking frightfully unhappy, her face almost white, came into the study. "Diana, I—I had to come to see you," she said.

"I couldn't go on with the part while—while you—" She paused. "Diana, I didn't ask for that part," she added quietly.

"No!" Diana said bitterly.

"But," Jean faced her levelly, "I was very glad to have the chance of it, Diana. It's not certain that I shall get it, of course, but—Diana, I want to tell you something," she added. "I feel you ought to know it—"

"Well, I don't want to hear it," Diana snapped.

"But, Diana—" Jean stood upright. "Diana, you have got to hear it," she said. "I'll tell you why I want that part—"

And she did, standing there while the anger faded from Diana's face, and she stared at her in astonishment. "Diana," Jean added appealingly, "if you knew the truth—"

"You mean you're absolutely broke?" Diana breathed.

"Yes."
 "And you've got to work for a living?"

Jean bit her lip. She nodded.
 "You see, Diana, this is my chance," she explained gently.

"But I don't see," Diana said. "Oh, bother it! Yes, it's rotten luck, and all that. I know, but— Here genuine sympathy struggled with her own vanity, and as usual Diana's vanity won. "No, bother it," she cried mutinously, "it's not fair! Why should you have your future carved out for you? What about others—what about me?"

"But, Diana, you've got money."
 "Yes; but money's not everything. I haven't got the other things I want," Diana scowled.

"Supposing I want a film career? Supposing I want that contract, so that I can get-out of this sickeningly rotten school, with all its little beastly sets of pals and schemers? I don't see—brutally—why you should be so cut up! If I had my way, I'd be out of Cliff House to-morrow. Anyway, when you leave I'll get you a job."

Jean started.



THERE were shrieks of dismay as the great cloud of soot billowed into the room. But none of the chums guessed for a moment that Diana was responsible for this disaster— Diana, who was out for revenge!

"What as?"

"Oh, I don't know! Something in my father's office."

"Thank you!" Jean drew herself up. "But I couldn't accept it, Diana—not in that spirit. I prefer," she added proudly, "to make my own way in the world."

Diana stared.

"You mean you refuse?"

"While I've an opportunity of doing something else—"

"I see!" Diana's lips curled. "All her sympathy vanished now. In other words, although you're a pauper, you still want to be a chooser. You want to hit the high spots. You want to go on the films. You!"

She knew that she was being unfair, but her consciousness of that unfairness only goaded her to greater cruelty.

"You wouldn't last five minutes on a real set with that face. They wouldn't even give you a scullery-maid's part in a decent film."

Jean turned white. Her eyes gleamed dangerously.

"Diana—"

"And don't Diana me," Diana burst out violently. "Oh, get out!" she cried. "Go back to your sneaking pals, Babs and Mabs. Go and whine your tales of woe to them."

Jean drew a deep breath.

"Diana—"

But Diana had lost all vestige of self-control now. She turned furiously. A magazine lay on the table to her hand. Impulsively she picked it up, impulsively she hurled it at the white-faced girl by the door. It smote Jean on the shoulder. She staggered a little.

"Diana, you awful—"

Outside came a sharp exclamation. The door opened with a rush. Miss Bullivant, the acid-faced mistress of the Lower Third burst like a hurricane, into the study.

"Diana," she snapped, "I saw that. It was an act of unwarranted, spiteful aggression. You will take a hundred lines—a hundred lines, do you hear? Jean, are you hurt?"

"N-no, Miss Bullivant."

"Then please leave this study," Miss Bullivant said. "Diana, I shall expect those lines before bed," she added.

She favoured the Firebrand with one winking glance and closed the door. Diana sank savagely into a chair.

So that was what she'd got for her pains. That was the reward her helping offer had provoked. Lined! Lined because—and suddenly a sense of all her wrongs welled up and exploded within Diana. Savagely she kicked a hassock across the room. Right! Well, better Jean Cartwright! Better Babs and Mabs! I should see!

They should see.

She'd rule the roost here yet—yes, and at the same time she'd oust that Scottish upstart from this part into which Babs and Mabs were trying to force her.

Let them wait.



Diana in the Limelight

talk was all of the coming of Constance Thackeray to-morrow, when the first rehearsal of the dormitory scene would be staged for the film star's benefit.

Indeed, it was hard to tell whether the Fourth, as a whole, was more exhilarated at the prospect of playing a part in a real film, or the entrancing prospect of having their efforts supervised by the glamorous Constance Thackeray.

Diana smiled.

Next morning she was up early, earlier even than Clara Trevlyn, the athletic Tomboy. Very leisurely she washed and dressed, and just before rising-bell walked out of the gates.

She took a stroll through the woods, consulted the gold watch upon her wrist, and, with a mischievous smile, turned into the telephone-box at the crossroads. Nobody was about. Good!

Babs, at that moment, was tripping downstairs, with Clara and Janet Jordan, when she turned as she heard her name, however.

"Barbara!"

"Yes, Stella?" Babs dimpled at the captain of the school.

"You're wanted on the phone in the prefects' room," Stella Stone announced. "Better hurry. It's Miss Thackeray."

"Oh, fine!"

And off rushed Babs in quite an excited flutter. Eagerly she grabbed the receiver.

"Yes, Miss Thackeray? This is Barbara Redfern."

"Oh, Barbara!" Very sweet was the film star's tone. "Barbara, I am sorry—most dreadfully, dreadfully sorry," Miss Thackeray's voice said, "but I find it absolutely impossible to keep my date with you at the school this afternoon. On the other hand, there are several things I want to see you about. I wonder if you could bring the committee over to the studios after lessons?"

Babs felt a little dashed, a little disappointed.

"Oh, Miss Thackeray, you're sure you can't come?"

"Positive, my dear. Just impossible!"

"Then," Babs said, with a regretful smile, "I'll come, of course. Yes, thank you, Miss Thackeray."

She put the receiver down. Rather forlornly she went off to break the news to her chums, while Diana, in the phone-box outside, hung up the receiver with a sly grin, and chuckled to herself.

Well, that would get Babs out of the way for the afternoon, she thought.

It did. For Babs & Co., without suspicion, went off immediately afternoon lessons were over. They found Diana lounging on the steps as they came out. Babs compressed her lips.

"Diana," she said, "we're going over to the Enterprise. Miss Thackeray wants to see the committee. You're a member, you know."

"Thanks," Diana said loftily, "but if that's an invitation—"

"It is."

"Then do you mind"—mockingly—"if I refuse? You see"—crushingly—"I'm rather particular about the company I'm seen keeping in public."

But Babs had a chance to utter the biting retort that came to her lips, she turned on her heel and lounged contemptuously back into the school.

"Oh, come on!" Clara Trevlyn grunted. "Jolly good job she's not coming, if you ask me! And we'll have to buck up!"

Buck up they did. Diana, appearing again on the steps, watched them, with a cynical smile, as they eyed off up the road.

Then, very leisurely, she strode down to the gates, nodding pleasantly to the

crowd of girls who were congregated in the tuckshop. Hardly had she reached the gates than a closed saloon car drove up.

And out of that car, dressed in an exquisite tweed suit, stepped—

Constance Thackeray!

"Diana!" she cried, and dimpling, her cheeks all rosy, hurried towards her. "Diana, how nice of you to meet me!" she cried. "But where is Barbara?"

"Barbara," Diana shrugged. "Oh, she's gone out."

"Gone—gone out?" The star's eyes widened. "But Barbara promised—"

"Well, she's gone, anyway!" Diana said disdainfully. "I don't know where. I'm not surprised," she added. "Babs is like that, you know. Takes a thing up with enthusiasm, and then drops it as if it had suddenly become red-hot. But don't worry," she added, as she saw the spasm of hurt that crossed the star's face. "The rehearsal need not suffer."

"I did you, didn't I, that I was running this show. Yes, I want to see the rehearsal, of course?"

"Y-yes, of course," Constance said, but her face was very puzzled. There was a hint of anger, of humiliation, in her expression. "Really," she protested, "I think Barbara might have told me. It—it's a little slighting of her, to say the least. Are Mabel and

Jean here?"

"The most Good gracious, no! They've gone off with Babs."

"Oh!" the film star said, and her lips tightened. "Very well, Diana, I have no alternative but to place myself in your hands. Let us go."

They went, Diana grinning triumphantly and gleefully. At one blow she had scooped the reins of leadership into her own hands and had blackened Babs & Co. in the film star's eyes. No wonder, no doubt, was her chance. Once Constance Thackeray had seen her in the role of the rebel girl, she would have no eyes for anyone else.

Into the school she took her, into her study. There she made the star comfortable with a magazine, and rushed round. A few minutes and the news was spreading like wildfire.

"What a bustle then, what a hustle! In ten minutes every available girl in the Fourth was in the dormitory. And what a silence fell upon them when a few minutes later, Diana entered with the beautiful film star. A silence of awe, of respect, of admiration!

Sweetly she greeted them all, most charmingly she spoke to each, as she was introduced by Diana—Diana, her colour heightened, her glorious billowing blonde hair accentuating the excited prettiness of her face.

"Well, girls, let's group!" Diana cried. "Yes, as we did last night. Now I'll take the part of the rebel school-girl." And, though giving anyone else a chance, she climbed on to the bed, striking a pose. "Will that do, Miss Thackeray?"

Constance nodded amiably.

"That's splendid, Diana! Yes, very good indeed! Right! Now, all you other girls look towards her. Diana, you're supposed to be laying down the law against me. You hate me. You're inciting the other girls to rise in rebellion against me. I haven't got the exact words of the script here, of course. But you can say something."

Diana did say something. She said quite a lot. She said it with such concentratedness, such impassioned fury, working herself up apparently into such an ungovernable rage that it was hard for the moment to believe that she was only film-acting.

"Very good—very, very good!"

Constance clapped. "Lovely, Diana! My goodness, I do believe your improvised words were an improvement on the script. Yes, that's good—really, truly good! Let's have it through again, shall we?"

Through again they had it, Diana, if possible, improving upon her first performance. Her cheeks glowed now, her eyes shone. She was almost breathless when she had finished.

"Well?" she asked the star.

"Well, Diana?" Constance smiled.

"Do you think I shall be able to play the part?"

Her heart beat a little faster as she asked that question, though she had little doubt of the answer. Constance looked at her. She looked queerly, oddly for a moment. Then her answer came, bringing a scowl to the Firebrand's face.

