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Incorporating  
'SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN'



## **PERIL FOR MABS**

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

## DIANA ROYSTON-CLARKE Features in This Brilliant Long Complete Story of the Girls of Cliff House School



# The Daring of Diana

THERE are three possible candidates for the juvenile "lead" in the film which is being made at Cliff House—Mabel Lynn, Jean Cartwright, and Diana Royston-Clarke. But Diana has decided to make the part her own, and in these brilliant chapters you will read how, with typical daring, the Firebrand strives to gain her own ends.

### Diana Schemes a Scheme

"GOOD! Very, very good indeed, Miss Lynn!"

Langley Rynniman, ace producer of the Enterprise Studios, Limited, spoke with unusual and enthusiastic warmth.

"That was fine! Now, Miss Cartwright, please, step on the set and see what you can do!"

In the big film studio there was a stir, a flutter. Mabel Lynn, of the Fourth Form at Cliff House, her blue eyes a-shine, her golden locks tossing picturesquely about her pretty face, stepped from underneath the blazing arcs, rejoicing the crowd of Cliff House girls who stood behind the producer's chair.

Barbara Redfern, captain of the Fourth Form, Mabs' greatest chum, delightedly beamed at her. Marjorie Hazeldene smiled that slow and gentle smile of hers.

Clara Trevlyn, the Tomboy, patted her arm, while Gemima Carstairs, adjusting her monocle, nodded her sleek head approvingly, for Gemima, if she were not a great actress herself, knew one when she saw one.

And so did Leila Carroll, the American junior, whose father was one of Hollywood's most famous directors.

Even Lucy Morgan looked impressed, while Joan Sheldon-Charman's eyes shone with the admiration she felt. Only one of them looked a little nervous.

That was Jean Cartwright, the tall, good-looking Scots junior.

She moved forward now and smiled.

"Oh, Mabs, that was lovely!" she breathed. "I'm sure I'll never be half as good."

"Oh, go in and win!" Mabs said, and pressed her arm. "Good luck, Jean!"

Jean licked her dry lips. Spellbound she had stood while Mabs had gone through the test. It was Mabs herself who had arranged that test. Mabs, indeed, who had insisted upon the test.

For Mabs, though she had a part in "The Rebel Sister," the film now in production, and though the first sequence of that film, which represented the rebel's life at school, had already been shot, with herself in the leading role, at Cliff House, she was still fighting for Jean to have her chance.

Jean needed that chance. Goodness knows she needed it! For not so long ago Jean's invalid mother in Scotland had lost all her small fortune.

And much as Mabs, a natural actress born and made, desired to shine upon the films, her loyal friendship to Jean came first. For at the end of this film the lucky juvenile lead would receive not only a salary of two hundred

pounds, but also a contract for a new film.

Two hundred pounds would dispose of Jean's immediate worries, and enable her to stay on at Cliff House School, which now she was destined to leave at the end of the term. The contract would have provided for her future.

Mabs knew that. That was why Mabs had been coaching Jean at Cliff House; that was why she had insisted, before the film went any farther, that Jean should have this test.

Jean, she averred, would have had the part from the beginning had it not been for the caprices of another girl at Cliff House School—that girl the stormy Firebrand, Diana Royston-Clarke, who had by devious methods tried to oust each of them from the part and collar it for herself.

But Diana, for the time being, at least, was disposed of, and the part now lay between Mabs and Jean.

Jean moved forward on to the set.

"Right!" Langley Rynniman nodded. "Now, Miss Cartwright, you know what you have to do?" he asked. "Just go through the same scene as Miss Lynn, interpreting it in your own way. Are you ready?"

Jean nodded.

"Recorder!"

"O.K.!"

"Lights!"

"O.K., sir!"

"Right! Then let's go! Now, silence everywhere, please! Wait for the

By

**HILDA RICHARDS**

Illustrations by T. Laird

clapper-boy, Miss Cartwright, and then do your stuff. Shoot!"

On came the clapper-boy with his little board, which he presented to the eye of the camera.

"Test, Miss Cartwright. Take one!" he called, and slap! went the clappers and off he dodged.

Jean braced herself. Now she had her chance she meant to make the most of it. If she failed this time! But she wouldn't!—she wouldn't!

Perfectly, flawlessly she went through it, while he sed silence held the Cliff House chums. Came at last the director's laconic "Cut!"

"O.K. Off the set, Miss Cartwright," he said. "That was good—yes, very good!" he said, and he nodded very friendly. "Bothered if I know which of you and Miss Lynn is the better! I'll let you know definitely when I've seen the rushes of the test in the theatre. Save your lights, there!"

He rushed off. Jean was trembling in the reaction of her ordeal. But she had done her best. She knew that she had done her best. She had impressed. She caught Mabs' glowing face. She saw Mabs coming towards her. Mabs laughed gleefully.

"Fine, Jean! Excellent!" she said. "That was topping!"

"Oh, Mabs, do you think—" Jean faltered.

"Of course I think! You wait!" And Mabs laughed again. "The part is yours, Jean—yours as sure as anything. I—" And then she turned as the page-boy came running across the floor. "Yes?" she asked, as he spoke her name.

"You're wanted, Miss Lynn, in Mr. Runniman's room," the boy said.

"Oh!" cried Mabs, and glanced at Jean quickly. Jean, who was eyeing her in sudden doubt, whose face most perfectly mirrored the thoughts that were going through her head.

If the director wanted Mabs, why didn't he want her, too? He had said that they were equally good. He had said— And then Jean, catching herself thinking those thoughts, flushed a painful conscience-stricken red.

No, no, this wasn't fair, she was telling herself. Bother it! She was feeling jealous of Mabs—Mabs who had done so much to help her, who had made this test possible.

"Jean, excuse me!" Mabs smiled.

She darted off. But when she reached Mr. Runniman's office she found that it was not Mr. Runniman himself who wanted to see her, but Constance Thackeray the beautiful star of "The Rebel Sister." She started up eagerly at Mabs' entrance.

"Oh, Mabel," she said, "I'm sorry I couldn't get down to see the test. How did it go?"

"It went"—Mabs smiled—"marvellously, Miss Thackeray!" she laughed. "Mr. Runniman said that he couldn't make up his mind between Jean and me. I'm glad of that, because Jean hasn't had a fair chance, so far. But, Miss Thackeray—"

The star smiled.

