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Incorporating  
"SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN"



**"I FORBID YOU  
TO ACT!"**

One of many dramatic  
incidents from this week's  
enthralling long complete Cliff  
House School story

## FEATURING DIANA ROYSTON-CLARKE: A Brilliant Long Complete Story of the Girls of Cliff House School



# THEIR STAND AGAINST THE FIREBRAND

### Ructions at Rehearsal

"NOW, is everyone here?" Mabel Lynn asked. "The film people are coming to shoot this scene soon, and we've just got to get it right. Now, everyone to their places, please!"

Hubbub and excitement immediately arose in the Fourth Form class-room at Cliff House School.

Amazing it was to find the members of that rather unruly Form so anxious to obey for once. Amazing the eagerness with which the girls scrambled to their seats—these same girls who usually manifested such open reluctance to take their places in class.

But, then, there was all the difference in the world between taking one's place for some sombre and boring lesson and in taking one's place for the rehearsal of a scene which was soon going to be part of a film.

And it was certainly a most novel and refreshing change to have for one's mistress—not the gaunt, lemon-like Miss Bullivant, the worshipping of maids, but this delightful and charming film star, Constance Thackeray.

Constance Thackeray, super-star of the Enterprise Studios, stood there now while Mabel Lynn, who had shouldered the task of assistant producer, shepherded the girls into their places.

"No; not you, Jean!"—this to Jean Cartwright, the tall, good-looking Scots junior. "You're playing the leading

By

**HILDA RICHARDS**

*Illustrations by T. Laidler*

part. Bessie!—to plump Bessie Bunter—"will you move up and sit beside Beatrice Beverley?"

"Oh, but really, Mabs"—Bessie glowered—"that's at the back of the class! This is a film, you know, and all the prettiest girls should sit in front!"

There was a titter.

"All the same, take that position, please, Bessie!" Mabs insisted. "No, Babs!"—to Barbara Redfern, captain of the Form—"you sit there, with Clara Trevlyn and Janet Jordan. Jemima, don't wear your monocle—not in this scene, anyway. Joan Charmant, will you move up next to Muriel Bond! And you, Twins!—to the two owlish Teraine girls—"sit closer together. That's it! Now we're all ready. I think, Miss Thackeray." Mabs added, turning breathlessly to the smiling film star. "Oh, no; we aren't, though! Where the dickens is Diana Royston-Clarke, the—"

She paused then as the door creaked open, and in stepped the haughty "Firebrand" herself.

Diana Royston-Clarke it was, Diana having deliberately made herself late. Not for any urgent reason, to be sure, but just because Diana realised that, by turning up on her own, she would

attract more attention than by crowding in with the eager rest.

Diana at any time was a figure to compel admiration, with her creamy, pink colouring and the great mass of glorious blonde hair that framed her haughty features.

Diana on this occasion, however, was more than usually radiant. She had put on her smartest drill slip; her slim, shapely legs were encased in the finest of fine silk.

"Well, here you are!" Mabs said impatiently. "We're waiting for you, Diana! Here's your place, between Lydia and Elsie!"

Diana, however, coolly shook her elegant head.

"Oh, but aren't you making a mistake?" she asked.

"Mistake?" Mabs stared. "How am I making a mistake?"

"Well, as I'm playing the juvenile lead in this film—"

Mabs' eyes glinted.

"You know jolly well that you're not the juvenile lead, Diana! The committee has voted Jean for that position."

"Yes, rather!" Barbara Redfern, captain of the Form, chime in. "For goodness' sake, Diana, don't start a row now!"

Diana's eyes glittered, however.

"But wait a minute!" she said.

"Let's get this straight! Fair play, dash it all! Don't we understand!"—and she turned deliberately to the film star, ignoring Mabs altogether—"that the part of the juvenile lead in the film is not anyone's personal property yet? I've been tried on it. Mabs has been tried on it. Jean Cartwright has been tried, and, as far as my information goes, we're all still candidates."

Constance Thackeray hesitated.

"Well, yes, that's true," she acknowledged.

**DIANA ROYSTON-CLARKE** has been thwarted in her first efforts to secure the lead in the film, which is being made partly at Cliff House. But Diana is never the one to admit defeat, and her first setback has only made her more than ever determined to triumph over her rival.

"Then why is Jean Cartwright stealing the part?"

"Because," Clara Trevlyn cried from the class, "the committee decided it, Diana! Now be quiet!"

But the light in Diana's eyes, the mischievous flush in her cheeks, showed that she was in no mind to be quiet.

"And who," she asked bitingly, "are the committee? You and Babs and Mabs here, and all your scheming pals! Oh, I know! You've made up your minds Jean is going to have this part!" Mabs breathed hard. Jean Cartwright, standing near the blackboard, winced. Barbara Redfern rose up in her seat. From the rest of the class came a murmur.

Everyone knew that Diana considered she had the strongest claim to play the lead; for was not her father one of the financial directors of the Enterprise Studios? Was it not largely his money that was keeping it going?

Apart from which, the girl who got the part would not only reap a reward of £200, but would sign up a contract with the Enterprise into the bargain.

Diana, rightly or wrongly, had set her mind upon bagging that part—not, certainly, for the money. But Diana did want to shine. Diana did want to lead. The playing of the juvenile role in this film would give her an opportunity both to shine and to lead.

Oh, she knew all right why Babs was doing it—why Mabs, who was an even better amateur actress than Jean, had deliberately effaced herself!

Because Jean Cartwright, owing to the sudden crashing of her mother's finances, must leave the school at the end of the term. The £200 and the film contract would save Jean.

Yes, Diana knew that. In her own way she sympathised with Jean's misfortune.

Well, she had done her best for Jean, she considered. She had offered her a job when she left school. She was willing to do more. But sympathy for Jean mattered less than a straw in a forest fire when Jean's project conflicted with Diana's own ambitions.

But it was Constance Thackeray who spoke now.

"Diana," she said quietly, "the question as to who shall take the part is entirely in my hands. I have not made that decision yet, nor shall I until I am confident that I have the best girl available. I endorse your committee's ruling. For the time being, at any rate, Jean will take the part. Now, will you please go to your place, so that we can start?"

Diana scowled blackly, marring the exquisiteness of her features. But there was no refuting that quietly spoken decision.

One swift, bitingly scornful look she flung at the Scots girl, then, with a shrug, she sauntered to her place. She dropped beside Lydia Crossendale.

"Sickening!" she growled.

And Lydia, who, like Diana, usually found herself arraigned in the ranks of Babs & Co.'s enemies, nodded in agreement.

"Now, girls," Miss Thackeray said, "please listen to me for a few moments. You are to imagine there has been a scene. Jean, as the rebel of the Form, has upset me, your mistress. Everybody will gaze towards Jean. Now, Jean, get hold of that pointer which is lying in the corner. You are furious, humiliated. You grab the pointer and fling round, obviously, with the intention of hurling it at me."

"Sounds good, I guess!" Leila Carroll applauded.

"I look at you. I realise your intention. Then suddenly I fall across my

desk—like this—in a dead faint. For a moment, Jean, you stand stiff and scared; then, dropping the pointer, you give a cry. You come rushing towards me, calling: 'Water—water!' Every body else, of course, will rise in their seats."

Jean went to the corner. The class watched. The film star, looking so worried that Bessie Bunter blinked in alarm, picked up some papers on the desk and ran her hand through her hair.

Jean looked round once, twice, glaring, and then picked up the pointer. Diana tittered.

"Looks the part to the life, doesn't she?" she giggled loudly. "Mind that pointer isn't a red-hot poker, Jean!" she called derisively. "You're handling it like one!"

"Diana—please!" the film star begged.

Jean glowered. Again she went through the scene, this time wheeling round, holding the pointer on high. Diana burst into a laugh.

"What noise!" she chortled. "Whoa, there! Ajax defying the lightning—with one stocking down!" Jean turned red.

"Look here, Diana—" "I am," Diana scoffed, "and—yoicks, what a sight I see!"

There was a howl from the class.

"Oh, stop it, Diana!" "But Jean's nothing like it!" she said. "Hopeless, in fact! She'd be all right if she were a fish porter's daughter bringing home the scraps from the market! But this—this—Like me to show you how to play the part, old thing!" she asked, and, without invitation, rose languorously from her seat.

But Jean by that time had had enough. She had done her best—and, really, it was a very good and creditable best, considering the Firebrand's heckling.

Jean was anxious to get the part. Jean's future depended upon her getting the part. But nobody on earth could act in these circumstances.

Her face was flaming now. Her eyes, which could shine with real Scottish temper, were coldly gleaming.

"Thank you, I can do without your help!" she said bitingly. "Get back!"

"Oh, no trouble at all—no trouble at all!" Diana loftily informed her. "Now—"

"Get back!" howled a dozen voices. "Let's get on!"

"Oh, my hat, throw her out!" Diana, however, affected to take no notice.

"Now," Diana said, and strode towards the corner, "give me the pointer, Jean! No? All right! I'll do it without one!" Then she stopped, as, tripping to the corner, Jean caught her by the arm. "Here! Wait a tick! That's not in the programme!" Jean was breathing heavily.

"Look here, will you leave me alone?"

"Oh, but, my dear old thing—"

"You're spoiling the rehearsal!"

"Oh, not me! No, surely!"—Diana laughed—"you, Jean! You're just ruining it, you know! It's not your fault that you just can't act for toffee, of course!"

But Jean had come to the end of her patience now. As the Firebrand made a contemptuous move to walk back to the corner, she caught her again.

"No, you don't!" she cried thickly. And she spun Diana round. Perhaps, in her temper, she spun her with more force than she intended.

Diana was not prepared for that. She half-jumped back, catching her elbow on the blackboard behind her.

Diana gave a yell, and the blackboard gave a lurch. Too late, Jean jumped forward.



DIANA broke into derisive laughter as Jean began the scene. "Goodness, what acting! What drama—what emotion!" she chortled. Jean flushed angrily, knowing full well that the Firebrand was deliberately trying to put her off.



Crash! Down came the blackboard. Back went the easel, joining the board in the clattering din it was making as it vibrated on the floor. A gasp went up. "Oh, my hat!"

And then—

"Cave!"

And thud! back went the Form-room door. Breathless the hush that fell. Electric the tension that suddenly descended upon the whole Form as Miss Primrose, headmistress of Cliff House, swept into the class-room.

One look at the fallen blackboard and easel was enough. The unusual attitudes of the two chief chorists in the scene seemed to tell her all the facts. She rapped out:

"Jean! Diana!"

Jean, her face turning a little white, slowly wheeled. Diana put on her most disarming smile.

"You were quarrelling," Miss Primrose said sternly.

"Oh, no, Miss Primrose!" Diana replied urbanely. "At least"—with a mocking look at Jean—"only a little misunderstanding. You see"—she added—"Jean couldn't act, and I was giving her one or two tips. Wasn't I, Jean?" she asked, with a flashing smile.

Jean's eyes glinted.

"Jean, is this true?"

To look of fury which Jean threw at the smiling Firebrand was not missed by Miss Primrose.

"No, it's not true!" she burst out hotly. "I was trying to do my part, and Diana just kept chipping in!"

"So!" Miss Primrose looked slowly from one to the other. "I understand! You quarrelled—you quarrelled here in the Form-room, in front of Miss Thackeray. Very well!" Her lips compressed. "Since both of you, apparently, are incapable of maintaining law and order in the absence of authority, you will both of you go now to your studies and write an essay upon the subject of discipline."

Jean's face turned white.

"But—the rehearsal, Miss Primrose!"

"Your own conduct has sacrificed the rehearsal," Miss Primrose said grimly. "Now, both of you, to your tasks. When you have finished, bring your efforts to me. Any more of this nonsense, and I shall bar both of you from taking part in the film altogether. Now, Diana—and you, Jean—go!"

And Diana and Jean went—Jean, bitter, anxious, sick at heart; Diana chuckling with a strange gleam in her eyes. Those last words—that threat of Miss Primrose's—any more of this nonsense, and I shall bar you from taking part in the film altogether—you had set the Firebrand's mind working in quite a startling channel.



Mabs' Sacrifice

IN the class-room gloom had fallen, a gloom particularly emphasised by the expressions upon the features of Barbara Redfern & Co.

It was not of themselves that Babs & Co. were thinking. They were thinking of Jean.

They all knew Jean's pitiful story. They all realised that if Jean did not obtain this two hundred pounds and the contract that went with it, her schooldays were finished, her future ruined. To help Jean, they had pushed

her forward, in spite of Diana's opposition.

Now, thanks to Diana—"Mabel!" Constance Thackeray broke in.

"Yes, Miss Thackeray?"

"I do not think," the film-star went on, "that it is any use our waiting for Jean."

"No," Mabs agreed. "We will go through the sequence again, I think, Mabs, as the next candidate for the juvenile lead, you had better take the part."

"Yes," Mabs agreed. "But she agreed with no enthusiasm. She agreed only because she did not want to see the rehearsal held up."

Somebody had to take the lead, however, and since the other girls were there, that duty must fall to Mabs.

There was a little hush of expectancy in the Form-room as she walked to the corner. With greater interest than ever now, the class took notice.

There were many there, not knowing that Mabs had deliberately sacrificed her own opportunities for Jean's sake, who averred that Mabs should have had the part by her enemies.

Even by her enemies, Mabs was universally acknowledged as the best actress in the Junior Amateur Dramatic Society at Cliff House—which was hardly surprising, perhaps, since Mabs had made theatricals her constant and absorbing hobby.

"Now," said Constance.

Mabs went through it all. She was trying to remember Jean! But from the moment she found herself in the corner, Mabs forgot herself, as she always forgot herself when playing a part.

From that moment she was the rebel schoolgirl, the girl who professed hatred for her Form-mistress, yet who, by some complex diversity of character, really loved her Form-mistress.

Dead silence settled upon the Form, a little thrill ran through them when Mabs, flinging round with the pointer in her hand, prepared to hurl it, and then stood stock-still as Constance Thackeray collapsed on the desk.

That cry which Mabs gave, expressing as it did all that it was intended to express! That swift rush towards the mistress, who now was in a swoon! Frantically she bent over her, shaking her, looking so distraught that the Form, struck into silence by the reality of her acting, forgot to act themselves.

"Water! Oh, get some water!" Mabs gasped frantically, and, shaking the mistress; "Miss Hayes! Miss Hayes!" "Miss Mous was Mabs. No other word could express it. She was completely lost in her part. The scene came to an end. Miss Thackeray, her face flushed, looked up.

"That was splendid—splendid, my dear!" she breathed. "Really, really magnificent! Shall we have it through again? Barbara, you take my part, will you? I want to watch Mabs."

Through again they had it. Again Mabs repeated her performance. The star nodded.