"That," she said "depends. Your acting was good, Diana, but I have yet to see Mabel and Jean. Not until I have seen them can I give a decision!"



"You Trickster!"



"WELL, here we are!" Babs announced breathlessly, as she slid from her machine outside the Enterprise Studios. "And, my gracious, only just in time!"—as the doorkeeper approached, with the key of the gates in his hand. "I say, excuse me," she added, with a laugh, "but don't shut us out, you know. We've got an appointment."

The doorkeeper looked blank.

"I'm sorry; I'm sure you've made some mistake," he said. "Miss Thackeray went to Cliff House half an hour ago. I was here when she stepped into the car, because I remember distinctly she asked me if I would be here when she came back. I told her I wouldn't," he went on, "but that I'd leave the keys with Mrs. Sharpe—she's one of the charwomen who's working with her daughter in the studio. But wait a moment—I'll go and ask Mr. Rummiman. She might have come back."

He turned away. Babs and Mabs eyed one another in consternation.

"Oh, surely she can't have forgotten!"

"Of course not!"

"I guess not. If she'd changed her mind, she'd have given you a ring, Babs," Leila Carroll put in. "But heads up, girls," she added a minute later—"here comes Mr. Rummiman himself."

Langley Rummiman it was, bareheaded, with a script in his hand. He frowned a little at sight of the girls.

"No," he said. "Miss Thackeray has certainly gone to Cliff House. She's there now. I rang Miss Primrose five minutes ago, to ask if she had arrived safely, and Miss Primrose says she's in the Fourth Form dormitory, rehearsing with Diana Reynton-Clarke."

"But—but she phoned this morning, about half-past eight."

"From here?"

"Why, yes?"

"Then somebody," he opined, "is certainly pulling your leg, Barbara, because Miss Thackeray did not arrive at the studios till ten o'clock. I can vouch very firmly for that, for I picked her up at her hotel in Courtfield at half-past nine. But as she's there," he

added, "she'll want you. Better hurry back."

In a dismayed group the chums turned. Obvious, now, that they had been the victims of a trick.

Babs coloured.

"Oh my hat! I'm sorry, girls!"

"That's all right!" Clara grunted.

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"No good crying over spilt milk. All the same"—her chin squared a little—"it's not hard to guess who the japer is Diana's conducting the rehearsal. Is she? Which reminds me—Diana got up rather earlier than usual this morning. Diana wants to boss the show, doesn't she? She wants the part. No wonder she wouldn't come along with us."

"Come on!" Barbara said grimly.

She caught up her bicycle. Almost angrily she flung herself into the saddle. The others, humiliated at the trick played upon them, followed her. It was in rather grim silence that the party rode back to Cliff House School, very grim indeed as they strode into the school and up to the Fourth Form dormitory. And there Clara, who was leading, flung the door open.

"So!" she grated.

"For there was the Form grouped about the beds. There on the centre bed was Diana, giving her speech for the third time. And there, looking on, was Constance Thackeray herself.

She swung round with a start.

"Why, Barbara!"

Clara, however, took no notice.

"Diana," she grated, "come off that bed!"

Diana stopped. She glared.

"Look here—"

"Come off that bed, you trickster!"

Diana flamed.

"Are you calling me names?"

"Be it!" Clara said, between her teeth. "You awful schemer! Who planned Babs this morning in Miss Thackeray's name, telling us to go over to the studios?"

"What?" cried the star.

"It's true!" Clara flared. "She got us out of the school by a trick. And why? Because she could receive you alone; because she could boss this show! Oh, you don't know our Diana!"

Down with a rush bumped Diana off the bed. Her face was flushed. Every eye was turned towards her now, every girl was looking askance. There was a steely glitter in the eyes of the star.

"Diana!" she said.

"Don't believe her!" Diana roared.

"It's lies—lies!"

"Is it?" Constance eyed her curiously. "Well, well never mind!" she cried. "Don't make a row—please. I

don't want your mistresses here. You and Clara had better thrash it out between you when I'm gone. Meantime, as Barbara and her friends have returned, we'd better go through the rehearsal again."

"But we've been through it!" Diana protested.

"All the same, I'd like to go through it again," the film star said firmly. "Yes, please. I'm anxious to see Mabs and Jean in the rebel schoolgirl's part. You other girls don't mind?"

"Oh, no, Miss Thackeray," came an immediate chorus.

"So this time, Diana, will you take your place among the chorus?"

Put Diana tossed her head. Bitter, black the look she flashed at Babs & Co., fierce the glance she threw at Jean Cartwright and Mabs.

"Thanks," she said bitterly, "but you can get on without me!"

And, without waiting for a reply, she roughly brushed her way past the film star, and strode savagely past Babs and Mabs to the door. The door closed with a bang. She was gone.

The film star bit her lip.

"What a very, very uncontrollable sort of girl!" she cried. "Oh dear! I'd no idea!" She sighed a little. "Well, let us get on, everyone!" she cried.

And while Diana savagely rushed off down the stairs, they got on!

BUT DIANA'S eyes were gleaming. Diana still was sure of herself. She had created the first impression. She had had the first word, and—she'd have the last!

After this rehearsal the star would be having tea with her. Right! Plenty of time to justify herself in Constance Thackeray's eyes then.

Diana, thinking, felt that, after all, everything was not lost. Babs & Co. had no proof, anyway. She had only to continue to seek refuge in denial.

She'd sway Constance Thackeray! For a whole hour after the rehearsal she'd have her to herself. Diana's lips parted. Thinking of that, formulating her plans, she went to the tuckshop and ordered a tea, the expensive lavishness of which made even Auntie Jones open her eyes.



Diana's "Damper"



BUT Constance Thackeray did not go to Study No. 8 for tea.

She accepted the invitation of Babs & Co. to the more modest spread which was to be given in Study No. 4 to herself and the members of the committee.

For Babs, without any knowledge of Diana's invitation, had arranged that. So much better, she said, to talk things over in the cheery atmosphere of the study over tea. So much jollier they could all be, and, though Constance would in the ordinary way have had to decline that invitation, she accepted with alacrity when, after the rehearsal, she had talked things out with the chums.

For then it became obvious to Constance, remembering the conversation she had had on her arrival at the school with Diana, the slighting remarks Diana had made about Babs & Co., her suggestion that Babs & Co. had gone off on some selfish adventure of their own, that Diana had been scheming.

And that avenged Constance entirely in favour of Babs & Co. It made her, at the same time, rather disgusted with Diana. If there weren't any actual proof against Diana, there were facts. Those facts spoke for themselves.

Quite successful the rehearsal had been. Most pleasing feature of all was the acting of Jean Cartwright. Jean might not have the dynamic personality or the fiery delivery of Diana Royston-Clarke. But her greater restraint, her utter sincerity, won the heart of the star. Diana, after all, was always too much "the great actress." Mabs had had her trial, too; but Mabs, though she was good, was remembering that duty to Jean, and Mabs deliberately withheld herself. Constance was pleased.

Sitting at the head of the gleaming table, surrounded by the members of the committee in the cheery atmosphere of Study No. 4, she laughed.

"Yes, Jean; you were good," she acknowledged — "marvellously good! Diana did the part very well, too, in a more showy way. But showiness is not everything. The girl who plays this part will have to produce other qualities besides mere rebellion. Diana rather gave the impression of being a deadly enemy of the schoolmistress."

Jean blushed.

"But — the star smiled — "your interpretation was different, Jean. Oh, there was no doubt about it that you were up against the Form-mistress! At the same time, there was the impression that you were just a little doubtful of what you were doing, and that, of course, is the note we want to strike in the film. Can I have another cup of tea, Barbara? I must speak to Mr. Rummman about you when I get back to the studios, Jean, and see if I can arrange a test on the set."

"Oh, Miss Thackeray!" Jean gulped, and her face flushed.

While Babs and Mabs, glancing at each other, smiled a slow and significant smile.

And in the corridor Diana Royston-Clarke clenched her fists. Diana had heard that.

Diana was fuming. In vain Diana had waited for the star's arrival. Never has a table looked more lovely or more tempting. Never had Diana herself, in her new yellow tulle frock, looked more adorable.

Impatiently she had waited for the star, and then, like a dart, stabbing her, had come Constance's voice — Constance in Study No. 4!

Humiliation, fury, flamed up within Diana. Out came her chin. In perfect passion, she strode along to Study No. 4. Crash! That was the door flying back upon its hinges. Fiery-faced, glittering-eyed, she looked it.

Everybody stared.

"Diana!"

"Oh, hallo, Diana!" Babs laughed.

"Like to come and join us?"

"Miss Thackeray!" Diana got out. The film star flushed a little.

"Well, Diana?"

"I thought you were having tea with me?"

"I'm sorry! I changed my mind!" the star said, a little stiffly.

"I see!" Diana showed her teeth.

"Listening to the lies of this fawning tribe!" she got out. "You're not coming, then?"

"I am sorry, Diana; but, in the circumstances, I must decline. And I most strongly resent —"

"Bah!" Diana snapped, and —

Crash! went the door, and back into the passage, in a perfect tempest, stepped the Firebrand.

Quivering she was, every angry passion within her aroused. Every un-

pleasant trait that went to make up Diana's compelling nature was on the surface now.

How she'd like to smash up that party!

Well, why not? Fury always gave Diana a fertility of ideas. Now — Her eyes gleamed. Well, she'd show them!

Suddenly she changed her direction, mounting the stairs until she had reached the attic, above which the workmen, now gone for the day, were still repairing the Cliff House roof. She found the trapdoor, climbed out on to the roof, looked towards the chimneys. Now, which was Study No. 4 chimney?

But she knew. Each of them was marked. The chimney of Study No. 4, surrounded by a lake of sacks and bricks and water and mortar, was that which was receiving attention at the moment.

Diana's eyes gleamed. She looked around her. A bucket of water caught her eyes. Almost without thinking, she snatched it up. Now — And on the lip of the chimney she tilted the bucket. It splattered a little dirty water over her frock, but Diana never heeded.

"Steady — steady!" she thought; and then, with a swoop, allowed the bucket's contents to escape.

She laughed aloud as she heard it go pelting down the chimney itself, and then, scooting quickly for the door by which she had come, disappeared.