"I know you've got influence with Mr. Runniman. Mabs went on, and now there was pleading, earnestness in her tone. "You know that I'm keen for Jean to have this part. I—I'd just love to tell her that she's got it! You know what it means to her."

"I know," the star nodded. "I'll do my best," she said. "But"—she eyed Mabs strangely for a moment, and then shrugged—"Mabel, it's not going to be easy."

Mabs looked anxious.

"But—but when shall we know?" The star shook her head.

"That," she said, "is something I can't tell you. Perhaps in an hour, perhaps not until to-morrow. Mr. Runniman isn't the sort of man to be hurried into any decisions. Apart from which, he'll have to consult the acting director.

"But don't worry," she added. "I'll do my best, Mabs, although I really do think that you are better than anyone—yes, even Jean, in the part. Better go now and rejoin your friends."

Mabs sighed a little. Poor Jean. But how she hoped—with all her heart and soul—that Langley Runniman would favour Jean in his decision.

Rather slowly she left the room, entered the studio, and looked round for her chums. But those chums, with Jean in their midst, had already left for the restaurant.

And then, as she paused, the door leading into the car-park outside swung open. Another girl, dressed in a smart white linen suit, her aristocratic face half-veiled by the cellophane brim of her very latest London hat, appeared on the threshold.

Tall, haughty, superciliously conscious of her own importance this girl was, walking into the studio, not like some casual visitor, but just as if she owned it. Mabs' own face dropped a trifle at sight of her.

"Diana!" Diana Royston-Clarke, the stormy firebrand of the Fourth Form at Cliff House, it was!

"Oh, hallo!" Diana smiled. It was rather an earbearing, provoking smile—the sort which nettled Mabs, stinging her to quick resentment.

"Still hanging about?" she demanded, her red lips curving in a sneer. "Still

the little tin goddess of the studios, eh? Well, and who's won the test match?" she added.

Mabs frowned.

"You know about that?"

"I know," Diana laughingly informed her, "of everything that goes on here, Mabel Lynn. You forget that my father is part owner of the place, though it's true he's got nothing to do with the acting side. Miss Thackeray in?"

"Yes," Mabs said shortly.

"Thanks; I'll go and see her."

And Diana, with another contemptuous smile, strode on.

Mabs shrugged. She went out. In the studio restaurant she found her friends, surprising a quick, inquiring look from Jean as she did so. Lucy Morgan turned excitedly upon her.

"Oh, Mabs! And what did Mr. Runniman say?"

"It wasn't Mr. Runniman. It was Miss Thackeray," Mabs said.

"Oh! And what did she have to say?" Clara Trevlyn asked interestedly.

"Oh, nun-nothing," Mabs replied. "Nothing very much." But again she caught Jean's eye. For some reason she turned away. "I say, Mabs, that iced lemonade looks good," she said. "I could just do with one."

"And one, my old film star, you shall have," Mabs gaily laughed. "Another iced lemonade, please. Jean, you have another one as well. Your glass is empty." Well, here we are," she added, and held her own glass aloft. "Here's to our merry old film stars!"

"What-ho!"

There was laughter. In great good humour the toast was drunk. Jean flushed a little. Mabs smiled. She made no further reference to the interview



"JEAN, what's the matter?" Mabs asked. "Is there anything I can do?" The Scots girl flung round. "No, thanks! Except"—bitterly—"leave me alone."

with Miss Thackeray, and presently, learning that Mr. Runniman was engaged with the casting director, the whole party tramped back to Cliff House School. Jean was getting anxious.

"Mabs, you really don't know anything?" she asked.

"Oh, goodness! When shall we know?"

"Oh, to-night, perhaps—or tomorrow," Mabs laughed. She put her hand on the rim of the Scots girl. "Don't worry, Jean."

But Jean was worrying. She was worrying intensely. She had a lot to worry about. Her whole future, she felt, was at stake, and not only her future, but her mother's health, for Mrs Cattermole, as her mother was now known, was not a strong woman, and this last shattering blow had affected her deeply.

In a mixed mood, Jean entered her study—Study No. 8 in the Fourth Form corridor, which she shared with Diana Royston-Clarke, and Gwen Cooke. Her face was a little strained, a little white. Uneasiness held her. One moment she thrilled with hope, the next, shook her head in despair.

More because she was inspired by the necessity to do something than because she wanted it, she put the kettle on to make herself a cup of tea. She was in the act of getting out a cup and saucer when the door opened. Diana, slimly elegant and very attractive, stood on the threshold.

And Diana was beaming. "Why, Jean, all alone?" she cried. Jean bit her lip.

"Cook looks like it," she said.

"It does," Diana, for once, seemed in no wise offended. She pushed the door to, peeled off her gloves and her coat, and flung herself back in the easy-chair. "Ah!" she said, and stretched her legs and her arms "Nice after-noon, though it does look as if it's going to rain. Any more news from home Jean?"

"No," Jean said shortly again. "Not very friendly?" Diana asked. Jean looked at her levelly.

"Have you given me any cause to be, Diana?"

Diana shook her head. "Oh, I don't know!" she said.

"When will you understand me, Jean? I've tried to be friendly, goodness only knows. I know you're broke. I've offered you a job. I offered, didn't I, if only you'd help to get me that part in the film which you and Mabs have been having a test for, that I'd give you the two hundred pounds which went with it. Jean," she added, "look at me. I'm talking as a friend. You know I want to help you, don't you?"

Jean stared at her, her clear eyes penetrating. There were times when she liked Diana. There were times when she hated her.

Diana had a heap of good points, and generosity, compassion for others less well-off than she herself, were two of them.

But Diana also had a host of bad points—chief among which was her own vanity, her feverish desire always to be leading, to be in the limelight. When those characteristics were uppermost, the good points rarely emerged.

And Diana, desperately, ruthlessly had tried, in the early stages, to oust Jean from that part. She had come within an ace, indeed, of destroying all her chances. Diana yet had not given up hope, Jean guessed, though

to be sure it was hard to see how she could accomplish that object now.