"Thank you that will do, girls!" she cried. "You may all go now. But not you, Mabs. No, please! I want to have a little chat with you." \* And then, when the Form had disappeared, and she had Mabs alone, she faced her.

"Mabs," she asked quietly, "why haven't you come forward before?"

Mabs flushed crimson.

"I—What do you mean, Miss Thackeray?"

"I mean, Mabel, that you have solved my problem for me. Diana is good in her way. Jean is better. Jean, I thought, would satisfy; but after seeing

you, my dear! No, there can be no possible shadow of doubt as to who shall play the lead. Mabel, I want you to come to the studios to-morrow and have a test."

Mabs' face burned. "You would like to?" Constance asked.

Mabs glanced at her dully. Oh, great goodness, how she would have liked it! Two hundred pounds, a contract which might lead to fame, fortune, and renown on the films. A glittering, wonderful future!

Wouldn't she have liked it! Nothing in the world she would have liked better.

But she was remembering Jean. She had at least, had everything at the moment she could desire. Jean had nothing Jean must come first. She must be loyal to Jean!

To Constance's consternation she shook her head.

"Miss Thackeray," she said, "oh, please don't think I'm churlish. But—do you mind? I—I don't want it, really. No, I don't!" she added fiercely, as if convincing herself. "I want Jean to have it. Miss Thackeray, you say Jean is good—"

The star eyed her curiously.

"Mabel, you are sure?"

"Yes, yes!" Mabs said feverishly.

Miss Thackeray sighed.

"Very well," she said. "But still, Mabs, I do wish you would reconsider it. Please do think it over."

"All the same," she added, biting her lip a little, "it's about time I fixed up someone definitely. Do you think you could help Jean—coach her a little?"

"Yes, yes!" Miss Thackeray, please give her a test!"

"Very well!" Miss Thackeray said, but her eyes still showed plainly the course she would have preferred to take. "I will do as you say, Mabel. Jean shall have the test!"

"I—I may tell her?" Mabs asked eagerly.

"Yes; you may tell her," the star smiled. "I will fix up the test for to-morrow afternoon. Tell her to be at the studios at five o'clock."



Taunis!

"AND that," Diana Royston-Clarke said, stifling a yawn, "is that!"

She rose to her feet, gathering the sheets of her essay together.

She was smiling still, though her back ached a little and her wrist felt cramped.

Thoughtfully she crossed to the mirror, pushed up her blonde hair into place, added just the tiniest fleck of powder to her nose, and grinned.

"You suit!" she told her reflection.

She gathered up the sheets. With them in her hand, she strolled off towards the headmistress' study. She knocked; there was no answer, so Diana turned the knob and went in. And then she paused.

"Why, my old friend—the enemy!" she chuckled.

Her old friend the enemy it was—Jean Cartwright; Jean, who stifened at sight of her.

Jean, too, had just entered Miss Primrose's study. Jean, too, had her essay in her hand.

"Nice day!" Diana said coolly.

Jean did not reply. She was not going to reply. If Diana had taken



heed of the headmistress' threat in the class-room, Jean had, too.

Her chance of the film lead, the future that chance promised, was too precious a thing to be jeopardized by further quarrels with the Firebrand, and so perhaps lost irrevocably. Perhaps also she sensed that Diana was looking for further quarrels.

She gazed steadily out of the window. Diana dropped into an easy-chair. "Chatty, aren't we?" she asked pleasantly. "Well, well! Any more news from home?"

"No!" Jean said, between her teeth. "Mother still broke, and all that!"

"Please," Jean said, "mind your own business!"

"All right!" Diana shrugged, but a little glitter came into her eyes. "If you don't want me to make it my business—well, of course—"

She paused, staring at the back studiously presented to her.

Then, unaccountably stirred by one of those inexplicable, compassionate impulses which were at such strange variance with her Firebrand character, she rose.

"Jean," she said in a different voice. Jean turned.

"Jean," Diana went on, "listen! Oh, bother it! I know you won't believe it, but I'm sorry—yes, I am! I know what it is to be down and out, even if I have got plenty of money now. I think I could help you."

"Thanks!" Jean replied bitterly. "You're keen on this film stunt, aren't you?" Diana asked. "Well, so am I. We'll never see eye to eye on that, I know. I want that contract, Jean, and if I get it—why, then, I'll give you the two hundred pounds that goes with it! That's the offer."

"Meaning?"

Jean stared at her steadily. "Meaning?" Diana shrugged. "Well, what need for us to be at loggerheads?" she asked. "Just quit, that's all. If you don't get the job, I shall. The two hundred would tide you over, anyway. It would help you to hang out until something else turned up. What do you say?"

But Jean's reply to that was to flush hotly.

Diana was sincere, but Jean could be excused for not realising that. Diana meant what she said, but Jean, remembering her bitter enmity of the last few days, did not believe it.

In any case, Jean was too proud to accept such charity—and charity, pure and simple, it surely was. She said, rather shortly:

"Thanks, but I say what I've always said. The chance is open to both of us. I'm going for it. I prefer to stand on my own feet, thank you!"

Diana's eyes hardened at that. The retort infuriated her.

So that was what Jean thought of her generosity! That was the answer she flung in her face!

Diana's sudden sympathy went. "And you think you're going to get the job?" she sneered.

Jean, feeling her temper rising, bit her lip.

"You think"—bitter was Diana's tone; and the old enmity, the old animosity, blanketed by that momentary good impulse, boiled back to the surface—"you think that you can act?" she cried. "With that face, that figure, with—" And she stiffened. "Blow you!" she burst out savagely. "Who don't you speak?"

Jean maintained tight-lipped silence. "Dumb?" Diana sneered.

No answer.

"Afraid of opening your mouth?"

Diana was furious. "Afraid you might

have another row and get the worst of it again?" She laughed. "But perhaps—" And swiftly, urged by some spiteful imp of mischief, she turned. Swiftly she dipped her finger in Miss Primrose's inkwell and scored it across Jean's cheeks. "Now," she panted, "will that make you speak?"

Up went Jean's hand to her face. Round Jean flamed, passion aroused at last in her eyes. She clenched her hand.

"Yes, Miss Primrose. Thank you, Miss Primrose!" Diana said sweetly. Together they went out. The door closed behind them.

Diana chuckled. Jean threw her a bitter glance, and strode off down the corridor.

Lined! Rebuked again, and all because of Diana!

Almost boiling with wrath was Jean. But also in her heart she knew a dull ache of misery.



**TILTING** the bottle, Diana let a stream of ink flow over her beautiful dress. Her eyes gleamed as she thought of a way of making it appear that her rival, Jean Cartwright, had done this thing!

"Why, you—you—" she blazed. And then fell back as the door opened, and Miss Primrose, in that quiet, dignified way of hers, came ominously frowning into the room.

"Quiet!" she cried sharply. "Jean! You two girls"—she eyed them fiercely—"quarrelling again! And, Jean—Jean"—her voice rang vibrantly—"how dare you present yourself to me in that condition? Have you seen your features, girl?"

Jean's hands fell helplessly to her sides. The red ink vied with the crimson of humiliation that suffused her cheeks. She glared fiercely at Diana, who, behind Miss Primrose's back, smiled mockingly.

"And please, Jean, do not glare at Diana like that!" Miss Primrose said. "I am aware that there is ill-feeling between you two girls, but that is no reason why you should quarrel on every conceivable occasion! I think, Jean, that you forget the spirit upon which we so prided ourse ves at Cliff House!"

Jean bit her lip.

"Now please give me that essay, and take a hundred lines for daring to present yourself in my study in your present untidy condition! Diana, you may go, too!"

Quite tempestuously she flung herself into the cloak-room and scrubbed the ink from her face.

She went out, and then—

"Jean!" cried a deliriously excited voice. "Jean! Jean! Oh, my goodness! News, Jean!"

And there before her stood Barbara Redfern and Mabel Lynn, their faces flushed with excitement.

"Jean, guess!" Mabel got out. "Oh, my hat! I don't know how to tell you! But Miss Thackeray—"

"Yes, Miss Thackeray—" gulped Babs, beside herself with delight.

"She wants you to—to go to the studios!"

Jean started. "Me?"

"Yes—but wait a minute!" Mabel gulped. "Wait a minute! You're to go to-morrow, Jean, at five o'clock. Miss Thackeray's going to arrange for a test. She says she's definitely going to fix up the juvenile part. Jean—"

But Jean was standing there, quivering, eyes wide, incredulous—all her troubles in one magic instant banished as if they had never been; all her emotions dissolved like morning mist in the sunshine.

She couldn't believe it. She

couldn't! She was going to have her test!

"Mabs!" she got out.

"Isn't it good?" Mabs glowed.

"Good? It—it's wonderful!" Jean gasped. "You're sure?"

"Perfectly sure! I arranged it myself," Mabs said happily. "And Babs and I, and the committee—we're going with you, Jean, to watch you score your triumphs." She caught Jean's arm excitedly, and Babs caught the other. "Come on!" she cried. "Oh, come on, we're going to celebrate this!"

"Yes, rather!"

And, laughing hilariously, they flew on their way, never noticing the girl who had halted farther up the corridor, and whose startled ears had heard every word of that boisterous conversation.

But Diana had heard every word, every syllable, and Diana's face, suffused with the rage she felt, was red.

Jean had got the test! Jean was going for the test—the test which meant, perhaps, that she would fulfil the role she coveted herself!

The fine white teeth came together with a snap.

"She has, has she?" Diana muttered.

"She thinks she has!"



### When Morning Came—

A SNORE came from Bessie Bunter's bed in the Fourth Form dormitory.

It was a heavy snore; a deep snore. It was a snore which resembled no other sound in the dormitory; completely drowned the rhythmic breathing of other sleepers, and drowned, too, the rustle of the bedclothes as the girl in the next bed to Bessie's rose.

That girl was Diana Royston-Clarke!

Grey light, peeped by dark shadows, filtered into the room through the latticed windows.

It showed vague, bundled shapes under white coverlets.

It shone on the face of Jean Cartwright—three beds away—Jean, slumbering soundly, a half-smile on her lips.

Towards that bed Diana now turned, her eyes glittering a little in the gloom, a sneer upon her lips.

She stepped on to the floor under the folds of her coverlet. Her hand closed upon something there—a bottle. A bottle half-full of red ink!

Over the rail at the foot of her bed was spread the white frock which Diana had worn that evening—a really gorgeous little creation of wool crepe, with organdie collar and cuffs, which had attracted quite a lot of admiration.

Diana lifted the frock. She hesitated even now to do what she proposed to do. It seemed unfair to the frock, somehow. Her own common sense told her that it was unfair to someone else, too.

For a moment she hesitated. Really, it was rather a rotten sort of trick.

And then her lips snapped. Fury with herself blazed in her eyes. Bah! She was a fool—she was squeamish!

Never mind the frock! Never mind the rights and wrongs! War, bitter and unrelenting, was declared between herself and Jean Cartwright.

All was fair in war, and she had got to stop Jean having that test—at all costs!

Savagely she jerked out the cork, stealthily approached the frock.

Drowned by Bessie Bunter's snores, the ink gurgled from the bottle. The beautiful whiteness of the frock became marred by great red ugly stains.

Diana breathed a little fiercely. She corked up the bottle again, and, with silent steps, carrying it in her hand, moved towards Jean Cartwright's bed.

The neck of the bottle was wet. She wiped it upon Jean's sheet, leaving there a conspicuous mark. Then, her eyes upon the sleeper, she quickly thrust the bottle under the Scots girl's bed.

Jean stirred, she muttered, Diana, her heart beating, tiptoed hastily back to her own bed.

Well, that was that, she thought with grim satisfaction. To-morrow—

Back into bed she got. By and by she fell asleep. She slept fitfully, however.

Rising-bell, loud and clamorous, at last split the echoes of the dormitory, and the Fourth, groaning, stretching, and yawning, rose.

Diana snoozed on, however. She was waiting denunciations.

They came—in the form of a sudden, startled shriek from Lydia Crossendale.

"Oh, look at Diana's frock!"

"Who's done this? Diana, Diana!" Diana stirred. She blinked up.

Half a dozen girls surrounded the foot of her bed. Half a dozen were staring in wide-eyed horror, at the beautiful, white wool crepe, now daubed and stained with great, soaking blobs of ink.

Diana let her eyes wander towards it, then suddenly sat bolt upright. She glared.

"Here, I say, who's done that?"

"That's what we want to know," Lydia said.

In a flash Diana had founced out of bed. She went towards the ruined frock. She snatched it up. Then she flung round.

"This was done during the night!" she said. "Look, the ink's nearly dry. Some spiteful vandal deliberately ruined it! Who's done it?"

But there was no reply.

The door opened. Miss Bullivant, the acid mistress of the Lower Third, deputising, during this morning, for the duty mistress came in.

Her eyes darted at once towards the group round Diana's bed. She jumped.

"Diana, what's that?"

Diana bit her lip.

"It's my frock," she said bitterly.

"But—but—" Miss Bullivant blinked. "Gracious me! How did you come to get it in that mess?"

"I didn't get it in this mess," Diana said. "This ink was poured over it during the night by somebody!" And her eyes flashed. Diana was acting well at this moment. "It's been done for a jape, or for spite!"

Miss Bullivant frowned.

"You suggest, Diana, that one of your Form-fellows—" She looked round. "Jean!" she cried to Jean Cartwright, who at that moment was disappearing through the door, intent upon a swift bath in the adjoining bath-room. "Come back! Remain here, all of you. Now," she added grimly, "does anyone here know anything about this?"

There was an awkward silence. Girls were glancing at each other. Sympathy for once was on the side of Diana;

anger against the unknown vandal who had perpetrated such a despicable trick was mounting.

Most of the girls had pretty frocks. Most of them could feel exactly what they supposed Diana to be feeling.

"I see!" Miss Bullivant's eyes gleamed. "The girl who did this, obviously did it during the night. I cannot accept the theory that it is a joke, Diana. This is an act of malice—of spite. Now—and she switched round—" is there any girl here who has some grudge against you?"

Diana looked uncomfortable. She looked reluctantly towards Jean Cartwright, but she shook her head.

"Nobody," she replied, "who would do a trick like this, Miss Bullivant."

But Miss Bullivant had seen that glance which Diana had cast in Jean's direction, as Diana had intended she should.

She flung round. She stared at Jean, and in staring at Jean her eyes were attracted by the ink smudge upon the overturned edge of Jean's coverlet.

Something like a hiss came from Miss Bullivant's lips. She stepped over to the Scots girl.

"Jean," she said quietly, "do you know anything about this?"

Jean flushed indignantly.

"Indeed, I do not, Miss Bullivant!"