While in Study No. 4 —

Unexpected and disastrous was the interruption. The fire was burning brightly; the merry little party was at its height. Then — Hiss! Whoosh! With a noise like thunder, the water swirled into the grate, bringing with it all the soot of the winter season.

There were screams, a yell. Chairs went over. From the open fireplace a great, black, ugly cloud of soot and steam gushed out, for a moment completely obliterating everything. Clothes, shoes, blouses ruined, the tea rendered at once uneatable and undrinkable. Everyone choked.

"Oh, my aunt!"

"What is it?"

"Atishoo!" wailed Bessie Bunter.

"Oh, gig-gig — oh, gug-goodness!"

Blindly they groped their way towards the door. Still a haze of soot and smoke hung about the room. Babs, fighting her way to the window, threw it open wider.

Constance Thackeray, the pretty dress she had on completely and utterly ruined, stared about her. Her chair had gone back; somebody had trodden on her toes. Under the sooty grime which covered her face she was white with anger.

"My frock!" she cried. "My —" and then, because anyone could stop her, rushed from the room, almost colliding with Miss Primrose, who was in the act of coming down the corridor to inquire how the rehearsal had gone.

"My goodness! Bless my soul! Girls!" she cried, and then stared. "Goodness gracious! It is — or isn't it, Miss Thackeray?"

"It is, Miss Thackeray!" the film star got out. "Oh, my goodness! Somebody, Miss Primrose, poured a pail of water down the chimney! My dress is utterly ruined!"

"Bless my soul!"

"Can you tell me where I can get a wash, please?"

"Why, yes, yes! Please come with me! Good gracious!" And the head-mistress looked flabbergasted. "I had no idea — But this way, Miss Thackeray! I must apologise! I must — Oh, my dear, you are black!"

Quivering, Constance Thackeray went.

Babs & Co., busily washing themselves, did not see Miss Thackeray go. They only knew she had gone when Miss Primrose, prowling like a tigress in search of the perpetrator of the jape, announced that fact half an hour later.

The faces of Babs & Co., clean as they were, were nevertheless grim. They had their own ideas as to who had been responsible for that outrage, and though they could not very well sneak on Diana, swift and grim was the interview they meant to have with that girl.

On vengeance bent they entered the confines of Study No. 4.

But Diana had flown!



Disaster!

DIANA, as a matter of fact, was on her way at that very moment to the Enterprise Studios.

Not Diana to do anything by halves. Diana possessed strategy. She believed in following up one smashing blow with another. Now was the time, Diana thought, to see Constance Thackeray herself.

She smiled serenely as she strolled along. She only wished she had her father's car. Down the road, however, the bus overtook her. Still very pleased with herself, Diana climbed into it, booked to the studios, stuffed the ticket into the palm of the white linen gloves she still wore.

A quarter of an hour later she alighted outside the gates of the Enterprise Studios, and frowned a little when she found those gates closed. She rang the bell.

Out of the studios came a small figure, a figure with a bunch of keys in its hand. Little Nellie Sharpe stared at sight of Diana.

"Oh, Miss Royston-Clarke —"

"What's the game?" Diana snapped.

"Who's locked these gates?"

"Well, everyone's gone home, you see, Nellie apologised, except Mr. Rummman. He's in his office."

"Oh!" Diana said, and smiled at the youngster. "Very well, Nellie, let me in," she ordered. "I'll wait for Miss Thackeray in her dressing-room."

"Yes, miss," Nellie said.

She unlocked the gates and then carefully locked them again. Almost breathlessly she followed Diana into the studios, eagerly rushing forward to open the door. Diana smiled at her eagerness. That soft, tender sympathy which she always felt for people worse off than herself came over her once again. She looked interestedly at the little one.

"You have a hard life, Nellie."

"Oh, it's not so bad!" Nellie said.

"But you're not intending to do all this your life, surely?"

"No, miss," Nellie said, flushing. "But I'm still at the Council school, you see. I only help mother in the evenings."

"I see," Diana laughed. "And when you leave school, Nellie, what are you going to be?"

"Well, miss, I don't know. But I'd like to do typing and all that sort of thing," Nellie said wistfully. "Mother says that it's silly work, though. Girls can't get jobs as typists nowadays. She wants me to go into the pickle factory at Courtfield."

Diana shook her head. Strange how the stormy Firebrand of Cliff House could be so gently tender all at once. Poor

little kid, she thought, and impulsively groped in her handbag, producing half-a-crown. Into the amazed and delighted hand of Nellie she pushed it.

"There!" she said. "Take that, Nellie. Get yourself some stockings—you need 'em. And when you leave school"—she dimpled—"you come and see me. I'll find you a job."

"Oh, miss!"
Diana laughed as she swished on her way. Nellie's worshipping eyes followed her as she climbed the stairs, then, looking at the half-crown in her hand again, drew out her handkerchief and tied it into a corner. Meantime Diana went on. She pushed open the door of the star's dressing-room and went in.

"H'm!" she said, and frowned around her.
Not a very tidy girl was Constance Thackeray. Her room usually looked as if a hurricane had swept through it. Papers, papers everywhere. The table littered and neglected. A great pile of expensive, flimsy frocks which the star had obviously been trying on had slid from the settee near the fireplace and now lay on the floor.

Diana grinned a little derisively. She walked over to the table. Thoughtfully she selected a cigarette from the star's silver box. She put it between her lips, took up a box of matches, and struck one.

She didn't notice, however, that the match had a double head. It lit with a spluttering fizz, and one fiery part of it, unseen by Diana, flew across the room, dropping amid the fine laces and frills of the tumbled pile of frocks on the floor. Diana strolled to the window.

Where had Constance gone?
But she guessed now. Of course. Constance could not come back here to change. Her own clothes would be at her hotel in Courtfield. That was where she had gone. But never mind. Obviously she must be coming back here. Nellie Sharpe had told her so, in order to meet Mr. Runniman. She'd wait.

Then a strange smell of burning smote her nostrils. A sudden roar and rushing sound behind her. Diana turned with a start. Her eyes goggled, her face went white as she saw the flames springing up from the centre of that pile of frocks. Instinctively then she guessed what had happened. Her match had set these dresses on fire!

Her heart leapt.
In one bound she was across the room. She caught the rug, savagely throwing it on the flames, beating, beating, stamping, stamping. Thank goodness; and she breathed with relief, feeling at the same time a little sick and dismayed. The flames were out, although a few thin wisps of smoke still arose.

Now what?
Then Diana realised. She couldn't stop! She hadn't stopped! A single glance told her those costumes' value. She would be blamed. What hope then of swaying the film star in her favour?

She darted for the door. Unheeded, behind her, the garments which she thought were now safe, were still smouldering. Down the stairs she rushed, three at a time, never realising in her hurry that she dropped a glove. Nellie Sharpe, at the bottom, turned with a start.

"Nellie!" Diana gasped. "Look here, let me out, and if anyone should ask if I've been here, I haven't—understand? Nellie, only you saw me come in?"

"Yes!" Nellie gasped.

"Yes! You won't forget?"

"No, Miss Royston-Clarke, as if I would!"

"Right!"
And Diana, breathing relief, followed Nellie to the gates and stepped into the road. She hurried along it, was turning the corner, when she stopped. Her jaw dropped, her face suddenly turned white.

For, coming towards her, swinging along with a rapid stride, was Jean Cartwright!

She was tingling as she reached the gates. She rang the bell. Nellie, the keys in her hand, came forward.

"Miss Thackeray isn't in, miss," she replied to Jean's inquiry. "But she's expected."

"Thank you! Can I come in and wait, then?" Jean asked.

She could. Nellie opened the gates. Up into Constance's dressing-room Jean



SWIFTLY Diana seized a rug and flung it on the flames. Her mind was reeling. Supposing she were caught here in the studio—supposing it became known that she had caused this fire!



Leaping Flames

QUICKER than the thought which slipped the action, Diana slipped behind the hedge near by.

While Jean, anxious, all unconscious, came on. There was a bag in Jean's hand, but it was not her own. It was the bag belonging to Miss Constance Thackeray, which that great star, in her perturbation and her haste, had left behind her at Cliff House School. Jean was bringing it back.

And perhaps Jean was also hoping for a further chat with the star. For Jean, at this moment, was intensely anxious to know exactly what was in Constance Thackeray's mind.

If only the two hundred pounds and the contract which went with it came her way! What a glorious end to her troubles and her difficulties. No need then to leave Cliff House. Jean felt that she must see Constance, must find out exactly what she intended to do. The discovery that the star had left her bag in the study seemed like an opportunity made by Fate.

went, thrilling, all a-quiver with expectation. She flung the door open. And then she stopped, spluttering and gasping in the cloud of smoke which rolled out to greet her.

Horrified, Jean looked round. Then she jumped. In the corner was a bundle—a bundle of clothes. They were smouldering, smoking. Even as she watched a tiny spurt of flame leapt up.

No longer did she think of her mission, her hopes. In a moment she was all consternation. A few more minutes and fire, fierce and furious, would have been raging in that dressing-room. Quickly she caught hold of the vase of flowers on the dressing-table, sweeping water and flowers towards the burning heap. It missed. As if to taunt her, a great sheet of flame burst upwards!

Something else—quickly—
Ah! The rug! Feverishly she snatched it up, frantically belaboured the flames.

Smash, smash, smash! Jean gasped. Her face was grimy, but she was mastering the fire. The last yellow tongue flickered and faltered. She threw the rug on top of it, and then jumped on the rug, stamping the embers beneath her feet.

Thank goodness! Thank goodness!
And then—
"Great Scott, girl!"

"A voice—a man's voice, at the door, and there was Mr. Rummiman, his eyes wide, his face set, rushing towards her. Jean spun round, almost trembling as he caught her arm and flung back the rug. He glared at her.

"Those costumes! You—! His face set. "How did you start this?"

"I?" Jean's eyes opened in horror. "But I didn't start it!"

"Then who did? No, wait a minute." His eyes turned angrily into hers. "Wait a minute, young lady. I came into this room half an hour ago. Everything was all right then. You are the only person who has been in it since. If you didn't start it, who did?"

"I tell you," Jean gasped, and felt frozen. "Mr. Rummiman, the fire was blazing when I came in."

"Indeed? Then wait a minute." He called down the stairs. "Nellie! Nellie Sharp!" he cried.

"Yes, sir!" Nellie replied, running up to him.