"Well?" she said. "Well!" Diana shrugged. "Mind if I have a cigarette? But no—I won't smoke. You don't like smoking, do you, Jean? Now, listen, old thing—" She paused: "Whether you believe it or not, I'm on your side. Yes, I know I've played you some pretty low-down tricks lately, but that was because—well you know. I'm cured of wanting to act in the film now, though, Jean, and I really, sincerely would like to make it up to you."

Jean stared at her dubiously. "But how—"

"When you leave school, Jean, at the end of the term, I can fix you up with a job in Lantham. I've already spoken to father, and, as it happens, his secretary is leaving to get married during the next recess."

Jean flushed hotly.

"Thanks, but—"

"But what? Oh, I see! You think you might get this film contract?"

Jean did not reply. But her eyes replied for her.

"Well, give that up," Diana advised. "Save yourself illusion, Jean. I happen to know Mabs is booked for that job. Oh, yes, I know she's told you that she wants you to have it, and all that, but you must admit she'd be a fool if she didn't want to grab it herself. I've just come back from the studios, Jean. I've seen Runniman and Miss Thackeray, and—she bit her lip—"well, I don't want to upset you, of course, I'm just giving you a friendly tip. But Mabs has made sure of that film job. That's what she went to see Constance Thackeray for this afternoon."

Jean's eyes rounded with horror.

"Diana!" she said.

"Oh, of course!" Diana lifted her hands expressively. "She didn't want to hurt you, I suppose, by telling you that you were no good. But you know as well as I do that Mabs and Constance Thackeray and Langley Runniman are as thick as thieves."

Jean took a quick turn about the room. What was this that Diana was saying? Oh, it couldn't be true—it couldn't! Mabs would never do a thing like that.

She flung round.

"I don't believe it!" Jean cried. "I don't!"

"I'm a liar, then?" Diana asked unpleasantly.

"No; but— Oh!" And Jean, in agitation, rose to her feet.

If only she knew—if she only knew the truth! But she would know; she'd know now—at once! She'd go and see Mabs. She'd see her at once. If she flung one dumb, hurt look at Diana and quitted the room.

While Diana, half-standing, fell back. She shrugged—she shrugged easily and triumphantly. She frowned; then a slow smile broadened on her lips—a smile of triumph, of cunning, of satisfaction.

Had Jean seen that smile she might have understood that Diana Royston-Clarke had by no means given up the idea of ousting both herself and Mabs from the part in the Rebel Sister.

Diana had her own axe to grind. If Diana could only put Jean Cartwright and Mabel Lynn at loggerheads, then surely the field would be left wide open.

Towards that objective Diana was working now.



## Strained Relations

AND fortune certainly seemed to be favouring her plans.

Just the cruellest luck in the world was it that Jean Cartwright, in that frenzied frame of mind, should arrive at Study No. 4, which was shared by Mabs and Bessie Bunter at that particular moment. Bessie Bunter was not there, having gone over to her brother's school a few miles away, and Mabs and Babs had the study to themselves. Mabs at the moment was describing her interview with Constance Thackeray.

"Of course, I asked her," she said, "but—she shrugged—"she said she'd speak to the producer; but she rather gave me to understand that Mr. Runniman had selected me. Of course, I haven't said anything to Jean, and don't intend to until—Hallo!

Who's there?"

Jean it was who was there—Jean, who had halted outside the door—Jean, who, with her hand half-raised to tap, had heard the last part of that sentence, and stood transfixed, every drop of colour ebbing from her face.

So it was true then!

She quivered. A wave of aversion, of nausea seemed to sweep over her. That Mabs could do this thing—

She paused. Then swiftly her Scottish pride came to overwhelm her black disappointment.

She was not going to let Mabs see that she was hurt. She was not going to let her realise that she knew.

She poked her head into the study. If she had wanted any confirmation of what she had heard, the guilty start which Mabs gave, the sudden colour that stained her cheeks, would have supplied it.

She said, rather awkwardly:

"Oh, I say! Could—could you lend me a little tea, please? I've run out."

"Any excuse!"

"Why, certainly!" And up jumped Babs. "There!" she laughed. "But why not stop and have tea with us, Jean?" she asked.

"No, thanks! I—I only want a cup," Jean said constrainedly. "I've some letters to write."

She got the tea. She went back into Study No. 8.

Diana threw her one glance from under her long lashes as she came in, but said nothing. But she smiled under the cover of the book she was reading.

"Well, tea?" she asked. "Come on, Jean! My goodness, you look washed out, old thing! Sit down! No, no!" Diana said, and gently pushed her into place as she would have risen. "Leave me to do the getting. And I say, Jean, you love oat cakes, don't you? Auntie Jones has got some scrummy ones in. Would you like oat cakes and jam for tea?"

Jean listlessly shook her head.

"Thanks; but—but I can't run to luxuries," she said.

"No," Diana laughed. "But I can. Wait a minute!" And, before Jean could stop her, she whizzed out of the study.

Down the corridor she raced, into the Third Form Common-room, and there, button-holing Ida Jackson, dispatched her with a ten-shilling note on an errand to the tuckshop. Then she returned.

Jean, white-faced, was still sitting in the armchair.

"Won't be long," Diana laughed. "Oh, goodness, Jean, you've got the kettle on. Keep still. Now the tablecloth; the bread; the butter. Yoicks, am I busy?" And she laughed in that merrily infectious way of hers, really pleased to be doing a good turn, and really sorry for the girl in the chair, even though that girl was her victim. "Cake, Jean? We've got a whole Dundee, and part of a seed cake left. And watercress. Bit mangey; but I'll get Ida to freshen it up a bit when she comes back from the tuckshop."

Jean smiled faintly. Here was the Diana she liked—whom everyone liked. Gay, busy, effervescent, keeping up a running fire of chatter as she executed her tasks. When Diana liked she could be very, very charming. She set out to be her most charming self now, and succeeded admirably in breaking down Jean's reserve, and even inducing in her old enemy a glow of friendship.

The table was laid in record time; the tea made. Then Ida Jackson appeared, staggering under an armload of perfectly mouth-watering delicacies.

"Why, great goodness, you've not bought all those, Diana!" Jean gasped.

"But I have," Diana laughed. "For you and I, Jean. Oat cakes—look! Real fresh strawberry jam and cream puffs. I know you like cream puffs. And this lovely blanchmange, just to finish off with. Ida, scuttle along and freshen up that cress, will you—and, here, while you're about it, wash these two plates. I'll give you a shilling for yourself when you come back, and you can take the remainder of this seed cake to your pals in the Third. Now, Jean!"