"Then perhaps"—and Miss Bullivant indicated the stain upon her pillow—"you can explain this, Jean?"

There was a deathlike silence. Jean, noticing the stain for the first time, started.

"And perhaps," Miss Bullivant added, as her bird-like eyes darted about, and suddenly stooped and suddenly rose, holding between her fingers a bottle—an ink-bottle, at the sight of which the Form gasped. "Perhaps," she added grudgingly, "you can explain this."

Jean turned quite white.

"Miss Bullivant—"

"Thank you! I do not think you need say more," Miss Bullivant said through tight lips. "It is a fact, is it not, Jean, that there is some sort of feud between you and Diana?"

Jean looked almost wild.

"But, Miss Bullivant, I tell you—"

"Thank you! You can make your explanations to the headmistress," Miss Bullivant snapped. "The mark on your bedclothes shows clearly that you have been playing about with ink. The discovery of this empty bottle under your bed confirms, without a shadow of doubt, that you brought ink into the dormitory."

"There is nothing more to be said, Jean. I am going to take you to Miss Primrose at once. Put on your clothes—then follow me!"



### Schemers All

"GATED!" Babs stared at Jean Cartwright's white, miserable face in dismay.

"Gated," Jean said, between her teeth—"gated for the rest of the day; and not only gated, but my pocket-money docked for the rest of the term!" Her hands clenched. "Oh, Babs!" she said, in a faltering voice.

It was ten minutes later. The scene was Study No. 4 in the Fourth Form passage, where Babs, Mabs, and Clara Trevlyn had foregathered to wait for

Jean to hear the result of that interview between her and the headmistress.

"Then—then," Mabs gazed at her dumbly, "Jean, that means that you won't—you won't be able to go to the studios this afternoon. It means you will miss your test."

The white face of Jean twitched. She looked oddly, queerly at Mabs. "Something flashed" in her eyes. She seemed to tense, to stiffen. She said quietly:

"I shall not miss the test!"

"But how—" Mabs asked.

"I shall break detention," Jean stated quietly.

"But, Jean!"

"You can't—"

"Look here, wait a minute!" Clara broke in roughly. "That's asking for trouble, you silly. Supposing you break detention; supposing you have the test and they vote you O.K. Well, wait a minute; let me finish. What's Primmy's reaction going to be when she finds out? She'll just bar you from the film!"

Jean's lips set.

"I'll have to risk that," she said.

The chums gazed at her hopelessly. When Jean got on her high horse she could be as obstinate as Clara Trevlyn herself.

Babs shook her head.

"No," she said, "Jean, you can't do that—you can't! Clara's right. What's the good of passing the test if you're going to be out of the film afterwards? If only we could find out," she went on distractedly; "if only we knew who did spoil Diana's frock!"

But that was out of the question. They believed in Jean. Knowing Jean as they knew her, it was impossible to believe that she would have stooped to a trick like that. In any case, it was beside the point at the moment.

"Oh, well, what's the good of that?" Clara asked testily. "Let's get down to bedrock. If we find the real culprit in the meantime—O.K., everything's easy. But we haven't got the faintest idea yet, and while we're running around trying to find her time's slipping by. The great thing is, my children, that somehow Jean's got to have that test, and at the same time we've got to work it so that Jean's absence isn't spotted."

A gloomy silence descended.

"But how?" sighed Babs.

"How?" echoed Mabs, and then suddenly started. "Oh, half a ticket!" she cried excitedly. "I've got it! I know!" She flung round, her eyes blazing with excitement. "Supposing—supposing," she breathed, "someone took Jean's place?"

Everyone, including Jean herself, stared.

"But how could they?"

"It's easy!" Mabs laughed. "You all know what happens. After lessons Jean remains behind in the Form-room. The duty mistress—that will be Miss Wright to-day—gives her a detention task. Right! Once Miss Wright's seen Jean started on that detention task, she leaves her, coming in at the end of the hour. Now, Miss Wright is a bit short-sighted—"

Still they stared.

"When Miss Wright comes in, you know what she is. She'll say, 'Very well, you can dismiss now, Jean, and go out again. It would never occur to her that the girl in the desk wasn't Jean, especially if Jean sat in the darkest corner of the class-room. You get it?'"

They did get it. Faces flushed a little. It could be worked. The very daring of the idea seemed to ensure its success.

But Jean gulped.

"Oh, Mabs, I don't like it—"

"Fiddlesticks!" laughed Mabs. "Then it's all settled!"

"Y-yes, I suppose so."

"O.K.! Then mum's the word!" Mabs laughed. "Babs, you're taking the committee over to the studio with you, aren't you? Right! Wait for Jean after lessons in Friardale Woods. You can take her bicycle with you, but don't say anything to the rest of the committee until the last minute. Things leak out; and if Primmy gets to hear of it—"

As it chanced, Diana Royston-Clarke, too, was making plans at this moment. If her conscience did now and again cause her a twinge at the thought of that treacherous trick she had played, she shrugged it away.

She only wanted her film chance, she told herself. Once she had that—well, then she would find some way of making it up to Jean. She would see that she didn't suffer.

Meantime, she had got to make it her business to turn up at the studios before Babs & Co. arrived there. She had got to make it her business to have that test, instead of her rival.

So Diana made her plans; she made them happily. Before breakfast she phoned up her father's chauffeur, Jarvis, telling him to have the big Rolls-Royce outside the gates of Cliff House School at half-past four.



### MISS THACKERAY

turned swiftly to Diana. "Here's Jean!" she cried excitedly. "We shan't want you for the film, after all!"

And at half-past four, when Diana, looking radiantly lovely in her new, cream linen outfit, sauntered through the gates, there was Jarvis, smartly and spickily uniformed, touching his cap to her and opening the door of her father's big black limousine. Diana languidly climbed in.

"Enterprise, Jarvis," she said briefly.

"Yes, miss," Jarvis said.

In ten minutes the car pulled up to the studio gates.

Diana got out. She nodded in a friendly way to the commissionaire. In high good humour was Diana then—and when Diana was in a good humour her best and most likeable instincts were uppermost.

About to pass into the studios, she paused, as a small girl, staggering under the weight of a pail, came from round the angle of the building, and at sight of her stood gazing in such open-eyed surprise that Diana smiled. She knew little Nellie Sharpe, daughter of one of the studio's charwomen.

"Why, Nellie!" she cried.

"Oh, Miss—Miss Royston-Clarke!" little Nellie gasped.

Almost reverently her glance passed over Diana's trim, elegantly attired figure.

"Hallo!"—and Diana laughed, very pleased indeed with the adoration that shone out of those widened eyes. "I say, that's a big job for a little girl like you," she said.

Nellie was tongue-tied with embarrassment.

"Where are you taking it?" Diana asked.

"Oh, just—just into the next studio, miss!" Nellie gasped. "But, oh, I say, don't you look lovely?"

"Do I?" Diana laughed pleasantly. "Thanks, Nellie, for the compliment. That's my ambition, you know—to look lovely. But—foicks!—you poor kid, you'll pull your arm out of its socket with that heavy pail. Here, give it to me."

"You, miss? But why?"

"Because," Diana said, "I don't like to see little girls working like horses. I'll carry it for you."

"But your clothes!" Nellie gasped.

"A fig for my clothes!"

And Diana ended the argument there and then by laughingly grabbing the pail. It was heavy; even she, athletic

and strong as she was, staggered a little under its weight.

"This way!" she cried merrily; and, with her little admirer trotting at her side, carried it the length of the studio and dumped it down. "There!" she cried breathlessly. "Sorry I can't do your scrubbing for you, Nellie; but if you'd let me know, I'd have come prepared. By the way, did you get those stockings I told you to buy?"

"Y-yes, Miss Royston-Clarke, and—and thanks!" Nellie beamed. "It—it was very, very kind of you!"

But Diana only laughed again. Gaily she ran her hands through the little one's curls and walked off.

Into the studio she stepped, picking



her way through the tangle of wires and cables that snaked about the floor as she made her way to the lighted set in the far corner of the room.

Langley Runniman, the Enterprise's ace producer, was there; so, also, was Constance Thackeray. They both turned as the Firebrand's drawing "Good-afternoon!" fell upon their ears.

Constance frowned a little, however.

"Why, Diana, you here? Have you brought Jean?"

Diana's lips curled.

"Is this the set for the test?" she asked.

"Why, yes. But Jean—"

"I've come," Diana said, "to take Jean's place. She won't be here; she got into a row last night, and she's detained. Oh, don't believe me!" she added, as she saw the widening of the film star's eyes.

"Ring up Miss Primrose and ask her, if you like!"

"But everything's ready!" Runniman cried.

"I know. That's why I've come," Diana assured him coolly.

Miss Thackeray and the producer looked at each other; Constance bit her lip.

"But—but—" she said. "Oh bother! Diana, is Babs coming?"

"Not that I know," Diana scowled.

"Then—then—" But she still hesitated. The hesitancy nettled the Firebrand a little and caused her eyes to gleam.

She looked round rather helplessly at Langley Runniman.

"Well, I don't know, this has rather put the lid on it! Diana," she added, "excuse us a minute!"

"And, plucking at the director's arm, she drew him aside.

Diana shrugged impatiently. Her attitude was meant to suggest that she didn't care. But inwardly her heart was racing, her pulses throbbing.

She looked approvingly at the set, representing the outside of a Spanish hacienda against a background of blue-peaked mountains, and her eyes glistened. What a setting for her in which to do her stuff!

She cast another glance at Runniman and Constance. The producer appeared to be remonstrating—the star to be doubtful and worried. At last, however, they seemed to arrive at a decision.

Constance hurried back.

"Diana, you're sure Jean can't come?"

"Oh, haven't I said so?" Diana asked pettishly. "And, bother it, Miss Thackeray, why all this fuss? I'm as good as Jean, aren't I? It might happen," she added, "that Jean won't be allowed to take any further part in the film."

"Then, in that case," Langley Runniman said slowly, "we'd better make up our minds, Constance. All right, Diana! Get off to the make-up room!"

"You mean, I'm going to have the test?" Diana cried delightedly.

"Yes!"

"Oh, yoicks!"

And then, as there was a commotion near the door, she flung round.

Runniman started, Constance stared. For a group of girls came hurrying down the length of the studio—Babs, Clara, Jemima, Leila Carroll, and all the rest of the committee.

Diana fell back. Something like a hiss left her lips. For in the middle of that assembly there walked—

"Jean—Jean Cartwright!" Miss Thackeray shrieked, and turned swiftly to the Firebrand. "Diana, never mind!" she cried. "We shan't want you, after all! You must have been misled! Here is Jean!"



"She's No Good!"

HERE was Jean, indeed—Jean, laughing, face flushed, eyes sparkling; Jean with Babs and Marjorie Hazeldene, with Jemima Carstairs and Lucy Morgan, with Clara and Leila, Lucy Farraday and Joan Sheldon-Charment. All the committed, indeed, of the Amateur Dramatic Society at Cliff House, except—and Diana was quick to notice, that—Mabel Lynn.

In a body they came hurrying upon the scene; in a body swarmed about the star, Diana, as if she were of no consequence, found herself swept aside. They hardly noticed her, indeed, in their excitement.

"Miss Thackeray, we're not too late?" Jean cried anxiously.

"No, not a bit. But—" Miss Thackeray paused. "I understood—"

Her eyes went to Diana. "Diana here has told me that you were detained."

Jean bit her lip. Her eyes flashed towards the Firebrand.

"I don't look like it," she said. "It doesn't look like it, does it? In any case, Miss Thackeray, that's got nothing to do with the test."

"You're sure it—it's all right?" Constance asked doubtfully.

"Of course!"

"Then—well, you'd better get up to the make-up room, Jean. Everything's ready."

Meanwhile, unsuspected by the girls on the set, the furious Diana had slipped away. Unsuspected, she slipped into the deserted office at the other end of the studio.

The office was Langley Runniman's, but Mr. Runniman was on the set. No danger for a minute or two of being disturbed.

Fiercely Diana drew a sheet of the Enterprise newspaper towards her. She slipped it into a typewriter.

She started:

"Dear Miss Primrose,—I wonder if you would be so good as to come down to the studios at once? I am sorry if this request encroaches upon your time, but there is something which it is very important for me to discuss with you affecting the school sequences of the film. I know you are interested, and you did, if you remember, offer to render whatever assistance you could. I shall esteem an immediate consultation a very great favour.

L. R."

She didn't sign the letter with a fountain pen. Even Diana shrank from forging names.

Primmy, she considered, would understand that the note had been written in a great hurry, and would excuse the typewritten initials.

She followed it up, addressed an envelope. She went outside.

"Nellie!" she called.

"Nellie! I want you to do something for me," Diana said. "Will you?"

"Oh, miss, I—I'll do anything for you!" Nellie gulped.

"Right! Then go and make yourself tidy. Now look here, this is an important message. It's from Mr. Runniman, and it's got to go to Cliff House School at once! You see? I want you to go over in my car and give it to the headmistress. Then wait, because the headmistress will be coming back with you. If Miss Primrose asks you any questions, however,

you're to leave my name out of it. Understand?"

"Oh, yes—yes, miss!" Nellie stutted. "But me—go in—in your car! And—and, Miss Royston-Clarke, I'm supposed to be scrubbing the steps over there!"

"Never mind that! I'll do any explaining necessary," Diana said.

"But hurry, Nellie!"

"Yes!" gasped the flustered Nellie.

She took the letter Diana waited impatiently till she reappeared. Nellie came out, shabby but clean. She took her to the car, and gave Jarvis instructions. She gazed thoughtfully up the road as the car bowed off.

"In twenty minutes," she murmured, "Primmy will be here! And in twenty minutes—"

A rather cruel smile crossed her lips.

"Och! Is that really me?" And Jean Cartwright laughed excitedly as she surveyed her yellow face in the glass in the make-up room. "Am I all ready now?"

"All ready, Miss Cartwright!" the make-up man smiled.

Jean quivered—she quivered with terrific happiness, looking at her reflection, clad in a wonderful Mexican costume, complete with sombrero and spurred riding-boots.

"At last! At last! Oh, it was like a dream—like a dream! She couldn't realise it. She was to get her big chance! She was to have her test!

And if she succeeded—

No need then to worry. No need ever to fret again. She would have her big chance in the film. Settled once and for all would it be that she was to play the juvenile lead.

And then, her eyes shining, she tripped off into the studio.

Babs & Co. turned as she came up, glowing with admiration. Constance was there. She smiled very sweetly at Jean, and Mr. Runniman called

"Lights."

On went the lights in a blaze of brilliance.

"Right!" the producer called. "Wait, though. Save it, number three. O.K., recorder?"

"O.K.!" came mysterious voices from somewhere near the ceiling.