"I want to ask you a question. Has anyone, except Miss Cartwright, called at these studios since the gates were closed?"

Nellie crimsoned. She thought of Diana.

"N-no, sir!"
"And nobody's been in this room?"
"No, sir!"

"Thank you, you can go!" And Nellie, looking rather scared, melted away. "Well, Miss Cartwright," he added grimly, "what have you to say to that? That fire didn't start of its own accord. No, don't deny it!" he said fiercely.

"Apart from almost destroying the studios, you've ruined hundreds of pounds' worth of costumes. What were you doing?"

Jean almost fainted.

"I—I was doing nothing, I tell you."
"You don't suggest the fire started by itself?"

"No, of course not. Yes—oh, I don't know!" Jean cried distractedly. "I tell you I came back to see Miss Thackeray."

"Thanks, it doesn't matter what you came back for. The evidence is plain. Obviously," he said grindingly, "you were here. Obviously, you were doing something you ought not to have been doing—playing with the matches, or something. You will leave these studios, Jean Cartwright, at once, and you will never," he added grindingly, "come in here again. I shall telephone Miss Primrose. Here," he added, picking something up from the floor, "don't leave your glove behind. Go!"

"But—"

"Go!" the director thundered.

And Jean, dazed, went, mechanically clutching the glove which he had thrust into her hand.

The heart seemed to have been torn out of her. She felt numb. She had no idea how she reached Cliff House, and was almost surprised when she found herself there. But at once a crowd of juniors descended upon her.

"Jean!" cried Barbara Rodfern.

"Jean, old thing!" Mabel Lynn exclaimed. "Oh, she looks ill!"

"Leave me alone!" Jean said.

"But—but— Oh, wait a minute!" Babs cried distractedly. "Jean, what's this we're hearing? Primmy sent for me ten minutes ago. She said that you caused a fire, or something." Mr. Rummiman—

Jean gulped.

"But I didn't—I didn't!" she got out. "No," she cried—"no! It was some horrible, some ghastly mistake! Someone must have been there before me! Someone else started the fire! I was

trying to put it out when—I was caught. It was already burning!"

"And isn't that," a mocking voice put in, "a really ripping story, children? So beautifully circumstantial. Just like a page out of a story-book! Who could have been there, Jean darling?"

Jean looked up. Diana, calm, cool, mocking, stood before her.

"Perhaps," Clara Trevlyn snappishly suggested, "you! Anyway," she added, her eyes narrowing, "where have you been?"

"My business!" Diana replied mockingly.

"Is it? Well—!" And then Clara stared. "Wait a minute!" she cried quickly. "Jean, what have you got there?"

And suddenly she jerked the glove—a long, white linen glove, with monogrammed initials on the cuff—from the Scots girl's hand. "Jean!"

Jean blinked.

"Why, that must be the glove Mr. Rummiman gave me. It was on the floor of the dressing-room. He put it in my hand." Her eyes widened. "Why," she cried, and flung round upon Diana, "it's yours!"

Diana started back. She gazed in furious consternation at that glove.

"Oh, isn't it?" Clara's face was grim. "Wait a minute, girls. No, you don't, Diana!"—as the Firebrand made a savage snatch for the glove. "My hat, I see it now! Diana was there! Diana set the costumes alight!"

"I didn't!" Diana panted. "It—it was an accident!"

"What?"

"I tell you—"

"Why, you've given yourself away!"

"All right, girls," a voice cut in—"all right!" And they all turned, gazing suddenly at the frozen features of Miss Primrose. "I heard. I think, Diana—"

—with a steely glance at the Firebrand of the Fourth—that an explanation is required. You—and you, Jean—come to my study!"

USELESS FOR Diana to deny that glove. It was the only glove of its kind in the school. If its unusualness hadn't given it away, its initials would.

"How," Miss Primrose inquired, "did this come to be there?"

"I don't know," Diana said sulkily. "But I do!" Miss Primrose's face was grim. "Diana, you deny going to the studio this afternoon?"

"I do!" Diana replied.

"Then how," Miss Primrose asked penetratingly, and held up a strip of green card, "is it that this bus ticket is in the glove, Diana? The ticket bears to-day's stamp."

Diana's face turned white.

"Miss Primrose—"

"Thank you! I do not think there is any need for you to fabricate further!" Miss Primrose said, with a curl of her lip. "The evidence is very clear. I am willing to believe it was an accident, Diana. I can forgive you for that. But I cannot forgive you for deliberately allowing another girl to suffer for your crimes. I shall get into communication with Mr. Rummiman right away."

"In the meantime"—she paused—"in the meantime, since you have shown yourself so unworthy of the privilege, and as, apparently, you are such a warring element within the ranks, you will consider yourself suspended from the committee."

"I would," Miss Primrose went on, "take this matter further and forbid you to take part in the film altogether, but I still have to consider your father's interests in the company. Jean," she added, to that girl's great relief, "I am sorry this has happened, but you have nothing to worry about, my dear. Go now, both of you."

They went—Jean happy, light-hearted, full of hope once more; Diana downcast, black, brooding, bitter.

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Just, she reflected savagely, when she had her enemy in the hollow of her hand, Fate had turned up with a trick like this!

She had been bowled out! Her own carelessness had betrayed her. She was in disgrace—she, the haughty Firebrand, now the scorn of the school.

But, worse than that, she was no longer a member of the committee!

What hopes now to her vaulting boast to rule the roost at Cliff House?

But there was still a gleam in the Firebrand's eyes.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

BAFFLED— BUT UNBEATEN

● NOT Diana to admit defeat! Not Diana to give in when she has made up her mind to get her own way!

Baffled in her purpose she may be—but she is by no means beaten, as you will see when you read next week's brilliant long complete story, specially written for THE SCHOOLGIRL by HILDA RICHARDS, and entitled:

"THEIR STAND AGAINST THE FIREBRAND"

**STARTS TO-DAY: An Enthralling SERIAL of Jungle Adventure,
Starring Betty Barton and her Chums of Morcove School**

MORCOVE IN UNKNOWN AFRICA



Heart of The Wild

By MARJORIE STANTON

Illustrated by L. Shields

"HERE, Madge dear, as you are awake—some coffee."
"What! Oh, Betty, thanks awfully! Daylight again!

Are they back yet?"

"Not yet, Madge. But it'll be all right. Don't worry."

"I feel so ashamed at having slept—"

"Rubbish! It's done you good!"

"But, Betty, when my dad is one of those who set off in the night, to—to make such a desperate attempt!"

"And any minute now, dear, they'll all be back—I'm sure!"

Madge Minden gave her chum, Betty Barton, a grateful look for having spoken so comfortingly.

Two hours of the sleep of utter exhaustion had there been for Madge in this tent to which Betty had now come, treading softly, bringing a mug of the coffee which had been brewed at the camp-fire.

Returning daylight, glimmering in at the unflapped entrance to the tent, showed two other girls coiled in sleep upon the ground, under some mosquito netting.

With relief Madge noticed how undisturbed they were—two of the girls from Morcove School—Bunny Trevor and Tess Trelawney. They must have crept in to lie down and snatch a little rest, some time after she herself had been persuaded to find relief in sleep.

At four in the morning that had been; the tropic night at its darkest, and the surrounding forest eerily silent, except for some frightening sound, now and then, all over in a moment, significant of the wild life of the place.

Tooth and claw! The domain of fierce beasts, and of tribesmen no less ferocious! Into such a perilous world as this had the spirit of great adventure

brought a party of travellers to whom these girls belonged.

Schoolgirls merely; and yet, with some schoolboy brothers and a couple of other sturdy lads, they were out here in the heart of Wild Africa.

"Who's about now, Betty—outside?"

"I think—only Polly and Naomer. They're just up and are seeing about some brekker."

Madge sipped a little more of the hot coffee, and then, retaining the mug, moved to get outside the tent. She and Betty were next instant in the open, where the strengthening light showed them much to put them in good heart.

This temporary camp, in a glade-like spot formed by the crashing down of mammoth forest trees many a year since, was terribly suggestive of remoteness from civilisation.

At the camp-fire there was the madcap of Morcove School, Polly Linton, obviously busy about her self-appointed task of getting breakfast cooked. She had as cook's mate that dusky imp, Naomer Nakara—a chum who, because she liked good things to eat, fondly believed herself to be a born cook.

Betty, glad to see Madge looking so cheered up, walked her towards the self-styled cooks. Polly and Naomer could not fail to provide their own infallible remedy for oppressive anxiety.

"That was delicious coffee, Polly," smiled Madge.

"You didn't notice a slight flavour of antelope gravy?" was the mock-grim inquiry. "I made it in the big dixie, so as to have plenty of it on tap. And of course Naomer here didn't really clean the dixie for me."

"Ooo, I did!" Naomer began to shrill; but Polly snatched a burning brand from the fire to wave it, in the same way that she was accustomed to flourish an ebony ruler in Study No. 12 at Morcove.

"Not so loud, kid, when the boys have only just gone to lie down, after being up absolutely all night. Mrs. Willoughby, too, and Mrs. Cardew—"

"They're getting some sleep at last?" Madge thankfully inferred. "How about Judy? She talked of staying until—"

"Yes, but some of the others simply made her go to her tent at last," Betty hastened to remark. "Like you, Madge, she'll be all the better for a bit of sleep."

"And able to make a good brekker," Polly brightly rejoined. "So, kid!" to Naomer, "go to the larder and fetch me that longside of antelope. Mind you close the door of the refrigerator," the madcap jested, "and don't leave the electric light burning! Madge I hope you won't mind fried antelope again! Oh, dash—here comes Pam now, when she should be fast asleep!"

Yet tall Pam Willoughby, stepping across from one of the tents, did not look as if she had opened her eyes before it was really time for her to do so.

Serene as ever, this fateful morning, was Pam! Quite calm, although her father was one of those who, in the middle of the night, had had to go off on a desperate attempt to rescue the negro guide, Kwamba, from a hostile band which had snatched him from their midst.

"I thought I might be useful?" Pam hinted.

"No hands wanted," the Madcap announced. "We have every labour-saving device! No more kitchen ranges for me after this, with flues to clean. But I object to those many monkeys watching from the trees. They annoy you know? I fancy it must be Naomer who so interests them."

"Naomer, being back with the joint of 'home-killed,'" was invited by an arch look from Polly to hear this theory expounded.