Tea was ready at last—the really lavish and delightful spread, which only Diana's generosity could provide. Jean was not hungry, but she ate. She was surprised at the amount she ate. Diana chuckled and chattered, really and truly enjoying herself.

A knock on the door—

"Come in!" Diana called gaily.

It was Mabs who appeared—Mabs, intent upon asking, Jean if she would like to come to the music-room for extra rehearsal. But she stared as she saw the two.

"Oh, I—I didn't know you were having your tea," she murmured.

Jean flushed.

"That's all right. Jean and I are nearly finished. Come in and join us."

But Mabs declined. She had had her tea. Also she was not on friendly terms with the Firebrand of the Fourth. She was rather astonished to find Jean treating her so chummily—especially after the upsets of the last few days. She rejoined Mabs in the study.

Babs, working on Marcelle Biquet's new autograph album, looked up quickly.

"Hallo, back so soon?" she asked. "Where's Jean?"

"She's having tea—with Diana."

"Oh!" Babs frowned. "Rather unusual, isn't it? I thought Jean and Diana were only just about on speaking terms."

"Well, they seemed to be on pretty good feeding terms at the moment," Mabs laughed. "Jean really looked as if she were enjoying Diana's company. Not, of course," she added, "that it's any business of ours. Jean does share her study, after all, and I suppose Jean can't hold out for ever, even against Diana. All the same—"

While tea in Study No. 8 went on merrily, Diana never so much as by a word referred again to the studios. After tea they washed up together, put the things away, and got out their books for prep. But Jean, in spite of Diana's efforts to make her happy, was worried still. She could not believe it of Mabs. She shouldn't!

her eyes wide, not yet having realised all that that news meant. Not realising for the moment that in that order the death-knell sounded for Jean Cartwright's hopes.

Like an engulfing flood the tide of misery, of humiliation rose within Jean. So that was it! She turned to Diana.

Diana was shaking her head, sorrow-



SWIFLY Diana removed the telegram from Mabs' coat pocket and transferred it to her own. Now to await the developments which must surely follow upon her mischief-making!

Call-over bell rang. She and Diana went down together. Jean did not look at Mabs as they entered Big Hall together. She did not see the worried, appealing glance which Mabs threw in her direction. She did not see the other girls nudging each other. She did not hear the comments that the entry of herself and Diana, apparently on the chummiest of terms, evoked.

She answered dully when her name was called. She listened—without hearing—to the routine orders for the following day, delivered from her rostrum by Miss Primrose, Cliff House's headmistress.

Not until Primmy called a name, indeed, did she sit up and take notice. That was when the headmistress, her mild eyes ranging over the heads of the assembled girls, fastened upon—

"Mabel Lynn!" she cried. "Yes, Miss Primrose?" Mabs answered.

"You are excused all lessons to-morrow morning. After breakfast you will leave the school for the Enterprise Studios. Mr. Rumminger requests that you shall arrive there not later than nine o'clock, as an important scene is to be shot before midday."

Jean started at that as if she had been shot. Her glance swept round to Mabel Lynn. Mabs was standing dead still,

fully, sympathetically. But the gleam of satisfaction in her eyes belied the pose she adopted.

"Tough luck!" she whispered. "Oh, tough luck, Jean, old thing! She's beaten you after all, you see!"

To which Jean, choking with a bitter, numb misery, did not reply. At that moment, bruised and bewildered, she was lying in the ruins of that foolish castle she had built in the air.

“JEAN!”

Jean Cartwright stiffened as Mabs came hurrying towards her. It was after call-over, and Jean, like a girl who had every atom of energy dragged out of her body, was strolling back to her study along the Fourth Form corridor.

"Jean, I'm frightfully sorry!" Mabs said.

"Thank you!" Jean said, tight-lipped. "But, Jean, I—I'll do my best," Mabs faltered. "I'll see Rumminger to-morrow. Jean—oh, goodness, don't take it to heart!" she said, and bit her lip at the look of acute misery in the other's face. "I was hoping to goodness, Jean, that you would get it!"

Jean smiled guiltily. "Thanks! Will you excuse me now?" she asked.

"But, Jean—"

"I—I rather want to go and think things out, you see," Jean added. She averted her face. "I—I've lived in a fool's paradise long enough, I think. Facts have got to be faced, and I'm going to face them. I—I'm glad," she said, and stopped. "No, the words sticking in her throat. No, she couldn't say it—she couldn't! She couldn't say 'I'm glad you've got it!'"

All the time she was telling herself that she wouldn't have cared if Mabs hadn't deceived her. She would have been really glad, even realising that Mabs' success must spell her own failure. Mabs was entitled to the part. But Mabs needn't have presented one case to her and another to the powers at the studios. That hurt. That made her feel humiliated. Rather pointedly she turned on her heel; rather quickly strode off.

And with tears mistily hazing her vision she pushed her way into Study No. 8, to be greeted almost immediately by Gwen Cook.

"Oh, Jean, a letter!" Gwen cried. Jean took it. She glanced at the inscription, and then her heart beat a little more swiftly as she recognised the postmark—Dundee, and the handwriting of her mother's faithful maid, Honor. She slipped it open quickly, she read it, stood perfectly still, and then read it again. Her face turned white.

"What is it?" Gwen asked. "Bad news?"

"No—yes—that is—Oh, don't worry me, please," Gwen said. Jean cried distractedly. She walked to the window, stared out with hard eyes into the gathering gloom, and then turned again into the room.

Oh, what was this—this, on top of all her other troubles. Her mother, bearing up so bravely under the shock of her financial collapse, had given way at last. She was in a state of collapse, seriously ill, Honor said. The doctor had been called, the doctor said she must go abroad immediately.

Jean winced. "Jean!" Gwen cried. "Jean broke out. 'Please, please—'"

Gwen threw her an almost scared look; she backed out of the study, almost bumping into Mabel Lynn. Mabel caught her.

"Hi, Gwen— Great goodness! What's the matter?"

"Jean!" whispered Gwen.

"What's the matter with her?"

"I don't know, but—but she's awful! She looks— And Gwen gulped.