"Camera!"

"All ready!"

"Good! Then we can go! Silence everywhere, please! Miss Cartwright, step on the set! I want you to come through the door of the hacienda. I want you to stand there looking out. Say something—never mind what. Make it fit in with the scene, though. You shade your eyes from the glare of the sun, then suddenly you start. You have seen someone coming up the road. Got that?"

"Yes," Jean gulped.

"O.K.!" When you see them, dart back into the house, grab a rifle. You come out again, throw yourself flat and train the rifle as if you were aiming at someone. That'll do, I think. O.K.!"

On the set, Miss Cartwright! When you hear the clappers, that's your cue to begin. All ready? Let's go!"

Silence. The chums, grouped together, stood tingling. Jean, all aquiver with excitement, disappeared into the hacienda. On came the clapper boy with his blackboard.

"Test, Miss Cartwright!" he called. "Take one—"

And bang went the clappers. Jean tensed now.

Oh, goodness what was she to say? Rather nervously she came out, staring this way and that. She paused.

"They can't be coming this way," she said, "they can't! But yet they

are!" she cried. "They are coming! The bandits! The bandits! And here I am, alone in the house. What can I do? What can I do?"

She gazed round wildly, her eyes fixed upon the director's face, who was nodding approval in his chair. She saw his lips frame the one word "Good!" She saw, as from a distance the face of Constance Thackeray, eyes aglow. She saw Babs & Co. And then—

She stopped, faltered. Someone else was sweeping through the studio towards them. It was Miss Primrose!

Jean gulped. What did this mean? What had fetched her here?

"What can—can I do?" she repeated, in startled accents. "What can—?" And then she saw Langley Rynniman shaking his head, making gestures with his hand.

She turned pale in her consternation, almost forgetting her part. She disappeared again into the house, searched frantically round for the rifle, and almost dropped it.

Again she appeared. "They—they're here!" she gasped, and heard the groan that went up from Langley Rynniman, the sigh that went up from the chums.

"What was she doing? Was she spoiling everything? She must take a grip on herself.

She remembered the sequence, and full length she flung herself forward, fingers fumbling at the bolt of the gun.

She didn't look at Miss Primrose—she didn't! But she knew she was quivering, she knew that her eyes were wide.

She knew that she had been discomfited, that Miss Primrose, amazedly, indignantly, was staring at her. She felt it.

She half expected, even despite the studio's strict silence rule, to hear the headmistress' voice suddenly cut in.

She trembled now—she, who, ten minutes before, had been so overwhelmingly, so ecstatically excited.

Oh, goodness, she was going all to pieces! The rifle! Something was happening. It slipped.

"Oh!" gasped Jean. Too late! Through her fingers it went, to fall against a near-by lamp and send it tottering.

A crash which awoke the echoes and brought a cry from the recorder above, resulted. It was followed by a terse, almost disgusted monosyllable from Mr. Rynniman.

"Cut!" Jean stood and trembled.

"Oh, you can come out there," Rynniman said wearily. "Save your lights, electricians. She's no good," he said, in a voice not intended to be loud, but which was loud in the dumbfounded, dreadful silence which had fallen upon the group. "You'll have to find another girl, Constance. Why, Miss Primrose!" he cried, as he saw the headmistress. "I'd no idea you were here!"

Miss Primrose's lips were thin.

"I suppose," she said, "you sent for me to see this? I thank you, Mr. Rynniman!" And, as he stared at her, shaking his head, too utterly disappointed to realise what she was talking about, her gaze fastened upon Jean. "Jean!" she thundered. "What are you doing here?"

Jean, under her make-up, turned pale.

"Oh, Miss Primrose—"

"I thought you were in detention!"

"Yes, Miss Primrose!"

"And yet—yet I find you here—here!"

The headmistress' chest rose and fell in

her indignation. "You have deliberately broken detention. You have—!" She gulped. "Jean, go and get that stuff off your face—at once, at once!" she stormed. "How dare you, girl! You will come back to school with me immediately—immediately!"

"Oh, but Miss Primrose," Babs put in desperately.

"Thank you, Barbara, do not interrupt!" Miss Primrose was really angry now. "Jean, obey—obey at once, girl! If this is what your craze for film-acting has led you to, then I most sternly forbid you ever again to take any part whatever in any film. Mr. Rynniman, you have finished with her?"

"I have," Mr. Rynniman said bitterly.

And Jean, hearing that, bowed her head. She felt utterly beaten—heart-broken.



### Getting Her Own Way

**B**UT if the world was bleak and black to Jean, it was the sunniest place imaginable to Diana Royston-Clarke.

Very craftily had Diana kept out of the way. She had watched the arrival of Miss Primrose with Nellie; she had seen Miss Primrose sweep into the studios.

From a table in the studio restaurant where she sat eating an ice, she presently saw Miss Primrose issue, followed by a Jean whose white, strained face certainly gave her a momentary pang of compassion.

She watched as they disappeared through the gates. Then she saw Nellie—Nellie looking round, obviously in search of her. She beckoned.

"Coo-ee!" Nellie turned. She saw Diana! She came forward.

"Good work, Nellie!" Diana chuckled. "Here, come in—have an ice! I bet you like ices, don't you? Come with me

And behind the screen Nellie told her.

And as she was telling her, a new figure came out of the studio. That figure belonged to Barbara Redfern.

Barbara, rather grimly, was doing a little scouting on her own account. Babs had not forgotten that Diana had been present on the set when she and the committee arrived.

Babs did not believe that Miss Primrose had appeared on the set by accident.

Linking up Diana with Miss Primrose's appearance, remembering that Jean had robbed Diana of her chance, she was putting two and two together. Now she was looking for Diana.

But at first glance there was no sign of Diana in the restaurant.

Very well, Babs thought. She must be somewhere about—because her car was still standing in the park outside, and she was out of the point of turning to go and look elsewhere when she heard a soft chuckle from behind the screen in the corner. And then Diana's voice:

"Good work, Nellie—good work! Here's half-a-crown. No—please, do have it. You're sure you didn't mention my name to Miss Primrose when you gave her the note?"

"No, Miss Royston-Clarke."

"And she came with you without question?"

"Yes, Miss Royston-Clarke!" "Thanks. You're a nice kid," Diana said. "I like you, Nellie. By-and-by, when we're through with this film business, we'll have a little talk about things—you and I. We'll fix up some job for you when you leave school. But look here, I've got to hurry. Stop here and finish your ice. I'll see you before I go."

Babs stiffened. She heard Diana's chair scrape back. Her lips were tight; her face was grim. She had heard enough to make her understand. Diana, then, had been responsible for Primmy's turning up!

As Diana stepped in from the screen, she stepped in front of her. Diana for a moment looked taken aback.

Then she smiled.

"Oh, hallo, Babs! Haven't you gone back yet?"

"Diana," Babs said, "I want a word with you."

"Sorry, I'm in a hurry."

"Are you?" Babs' eyes flashed.

"Then your hurry can wait!" she cried bitterly.

"Oh, don't look at me like that! I've heard what you said behind that screen there. I suppose you know what you've done for Jean. You sneak, Diana!"

Diana flushed.

"Here, steady on with the names!"

"You don't deny it?" Babs asked her.

"You seem to know so much about it, why should I deny it?" Diana shrugged calmly. She walked out, but Babs stuck to her. Then suddenly she flung round.

"Well, puppy dog," she said behind her teeth, "must you follow me?"

Babs flinched.

"Diana, you know what the test meant to Jean."

"Oh, shut up!" Savagely Diana swung round upon her. "Shut up!" she cried tempestuously.

"What the dickens is it to do with you, anyway? Well, you want to know, I did bring Primmy here. And why? Because I'd already bagged that part and she crashed in and stole it from me. I want that part. I mean to have it. That's why!"

"And perhaps," Babs added, with a sudden flash of inspiration, "that's why you spoiled your own dress."

## THE NEXT SCHOOLGIRL

WILL BE ON  
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and sit behind this screen, and then tell me all about it."

"Yes, Miss Royston-Clarke. But—but—" Nellie paused. "That girl, Miss Royston-Clarke, Miss Cartwright—she's not going to get into any row, is she?"

"Oh, don't you worry about that," Diana said confidently. "She's not going to get into any trouble. Now, Nellie, tell me exactly what happened—everything."

Diana sneered.

"Perhaps it is," she replied recklessly. "Oh, don't look so scandalized! You ought to know by now that when I want things, I don't let much stand in my way. Anyway, you needn't look upon that as a confession," she sneered. "But I'm more entitled to that part than Jean, and if it wasn't for the fact that her mother had gone bust, she'd never even have troubled about it. Well"—her eyes flashed—"I offered to help her. I've offered to find her employment. I've promised her money. She won't have it. She prefers to pinch chances which belong to me."

"Diana!"

"Oh, shut up!" Diana cried, and flounced off.

She went into the studio. Babs, shaking her head, biting her lip, rejoined her chums at the lodge, where they had collected in rather a sad group. There was no arguing with Diana, obviously.

Diana, meantime, flounced back into the studio. Langley Runniman was still on the set, talking rather worriedly to Constance Thackeray. She heard Mabel Lynn's name as she came up.

"Well," she drawled, "what about it? You wouldn't believe me, would you, when I told you that Jean was playing truant. Do I get my chance now?"

The producer eyed her grimly.

"You still want it?"

"Naturally!"

He looked worriedly at the star.

"We've got to have someone for the part," he said.

Constance bit her lip.

"But Mabel Lynn—"

"I'm not running any more risks," Runniman said. "Mabel Lynn may be good, but if she's willing to act the part why isn't she here? Let's make the best of what material we've got, I say. Diana, go to the make-up room."

Diana grinned.

"And this time it's definite?" she asked. "No more stalling. Let's see eye to eye on this. If I'm good enough for the test, I get the part?"

"Yes."

"And that's final?"

"Oh, yes; I suppose so!"

"Right!" Gleefully, Diana flew. At last—at last! She'd show them—yoicks, last-but-not-least! In the make-up room she dressed frenziedly, and returned to the set. The same test which had been Jean's was given to her.

Triumphantly cock-a-hoop was Diana. She knew she had won. She meant to impress Mr. Runniman. She did impress. Twice she went through it, and she knew the second time that she was better than the first. The director's laconic "Cut" came at last.

She looked towards him.

"All right?" she asked.

"Let's see the rushes," he said cautiously.

Half an hour later she had the thrill, in the little theatre at the back of the studios, of seeing her test on the screen. Langley Runniman nodded.

"Very good—very, very good," he said. "Diana, consider yourself booked for the part. To-morrow we're coming to Cliff House to shoot the first of the backgrounds. I'm sorry about the other girl, of course, but really—" He shook his head. "Will you tell Miss Primrose that I'll call and see her to-morrow morning to make the necessary arrangements?"

And Diana laughed. She laughed gleefully, triumphantly. She felt she could afford to laugh now. She had what she wanted!



"We Refuse!"

"It's not fair!"

"It's a downright shame!"

"Jean was cheated out of the part!"

"Diana's got no right—"

The committee meeting in the music-room was hot and indignant.

The full committee was gathered there, and to judge by the flushed and angry looks upon each face, each one of the members of that committee was feeling as incensed as Barbara Redfern & Co.

Mabs was there—Mabs fortunately having carried her deception to its conclusion before the arrival in disgrace of Jean Cartwright, half an hour ago.

Jean was there, too white and wan. Even her Scottish stoicism seemed to be on the point of breaking for once.

Babs had just addressed the meeting.

She had told them almost word for word that interview with Diana—the interview in which Diana had unashamedly confessed to having betrayed Jean to Primmy. In which she had hinted that it had been her own hand which had perpetrated that vandal deed for which Jean had got the blame. The meeting, in consequence, was seething.

But worse than that—that much worse—Miss Primrose had just informed them that Diana had been finally selected as the juvenile lead, that the company was coming to-morrow to start shooting—with Diana playing opposite Miss Thackeray.

"We've got to do something about it," Babs said determinedly. "We've got to make a stand. Diana's wormed her way into the part through cunning and treachery. We've got to get Jean back into the part."

"But how?"

"You know—" Jean gloomily shook her head. "You forget, Babs, that I'm barred from the film altogether."

"We'll fix that," Babs said. "Primmy doesn't know. She doesn't understand. I vote," she added, "that we call upon Primmy as a deputation now. Once Primmy knows the circumstances, Jean—and she doesn't know them yet—she'll reconsider like a shot. But the question is, what about Diana?"

"I've got an idea to settle that!" flashed Mabs. "Now, listen to me. We've got to round up the Form—at least, the girls in the Form who are on our side. We've got to have a meeting in this room—at once. I'll go and speak to Diana. Babs, will you see Miss Primrose?"

"But you won't do any good!" Jean said despairingly.

But Babs had other ideas. Straightaway she went to Miss Primrose. Miss Primrose, busy with plans for to-morrow—for to-morrow was half-holiday, and the company was coming over during the morning—looked up at her entry. She smiled a welcome.

"Well, Barbara?"

"I've come to see you about Jean Cartwright, Miss Primrose."

"Indeed, Barbara?"

Babs drew a deep breath.

"Miss Primrose," she added, "it is my duty, as captain of the Form, to tell you certain things—things which at the moment you don't understand. Jean is sorry for breaking detention this afternoon, but she would not have

broken it. Miss Primrose, if she had not felt that she had been punished for something she never did. She did not spoil Diana's frock."

Miss Primrose's eyes glittered.

"Indeed? Then who did?"

"I am sorry, Miss Primrose, but I can't tell you that," Babs said steadily.

"We know the girl, but—" She bit her lip. "Well, there are circumstances which affect the code of honour among the girls of the Form. Jean was not entitled to that punishment, Miss Primrose. She broke it to have the test—that test which meant more to her than anything on earth."

The headmistress frowned.

"I do not think that you know—"

And while Miss Primrose listened, she explained what had happened to Jean—the sudden collapse of her mother's finances, Jean had to put matters right by succeeding in getting the film contract.

Miss Primrose considered.

"I am very sorry," she said, "that Jean did not tell me this herself. Thank you, Barbara. I did not know, of course, what you pursued her lips."

"Well, I am afraid that I cannot get Jean her chance in the film, but as you vouch for her innocence in the matter of ruining Diana's frock, I will let her off the punishments I have given her. She can take part in the film—yes."

That was all Babs wanted. Given that permission, she thought the committee would do the rest. She flew to join Mabs.

Mabs was looking quite tense.

"Mabs, you saw Diana?"

"Yes, I saw her."

"What did she say?"

"Oh, you can guess, Mabs shrugged hopelessly. "She's not giving up the chance—not for anything. I'm afraid we've got to take stronger measures. But she shan't have it! She shan't!" she vowed. "Rather than that—"

She broke off. "But come on, the Form's waiting. They're all in the music-room."