"What puzzles the monkeys is this, of course," Polly chatted on. "Why, when Naomer is so like all of them—why she should wear clothes, and a pith helmet!"

"Or do they wonder why we're all here? That's more like it, I expect," Betty carried on the playful talk. "But whether they like it or not, here we are!"

"Without any intention of staying, though," Polly continued. "Don't worry," she addressed any frisky tailed ones who might be nervously peeping down from the trees; "going on again presently! But our old Kwamba left, girls," she added to her chums. "Always moving on! That's us—these hols!"

"What a holiday it will be to talk about, when we get back!" Betty exclaimed. "Oh, we're going to do—wonders, you see! As for this spot of trouble with some of the natives—it'll soon be over."

"Have this, for saying that," Polly exclaimed, handing a mug to Betty, that had been dipped into the dixie. "You really had some sleep, Pam?"

"I did! Might have been dozing now, but a dream woke me up. I dreamed—"

"Not about—what's been happening, I hope?"

"No, Madge, dear. Strange! I dreamed about—your neck—"

"This?" And Madge, hastily putting a hand into the neck-opening of her cotton-frock, drew out a medallion-like pendant that hung, locket-wise, by a thin gold chain about her neck.

Pam nodded.

"The Ankh necklace—yes," she said.

"I dreamed that you lost it!"

THE ANKH NECKLACE!

They had all called it that ever since a certain day in the Easter holidays when, quite by chance, the father of Pam Willoughby had found that Madge possessed a trinket that was really a priceless find—Ancient Egyptian!

Some "language of the dead" lettering, on one side of the pendant, had been translated by Mr. Willoughby. He said that a certain King Ankh, "who rules and has dominion over the Golden Grotto," had given the finely wrought trinket to his "royal wife."

On the other side of the pendant was the device of two hawks facing each other—a symbol occurring frequently amongst relics of Ancient Egypt.

And what a sensational development it had been for Morcove, during those Easter "hols" in camp, when they found that a black man, belonging to a travelling circus, had his right arm tattooed with exactly the same device. A negro, tattooed with a symbol relating to the Egypt of three thousand years ago!

That negro was the man Kwamba—so called, after the tribe to which he had belonged before he found his way to England. He was quite a character, and a jolly good sort, and the campers had become very fond of him.

By getting him to talk about his early days in Africa, they had learned with

amazement that every member of the Kwamba tribe was tattooed with the double hawk.

He could not say why, except that in the Kwamba country there was a "heap big cliff" on which a similar symbol was chiselled. It had been there "ebber since de world began," and the Kwambas had a tradition that some day a great secret would be revealed, and then every man and woman and child of the tribe would know good fortune.

Such was the strange, mysterious association between the "double hawk" of the Kwamba country, and the device on Madge's necklace, which had started talk of an expedition to Central Africa in the next holidays—in quest of the Golden Grotto!

Mr. Willoughby, a much-travelled man, had arranged all details. He had found Kwamba of the Circus very eager to give up his ill-paid job to come out with the expedition, as guide and interpreter.

Everything, at the start, had promised well. Nor would there have been this sudden hostility on the part of tribesmen through whose country the expedition was making its way, only—someone else was eager to find King Ankh's Golden Grotto!

That rival to Morcove & Co. might have been one here in Africa months ago, but he happened to have been sent to prison for some petty fraud consistent with his rascally character.

Pierre Dupont was his name; a Frenchman, who had done much work amongst the tombs of Ancient Egypt, only he had not acted honourably, and had been "warned off" by the authorities.

It had been Morcove & Co.'s joyful belief that they were going to be "first at the Grotto." This well-deserved they were in, in gaol for M. Dupont had, they reckoned, just about "stalled" him. But during the last forty-eight hours in this African forest that pleasant belief had been rudely shattered.

Dupont, after all, was out here in Africa—a scoundrel trying his hardest to frustrate their expedition.

It was his doing that trusty Kwamba, their guide and interpreter, had been carried off. Of this, no one in the camp had a shadow of a doubt. Dupont's time in gaol must have been cancelled out by the term spent at school by the girls and boys since Easter. The Morcove expedition had, perhaps, obtained a few days' start of the Frenchman, but no more.

And so it was quite natural for Madge Minden, still standing at the camp-fire with Betty, Polly, Pam, and Naomer, to make a sudden allusion to Dupont. "I wonder if his wife is with him, girls? You remember her—"

"Madame Dupont?" Polly exploded. "Hardly the place—"

"Hark!"

That was Madge, in a tone of most hopeful excitement.

Sharply she turned round.

"There they are—back at last!"

"Yes—hurrah!" Polly cheered, but only under her breath, for she did not want to rouse all those who were getting much-needed sleep in the various tents.

She, like Madge, was joyfully certain; so were Betty and Pam and Naomer.

Back with the dawn—those who, taking their lives in their hands, had gone out at midnight upon such a desperate mission.

Eagerly they rushed to where, judging by those faint, tell-tale sounds, the returning rescue-party was likely to burst clear of the creeper-festooned trees.

And yet, as they ran, the fancy came to all these girls that there were very few sounds for several persons to be

making, floundering through such deep cover.

Two seconds later they beheld a first figure, as it came, lurching from dead weariness, out of the dark forest.

"Dave!" It was he—that sturdy lad who had been picked last night out of the five schoolboys who had volunteered to go with the two fathers.

His clothes were torn, his pith helmet was awry, and his face and hands were badly scratched. He still carried a rifle, but the weight of it seemed to be all too much for him now.

Dazed-looking, utterly dead beat—like this had he returned. And the others—where were they?

The Only Way

FOR a few seconds Dave could only stand amongst them panting.

"Everything all right here?" he husked. "Nothing happened here in the night?" "Nothing, Dave. But you—the state you're in!" Betty gasped. "And the others—are they coming on? Or—or what?"

He looked at Pam, then at Madge. It was a moment when he, after enduring horrors about which they were to be told only long afterwards, might well have gone to bits. Yet he held himself up, and his chivalrous nature made him exert his fagged mind to find such words as would minimise the shock for those two girls in particular.

Pam and Madge, each with a father who must now be considered—missing! "The last I saw of them," he panted, "they were not hurt, anyway. They showed up once, for all your sakes, to get away and get back to camp, or you wouldn't know what to do. So that's what I've done—come back to tell you. The message is—"

"But what happened?" clamoured Betty and Polly. "The rescue failed?"

"We got Kwamba away from that lot," Dave quavered. "But we were set upon by twice the number on our way back. I don't want to describe it all. I—I must have been pretty lucky myself. Anyway, I kept out of their hands and kept my gun. Then—then, when the others saw how things were going, they shouted to me to get away whilst I could. We are all to push on to the Kwamba country—"

"Oh, we can't!" Madge struck in. "We can't, leaving them—"

"But listen," he checked that anguished outcry. "It's a means of saving them, after all. It's the only way. If we can get to the Kwamba country, we'll be amongst friends. I heard our Kwamba shouting that to me. We're to show his tribe the necklace, and that will work like a charm. You get that?"

He paused, still heaving for breath. And seeing him sway a little just then, two of the girls took hold of him on either side.

"Act like magic, it will—Kwamba shouted that to me," the exhausted lad panted. "And so, with the whole tribe on our side, we can—can save our men. The Ankh necklace—"

But he could not go on. Of a sudden all life seemed to go out of him, and Betty and Pam, after supporting his collapsing figure for a moment or so, let it sink gently down, to lie there in the rough grass.

"Awful!" Polly muttered.

Then she rushed away to find a cup of something to hold to those parched and cracked lips.

NEVER in their young lives had the girls and boys worked harder and faster than they had to do during the next three hours.

By a little after nine only one tent had still to come down and be bundled together for transit. It was the tent in which poor, worn-out Dave had been put to rest.

He was still there—watched over by his mother and sister. But very soon he would have to be brought out, and if he could not manage to march with the rest, then he must be taken along on a stretcher. There was one in the camp.

Gladly enough, too, would chums of his do that for him, who had done so much for them.

At any minute Mrs. Willoughby and Mrs. Cardew—the only grown-ups still with the juniors—would give the order to start. For it must be on, on to the Kwamba country, as quickly as possible now!

The vital importance of Dave's last words before he collapsed had been readily grasped.

Those words had constituted an urgent order, from the lost menfolk of the party, that must be obeyed. Not by a turning back could any good be achieved; only by going on.

Tenting, stores, implements, a case of ammunition, the first-aid box—all such vital necessities as these were to be taken along; but much stuff was having to be abandoned. No help for it!

Days ago their hired porters had deserted. The beginning of their troubles, that. Since then Morcove & Co. had done plenty of marching with a pack upon the back. But they must be lighter packs now.

"Whew!" Polly puffed, for it was another morning of that burning heat which all the creatures of the wild seemed to revel in.

The surrounding forest, into which the plunge must soon be made, was noisy with the jarring notes of strange birds and the queer, sharp cries of all the thousands of monkeys.

"Sit down whilst we can," Betty blithely counselled. "For everything is ready."

"Not a bad bit of work, either," Bunny blandly commented.

One of the fallen tree-trunks offered a seat for as many others who might come to join these few who had chanced to be together.

"You as well, Madge—come on!" Betty said, patting a place beside her. "I wonder," Madge murmured, as she seated herself, "what that wretch will do to them?"

"Dupont? You can be quite sure of one thing," Betty cheerfully argued. "He won't let them suffer harm. Can't you imagine him using them as—what's the word? Hostages!"

"You mean—"

"Use them, as captives, to try to strike a bargain with us! He's a heartless brute, we know. But also he's a hard-headed business man. On the make—that's why he wants to be first at the Grotto. So, as to be able to lay claim to it! Simply for the sake of the gold that is almost certainly there; the rich mine that men from Egypt, in King Ankh's time, must have discovered—Hallo, though!"

And Betty jumped up in a startled way, as did her chums. They, too, had been electrified by a most significant sound from the forest. Someone coming!

The lost men? Escaped, and now coming in, as tattered and exhausted as poor Dave had been when he turned up?

There was just time for a longing "Oh!" from the girls, that it might prove to be so; and then—

Their dilating eyes beheld only a black man as he burst clear of the trees and at once stood quite still in the open—a swarthy, even majestic figure, wearing a leopard-skin apron as part of his scanty dress.