"She's just received a letter—from home, I think."

Mabs gazed at her quickly, then quietly she stepped towards the study; she opened the door. Jean was there—in the chair now—her face hard and tragic; she flung round at sight of Mabs.

"Jean, Jean— Oh, my goodness!"

And Mabs jumped forward at once. "Jean, old thing, what is it? Is there anything I can do?"

Jean looked at her bitterly. "Not you!"

"But, Jean—"

"Oh, please," Jean gasped, "can't you leave me alone? First Gwen, then you! No, Oh, I'm sorry!" she pleaded.

"I hardly know what I'm saying. It's mother; she's ill—seriously!"

"Jean!"

"But—" Jean shrugged. "That means nothing to you, does it?" she asked, hardly realising in the terrific tumult of her mind what she was saying. "It doesn't matter that—that—"

And she stopped. "Mabs, please go away," she begged wearily.

Mabs eyed her queerly, but she went

Jean, sitting down again, buried her face in her hands.

Dormitory bell rang. Weary, haggard-eyed, and grief-stricken, she went up to bed. Without a word, she undressed; without a word—not even a "Good-night!"—flung herself between the sheets and, throwing them quickly over her head, gave way to the silent tears which pent-up reaction brought in the train of the poignant emotions which had shaken her all the evening.

Haggard-eyed, drawn-cheeked, she rose next morning. Again without a word, she dressed and went downstairs.

In the study she met Diana. Diana was holding a letter in her hand; Jean stared as she saw it; it was the letter which she had received from Honor last night and which, in the extremity of her emotions, she had forgetfully left on the table.

"Diana!"

"Jean!" Diana faced her. "This is your letter, isn't it? I'm sorry. I read it—by accident. It was on the floor there." She took a pace forward, sympathy and compassion in her eyes.

"Jean, what are you going to do about it?"

Jean's hands fell hopelessly. "What can I do?"

"You want money?" Diana asked quickly; and went on, as Jean gave a helpless gesture: "That is a matter we can soon arrange, Jean." She paused, eyeing her; and then suddenly, unaccountably, turned on her heel and went out of the room, leaving Jean staring bewilderedly after her.

Straight to Miss Primrose's study she went, and there faced the headmistress. Miss Primrose frowned.

"Well, Diana?"

"Miss Primrose, I want to be excused lessons this morning."

"Indeed?" The colour mounted at once to Miss Primrose's face.

"I want," Diana continued, "to go to see my father, Miss Primrose. It's urgent—most important. It's about Jean Cartwright. She's had some bad news from home. I think my father might help her."

Miss Primrose blinked.

"Well, yes, of course, as it is for such a worthy purpose—yes, yes, certainly!" she said. "But you do assure me, Diana, that you will see your father? You are not asking for this privilege for any other purpose?"

Diana smiled a little cynically. Primmy evidently knew her little ways.

"If you doubt me, Miss Primrose, will you allow me to telephone my father to make the appointment?" she said. "Or perhaps," she added, "you would like to come to him yourself?"

The headmistress shook her head.

"Thank you, Diana, but that's impossible," she replied. "In the first place, owing to a burst water-main in Courtfield, the telephone is out of order, and is likely to remain so, I am told, for the next few days; in the second place, it is against my code to employ such methods. I put you on your honour. You may go."

And Diana, smiling cynically, went.

And immediately after breakfast Mabel Lynn went, too; she went by bus—as did Diana—but it was not the same vehicle the other girl boarded.

Before nine o'clock she reached the film studios. At nine she hurried, not on to the set, but to Mr. Rynniman's office. The producer smiled up as she saw her.

"Good-morning, Miss Lynn! You're early."

Mabs bit her lip.

"Yes, Mr. Rynniman. I wanted to have a word with you."

He beamed back good humouredly.

"Shoot!"

"About Jean Cartwright."

"Well?"

"Mr. Rynniman" — Mabs looked pleading—"can't you see your way to giving Jean the part?"

His face hardened.

"Miss Lynn," he said, "you've got to understand. If Miss Cartwright had appeared in the film from the beginning, I would have given her the part like a shot, on the strength of her test yesterday; but she didn't. You've already appeared in a number of sequences. We've done a week's work on the film, and I'm scheduled to have it finished by this time next week. To give Miss Cartwright the part now would mean scrapping what we have done. It would put me back a week, together with everyone else. Added to which, you're—frankly—better than she is. I'm sorry, Miss Lynn. I'd like to oblige, but I just can't."

Mabs' face worked.

"But, Mr. Rynniman," she pleaded, "please remember—"

"Miss Lynn—the matter is closed—finally and completely. Will you go and get made up now? I shall want you on the set in ten minutes."

Listlessly Mabs trailed out of the office; she was biting her lip.

Jean, Jean! How her heart ached for her! How bitterly she regretted now that she had ever taken part in this film! But no, she didn't. If she had not had the part, Diana would have had it. And Diana, in her usual overbearing way, would have made a mess of it.

That morning Mabs' mind was more on Jean than upon her acting. For once she failed to throw herself into her part. Her frequent mistakes brought more frequent interruptions from Langley Rynniman.

"No, Miss Lynn. Don't you know you run across the set there. Don't you know you're supposed to laugh there! What is the matter with you this morning?"

Again, again, again. Four, five times they went through that particular shot.

Mabs was not good, she knew it. But Jean's face—Jean's reproachful eyes—kept on rising in front of her vision.

Knowledge that she was not doing her best tormented her. Never, never before had she felt so wretched, so little like acting.

Twelve o'clock.

"Cut!" Langley Rynniman said distractedly. "Miss Lynn, when you get back to school, do rehearse that panty scene again. Come back with it this afternoon at your finger-tips. I scheduled to shoot three sequences this morning, we've only done two, and one of those will probably have to be done again, when I've seen the rushes. You can go now. Constantly—Miss Lynn, stop behind a moment or two. I want to talk to you."

Mabs went. The director and the film-star were still talking when Diana, having had an entirely satisfactory interview with her father, entered the studios on her way home. She heard some of the conversation before star and producer became aware of her presence.

Langley Rynniman was angry.

"I tell you she wasn't even thinking of the part. Her mind was elsewhere. It's that Miss Cartwright business"—savagely. "She's made up her mind that the Cartwright girl is going to have the part, and she's just playing below form so that we shall throw her out."