Off to the music-room they rushed. For the next half-hour, behind closed doors, neither Babs nor Mabs was seen.

But there was an air of grimness, of purpose, in their bearing as they came out. The Form, too—or that part of it represented at the meeting—was looking grim.

"To-morrow!" Babs whispered. "To-morrow!"

Yes, to-morrow. Great and exciting things were destined to happen on the morrow.

They happened.

In the morning the film company, with all its paraphernalia, invaded Cliff House. In the afternoon the girls were called into the Form-room, where lights, microphones, and recording apparatus had been erected, and where the cameras stood sentinel and ready.

Miss Thackeray, looking very charming in mortar-board and gown, shepherded the girls into their places, and explained the scenes all over again. There was a grim silence.

And when she had finished, Mabs stood up.

"And do we understand, Miss Thackeray, that Jean Cartwright still takes the part of the rebel girl?"

Constance Thackeray frowned.

"I am afraid not. That part is now passed over to Diana Royston-Clarke."

Whereat Diana a triumphantly grinned. But she was the only girl there who did. The others looked grim.

Babs' face was set.

"I see!" she said, but still she stood. Something like a thrill went through



the Form. "Miss Thackeray," she added respectfully, "when this film was mooted, you agreed to work with the committee, to accept the committee's decision. The committee with the approval of the Form, or practically all of it—has decided that Jean Cartwright shall play the lead."

Miss Thackeray bit her lip. Langley Rynniman, who, as director, was in the room, frowned.

"Miss Redfern!" he cried. "That's the Form's decision!" Babs announced.

"Then," Langley Rynniman said, "I am sorry to have to refute the Form's decision! Had Jean Cartwright been good in her test yesterday, she would have had the part."

"But Jean," Babs told him, "was good until Miss Primrose appeared on the scene. In the early part of the test, Mr. Rynniman, you know yourself that she was good. It was the presence of Miss Primrose which upset her."

He pursed his lips. Diana smiled a scornful smile.

"Well, I'm sorry," he said. "I am afraid we can't consider that now. Miss Royston-Clarke was given a test later, and on the strength of that test she was promised the part. Miss Royston-Clarke," he added, "will you step forward!"

Diana languidly rose. She sauntered out to the front. Babs looked round, flinging a swift glance at the faces of the Form fixed upon her.

There was a stir, a rustle. Full twenty-four of the thirty-two girls in the room rose to their feet.

Babs very quietly stepped out to the front of the class.

"And that is your last word, Mr. Rynniman?" she asked.

"That is my last word!" "Thank you! Very well! Then, in that case," Babs stated distinctly, "we—the Form—refuse to play with her! Diana has got that part by lies, by trickery, by cheating! Either she is dropped in favour of Jean, or we all walk out here and now!"



Mabs to the Rescue!

SILENCE!

The girls standing up remained stiff and rigid. Those sitting down, Lydia Crossendale and her cronies, and Frances Frost, glared up at them. Under the cream and roses of Diana's cheeks an angry flush rushed up. Langley Rynniman clenched his hands.

"Oh, Great Scott!" he gasped, and looked helplessly, hopelessly, at pale-faced Constance. "Miss Thackeray—" he appealed.

But Miss Thackeray could do nothing. The Form was obviously in earnest. The Form, outraged by Diana's trickery and her cunning, all of them on the side of Babs and Mabs, were standing by Jean against the Firebrand. Obviously, there could be no filming without the Form.

Constance Thackeray looked towards Diana. It was an entreating, an appealing look.

"Diana—" "Diana set her teeth. "Diana, would you—just for this once—mind standing aside?"

Diana's eyes flashed.

"I would!" she said.

"But the film—" put in Rynniman.

"Diana, you must realise—" "I just realise one thing," Diana said



TO Jean's utter horror she saw a familiar figure step on to the set. It was Miss Primrose! And she, Jean, was supposed to be at Cliff House—in detention!

scornfully—"that you're allowing yourselves to be intimidated by a crowd of schoolgirls! What's Jean Cartwright doing to deserve the part, anyway?"

Another heavy pause. The atmosphere seemed to be charged with electricity. Langley Rynniman bit his moustache. Glinting, his eyes travelled over the stern, determined faces in front of him. Angriily his lips came together. Then impatiently he faced round with an snort.

"O.K.!" he said, with laconic finality. "Get the staff in; tear those lights down; pick up the mikes! I'm fed-up! We'll never go into production at this rate! We've had nothing but trouble and fuss and expense ever since this film was mooted! If these girls won't do it, then we'll transfer the whole bag of tricks to some other school!"

There was a jump at that. Mabs started. Babs looked dumbfounded. A murmur of consternation, of disappointment, went all round the class.

Diana, however, easily grinned. She didn't mind that. She had got her chance, anyway, and whether the film were filmed at Cliff House or Whitechester, or anywhere else, she was confident now that she held the part. She clapped her hands.

"Bravo!" she applauded. The producer turned irritably. Furious he was now. He had wasted time; he had been put to expense. All the work of the last few days had been rendered useless.

Privately he was reviling himself for ever having entered into any understanding with a crowd of schoolgirls. Patently he was in a mood to put an end to it all.

Jean turned white. She gave a half-strangled cry.

"Mr. Rynniman, please—please don't do that!" she gasped.

"No?" He glared. "Then what the

dickens am I to do?" he snapped. "You want the part; Diana wants the part. I've chosen Diana, but your friends say that they won't play with Diana. Well, I refuse to be dictated to by a crowd of girls! Either you make up your minds here and now, or I wash my hands of Cliff House altogether!" He turned once more to Diana. "Diana," he said, "think about it—think about it for the last time. Won't you give up your part to Jean here?"

Swift and sharp as a shot came Diana's retort:

"I will not!" "Well, there you are, that finishes it!" Rynniman snapped, and stopped as Mabs, emerging from her place, stood in front of the class. "Well?" he growled.

Mabs faced him.

"Mr. Rynniman—" He took a furious turn. "Mr. Rynniman," Mabs said steadily, "wait! Listen to me! We don't want to let you down."

"No; it doesn't look like it!"—bitterly.

"Please," Mabs pleaded, "we're all anxious to take part in the film, really. It's only that we don't feel disposed to support Diana. Well, we stick to that, Mr. Rynniman. On the other hand, we don't want you to think that we're trying to dictate to you."

He laughed shortly.

"What do you call this?"

"We're willing," Mabs went on levelly, "to play. We're willing to do our best. But"—she glanced at Diana—"the girls won't play up with Diana. You don't want Jean. Right! There's another way out—one other way."

"And that?"

"Find another girl to play the lead!"

A breathless murmur—a sudden murmur of applause. Rynniman stared. Quickly he looked at Constance

Thackeray. She had half-risen in her seat now; she was looking at Mabs, her delicate features suffused with colour. Hope, eagerness, were on her face.

"Mabel, you mean that you—"  
"I mean," Mabs said, and quietly nodded—"I mean that, rather than spoil the film, I'll take the part!"

At which once again there was a breathless pause, at which a shiver ran through the Form. And then irresistibly, spontaneously, a burst of cheering rippled forth.

"Mabs! Oh, my hat!"  
"Good old Mabs!"  
"Mabs is the girl, Mr. Runniman!"  
But Mr. Runniman knew that. His own eyes lighted up then, his cheeks became suffused. He glanced quickly at his star, Constance Thackeray, who was leaning forward, her eyes alight, her face aflame.

Diana, with a scowl, fell back. But Diana was not noticed then. A sudden wave of excitement, of enthusiasm, swept the Form.

"You mean that, Mabel?"  
"I mean it!" she said.  
"But, look here—" hooted Diana.  
But nobody was looking there. Diana for once found herself out of the picture.

No need to ask what Mr. Runniman thought of the proposal. No need to ask what Miss Thackeray thought. The Fourth to a girl—yes, even Lydia Crossendale & Co.—were glowing; knew that Mabs was the girl!

"Then," Runniman said, "it's a go! Are you all agreed, girls?"  
"Yes!" came a perfect howl.

"Then let's get to business!" Diana—she shook his head—"I'm sorry, but you see how it is? Later on, perhaps, I'll find you something else. But Miss Lynn—well, you know that we've had our eyes on Miss Lynn from the start.

Now, please, no argument," he added. "Let's get to business. Miss Lynn, will you come here? Diana, will you take Miss Lynn's place?"

"As one of the crowd?" Diana sneered bitterly.

"Well, for the time being."  
"Thanks!" Diana's eyes flashed. She flung a furious, flashing look round. "But I don't want it, thanks! I wouldn't take it if you offered me the studios with it! Mabel Lynn incited the Form to bar me! I bar her!"

She flung one contemptuous look towards Mabs; for a moment she clenched her hands. Then, without another word, she strolled across the Form-room, let herself through the door, and—Slam! She was gone.

Gone, yes. Gone, while Mabs, taking her part, smiled; while Jean shook her head, fearing the malignancy she read in that last look of the Firebrand.

But Mabs did not care. Mabs had the part. She had brought Diana's trickery and scheming to nought. If she had not saved Jean, she had saved the film—she had saved the Form.

Meantime—  
Meantime—well, she was still working for Jean's sake. She was still working that Jean should benefit by her taking over of the part. How that was to be accomplished she had not yet worked out, but—

Diana, at any rate, was finished. So Mabs thought. But Diana, rushing along the corridor, was by no means finished. Even if it meant Mabs' expulsion, Diana was determined she should come down from that cockily high perch she occupied now.

While Mabs opposed her, there was no longer room for both Diana Royston-Clarke and that girl at Cliff House School.

THE END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

## HILDA RICHARDS REPLIES To You

"Animal-Lover" (Midlothian, Scotland).—You were quite right. The question to which I answered "No" was the one you stated. Your collie dog, Glen, sounds a beauty, and what fun that he is so full of mischief!

"Tunny" (Lincoln).—If you would like me to send you a personal reply, you must, of course, give me your full name and address; otherwise, I will willingly reply to you here when space allows. The Lower Third would be your Form, my dear. Best wishes, my dear!

"Stewed Tea" (Northern Island).—What a strange pen-name you chose! June thinks you ought to have a much nicer one. I gave her that extra biscuit, as you asked, and I'm sure she appreciated it more than another pat—of which I pass on to her hundreds a day from readers of THE SCHOOLGIRL. Would you please give an extra biscuit to your two dogs, a tiny saucer of milk to your cat, and a piece of groundnut to your canary—from me?

"Virginia Ann" (Plymouth, Devon).—Fancy having to "pick up courage" to write to me, my dear! Dozens of school-girls do so, every day, you know, and I've never set June on any of them! Not that she'd hurt them if I did! Babs' second name is Hilda; Mabs' is Elsie. Please write and tell me all about your sister's wedding.

"Blue-Eyed Blonde of Bloemfontein".—I wonder if many other readers will agree with you that Babs and Mabs look old-fashioned as shown in the drawings illustrating my stories? Not all modern school-girls wear their hair brushed back, surely. Jemima and Diana resemble many who do, but there are other hair modes—Marcelle's fringe, for example.

"Admirer of Babs" (Surbiton, Surrey).—Here's your reply, my dear. I hope you have not given up looking for it again. But I have such a huge pile of letters awaiting reply in THE SCHOOLGIRL and they all have to wait their turn. Thank you very much for your numerous suggestions. I will try to do all you ask—in course of time.

"Olga and Tania Bonavia".—Such an unfortunate thing has happened. The letter I addressed to you at Caterick Camp has been returned marked "Insufficiently addressed." Please send me your full address, because, after all the nice letters from both of you when you were in Shanghai, I do not want our friendship to end abruptly.

"Francesca" (Shropshire).—You'd be in the Lower Fifth if you went to Cliff House, my dear. How is the stamp-collecting going? It is an interesting hobby, isn't it? Thanks for putting the SCHOOLGIRL stories in the order you like them—it helps me a great deal. Yes, do write (or type) another letter to me soon!

"Cheeky Daphne Poll" (Hampstead).—You would be in the care-free Second Form if you went to Cliff House. And how you'd love that, wouldn't you? It has never been discovered who cats more—Bessie Bunter or her brother, Billy. Most girls at Cliff House would back Bessie—but, then, they don't see Billy at meal-times so often as they see their Bessie.

"Sybil" (Cape Town, South Africa).—You'd be in the Upper Third if you went to Cliff House, my dear—and in the Fourth very soon, as you are nearly fourteen. I addressed a letter to you at Three Anchor Bay, but it has been returned to me, marked "Not known."

## SHE LONGED FOR THE LIMELIGHT

● So Mabs has secured the part which Diana had so coveted! And Mabs is working on Jean's behalf—resolved that her chum shall benefit.

But Diana, even in this moment of humiliation and shattered hopes, is undefeated. More than ever now is she determined to wrest the part from Mabs; more than ever is she resolved that the limelight shall be upon her and her alone!

And so the reckless Firebrand schemes to bring about the downfall of her rivals . . .

Packed with dramatic incidents is next week's enthralling long complete Cliff House School story, which you must not miss. It is entitled:

COMPLETE  
NEXT  
WEEK



*The Daring of Diana*

By  
HILDA  
RICHARDS

Betty Barton & Co., of Morcove School Fame, Feature In This Thrilling Serial of Adventure in the Jungle

# MORCOVE in UNKNOWN AFRICA



BETTY BARTON, POLLY LINTON, NAOMIE YAKARA & CO., of Morcove School, together with members of Morcove, are in an unexplored part of Africa, seeking a mysterious Golden Grotto in the Kwamba country. They have a rival—a Frenchman named DUPONT. Through his villainy three members of the expedition—fathers of two of the girls and Kwamba, a negro guide—are kidnapped by natives. MADGE MINDEN—one of the Morcove girls—suddenly discovers that she has lost a strange Ankh necklace which was to serve them as a passport when they reach their goal. Without it they are helpless!  
(Now read on.)

By  
MARJORIE  
STANTON

Illustrated by L. Shields

Easy enough it was to go back over ground previously traversed. Through virgin forest had they all been pushing on so desperately, and now there were slashed creepers and lopped boughs to reveal the trail.

After each step, Betty and Dave paused to scan carefully the trodden creepers and grass in hopes to catch the dull gleam of gold. Poor enough was the light even now, the foliage of all the intertwining branches being so dense overhead. Betty wondered if Polly and other chums were feeling such a strain as her own eyes were suffering.

She had to glance up now and then, if only to relieve the blinding effect of such continual peering at the dark carpet of the forest. As for Dave, he raised his eyes once in a while to give her a heartening look.

Suddenly he stood stockstill, and made a quick, faint sign for her to do the same. She obeyed, feeling that it could have nothing to do with the lost trinket; was due, rather, to his scenting some hidden danger.