He was unarmed, and instantly Betty and all others who were now agape at the man guessed that he was a messenger—a "runner." So the fear that he might be a tribesman at the head of a hostile band at present keeping to the trees—passed as quickly as it had come.

Then, as all who were about in the open air went towards him, he fumbled his right hand into his jet-black, fuzzy hair, and drew out—a rolled-up paper.

Betty it was who went to take it from him—at a sign from the boys, who still kept their guns levelled.

As the paper came into her keeping she saw that it was a page torn from a pocket-book.

Eagerly she uncurled it, and, standing away from the messenger, read these pencilled lines:

"You will, I am sure, be relieved to know that your men are in my safe custody.

"But I regret that the blacks are in the mood to make a mass attack upon your camp, in which case the results can only be disastrous to all of you.

"I have, however, great influence amongst these people, and that influence I will use—on one condition.

"Be so good as to let my runner have the Ankh necklace, and I can promise you complete immunity.

"(Signed) PIERRE DUPONT."

The Ankh Necklace

"PIERRE DUPONT!" The name came in a disgusted tone from Betty and all who, crowding about her, had managed to read the note with her.

Pierre Dupont! So here was final proof, if any such proof had been needed.

"Mrs. Willoughby must see this," Betty panted. "She's with Mrs. Cardew in the tent with Dave. I shall call her to come outside. We don't want to worry Mrs. Cardew—"

"But here's mother," Pam calmly remarked. "So that's all right."

Mrs. Willoughby was, at this exciting moment, coming away from the tent. Betty and the rest of the girls rushed to her, and so her amazement at seeing the black runner was quickly ended by her own perusal of the note.

"No," she said at once. "Not likely. All right, girls. I will send a message back."

"To tell him—what?" clamoured Morcove.

"I am going to tell Dupont he can have the Ankh necklace—when he has personally conducted his prisoners back to this camp!"

"Good!" several of the girls shouted. "Stuff to give him!"

And Madge and Pam, as the two who were most vitally concerned for the safe return of the white prisoners, came in for joyous slappings on the back. Naomer capered. There was such a general rejoicing, due to a sense of holding a trump card, as finally took the girls back to the black runner, to "let him see!"

He rolled up the note, stuck it in his hair, and was instantly gone.

"Gosh, Tubby," chuckled Polly's fun-loving brother, Jack, as the negro flashed away into the forest, "why don't you run errands for the pre's at school as lively as that?"

"But isn't it— isn't it grand?" Bunny Trevor sparkled afresh. "We shall go; our men back. And what do we care if the Ankh necklace has to go to Dupont?"

"Not a bit, on those lines!" Betty



A FIGURE lurched into the clearing—the figure of Dave. But he was quite alone, and instantly Betty & Co. wondered: Where were the others?

cried gaily. "It would have guaranteed us friendship from the Kwamba people. But as to that—"

"We shall have Kwamba himself!" Polly exclaimed. "Just as good!"

"Yes. Ha, ha, ha!"
 "So, what I zink, everybody!" shrilled Naomer, "we ought to make ze fire up again and get something on to cook! Bekas zey won't be long, perhaps, and zey will come in hungry, don't forget! Anyway—"

"You could do with a snack, is that it? Of course!" Polly withered the ever-hungry one. "Well, as we shan't be moving off after all—a couple of ducks, please, you boys!"
 "Some nice antelope to-day, mum," said Jack, as if he were a roundsman calling for orders.
 "I said—ducks!"

So ducks it had to be. Jack and Jimmy brought down a couple of brace from one of the flights that were constantly going over—winging from one swampy bit of ground to another. Benny plucked them. Polly cooked them. And in due time the whole camp enjoyed them. Dave "rolling up" for his ration, looking finely recovered from the effects of last night.

Then another runner turned up, with a note to whip from his hair and hand to Mrs. Willoughby. Mrs. Willoughby and the mother of Judy and Dave first read the note to themselves, then exchanged consulting looks.

Dupont, it was apparent, had not accepted the counter-offer, and that was bad. And yet the two mothers gave no signs of dismay.

"He refuses," Pam's mother calmly announced. "He says—I will read you his very words—'I must have the necklace and yet keep your men.'"

"The rotter!" Jack exploded. "The utter black-guard! Here, can't some of us chaps go after him—"

"My dear boy," Mrs. Willoughby serenely smiled, "just as if that would do any good! Oh, no! Our reply, this time, must simply be that he must keep our men, and we must keep—the necklace. I'll get the note written now."

"But—"
 Betty could not help crying out.

Pam's mother paused in the act of stepping away, and faced round, smiling still.

"It is quite all right, all of you. Oh, don't be in the least fear for the lives of those prisoners! I say that, as the wife of one of them."

"Yes, well—" Pam nodded and smiled—just like her mother! "I see what you mean, mumsie. Those very words in Dupont's second note—that he must 'keep the men.' They mean a good deal?"

"They mean—everything!"
 Next moment all tongues were going. Betty turned to Madge. That chum, like Pam, was in good heart again, even though a loving

father was to remain in enemy hands. It was as Mrs. Willoughby had said. There need be no fear, now, of the lost men being done to death or even ill-treated.

Dupont could see a future use to be made of them: that would suit his purpose.

But, if Dupont were still to keep his prisoners, as being of possible value to himself later on, then Morcove, keeping the necklace, must now rely upon it all the more to aid them.

More than ever, there must be that reliance upon the weird trinket, to act as a friendship-winning charm in the Kwamba country.
 Without the necklace, they might get to Kwamba, only to meet with a hostile reception. With the necklace, it was the best thing for all concerned to push on at once to Kwamba—and that was what they would do!

How the juniors "jumped to it," as soon as that second messenger had been sent away, with the second note for Dupont. Every minute counted now!

Refusal to send him the necklace on such shamefully unfair terms, meant that he would get his following of blacks to attack, after all.

There might be a waiting for night-fall; even so, there was not a moment to waste!

"On to Kwamba!"

"WHILST the going is good; that's the idea, girls!"
 Betty said, with an excited laugh, as she and her chums took part in hasty preparations for a flitting. "The longer we've been gone, when they do turn up, the better chance we shall have."

"A dashed sight better," Polly agreed. "To Kwamba, non-stop! That's what it ought to be now—if only it were possible!"
 Would they do it—would they?

Well might they have their doubts, knowing that there were miles of forest yet, and then a tract of open country—much of it reedy swamp.

At any rate, there was this lightning-like readiness to be off. Only a few minutes later, and they were started, going as quickly as possible away from the sunlit glade into the dimness of the forest.

"Come on, Morcove—best foot forward!"

"Come on, chaps!" Jack capped Betty's rallying cry to her contingent. "Corporal Tubby, another stripe for you when we get to Kwamba!"

But, all in an instant, there came an end to this desperate cheerfulness.

There was a cry from Madge that had a note of sudden frenzy in it.

"The necklace—oh, the necklace!"

Of all who stopped dead, then, many were able to see her instantly—how she herself was at a standstill, fumbling a hand searchingly about her neck and chest.

"Gone!" she gasped on, and her eyes in the gloom looked enlarged with horror. "It has dropped off somewhere!"
 "What!"

"The necklace that would have done so much for all of us; would have been the saving of dad, and Mr. Willoughby, and Kwamba—it's lost!"

And she cried out again after that, in wild despair: "It's lost, I tell you—lost!"

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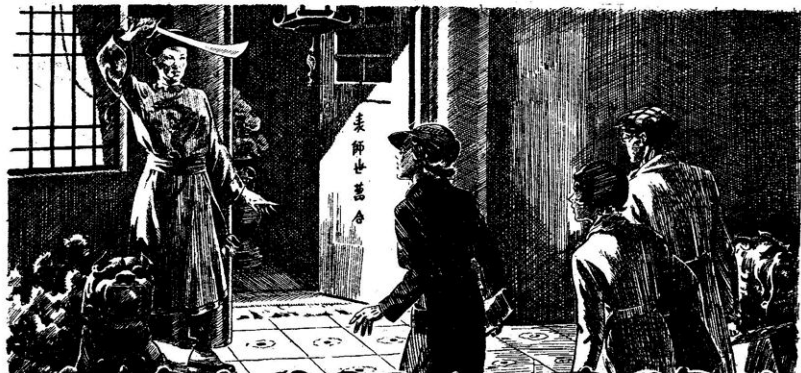
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THE PAGODA OF PERIL

Warning

UN-AWARE that a yellow Chinese face peered at her through the window of the railway compartment, Catherine Sterndale stirred in her sleep.

The Chinaman's slanting, almond eyes were expressionless. His face was like a mask, and gave no signs of alarm at Catherine's awakening. One slim, strong hand clasped the iron handle outside the compartment, the other reached for the gap at the top of the window.

In that hand was a slip of paper. The train was hurtling through the darkness at seventy miles an hour, but the Chinaman was unperturbed.

With great deliberation, he clasped the top of the window with finger and thumb. The folded piece of paper was tightly held by the next two fingers. With the ease of a stage juggler, he tossed it at Catherine's face. It flicked her nose, and fluttered to the ground.

Catherine woke up with a start. But already the Chinaman had ducked from view.

Catherine, rubbing her nose, looked across the compartment. She blinked, still half-asleep. Opposite her was Molly, her cousin, crouching, knees and feet on the seat, asleep.

Her other cousin, Charles, was in the far corner, also asleep, but in more dignified attitude. He was always dignified.

"Now," mused Catherine, "which of those two duffers did that?"

She looked from one to the other thoughtfully. They both seemed to be asleep, and were breathing deeply and evenly.

But Catherine was at school with Molly. She knew her cousin's gift for pretending to be asleep. It had often been useful to bluff roaming mounties at night.

"More likely to be Molly than solemn old Charles, anyway," Catherine told herself; so, reaching out, she flicked Molly lightly on the nose.

Molly awakened on the instant, and to Catherine's surprise, hit out with both hands at space.

"Think I'm frightened of dragons?" muttered Molly.

Catherine's eyes danced.

"Dragons? You're dreaming!"

"Dreaming? Where am I?" asked Molly blankly, blinking about her, wide-eyed. "Gracious! Still in this old train! I thought we were there. I was dreaming about Chinamen, and dragons. An old dragon just flicked me on the nose with its tail—"

"Then that's what flicked me," said Catherine lightly. "You're bowled out, Molly. You haven't been sleeping at all!"