"And what," Diana put in mockingly,

"a good guesser you are, Mr. Runniman. You're referring to Mabel Lynn, I take it?"

"He growled.

"I am!"

"Not so good, eh?" Diana asked composedly.

"I don't see, Miss Clarke, that this is your business."

"Miss Royston-Clarke," Diana said composedly. "Don't forget, Mr. Runniman. Hyphen and e, and all that, you know. Well, well, this is too bad," she went on mockingly. "I mean to say, discovering that your little Mabel idol has feet of clay, and all that. Or perhaps—a better illusion—your budding star has turned out to be only a fleeting meteorite after all. Can I help?"

"This," Langley Runniman said between his teeth, "isn't a laughing matter, Miss Royston-Clarke."

Up in a moment the colour flamed in the haughty Firebrand's cheeks.

"And who," she demanded hotly, "said that it was a laughing matter? Dush it all, I'm offering to help you. Look at the position you're in. You can't employ Jean because you've already shot half the film. Mabs won't play up because she wants you to employ Jean. Well, where are you?" Diana demanded. "Just between the table and the stool. Supposing Mabs goes on being dud?"

"She won't go on being dud," he said between his teeth.

"All right, you'll see," Diana turned haughtily. "In spite of your rudeness, I'm still in the running," she added drawlingly. "Let me know when you want me."

She went out, feeling better for that. But her eyes were gleaming. There was a flush in her cheeks.

Transparently clear Diana's course lay before her. She saw by playing her cards carefully how she could bring about that great ambition which she so desired. Already she had forced the thin edge of the wedge into the friendship of Jean and Mabs.

Diana chuckled. She had sworn to wrest that part from Mabel Lynn. Here at last was her bright, golden chance.

Meantime—

Meantime she must see Jean. Back to Cliff House in her father's magnificent limousine she hurried, arriving there ahead of Mabs, who was travelling more prosaically by bus, arriving, in fact, ten minutes before morning lessons were due to be dismissed.

She hurried at once to Miss Primrose.

Miss Primrose received her with a kindly smile.

"Well, Diana, you saw your father?"

"Yes, Miss Primrose, thank you. But my father would like to see Jean—at once. May I take her over to him?"

"Yes, yes, of course."

Diana left. She left jubilantly. Already she had an idea in her mind—an idea that was not unconnected with the failure of the telephone system. Trust Diana to turn a disadvantage into an asset!

Down the stairs she languidly tripped, arriving outside the Fourth Form classroom door, just as that door opened to disclose its crowd of weary girls after a grueling morning under the tutelage of a sharp-tempered Miss Bullivant. Jean, looking still strained and tense, came out among the first group. Diana caught her arm.

"Jean!"

The Scots girl started.

"Jean, please," Diana said earnestly.

"Come along to the study—I want to talk to you."

"But why?"

"This way."

And imperiously Diana tugged her forward. Jean, rather bewildered, per-

haps thinking of the two hundred lines she had earned from Miss Bullivant for inattention that morning, marched off. Barbara Redfern, behind her, saw Diana's arm go chummy through the crook of the other's, and exchanged a glance with Clara Trevlyn.

"Now, Jean, listen," Diana said, once they were in the study. "You know I've been away all the morning. I've been over to Lantham to see my father. That secretary's job I told you about—"

Jean looked up.

"It's yours, Jean—if you like to have it when the old secretary leaves. But my father says that he would like to see you—at once. I've arranged that you shall come over with me to Redlands—that's the name of the house—you know, to lunch. I've got the car waiting outside."

Jean started, her lips parted. Very, very worriedly Jean had been thinking of what she was to do when she left school. It was that preoccupation which had caused Miss Bullivant's extreme displeasure, and had brought retribution in class upon her head. She knew that jobs did not grow on trees. Definitely now it seemed she had lost all hopes of making her name on the films. If this were true—

"Oh, Diana, you mean it?"

"Come on," Diana said briefly, "let's go. Everything's O.K. I've got permission from Primmy, and as this afternoon's a halfer, you needn't worry about rushing back."

Excited then was Jean. Again the school stared when they saw the Firebrand and her erstwhile enemy walking through the quad arm-in-arm. Jean, her face flushed, Diana triumphantly strutting along, knowing perfectly well what they were thinking, what they were saying.

Almost trembling was Jean as she climbed into the big limousine.

Haughtily Diana gave the order to the chauffeur, and the car bowled off. Jean gulped.

"Oh, Diana, this is—is awfully decent of you!"

Diana laughed.

"Oh, nonsense! I had to do something to make up to you," she said. "I only wish to goodness that I could have got you the film contract!"

Jean sighed.

"That's gone!" she said.

"Yes, it's gone"—Diana frowned—"thanks to Mabs!" she added disdainfully. "Anyway, you do know where you are with me, don't you? That's more than you can say for Mabs."

Jean was silent. But she was reflecting a little sadly upon the truth of this.

Redlands was reached at last. Mr. Royston-Clarke himself welcomed them.

Not a word was spoken of the business, then. Into the dining-room they went, and there Jean—rather uncomfortable, but very, very appreciative of good food—enjoyed one of the loveliest meals she had tasted for a long time.

After lunch the Mayor of Lantham—for Mr. Royston-Clarke had retained that exalted position for two years—nodded

"Diana, would you mind leaving Jean and me alone?" he asked.

"Why, certainly!" Diana answered, and paused. "Jean, do you mind if I don't come back to school with you afterwards? I've got a rather important appointment with the Lantham Sports Club."

"No, not at all," Jean said.

Diana beamed. Off she went.

But she did not go out immediately. She went up to her own exquisitely furnished pink-and-gold room, and there wrote out a telegram. She enclosed it in an envelope.

She marked the envelope "Private," then hurried down into the hall.



"I'M going to see Diana—I'm going to have it out with her!" Jean panted, and before Babs and Mabs could stop her she was rushing from the study.

"Oh, Smithers"—this to the butler—"I want you!" she said loftily. "When Miss Cartwright has finished with my father, I want you to give her this. Ask her to post it in Courtfield on her way home. But wait a minute!" she added. "Let her get outside first. Then, when she's half-way down the drive, rush after her. You understand that?"