Within whispering distance of him as she was, after a few moments she asked him, under her breath, about chums of theirs who were only a few yards behind them.

"Creep back, shall I, Dave, and get them to stand still?"

"No," the whisper came back, "you mustn't move!"

Then her heart throbbed fast as she realized that he was very stealthily put-

ting up his gun. Like the other boys in the party, he was never without his sporting rifle these days. She saw him bring it, inch by inch, butt to shoulder, whilst he watched something—what could it be?—that lurked amongst sprawling branches overhanging the trail.

Motionless behind him, Betty looked over his left shoulder towards the spot which his own steady eye was sighting. And then she saw—a small monkey, sitting up, with something bright in his forehands that was quite fascinating him.

The lost necklace!

There it was—a puzzling find for one of the thousands of lively monkeys that trooped in the trees.

But it was not only that which made Betty feel giddy with excitement.

Poised above the monkey was the gently waving head of a huge snake, about to strike at the innocent little animal.

BANG!

The shattering report made Betty close her eyes and jump. When she looked again, Dave was rushing forwards to snatch up something from the ground.

"Got it, Betty!"

Quite calmly he said that, although it was the vitally important trinket which he had recovered—after all!

"Oh, Dave—Dave! How splendid!" He had shot the snake—killed it with a bullet through the head, thus saving the monkey's life.

As for that happy little rascal, was it a wonder that he, when Dave's gun went off, had dropped the trinket and made off in his sudden fright?

The rifle-slot was now bringing the rest of the searchers floundering this way. A few moments more and they were all here. In the fast-fading light, a dozen faces revealed looks eloquent of a relief too great for words.

## Jungle Island

"HOW long now, Dave, before it's dark?"

"Oh, about ten minutes, Betty!"

"Only ten minutes!"

And Betty Barton found it hard to keep back a sigh of despair.

She was far from being a girl to lose heart easily; but nobody would have failed to recognise that what had just happened to her and her fellow-adventurers, out here in the heart of the African forest, comprised a first-class disaster.

No sooner had Madge Minden cried out about the loss of that trinket upon which, so fatefully, the very lives of all of them depended, than packs had been dumped so that there might be a hasty going back to search for it.

Even if there had been hours of daylight still to come, the hope of finding the "Ankh" necklace must have been such a feeble one. But this was the sunset hour, and in the tropics darkness comes very suddenly.

There had been that exchange of whispers between Betty and Dave, just then, because they had become separated—but only by a few yards—from others who were also searching.



Then there was a rush to rejoin those who, by arrangement, had remained as a guarding party where all the baggage had been dumped.

It meant going only a quarter of a mile at most, and the way was familiar by now. Yet it was in deepening darkness that the searchers rejoined their friends.

Night was swiftly enshrouding the forest. And it was to be no night spent under hastily rigged up tents, with a camp-fire to give off a comforting, protecting glare.

How could there be any thought of resting here until daylight returned, when they knew themselves to be in deadly peril from the hostile tribesmen?

Packs, taken up again, were buckled to killing backs. Slender poles, from which some of the larger bundles of camp-stuff had been slung, were shouldered at either end once more. And so the forced march was resumed; a big company, yet not a man amongst them now.

Betty and her chums of Morcove accounted for the larger part of the party. The rest comprised the five Graugemoor boys and Mrs. Willoughby and Mrs. Gardner.

As for those three men who should have been with them—Pam's father, and Madge's, and the negro guide, Kwamba—what use to despair of ever seeing them again? Was it not a blind, unreasoning, but unconquerable hope of rescuing them which kept them pressing on through the jungle wilds?

Once we are out of this forest, then we'll get on much faster to the Kwamba country," Betty cheerily predicted, plodding along between Polly Linton and Pam Willoughby. "Might even do the last stretch in a single day's march!"

"And then"—Polly nodded and smiled in the darkness—"and then, girls! We've had Kwamba's word for it; we only need to let his tribe see the necklace—the mysterious sign of the double hawk on the medallion—and they'll all come in on our side!"

"That should put a spoke in Dupont's wheel," Pam murmured. "He'll be certain to turn up there, bringing our lost men with him—"

"Expecting a walk-over, which he won't get!" Polly Linton fairly chuckled. "So what's the use of worrying?" she began to chant, whilst hitching up the bundle on her back. "It never was worth while! So—"

Her brother, Jack heard this, and joined in, jovially:

"Pack up your troubles in your old kitbag,

And smile, smile, smile!"

"O.K., boys!" he voiced, meaning the girls as well. "See me, when I'm O.C. Troops at Kwamba! And Tubby shall be given a sergeant's stripes. And all you girls—I don't know what you'll be. Nuisances, as usual, probably!"

"Shall we take his gun away?" Polly proposed, as punishment for such impudence. "As a matter of fact, of course, while you boys are merely strutting about, trying to look grand with your rifles, we girls will be solving the mystery of the Golden Grotto—Hullo, though! What's up now?"

Those at the head of the struggling line had not only checked suddenly, but were noisily excited. A babel of loud remarks was obviously due to a dramatic surprise.

Then one halting cry, over-riding all others, came to all who had been trailing on behind

"I s-s-say—quick!"

"That's Bunny!" jerked Betty. "What does it mean, I wonder?"

"Something good, by the sound of her voice!" panted Polly. "Come on, girls!"

Such groping darkness it was, amidst the close-growing trees and all their draping creepers, it took them a full minute to catch up with the first half-dozen.

But to do that was to find open ground exposed to view by bright starlight.

Peering eyes could see that here was the wide, dried-up bed of what, during the rainy season, must be a watercourse. The hard, cracked mud was going to offer an easy passage for the marchers. And what a cheer Morcove & Co. wanted to give!

Even though they were not yet to be done with the forest, at any rate, there was this open way for them—going in just in the direction they needed to follow.

But there could be no hurrahing, no starting a chorus with which to march. For all they knew, even now there might be an enemy horde tracking after them—within hearing distance.

All those black fellows whom the scoutless Dupont had managed to enlist for the purpose of frustrating the Morcove expedition—they were a menace which would only pass when the Kwamba country had been reached.

Rejoicings, however, were none the less hearty for having to be subdued, as every weary foot began to tread this firm, open ground.

No more stooping, no more thorn-bushes or entangling tendrils to contend with. And to look up now was to see, not the snake-haunted branches of forest trees, but the stars in their thousands, flashing brilliantly!

Very soon the mud-flat became so wide, it began to seem as if it might be only the bed of a dried-up, forest-girt lake—not a watercourse.

In that case, the marchers would sooner or later find themselves at the other side, with only more forest to enter.

For a mile at least they trailed along in this state of uncertainty. Then suddenly there was not one pair of eyes so weary that it failed to see—a patch of water, its dark surface shimmering in a dull, oily way.

Eagerness to know what this was to mean for them all—a river to cross, or a great lake to go round; it might be either—made them forget fatigue.

There was something almost comic in their last hobbling run to get to the water's edge. Breathless, they panted anxious remarks to one another whilst scurrying along.

"Bekas, what ze diggins!" shrilled that excitable Morcovian, dusky Naomer. "If he is a river, zen you won't catch me swimming! Bekas, crocodiles, don't forget!"

"Howwows, yes!" gasped Paula Creel, who was the sort of girl to jump on a chair at sight of a mere mouse.

"Dreadful!"

"Rabbits!" snorted Polly. "Anything's better than the forest! And who's talking about having to swim, anyway? But here we are, and—Gosh!"

"It's a lake—must be!" Betty panted, now that they were all at the water's edge. "You can't see to the other side. No river could be so wide!"

"Chain of lakes, connected with swamps, perhaps," Dave hazarded.

"And will that make it any better for us?" Bunny Trevor asked, a bit dejectedly; but, then, oh, how dead-beat she, like others, felt!

"We'll manage," Betty voiced her old Morcove slogan. "Only think! Once across, and what a difference it will

make for all of us! A strip of water between us and Dupont and his lot!"

"But not to-night," Pam's mother quietly rejoined. "Obviously, we simply must wait here for daylight, and then see what can be done."

"A raft, chaps!" came from Jack gaily. "That'll be it! Fetch down some branches, lash 'em together, and then—"

"But look—look!" was the interrupting cry from Tess. "Surely—"

"What, Tess—what?"

Those who turned to her found her staring along the left-hand bank, to the very edge of which the forest grew.

Tess, always so sharp-eyed, pointed to what her companions, seeing everything so vaguely in the starlight, had taken to be a tongue of land making its thrust into the lake.

"There's a thin strip of water," she said, "and that means—an island!"

#### A N ISLAND!

Was it really so? An island—offering itself to them, in their desperate need of a thorough rest, as a temporary camp!

What could be better, remembering that they were living hunted lives at present? The security it would mean, since rest they must—to have water all round them!

Should the enemy turn up, having trailed them through the forest, then the island was just the place for putting up a good defence.

"And I can see how we can land there!" the girls heard Jack shouting jubilantly, during the rush along the tree-grown bank. "I can see one whacking great tree leaning out over the water just there. Fetch her down with the axe, boys, and she'll fall right across!"

"Gorjus!"

Another minute and packs were being dumped again. The whole party was mustered near that overhanging tree, with the island on the other side of a forty-foot-wide strip of water.

"Here, we girls are going to help!" was the lively cry with which Polly put herself amongst the boys. "Chopper, one of you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was the Madcap pretending to spit upon her hands that caused such laughter. But there was no pretence about the help which she and other Morcovians rendered during the next half-hour.

Turn by turn they worked away, along with the five sturdy lads, so that never for a moment were the chips failing to fly.

Meantime, some who had quite intended to lend a hand were already—fast asleep! They had meant to keep awake, but whilst rightly seizing the chance for a brief rest, but even whilst they lay with heads pillowed upon discarded packs, their eyes had closed. And those who were so hard at work said: "Let them sleep!"

Geo, there'll be nois enough to wake 'em presently," Jack jovially predicted. "Such a crash when she does come down—meaning the great tree which he himself was attacking with an axe."

"Bags the finishing stroke!" Polly said.

"Then you can go away and come back later, for she's nowhere near it yet!"

"That she isn't," puffed Tubby, his fat cheeks shaking, jelly-like, every time he brought off a shrewd stroke with a billhook. "Must be six feet round the middle—"

"Almost as thick as you, in fact," Tom chuckled.

"And a dashed sight taller," their fat chum was further twitted.

At last a sharp warning crack sounded, entitling Jack to give a rejoicing:

"Look out, boys! She's going!"

Another and louder cr-r-rack!

"It's a really lovely sight—a wonderful sight!" Jack said, imitating a running commentary on the wireless. "Those who have done all the hard work are now standing by, and Miss Polly Linton—looking very charming in tennis shorts and a pith helmet—"

"Oh, funny—"

It now taking the hatchet from Sir James Cherrol, to cut the cake—sorry, I should say, to give the coup-de-grace! Nothing can be heard but the grunting of a wart-hog. Sorry again; the grunting, I find, is Tubby as he stoops to mend a bootlace. A wonderful sight; such graceful lines—curves—and then the suggestion of tremendous digestive power. Such a stout ship—follow, I mean—was never before launched from the Grangemore yards! Go it, Polly-wolly! Great strength rings the bell."

From right above her head once again Polly brought down the hatchet, striking it with all her might into the wide cleft.

"See if that will!" she puffed.

It did! Swoosh rustled—all the branches as the tree suddenly flopped lower over the glassy water. Then—

Cr-r-rack, CRASH!

And to that last deafening sound the few who had been asleep suddenly awoke, whilst those who had felled the tree sent up a jubilant:

"Hurrah!"

## Attack!

"COME on, chaps!"

"Come on, girls!"

"Here—hi! Grangemore

first!"

"No—Morcové!"

With all the skittishness of term-time at both schools there began an eager scrambling across the makeshift bridge.

As there was no knowing what dangers from wild life might be lurking upon the island, it was certainly rash of Betty and other Morcovians to struggle across in advance of Grangemore.

The boys were bringing their guns with them—in case—and, of course, this hampered them. So there were Betty and Polly, a few moments later—jumping clear of the tree altogether, easy winners in the race!

"And I name this island—Morcové Island!" Betty gaily shouted. "After our old school!"

"Hurrah—yes!" Polly cheered. "Why shouldn't we?"

Why, indeed, when perhaps never until this moment had any human being set foot upon the island!

It proved to be little more than twice the size of a tennis court. But, small though it was, the island promised to serve them splendidly as a temporary camping-ground. There was firm, dry footing everywhere, and another gratifying discovery, instantly made, was that of a fallen tree—its wood dead and brittle. Grand for a camp-fire!

So within five minutes the first tongues of flame were licking upwards in the darkness. Madge and Tess saw to this kindling of the camp-fire, and never in their lives had they known fire-light to seem such a thing of joy as it did at this moment.

Meantime, other members of the party, having returned to the main bank, were coming across again, bringing the last of the stores. Much easier was the "bridge" to tackle this time, as



DAVE'S whisper was calm but tense. "Did you see,?" Betty—that black man over there, spying?" Betty followed the direction of his pointing hand. "Does that mean that we've been seen?" He nodded grimly.

Betty and Polly had joined Jimmy and Tom in lopping away some of the obstructing branches.

Nor was the work with hatchet and billhook to end there.

By working on in relays they hoped to float the main stem right away at last, so that the strip of water would be unbridged to any hostile party that might turn up.

As for how the expedition was to get away from the island after daylight, that was no problem to Morcové & Co. With so much timber available, they would have no difficulty in fitting together some sort of a raft!

A couple of their chums believed Betty and Polly presently, and they could go to the camp-fire to find a disc of steaming coffee into which to dip tin mugs. The frying-pan had done some good work, too, and for once dusky Naomer came in for a genuine compliment from the usually scornful Madcap.

"You deserve a medal, kid! It might be grilled gammon; and the smoky flavour only makes it all the tastier! Hallo, Madge! Expect you've earned a rest!"

"I've just finished helping to get some of the tents up," was the quiet remark with which Madge sat down to rest for a minute. "So anybody who wants can get some proper sleep now."

"Well, I don't want—for a bit!" Betty laughed. "But hasn't it put new life into us all, Madge dear! You're not—worrying?"

"Oh, no! Now that we've got the Ankh necklace back, I feel as I did before it was lost. We know it is going to work wonders when we get to Kwamba. That tribe will be ever so friendly, and so the Dupont wretch will find he has lost the trick."

"Polly's hand in—he'll have to," Thuck agreed, resorting to her brother's slang.

"So what about your going off to bed on that, Madge?" Betty affectionately suggested.