Molly was indignant. "Yes, I have. I was fast asleep. What flicked my nose?"

Catherine was puzzled. She could see that Molly was not joking.

"Well, what on earth, or who on earth, flicked my nose?" asked Catherine.

Charles stirred slightly, but said nothing. He, too, was obviously sleeping.

"Must be a wasp, or something," said Molly. "Unless Charles has become

startled. "I was dreaming about Chinamen, too!"

"Oh, well," said Catherine, "considering we've talked of nothing else for days, what can you expect? We'll see plenty when we get to Pagoda Place."

The three cousins were on their way to stay with their Uncle Gerald at his strange house in the North. Their uncle had spent most of his life in China in the Consular Service, but now he had retired and was living at Mallingford. This house was called Pagoda Place.

It was the first time the cousins had been invited to visit him, and since the arrival of the invitation, they had thought of nothing else. For Uncle Gerald still lived in the Chinese manner, even though he was home in England.

The house was built like a pagoda; the furnishing was Chinese, and every servant—every other person in the house except Miss Smith, his secretary—was Chinese, too.

Catherine looked at her wrist-watch casually.

"Goodness! Nine-thirty!" she said; then added curiously: "Hallo, what's this?"

She had looked down, and for the first time had seen the folded paper which the Chinaman had thrown in through the window. It had flicked her nose, and then fallen to the floor.

"What? That paper?" echoed Molly. "Goodness knows!"

Catherine unfolded the piece of paper casually, not expecting it to be anything of importance or of interest. But no sooner was the sheet open than she gave a violent start.

Molly was at her side in a moment, staring over her cousin's shoulder at the paper.

There were words scrawled in handwriting that was not easily read. At the top was a strange symbol.

"Chinese writing!" exclaimed Catherine sharply.

They knew that the symbol was a Chinese character. They had seen such

By
**ELIZABETH
 CHESTER**

Illustrations by Baker

skittish and taken to playing jokes. Sounds jolly unlike him, though!" she added, with a chuckle.

Charles was the last person to play jokes.

"I flicked your nose," admitted Catherine, "because I thought you flicked mine. Sorry! Mistake. But I was dreaming about Chinamen, too. One of them was creeping up to me."

"How funny!" exclaimed Molly,

things in books, and at the cinema, hundreds of times. But it conveyed nothing to them.

The mere sight of it, however, gave Catherine a strange, uneasy feeling. With brows knit, she tried to decipher the writing. It was slanted, very steep, and closely packed, one letter almost merged into another. But Catherine gradually pieced it together and made sense of it.

"My goodness!" she exclaimed. "It's a warning!"

"I can read 'Come not,'" said Molly. "Beware"—that's the first word. 'Great peril shall await ye,'" read on Catherine, a little shakily. "'Do not arrive at Pagoda Place. It will be evil toward you. Be wise. Spy not. Return with all speed.'"

Catherine lowered the note, her face pale. She did not speak, but looked towards the open window of the compartment. The train had no corridor, so the compartment was isolated from others. It was obvious to Catherine, therefore, that the note had been tossed in through the window.

"Someone tossed it in. And he must have been standing on the running-board," she said in amazement.

"What with the train hurtling along like this?" said Molly, knitting her brows. "My aunt! He must have wanted to warn us badly, to take that terrible risk."

"She went to the window, but Catherine pulled her back.

"Better be careful, Molly," she warned. "That message wasn't sent by a friend."

"Why not?" said Molly. "It's a warning, even though I think it's boss. Most likely a joke, I should say. But, anyway, I don't see what you mean by not being sent by a friend."

"I mean," said Catherine grimly, "that someone's anxious that we shouldn't go to Pagoda Place. But not for our sakes—"

"Not for our sakes?" echoed Molly in wonder. "Then for whose sakes?"

"I don't know," said Catherine wearily. "I can't guess. But I do know that we've got to be very careful. We've got to be on our guard. Chinese are funny people to deal with, and the first thing I'm going to do is to tell uncle, and show him— Why, goodness—"

She held up the paper in her hand. It was that which she intended to show her uncle. But now, turning it over, she found it blank.

"Where's the writing gone?" jerked out Molly in amazement.

Catherine's hands trembled slightly as she held the paper to the bowl-light of their compartment. It was quite, quite blank. The writing was gone!

The two cousins stood silent with wonder.

Charles stirred in his corner and stretched.

"Hallo," he said, waking up and adjusting his glasses. "What are you two up to?"

Catherine held out the paper.

"Charles," replied Catherine slowly, holding out the paper. "Just look at that—"

Charles took the paper.

"I suppose this is a silly joke," he said, frowning. "You expect me to say that there is nothing visible on this paper?"

"Well, there isn't, damn," said Molly. "Shake yours, and wake up. While you're being snored, you—"

She broke off, for the sound of a shrill scream came from someone on the train.

Catherine rushed to the window and looked out.

What she saw almost brought her beating heart to a standstill.

Farther down the train a Chinaman crouched on the footboard. He was dressed in a dark overcoat, but wore light plimsolls. It was not he who had screamed, however.

At the window of the compartment was a girl—a Chinese girl.

"He's going to jump!" gasped Catherine.

Other people were trying to open their windows, but they were too late to see anything. Only Catherine saw what happened.

The Chinaman reached up, and with his outstretched hand pushed at the Chinese girl—pushed her face back from the window, and then, crouching, suddenly hurled himself lithely into space.

Catherine caught her breath. She clutched the window-frame tightly. Molly, forcing her head out beside her, saw nothing at all.

For the Chinaman had jumped out of the light thrown by the train into the darkness of the grass-bank.

"A Chinaman!" panted Catherine. "He jumped—"

"But the scream?"

"A girl. A Chinese girl. He pushed her back from the window," said Catherine.

"Then he sent the message—he climbed along the running-board," Molly exclaimed. "And that girl—"

"She's in it, too," said Catherine. "And when the train stops at the station I mean to find her. Quick, you two! See to the luggage."

Behind her, Charles, showing great excitement, clutched her shoulder.

"What is all this, Catherine?" he asked. "I demand to know. Chinaman? What Chinaman? Where—"

"He jumped off the train," said Catherine.

"Why?" asked Charles.

"Because," said Molly, "he'd dropped a Chinese ha'penny."

"How do you know?"

"I don't. I'm just guessing," said Molly cheerfully.

Charles gave a sniff of scorn.

"If you girls can't talk sense, keep quiet."

The train pulled to a standstill, but Catherine had already hurled open the door. Before Charles could snatch at her, she jumped.

As she jumped, however, the Chinese girl, five or six compartments away, jumped, too, and ran for the exit.

Mystery Ahead

"STOP! Kwanyin! Kwanyin!" Catherine, turning on the platform to chase the Chinese girl, heard that sharp cry. It was uttered by a woman who was standing some yards ahead of her on the platform, and who was turning towards the Chinese girl.

To Catherine's astonishment, the Chinese girl slowed, halted, and turned. She was a tiny thing, with diminutive feet and hands, and a small, oval face.

Her dress was English, in silk, with a wonderful pattern, reaching almost to her feet and fitting her tightly to the waist, then flouncing. Over her shining black hair she wore a thin scarf.

"I come," she said softly. "Kwanyin she come pteentee quick, Miss Smith—"

Miss Smith! Uncle Gerald's secretary!

Catherine stepped forward.

"Miss Smith?" she asked.

The woman who had called the Chinese girl turned swiftly and looked Catherine up and down.

"You are Molly?" she asked. "Mr. Sterndale's niece?"

"I'm Mr. Sterndale's niece, but I'm Catherine; Molly's behind," said Catherine. "I take it, Miss Smith, you know this Chinese girl?"

"Yes, she is staying at your uncle's house. Why do you ask?"

Catherine looked at the little Chinese girl whom Miss Smith had called Kwanyin. The girl's face was very pretty, in an unusual, fascinating way, but no one could have guessed what was going on in her mind.

Was she alarmed at Catherine's question? Had the man's jump from the train frightened her? There was no telling.

"I ask," said Catherine slowly, "because on the train a mysterious message was slipped into our compartment—"

"Message? Where is it?" Miss Smith cried, quite startled.

"My cousin has it," said Catherine. "It was a warning, and I think this girl must know something about it. There was a man with her. He jumped off the train. Didn't he?" she asked the Chinese girl.

Kwanyin stood impassive.

"Me 'lone," she said. "No see no one."

Catherine was dumfounded.

"But I saw the man jump off! And besides, our message—"

Molly had joined them, and Charles, too.

"Kwanyin," Miss Smith said sternly, "why did you scream?"

"I see spidel. Me frightened. Me scream—"

"Who was with you?"

"Me 'lone."

Miss Smith turned with exasperated gesture to Catherine, Molly, and Charles.

"You cannot make them say what they want to keep to themselves. But what was this message? What on earth was it about?"

Catherine explained exactly what had happened, and then gave Miss Smith the piece of paper.

"Disappearing ink; an old Chinese trick," said Miss Smith grimly. "But for goodness' sake don't let that message frighten you. Pagoda Place is charming. Please don't think of perils or horrors."

Her smile reassured them, although Catherine could not help noticing that those cold grey eyes did not seem to warm with the smile.

"Well, we came to enjoy ourselves," said Catherine, smiling, "and I'm not nearly so alarmed as I was—not after seeing little Kwan—"

"Kwanyin. But you must not talk to her. She is under a ban of silence. She has been to London to report herself to some officials, accompanied by a Chinese woman."

Catherine did not press the matter. She meant to ask her uncle, however.

"Where is uncle?" she asked Miss Smith.

"He has sent me to meet you. He couldn't come, but no matter. The car is outside. The chauffeur will get the luggage!"

It was a Chinaman who came from the car, and he made light work of the considerable luggage.

"Will you all get into the car?" said Miss Smith. "Kwanyin can sit with the chauffeur."

Molly got in first, and Miss Smith followed. Charles remained gallantly until last.

Kwanyin stood by, hands clasped, looking very pretty, Catherine thought. Then she started. The Chinese girl had moved her lips as though trying to form a message—

"You next, Catherine," said Charles.

But Catherine pushed Charles towards the car.

"You first," she said. Then, as Charles climbed in, Catherine found Kwanyin next to her. Catherine found "Me fend," she whispered. "Me fend."

Then she nudged Catherine, and took her hand, turning aside at the same moment.