"Yes, Miss Diana."  
"O.K.!" By the way, don't mention my name in connection with it. Tell her that Mr. Royston-Clarke wished her to send it. That all right?"

"Yes, Miss Diana!"  
Diana smiled at him. She went on her way. But she was chuckling to herself as she swung into the car and ordered the chauffeur to drive her to the studios.

Half an hour after she had left her, Jean, her eyes shining, her face alight with joy, came out of Mr. Royston-Clarke's room.

Well, that was that! Mr. Royston-Clarke had been so awfully, so frightfully nice! The job he had offered her was well paid, and he had proposed, in the meantime, to do what he could for her at the studios.

Jean was happy. Working as a secretary was not her idea of a future career, but it was something.

She felt grateful to Diana—Diana, who, as she had said, had really done something to prove her friendship.

Outside into the drive she swept, then turned. The butler, an envelope in his hand, came running after her.

"Oh, Miss Cartwright—er"—he stumbled—"Mr. Royston-Clarke—this telegram!" he got out, rather incoherently. "Would you mind dispatching it for him in Courtfield?"

"Why, of course!" Jean promised. She took it, only too delighted to do something for the man who had been so kind to her.

Straightaway she hurried to the Courtfield Post Office. She saw the mark "Private" on the envelope, and Jean, scrupulously honest in all things, handed it over the counter just as it was.

The assistant read it and looked at her, asked for the shilling which it would cost, and stamped it. He nodded.

"Thank you, miss! It'll be there in an hour," he said.

Jean walked out. Well, that was that! She had the afternoon on her hands now. There was no hurry to get back. She would want clothes for her new life. No harm, she thought, in having a look round the Courtfield shops, with an eye to buying for the future.



Diana "Doubles"

"CAKES, Bessie?"  
"Yes, rather!"  
"Bread? Butter? Pine-apple?"

"Yes; I—P've got them all here." Fat Bessie Bunter puffed ecstatically as she bent over the picnic hamper in Study No. 4. "And the primus, you know. And the matches. But, I s'ussay, Clara, you mum-might see if there's enough methylated in the bottle, you know. Last time we had a picnic Jimma forgot to put in the methylated, and we couldn't have tea."

There was a laugh. It was an animated, happy laugh. Jimma, Babs,

Bessie, Clara, Marjorie Hazeldene, and Janet Jordan were foregathered in Study No. 4.

The day was fine and warm, and the picnic on Belwin Island, with which they meant to while away the afternoon, looked like being a great success. Only Mabs, who was among them, did not look happy.

"Well, are we ready?" Babs asked. "Marjorie, you did arrange about the boat?"

"Yes, rather!" Marjorie said.

"And—rather—well, we'd better get off." Babs pouted. She dubiously glanced at her golden-haired chum. "I suppose you—you couldn't come, Mabs?"

Mabs regretfully shook her head. She would have liked to go. Remembering her experience of the morning at the studios, remembering Jean, she had little heart for acting. She felt unsettled, however. She felt as if—silly, of course—she were stealing Jean's chances.

"Tough being a film star!" Jimma sighed. "What sacrifices one does make in the name of art! Too bad—what? Simmering under the old arc-lights while your merry pals make whoopee on the old island! We'll think of you, Mabs."

Mabs smiled a trifle wistfully. Not for a moment would she have minded missing that picnic had things been otherwise. Acting in any shape or form was Mabs' life blood. Against acting there was no other delight comparable. But this time—

She strolled off with the party, down the stairs into the sunlit quad, intending to see them off. She had almost reached the gates when the post-boy from Friarade rode up.

"Miss Lynn, wire for you!" he said cheekily, and winked at fat Bessie.

"Shall I wait for an answer?"

"Please do!" Mabs smiled.

She tore the envelope open. The chums stood still, clustered round her. Then Mabs gave a whoop of delight.

"Oh, hurrah!"

"Mabs, what is it?"

"This!" And Mabs, her face all smiles, thrust the wire into Babs' hand.

"Read that!" she cried.

Babs read it. It was a telegram from Langley Rummiman. It read:

"Sorry, can't phone, line out of order. Don't come this afternoon."

"RUMMIMAN."

"Well?" Babs said.

"Well"—and Mabs broke into an excited laugh. "Don't you see, chump? That lets me out. That means that I can come with you!"

They laughed. Unfeignedly glad they all were to have Mabs—even Bessie, though Bessie was privately reflecting that there might be a little less tuck for her in consequence.

Radiant was Mabs once more. Glad, indeed, of this opportunity to cut her duties for this afternoon, never for one moment suspecting that that telegram was anything but genuine.

But Diana, on her way to the studios, was smiling. She felt she had cause. Jean, all innocently, would by now have sent the telegram to Mabel Lynn. Mabs, reading it, would go off with Babs & Co.

Diana knew all about that picnic, for the picnic had been arranged yesterday, and Bessie Bunter had been full of it in the Common-room last night.

Diana chuckled. Very well pleased with herself was Diana, and when Diana was in that mood she was most extravagant in her generosity.

In Courtfield she stopped, her eyes

attracted by a special display, in Holland's Stores, of children's outfits. A rather nice tweed coat for a youngster of twelve was in the window, together with a macintosh. Just the thing, Diana thought, for poor little Nellie Sharpe, her heroine-worshipping little friend at the studios, though Nellie, indeed, was nothing more or less than a daughter of one of the charwomen.

She went into the shop. She bought them. Then off she set for the studios. It was four o'clock then. She guessed that Mabs would have been missed, and she was right.

In the studio she met Langley Rummiman, who was almost red with rage.

"He glared when she came in.

"Ho, you!" he growled disappointedly. "I thought you might—!" He checked himself. "Do you know anything about Mabel Lynn?"

Diana smiled.

"Oh, yes, I've seen her! She's gone out."

"What?"

"She's gone," Diana said pleasantly. "out—out with her friends to Belwin Island. She's gone on a picnic, if you want to know."

"But she must have known—"

"Of course," Diana shrugged. "Well, and what did you expect after this morning?" she asked. "You said yourself Mabs was playing fast and loose to get Jean in the part." Her lips curled.

"Oh, yooks!" she cried scornfully. "Can't you see Mabs is just playing you up because she hopes you'll get fed-up with her and let Jean have the job?"