Madge smiled and nodded as she never could have done if mind and heart alike had been oppressed with fears for the safety of Dupont's three captives. But when, presently, she got up to do away from the camp-fire, she did not withdraw to one of the tents.

Betty and Polly saw her go to relieve one of those who were so hard at work destroying the "bridge." The dancing light from the crackling brands were illumining that busy scene, and from their places at the fire Betty and Polly were able to see the chum whom Madge relieved. Paula!

A bit of a shirker Paula might be when at school, but out here in Africa she was resolute to "do her bit." As a cricketer who has made a century is clapped on his return to the pavilion, so Paula was clapped as she came across to the fire.

"Bekas, bravo ze duffer!" Naomer shrilled. "And you can help yourself to what you like, Paula; bekas—"

"Oh, thanks—thanks! But I wather think of going to lie down now," said Paula, looking very proud of herself. "Bai Jove! Great welief, geals! They tell me theah is not the slightest trace of animal life on this island!"

But Paula's blissful sense of security was short-lived.

There had been just time enough for her to drift away to one of the Morcové tents when everyone else was electrified by an ear-piercing shriek.

Alarm was all the greater because Paula did not come rushing away from that tent, nor did she yell out a second time.

Had she been pounced upon by some savage animal or seized by a deadly reptile? That was what her companions

were wondering as they ran to find out.

From their work upon the cut-up trees came some of the girls and boys; whilst others made just as hasty a dash from the camp-fire.

Two of the lads had dropped their hatchets to snatch up a rifle apiece. Pam and Madge came up, retaining billhooks. As for Betty, presence of mind caused her to snatch a burning stick from the fire to serve as a torch.

"Paula!" several shouted, as they all converged upon the tent. "What's the matter, Paula? You in there?"

"Aiow, ye-ye-yes!"  
More timidity than genuine peril in that wailed response. So it was instantly realised that there was to be no doing or dying for Paula's sake, after all. And this, in Polly's case, meant a scornful grin.

"Come out of it, then!"  
But what came out of the tent at that very moment was a creature of such startling appearance in the torchlight, the Madcap herself jumped about a yard high, and there were some yells every bit as screechy as Paula's had been.

Even some of the boys shouted "Gosh!" and "Wow!" whilst backing sharply just like the girls. They took the creature to be a rat—and such a rat!

"Bekas—enormous!" shrieked Naomer, as she did her caper to get out of the way.

Then a calm remark from Dave—"Porcupine, that's all!"—put an end to the mild panic.

Jack said hastily:

"Yes, of course!"

And Tom said:

"Yes. What else did you think it was?"

But, Polly, perhaps, was best of all at pretending not to have been the least bit scared—oh, no!

Polly, striding into the tent, with Betty beside her lighting it up with the torch, witheringly eyed a very shaky, flabbergasted Paula.

"You don't mean to say," the Madcap exploded, "you let a little thing like that scare you stiff?"

"B-b-but, g-g-good gracious, geals, what was it!"

"Only a porcupine, of course!"

"Bai Jove! Er—pewtically hawmless, in fact?"

"Of course, duffer!"

"And—er—it's gone now, has it?"

"I don't know. Why not go and see for yourself!"

"No, thanks!"

Then Betty went off into laughter that was taken up by the crowd outside.

"Hurry up and get down to it, Paula darling, because I'm going to put the light out!" she chuckled, now that the torch was giving off more smoke than flame. "And I think I'll snatch a bit of sleep, too, now I'm here."

"Ditto me," said Polly, patting back a yawn. "I don't feel I'm any good for anything until I've had a snooze."

Tired! Never so tired in all their lives; but with all this dead weariness there was not the slightest despondency.

For a few minutes after they had curled down to sleep, with some mosquito netting drawn over them, the girls talked in subdued but confident tones. The sharp strokes of axe and billhook still went on in the otherwise silent night. Mighty task, out there, and as urgent as it was arduous. And at daylight there would be a call for fresh labour, working in shifts at the building of a raft.

The compass had assured them that a direct course could only be kept by crossing the water.

Betty, when she awoke, found daylight creeping into the tent. She sat

up quietly, instantly realising that Polly and Paula were still fast asleep. So were a couple more of the girls who must have come here to lie down after completing their "night shift."

Rising up silently, Betty went outside the tent with the intention of finding something useful to do. But, one step beyond the tent entrance, she was struck to a standstill by a thrilling sight.

Dawn had revealed a wide stretch of water. It seemed to her that it must be at least half a mile to the other side where there was a vast tree-dotted plain and, beyond that, gigantic mountains.

The Kwamba country!

That was the thrill for Betty—to see in the rosy dawnlight that mountain range which was to have been the expedition's journey's end.

Yonder, at the foot of those mountains, lived that tribe to which their own guide belonged. Along with the two white men who had been the leaders of the expedition—Mr. Willoughby and Madge's father—their Kwamba was now a prisoner in the hands of the Frenchman Dupont.

Had the devoted negro been here at this moment, he would have been able perhaps to point out the very mountain that had its "heap-big cliff," and on that sheer wall of rock the cherished device of two hawks facing each other—the same device which figured on the medallion of Madge's "Ankh" necklace!

Betty ceased her far-away gazing to look around and see who was about on the tiny island.

Then she saw two of the boys, Dave and Jimmy, close together, rifles in hand, their entire attitude that of sentinels who had just received warning of danger.

Suddenly she saw Dave give a whisper to Jimmy, who nodded.

Then Dave turned about to come away from that sheltering bush, behind which his chum stood as watchful as ever.

Quickly but silently Dave, now that he had caught sight of Betty, nipped across to her.

"You didn't see just then?" he asked, under his breath.

"No, nothing. But I could tell that you and Jimmy—"

"A black fellow, spying from the trees on the bank over there. He's gone now—"

Abruptly as that he broke off, but with no loss of composure, although sounds bearing a dreadful significance had suddenly arisen.

A loud commotion it was, only a little way off in that dense forest from which the island was separated by the narrow strip of water; a violent rustling of foliage and a crackling of dead sticks, as if hostile tribesmen were even now coming on to launch a savage attack.

She darted a glance in the direction from which the noise came.

BANG!

And they both looked across to Jimmy, and saw that he, after letting off that shot, was quickly reloading, to be ready to fire again—at what?

Betty darted into the tent.  
"Polly! All of you!" she cried.  
"Up! We're going to be attacked!"

What terrible peril faces the chums? Don't miss next week's dramatic chapters of this enthralling jungle serial. A superb photo-postcard of FRED ASTAIRE will be given away with every copy of next week's SCHOOLGIRL.

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FRED ASTAIRE,

and it will make a worthy addition to your growing collection of postcards.

There has been an enormous demand for the first two gift numbers of THE SCHOOLGIRL, so much so that I'm afraid some readers may have been unable to obtain their copies. To guard against this, I would suggest that you all order your copies well in advance, then you need never fear the possibility of being greeted by your newswagon with the sad words, "Sold out."

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Don't miss all these good things which await you in the next free gift number of THE SCHOOLGIRL. Remember my advice, and order your copy now!

With best wishes,

YOUR EDITOR.



## Further Dramatic Chapters of One of the Most Exciting Mystery Serials You Have Ever Read



CATHERINE STERNDALE, together with her cousins, MOLLY and CHARLES, are staying at a queer Chinese house owned by their UNCLE GERALD. They receive mysterious warnings, and a little Chinese girl, KWANYIN, seems as if she has something of importance to tell Catherine. On the evening of their arrival, Kwanyin comes to Catherine's room. As she is about to speak a yellow arm issues from behind some tapestry and clutches at Catherine's coat.

(Now read on.)

### Suspicion

**L**ET GO—Catherine Sterndale gave a strangled cry and struck out at the long-fingered yellow hand that had reached through the wall and clutched her coat.

Now, as Catherine struggled, she could see that the hand had pushed aside some Chinese tapestry which covered an aperture. Two dark, almond eyes glared at her for a moment from the blackness behind the tapestry. Instantly the grip relaxed.

But Catherine held on to the hand and called to the little Chinese girl—Kwanyin—who had been beside her. She called in vain. Kwanyin had gone, as silently and mysteriously as she had come.

"Who are you?" cried Catherine, in desperate anger, and hauled on the arm with all her strength. But she was helpless against the power of her unseen assailant.

She was hurled back, tottered, and fell against the polished Chinese bridal chest, banging her arm.

For a moment the pain was sharp and intense. When again she was able to think about anything else, the hand had disappeared.

Jumping up, Catherine ran to the tapestry, past which the hand had appeared. She drew it aside, and then stood amazed.

There was no sign of a hole. Nothing at all to suggest that there had been a sliding panel, even.

She stood quite still, her heart beating fast.

She found herself wondering if her imagination were playing her tricks.

"Perhaps it's a silly dream," she told herself.

Bewilderedly she ran her mind over the events that had happened since she and her two cousins, Charles and Molly, had stepped into the train at a London station to visit their Uncle Gerald. For days before they had talked of nothing else but this visit. Uncle Gerald had recently returned from China, where he had spent most of his life.

On his return, he had bought a strange house, known as Pagoda Place. It had been built, originally, by a naval officer who had taken part in the capture of the Peking Palace. He had died, and the place had been left derelict until Uncle Gerald had bought it.

Naturally, the three cousins had thought a great deal about this strange house. All the servants were Chinese, and the furnishing was Oriental, too.

But none of the cousins had expected to be involved in a mystery. The first strange happening had occurred on the train. A mysterious message had been tossed in through the window.

Catherine recalled that incident, and now it took on a new significance. The message had warned them not to come to Pagoda Place.

Who had sent that message? Who had tossed it into the compartment while they were asleep? And why?

Was it flung by the hand which, a moment before, had reached through the wall?

The thought made Catherine shudder.

By  
ELIZABETH  
CHESTER

Illustrated by E. Baker

Yet it was not for her the hand had groped, but for the little Chinese girl, who had been on the same train. Catherine was sure that the latter knew who it was had sent that message up to the cousins. But she had refused to say. She tried to make them think that she knew nothing.

But she alone could solve the mystery of these happenings. Catherine's jaw set grimly.

She had to find Kwanyin. The little Chinese girl could be made to tell her what all this meant, why they had been warned not to come to Pagoda Place, and what it was of such importance that she had to say about Uncle Gerald.

With that thought in mind, Catherine turned to the door. As she did so, the door opened gradually inch by inch. Catherine's skin tingled, and she drew back.

She felt that if she saw the yellow hand of a Chinaman move round the door she would scream.

The door was suddenly flung wide, and there, on the threshold, stood her laughing Cousin Molly.

"Thought I'd give you a little surprise—" began Molly, and then broke off with a gasp as she saw Catherine's pallor and alarm. "Gracious, Cath, what's wrong? You don't mean I really scared you? Why, you look as though you'd seen a ghost!"

Catherine pulled herself together. She did not want Molly to think she was unnerved by what had happened.

"No, no! It wasn't you who scared me. But tell me, Molly, did you see Kwanyin in the corridor?"

"Kwanyin? Molly was a little puzzled.

"Or a Chinaman?"

"Plenty here and there. This house is full of them. There weren't any in the corridor. But what's happened, Cath?" Molly asked anxiously.

Catherine explained.

"I was in here alone, and Kwanyin came in. She started to talk to me, to say something about uncle, when a yellow hand clutched out at her from

the wall. I stepped between, and it caught hold of me by mistake!"

"Molly's eyes rounded as she heard the strange story.

"Phew!" she breathed. "Sounds as though there was something about uncle she was trying to tell us that someone else doesn't want told. What on earth could it have been?"

Catherine looked about her warily, and then lowered her voice, for if there were a hole in the wall which a hand could pass through, then it would help someone to overhear their conversation. "Molly," said Catherine tensely, "Kwanyn gave me a message as we got into the car."

"A message—another? Like the one we had on the train coming here—a warning to keep away?"

"No; a very strange, puzzling message," said Catherine. "It simply said, 'White man not uncle.'"

"White man? There's only one white man here apart from young Cousin Charles, and that's Uncle Gerald. But what does 'white man' mean?" Molly said, with a short laugh. "Of course, he's our uncle!"

Catherine did not answer.

"We don't know. I can't remember any snapshots I've seen of uncle in detail. We've never seen him face to face. Suppose he is an impostor?"

"We've got to face possibilities."

"What can we do?" asked Molly helplessly.

"We've got to find Kwanyn. Come on—she must be about somewhere!"

Catherine pulled open the door and stepped into the corridor.

"Kwanyn!" she called.

"Me here! Me—Oh!"

It was Kwanyn's voice, and it came from behind some bead curtains that hung in the corridor.

But the sentence was interrupted; there was a muffled sound of scuffling, and a shrill scream.

Catherine, the colour draining from her cheeks, hesitated for a moment, and then ran forward.

"Molly—Charles! Come on!"

"Molly rushed in pursuit of Catherine, who dashed through the curtains.

Cousin Charles, a solemn-faced youth, hurried open the door of his room on the other side of the corridor and dashed out.

"What's wrong? What's happened?" he exclaimed.

"Come on, quick!" called Molly.

Catherine, pushing through the bead curtains, looked right and left in a richly ornate Chinese room, but saw no sign of Kwanyn. But opposite were more curtains, and dashing them apart, she sprang through.

Then she saw Kwanyn.

The little Chinese girl, her eyes closed, was writhing in the grasp of a tall Chinaman on whose face was a look of dark anger. His hands held her wrists in a cruel grip. Angry Chinese words came from his lips.

Catherine leaped forward. She snatched at his arm and tugged.

"Let go, you beast!" she cried in fury. "Let her alone!"

The Chinaman, startled, drew back. Kwanyn, who had seemed about to faint, instantly straightened and opened her eyes. Then her hand shot out to Catherine.

"Take quickie!" she cried. "Picture likeness—uncle—"

It was a photograph she held in her hand, and Catherine reached out to take it. But quick as a flash of light the Chinaman's hand had snatched it.

"Give it to me!" cried Catherine in anger. "How dare you? Are you a servant here? If so, my uncle—"

Charles stepped forward and adjusted his glasses.

"My good fellow," he said in his ponderous way. "This is simply not done, you know. I can't allow you to talk to my cousin or this young Chinese lady in this manner at all. Greatly though I deplore physical violence, if you lay hands on either of them again, I shall have no alternative but to strike you."

The Chinaman looked at him with dark, angry eyes, and then suddenly smiled, released Kwanyn, and bowed, smoothing his hands one over the other. For all that Charles looked anything but a fighter, his words had had effect, and Catherine gave him a look of gratitude.

"Good old Charles!" she said. The Chinaman bowed.

"This person, Kai Tal," he said in honeyed tones, "insignificant. Very sorry that he spoke with such low-bred hardness to your noble lady of such high birth and great quality. Nevertheless, Kwanyn very deprecates the creature."