Catherine felt that something was being pressed into her hand, and closed it. The something felt like a ball of paper.

"Come along, Catherine. Get in, Kwanyin," said Miss Smith.

Kwanyin stepped into the seat beside the driver, and Catherine, still clutching the ball of paper, entered the car.

The mystery was deepening. Kwanyin was trying to tell her something, giving her a message.

But Catherine decided not to let Miss Smith know. She could not help liking the exotic, pretty little Chinese girl, and she guessed that Kwanyin might be rebuked for breaking the ban of silence again.

Catherine did not want to get her into a scrape. But when Miss Smith turned on the electric light to find a coin she had dropped, Catherine unfolded the slip of paper and secretly read it.

The writing was different from that on the other slip of paper, and the message was clear.

"White man not uncle."

Catherine crumpled the paper, and sat deep in troubled thought, while the others chatted.

"White man not uncle? What could the strange message mean? What could it possibly be but a warning that someone was not her uncle? Someone who would claim to be the uncle they had never seen? An impostor!"

But why? And if there were an impostor waiting to greet them, where, then, was Uncle Gerald?

Catherine's mind was in a whirl. She did not know whether to take heed of this message or to regard it as a strange trick.

"In a minute you will see the wrought-iron gates of the Place," Catherine heard Miss Smith say. "And at last your uncle." Then followed what seemed to Catherine now strangely meaningful words: "You've never seen your Uncle Gerald, have you?"

Catherine fancied she noticed a trace of anxiety and keeness in Miss Smith's tone.

"No, never," said Molly.

"Photographs, of course," said Miss Smith, apparently in a casual tone.

"Only snudges," said Charles. "Poor photographs, over-exposed. The trouble with most people taking photographs, you know—"

He was about to give one of his learned lectures, when Catherine broke in.

"We'll have to compare some of the photographs in that little black case with uncle, when we meet," she said.

She saw Miss Smith give her a swift look, and then glance at the black case.

Catherine felt a thrill of excitement run through her.

Kwanyin's warning was no joke! Otherwise, why was Miss Smith so startled by that remark? Why had she looked at the black case?

For the rest of the journey Catherine sat silent. She was worried and alarmed, yet strangely excited, too, eager to meet this "uncle" face to face.

But if he were indeed an impostor, then where was Uncle Gerald?

The car headlamps brought into view an enormous pair of beautifully and intricately wrought iron gates. On each gate was a fanciful dragon, with curling tail and fierce fangs. Across the top of the gateway was a strange-looking Chinese roof, which curved up at the corners.

It was the entrance to the house of mystery, Pagoda Place, known in the district as the Chinese Palace!

A Yellow Hand

CATHERINE STERNDALÉ and her cousin felt like sightseers in a foreign land, as the car swept up the winding drive.

The house was a blaze of light. Every window seemed to have a light in it, and high above, on the roof, was an enormous Chinese lantern, brightly coloured. It was lit by electricity, they learned later.

Right in the centre of the building was the pagoda, a seven-storied tower. Every floor had a terrace and guard railings, and there were seven curly roofs.

The car halted before an enormous doorway at the foot of the pagoda. A lantern swung in the doorway, and on either side were enormous stone lion-dogs, sitting with the traditional ball in their gaping jaws.

"Golly! Look like huge Pekes!" said Molly.

"They are lion-dogs," replied Miss Smith. "The sacred dog of China. The Pekingese is really a lion-dog, and used only to be owned by nobility."

Kwanyin jumped down from the car the moment it stopped, and instantly ran into the house without giving a backward glance.

The chauffeur opened the door, and Catherine stepped out, followed by Charles, who gallantly helped Miss Smith down.

"Fling down your coat for me, Sir Walter," said Mollie playfully.

Then she jumped, and caught Charles round the neck, knocking him off his balance.

Charles gave her an angry look of reproach, straightened his collar, and smoothed his hair.

"Cheer up, Charlie," said Molly. "I've told you not to call me Charlie—"

Charles broke off, and Catherine nudged him.

In the doorway of the house an extraordinarily tall man appeared. He was dressed in a tunic of light blue, trimmed with gold. Across the front of it was embroidered a golden serpent, with jewelled eyes. The sleeves were bell-shaped, and from each there hung a gold thread tassel. Below the long tunic a pair of baggy trousers showed.

The three cousins almost gaped at him. He looked strange and magnificent.

He bowed to them three times, touching the velvet cap on his head with the tips of his long-nailed fingers.

Then, still bowing, he moved backwards, to leave the entrance clear. Next he drew from its fastening at his waist a large, curved sword, broader at the end than at the hilt, and held it aloft.

Catherine's heart pumped wildly. She wondered what he was going to do



RUSHING to the window, Catherine saw the figure of a Chinaman crouched on the footboard—and at once the thought flashed into her mind: It must have been he who had flung that warning message into the compartment!

But why?

with it, whether it was a gesture of enmity or friendship.

Suddenly he hurled it down into the doorway.

It clattered harshly on the stones and then lay still, gleaming in the lamplight. Charles stood rigid, gaping: even Molly was abashed.

"It is all right," said Miss Smith. "You must walk over the sword with your left foot first. Then there will be no quarrel but of your own seeking. It is a tradition of the cult."

Catherine wanted to ask what the cult was, and how such a strange custom had arisen, but she felt that it was not a time to inquire.

She stepped boldly forward, taking great care that she crossed the sword with her left foot first.

Charles and Molly followed. Catherine halted then, for she found herself in the strangest room she had ever seen.

In front of her was an enormous gong, bronze fully four feet in diameter, standing upon a bamboo stand. Behind the gong were bead curtains, moving slightly in the draught from the open door.

"Sound the gong, and you'll drive away all evil spirits," said Miss Smith.

Catherine turned and found that the Chinaman who had thrown down the sword stood beside her now, holding an enormous gong-beater.

She hesitated, and then, not wishing to treat any custom lightly, took it, and gave the gong a light blow with the padded leather head.

A deep, vibrant note sounded, and Molly eagerly sounded it in her turn. Charles followed in his solemn, stately manner.

No sooner had the last echo of the gong died away than the curtains parted and Catherine turned quickly.

A tall, good-looking man, grey-haired, but upright and athletic-looking, stepped into view, smiling.

"Uncle Gerald," said Molly eagerly. Catherine looked at him searchingly, anxiously.

Was he her uncle? Was he the white man who was not her uncle? How could she be sure?

"Molly—yes, I should have known you. And you, too, Charles. And Catherine?"

Catherine stepped forward, flushed and embarrassed. She could not call him an impostor. She could hardly believe that he was. Suppose, after all, that Kwanyin was misleading her, fooling her? How terrible to be rude, to be cold and distant—

Catherine decided to play for safety. "I hardly recognised you, uncle," she said. "You have changed."

He gave her a keen look, and smiled. "Yes, everyone tells me that I have changed. I do not look at all as they thought I would from my photograph."

Catherine was abashed. She could not tell from that reply whether he were genuine or not.

He kissed her forehead, and gave her arm a squeeze.

"You'll get used to me in time," he said. "Charles is the good-looking one of the family."

Charles adjusted his tie and tried hard not to smirk or seem stuck up about his good looks.

"I mean Uncle Charles, of course," said Uncle Gerald, with a wink at Molly. "Of course," said Molly.

Catherine saw that, impostor or not,

this man was jolly, and that Molly had taken an instant liking to him.

"Miss Smith will show you girls to your rooms," he said. "Divan beds, you know, and rugs, but you can make them more European if you like."

He went off with Charles, who had a somewhat haughty air.

Miss Smith took charge of Catherine and Molly then. They were to have separate rooms, and not really near to each other. But that did not matter much to them.

First they went through bead curtains. It led into another room, the

dominant colour of which was peacock blue. There were panels of embroidery in the most amazing silk woven with gold thread, with scenes of Chinese mountains, rivers, trees, and the usual peacocks and dragons.

But the cousins, walking through, had hardly time to give more than a casual glance.

From that room they passed into a banquetting-hall with a long, polished table in the centre, and at one end black curtains shrouding a golden, bejewelled chair. It was a throne, Catherine decided.

Catherine looked at Molly's room first, and then passed on to her own. Both had dressing tables adorned with mother of pearl inlay.

"Oh, how wonderful! How perfectly lovely!" cried Catherine in joy, as she looked at the gloriously made piece of furniture.

"You like it?" Miss Smith asked. "Oh, I love it!" cried Catherine, in delight. "It's all so beautiful—so unusual, and it seems so friendly, too. It's like fairyland."

Miss Smith smiled. "Then if you are happy I will leave you. The suitcase is in the corner, and the trunk will be sent up. This door slides out from the wall, see?"

She showed Catherine how the door moved, and then left her.

Catherine went to the dressing-table and studied its wonderful workmanship. Then she glanced in the mirror.

A sudden uneasiness seized her. She had a feeling that she was being watched.

She had heard no sound; yet she was sure that someone had entered the room. Without moving her head, Catherine glanced sideways. Then she looked back into the mirror.

When she did that her self-control went. She gasped aloud.

For someone was just behind her. She had a brief glimpse of a scarlet tunic threaded with gold, and a yellow face.

Then a hand touched her. Just behind her stood Kwanyin, finger to lips.

"Sssh! You no speak. Me plenty say—" whispered the Chinese girl.

"To say? About my uncle? Giving me warning?" asked Catherine sharply.

"Is this the truth, Kwanyin?" she said. She saw Kwanyin's eyes widen; the Chinese girl's face showed expression for once. It showed fear, and she turned her head to stare.

Catherine, alarmed, looked in the same direction, then recoiled in horror.

Through the wall a yellow hand came groping. The fingers were slim and the nails were long. It groped for the Chinese girl, who stood stock still, as though paralysed. In a moment it would have gripped her tunic at the neck.

But Catherine suddenly acted. She pushed Kwanyin aside. But that push sent her forward. With a sense of horror she found herself close to the hand.

Suddenly it snatched Catherine's coat. She could neither shout nor scream, but she felt herself pulled forward to the wall. Catherine struck out then, in sudden desperation.

Dramatic indeed is the mystery into which Catherine and her cousins have been so dramatically plunged. On no account miss next week's thrilling instalment of this unusual serial; order your SCHOOLGIRL now, and make sure of securing the free photo-postcard of Merle Oberon.

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