Catherine held out her hand.

"Well, after all that, perhaps you, the insignificant Kai Tal, will give me that photograph."

"I shall have much pleasure to do so," purred Kai Tal, and, slipping his hand into his loose, bright-coloured blue-and-gold garment, he took out a small photograph and handed it to Catherine.

Molly and Charles looked over her shoulder.

"It's a photograph of uncle in a deck-chair," said Catherine, puzzled.

"Good likeness, too," said Molly. "But why does Kwanyn want to give it to us?"

"Or why doesn't Kai Tal want her to?" asked Charles, frowning severely.

Kwanyn hung her head. Kai Tal smiled blandly.

"Kwanyn is a very untruthful teller of strange and impossible stories," he purred musically, "whose tongue is as troublesome as the causing of much trouble, who would make the noble and very pretty young niece of my mighty and much-respected master very sad and ill at ease."

He turned to Kwanyn and spoke in Chinese, pointing down the corridor.

Kwanyn, her head still hanging, went, followed by the glances of the three cousins.

"Well, that settles that," said Molly. "Yes, lies, apparently," frowned Catherine. "Silly mischief making. And yet, how odd!"

That photograph had convinced her that the man who called himself their Uncle Gerald was indeed their uncle.

And although it was very surprising in itself, Kwanyn had apparently worried Catherine needlessly by putting a quite unjustified suspicion in her mind.

"I almost feel as though I owe uncle an apology," said Catherine guiltily.

The thick velvet curtains in front parted as she spoke, and, to her embarrassment, Uncle Gerald, bronzed, green-looking and grey-haired, appeared before them, smiling.

"Hallo, a little party?" he asked in surprise.

Kai Tal spoke rapidly in Chinese. Uncle Gerald's face clouded, his brow darkened, and then once again he smiled as he turned to the three cousins, who had been watching him closely.

"Come," he said. "This must all seem very strange and mysterious to you. But supper has been prepared. Let us go down, and I'll tell you about the strange little girl, Kwanyn."

— — —

Kwanyn Beckons

THERE was only one cloud on Catherine's mind as she went down the stairs. And that was in regard to the yellow hand that had groped through the wall.

But as she was quite certain her uncle would soon find the culprit and punish him, she did not think there was likely to be a repetition of anything of the kind.

When the three reached the end of the corridor where a Chinese servant was beating a gong, they saw yet another Chinaman standing in the doorway of the dining-room.

He bowed deeply at their approach, and then spoke in correct English.

"Oh, honourable and exalted guests in my master's house," he said musically, in the same flowery but excellent English used by Kai Tal, "the kitchen implore your so kind indulgence for the ill-prepared and altogether insufficient repast which they have prepared for your highly esteemed selves."

The Chinese servant then bent low and stood aside, drawing back the glittering bead curtain for them to enter the dining-room.

"Phew!" gaped Molly, looking at the table. "Is this an ill-prepared repast? My golly! What do they think we are? Ravenous elephants?" And she gave a chuckle of amusement.

For there seemed to be enough food for a regiment.

Catherine, her eyes sparkling with pleasure, stood quite awed by the magnificence of the room. She had never seen such rich colouring, such gorgeous tapestries, such shining woodwork, such an array of golden vessels mingled with green jade.

"It's Pagoda Palace, not Pagoda Place," she whispered.

"Charles frowned.

"Dorcas make comments, it's rude," he rebuked her. "But fancy sitting at a table. I thought one squats on cushions on floors in China, you know."

There was a lot about China that he did not know.

On either side of the long polished table, so richly appointed, stood three attendants, each bearing a bowl. The house seemed filled with Chinamen, and to the cousins they all looked very much alike. Kai Tal, to whom they had all taken a dislike, was distinctive. They would know him again.

Uncle Gerald entered the dining-room, a gong sounded, the servants bowed, and then he took his seat. Miss Smith, the secretary, followed, taking the foot of the table, and the cousins arranged themselves as requested, with Catherine on her uncle's right, Molly and Charles on his left.

Uncle Gerald was an amusing talker, and before long there was merry chatter at the table. He told them about China, how he admired Chinese customs, and how he wanted them to do the same.

Catherine was burning to ask about Kwanyn and hear that strange girl's story.

"Kwanyn doesn't eat with us, then, uncle?" she asked, looking at the empty place beside her.

Her uncle frowned slightly and then shrugged.

"Not to-night. Kwanyn is under a ban of silence. In China she would be a great personage, but, as you know, things have changed there. Her ancestors were illustrious, but Kwanyn—"

He paused, and the three cousins paused in their eating.

"Yes?" persisted Catherine eagerly.

"Kwanyn," resumed Uncle Gerald, "is a dabbler in witchcraft—"

The cousins were startled.

"Witchcraft?" they echoed in unison. Their voices showed how intrigued they were.

"Yes—so it is said. Kai Tal knows more about it than I. He is a loyal and faithful servant, my most trusted retainer. And but for a vow I made to Kwanyin's dying father, she would not be in the house. She causes mischief. She is as likely as not to tell you that I am really a Chinese mandarin and not your uncle at all!"

Catherine went red, and Molly gave her a wink. She felt that the joke was on Catherine, who had really had doubts at one time.

"Yes," said Catherine, in confusion, "but, of course—"

Uncle Gerald laughed.

"I can see that she has been up to her tricks already. Dear, oh dear! We shall have to be very firm with this young person. If you were less sensible girls, you might have taken her seriously, and it might easily have offended me."

Catherine felt hot and cold all over. For she had actually entertained doubts. Now, of course, she felt foolish and rather ashamed.

"Oh, quite, uncle. But as if anyone would take heed of such nonsense!" said Charles stiffly. "But why did she give us that photograph of you?"

Uncle Gerald pursed his lips.

"Why does she do anything? It's a mystery known only to herself. Perhaps she thought it was a bad likeness. Move like a mandarin, perhaps." He laughed. "Anyway, let's not talk of silly Kwanyin, who is eating alone in her room. You probably won't see her again during your stay."

Catherine felt disappointed. For, despite her uncle's unflattering description of her, she had taken a liking to Kwanyin. Catherine wanted to make friends with her.

Uncle Gerald changed the conversation.

He started to tell them then of an adventure with bandits in China, but before he had more than begun it, the curtains rustled apart, and in the doorway stood Kai Tal.

Catherine felt a thrill of alarm, even at sight of his evil face.

He spoke rapidly in Chinese, and Catherine saw her uncle give a start. "Miss Smith," he exclaimed, "Kwanyin has disappeared from her room. Can you go at once, please?"

He spoke again to Kai Tal, who bowed and disappeared.

Catherine, watching him go, felt an impulse to confide in her uncle about the snatching yellow hand. She told him briefly what had happened, and he listened intently. So did Charles, who heard of the adventure for the first time.

"Catherine," said Uncle Gerald, in an impressive tone, "you have been the victim of witchcraft—"

"Witchcraft? But I saw the hand—"

"No. It was imagination. There is no hole in that wall. There is no one here who would frighten you in such a terrible way. Kwanyin alone is to blame. You only thought you saw the hand—thought you felt it. As soon as she went, it went."

A shiver ran through Catherine. It sounded the most fantastic story she had ever heard.

"But, uncle," she protested, "I am so sure—"

"That is proof of her experience as a little witch, I'm afraid. I will have her locked up."

"Locked up, uncle? Oh, no!"

"I'm afraid, Catherine," her uncle said, with a hint of rebuke in his tone. "I must do as I think best!"

Catherine was silent. It was not her business, and she had no right to interfere in her uncle's house. Nevertheless, she was sorer than ever for Kwanyin.

She did not for a moment believe the story of witchcraft.

Before she could speak again, the curtains parted and Miss Smith re-entered.

## In the Darkened Room

CATHERINE crept through the hall, past the great bronze gong, and shivered slightly as a huge wooden idol, with jewelled eyes, seemed to glare at her. She passed a Chinese servant, who stood at the door. He was quite motionless, and did not even glance at her.



FOR a fleeting instant Catherine had a glimpse of a face between the curtains. It was Kwanyin—and she was beckoning urgently.

"Kwanyin has not been found," she said. "Can you come, please?"

Uncle Gerald rose.

"Yes. You must pardon me, youngsters. I must find this little wriggling eel from China. I am sorry that your first meal has been interrupted. Just in case we are all busy searching, can you find your own rooms unaided? If not, Kai Tal—"

"Oh, no!" said Catherine hurriedly.

"We'll manage—"

After he had gone, Catherine looked at her cousins.

"Come to my room, all of you, as soon as you're finished," she said, in a low tone. "I want to examine that wall more carefully."

Some slight sound, something, she did not know what, made her look to her left. For a brief moment she saw a face at the window between the thin curtains.

It was Kwanyin—and she beckoned! Catherine looked back. She glanced at the servants. They gave no sign of having noticed the little Chinese girl, or having glanced in the direction of the window. And when Catherine glanced again, the little Chinese girl was gone.

Trembling with excitement, Catherine rose.

"You come along when you've finished," she said.

And, leaving the room, she went swiftly down the corridor to find Kwanyin.

For a moment Catherine wondered if he would try to bar her way. But he did not move, and she opened the large carved wooden door and stepped out into the garden.

"Kwanyin," she called softly, and looked into the thick shrubbery, and then at the line of bushes that grew close to the wall of the house.

"Yes, yes; I am here!" came a voice on her left, and then a slim, graceful hand showed above the top of a bush. Catherine stepped down towards it eagerly.

"Bend down," said Kwanyin, showing her face for a moment.

Catherine stooped low, and by the light of the starry sky, she saw the little Chinese girl's face clearly. It was very attractive, and quaint, and the expression had something appealing, so that Catherine's heart warmed to her.

"What do you want to tell me?" she asked. "Is it about uncle?"

"No," said Kwanyin. "I spoke bad your tongue. Me tly to say, but no. Please, Kwanyin is friend of great uncle. I love him much, Kwanyin die for him. But Kai Tal bad man. Bad man." Her voice rose passionately, and Catherine touched her arm gently in warning.

"He is your enemy?" she asked.

"Yes, yes, it is so. Bad man. Much great enemy of kind uncle of pretty English girls also."

Catherine nodded. She could easily believe that. But she remembered her

uncle's warning. Was Kwanyin romancing?

"You are not joking or teasing?" she asked seriously. "My uncle says you—well, you can work witchcraft."

She saw Kwanyin's expression change. "Oh, velly bad, velly bad Kai Tal," she said. "To say such! He tellee uncle. Uncle thust him. Kai Tal, he tly flighten you from house."

Catherine gave a start. "Was it Kai Tal who stretched out his arm through the wall?"

"Yes, yes. He stoppe me speakee to you," said Kwanyin earnestly. "He much cunning. He make bad business for your kind uncle."

Catherine watched her closely. Her mind was working hard.

"Kai Tal is an enemy of my uncle. He is plotting against him? He wants us out of the house because we are a nuisance. And so—so he sent the warning for us to keep away—"

"Yes, yes—"  
Before the Chinese girl could say more, a sudden shaft of bright light showed that the door had opened, and a shadow fell across the ground. It was the shadow of Kai Tal.

A shiver ran through Kwanyin; Catherine, touching her hand, felt that it was remarkably cold.

"Don't be afraid," she whispered. Kwanyin hissed a word softly.

"Hide!"  
Then, leaping up, she sprang out into the light.

"Kwanyin!" cried Kai Tal.  
"It is the noble Kwanyin," said the Chinese girl, with a toss of her head, "whose ancestors nucee great emperors. Ancestors of ill bred Kai Tal, snakes, dragons, and yellow doges."

Kai Tal made a sudden snatch. Kwanyin dodged too late. He had hold of her by the collar of her tunic, and with one mighty movement hauled her into the house.

Catherine sprang up with a cry of anger on her lips. But she did not utter it, for the great door swung to with a bang.

Hands clenched, Catherine hurried forward.

"The beast," she exclaimed. "He dupes uncle, but he won't dupe me!"

She reached the door, and tried the handle, but it did not open. Alarm seized her then, for she did not want to create a commotion. But of a sudden the door whisked open.

Catherine stepped in, an apology on her lips, but the Chinese servant who had opened the door, stood motionless, and did not look at her. She walked in, but he did not bow. He looked through her as though she were a ghost.

Catherine turned to him.

"Kwanyin—Kai Tal!" she asked.  
The servant raised his hand, pointed, bowed, and touched his forehead. Then, instantly, he resumed his former immobility.

Catherine turned in the direction he had indicated, and hurried along the quiet, deserted corridor. But the sound of voices led her on to some thick curtains at the end of the corridor.

It was Kwanyin's voice she heard first. "Kwanyin no speakee Chinese. Kai Tal talkee English. No savvy Chinese, poor Kwanyin—"

"The far too clever and ingenious Kwanyin," said Kai Tal, "has wish to let the English girl hear what it is she has to say, but contemptible Kai Tal, whose ancestors are yellow dogs, can well say in English that Kwanyin shall be punished."

Catherine crept forward. If Kai Tal tried to punish Kwanyin, twisted her wrist again, she would intervene. She would call her uncle, prove to him that Kai Tal was a fiend.

As she approached, Kwanyin spoke again.

"Me no afraid, Kai Tal. Kai Tal great enemy Uncle Gelald, who—"

"Silence! It is commanded by my mighty master that you go to spend the night in the den of the sacred crocodile!"

Kwanyin screamed, and Catherine rushed forward.

She parted the curtains of the room, to find it in darkness.

Kwanyin, pleading piteously, was being dragged across the room.

"Stop!" choked Catherine, in horror.

But her voice was not heard. Kai Tal had Kwanyin in a tight, cunning grip. Catherine, groping forward in the darkness, touched the face of an idol and shuddered. Then she heard scuffling and drew nearer.

A sudden, sharp cry of pain. But it came from Kai Tal. Kwanyin had bitten his hand. His grip relaxed, and the Chinese girl wriggled away.

Then, of a sudden, hands clutched Catherine.

Kai Tal had seized her in error for Kwanyin.

"To the dungeon of the sacred crocodile!" he hissed.

His hand was over her mouth. She was pushed forward, struggling madly in terror. But her left foot, moving forward, stepped over space.

The hand was whipped from her mouth. Kai Tal gave her a push, and Catherine, losing her balance, tottered over the open gap in the floor.

Blindly she threw out her hands, and caught the tunic of Kai Tal.

Mistaken for Kwanyin, Catherine had been plunged into deadly danger. What will be her fate? Continue this vivid mystery serial in next week's number of THE SCHOOLGIRL, with which you will receive a beautiful photo-postcard of FRED ASTAIRE. Order your SCHOOLGIRL at once!

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