There was a pause. The director's face was grim.

"Then what the dickens are we to do?"

"Easy," Diana smirked.

"You mean?"

"I mean—well, what about me?"

"But Miss Lynn has made half the film."

"Does it matter?" Diana shrugged. "The next sequence, as far as I understand, is where Mabel Lynn wears a mask. Oh, don't stare! I know the film from A to Z. My father has a script, remember, and I've kept a pretty good check upon the work already done."

Well"—and Diana eyed him steadily—"it won't ruin the film if somebody doubles for Mabs in that particular scene, especially as her face will not be seen. My hair's blonde. It will come out the same colour as Mabs' in the photography. I'm her height, her build. So what about it?"

And she knew, even as the words left her lips, that she had won.

Rummiman was desperate. Thanks to the difficulties of the morning, the film was really behind time. He was anxious to get on with it. His staff were anxious to get on with it. And, as Diana said, she could double in that particular scene without the film being affected.

Ho nodded.

"Right! I see the continuity girl about your clothes, then get off to the make-up room. Meantime"—he frowned—"I'll have a word with Mabel Lynn. Bother that telephone! Miss Wright, come to my office and I'll dictate a letter to her."

Miss Wright, his secretary, rose. Off they went, while Diana, jubilant, triumphant, feeling that the game was going all her way, went off to be made-up. Ten minutes later she appeared on the set. There was a brief rehearsal, and then the scene was shot. She beamed.

"Will I do?"

Rummiman granted.



"You'll do all right"

Diana felt nettled.

"What do you mean, all right?"

Wasn't I good?"

"Listen, Miss Royston-Clarke!" Rynniman interrupted. "You were good—yes. If you'd been in the part from the beginning I'd have been satisfied, really. I am now; but, you see—"

He broke off lamely.

Diana laughed. "Not very good at finesse, are you?" she asked, somewhat mollified. "Yes, I understand. O.K. Mabs is good—better than I am? Right? We understand that. But if I'd had the part from the beginning, you wouldn't have had any cause for complaint? But—and this is the point—you can't give me the part because it would mean scrapping all that's been done already."

He blinked.

"Why, yes, of course. I'm glad you seem to understand so much, Miss Royston-Clarke."

"It's my business to understand," Diana told him, and turned away. To herself she was muttering, however. "And it's my business, if I'm going to get Mabel Lynn definitely out of the way, to see that what she's done in the film is scrapped altogether."

And she smiled slowly and inscrutably.



### A Shock for Mabs

NOT a word did Diana say about her visit to the film studios when she arrived back at Cliff House. She went straight to her study, there to meet Jean. Jean flung round.

"Oh, Diana!"

"Hallo, old thing!" Diana laughed. "Fixed everything up with the old man?"

"Your father, you mean?" Jean stared a little. "Yes, Diana, and—and thanks."

"Pleasure," Diana said. "Hope you'll do well, Jean. I've had a talk with him. He's keen about you; thinks you're the very girl he wants. Any more news from home?"

Jean's face overshadowed a little.

"No," she said; "but—"

And she bit her lip. "Oh, Diana, I wish I could do something—about mother!" she said.

"Your father offered to advance me money, but I couldn't very well take it, could I? Not until he's satisfied that I'm all right for the job. But I'm worried about her. The doctor says she ought to be sent abroad, as I told you, and now—"

bitterly—"we haven't two halfpennies to run together."

Diana smiled queerly. She crossed over to the Scots girl. She patted her on the shoulder.

"Cheer up, old thing!" she said. "A miracle might happen, Jean."

And there was that in her smile, in that quiet, confident timbre of her voice which made Jean look up rather sharply. "Miracles do happen, you know. Babs and Mabs back yet?" she asked carelessly.

"I haven't seen them," Jean replied rather shortly.

"Mabs hasn't said anything else about the film?"

"No," Jean said. "Shall we have tea?"

They had tea. Diana smiled again. She rather wanted to see Babs and Mabs—she, at least, she wanted to see Mabs. Her plans were laid now—well laid. She could guess what would happen in the morning when Mabs

received that stiff letter which was on its way from Langley Rynniman, and perhaps, with that shrewd coolness for which she was so noted, she foresaw the denouncement.

Diana told herself—she must get hold of that telegram. She must destroy it.

It was six o'clock, however, before Babs, Mabs, and the rest of the happy picknickers came back, tired but happy after an afternoon spent in the sunshine on Belwin Island.

The first thing they did upon reaching the school was to wash and to change in the dormitory, and then tramp down to prep.

Diana saw them come in. She saw them go to the dormitory. She saw

## TELL ALL YOUR CHUMS ABOUT THE SCHOOLGIRL

them come down. Right! Now was her opportunity.

Up to the dormitory she slipped. In Mabel Lynn's cupboard she found the coat she had been wearing, with the telegram in it. With a hard smile, she transferred it to her own pocket.

Now to watch developments!

Developments came with the first post on the morrow. That was when Mabs received and read with incredulity the letter from the producer at the Enterprise Film Studios. It was brief and to the point:

"Dear Miss Lynn,—I was extremely surprised and very, very annoyed that you failed to keep your promise yesterday afternoon and turn up at the studios as arranged. In consequence work on the film is being greatly held up. I understand, of course, your motive, but I must remind you that, having entered into the agreement to finish this film, it is incumbent upon you to forget personal matters and do your best along with the others. I shall hope to see you to-morrow."

"But—he sent me that telegram," she stammered to Babs.

Babs frowned.

"Must be some mistake," she said. "Mabs, have you got that telegram here?"

Mabs flew at once to find it. She came back.

"I thought I'd put it in my pocket, but it's not there," she said. "Must have left it on the island. But—Oh gracious, Babs, I can't go on letting him believe this! I must see him."

"Ask Primmy," Babs counselled.

Mabs did ask Primmy. Miss Primrose, anxious to help the film on, gave permission for Mabs to go to the studios at once. Off rushed Mabs, presenting herself to Mr. Rynniman half an hour later. His frown was rather grim as he saw her.

"Well, you've turned up."

"Mr. Rynniman—" she gasped.

"You put me to considerable inconvenience yesterday," the producer went on. "I don't mind telling you, Miss Lynn, that I was on the point of scrapping the film and starting all over again. You have Miss Royston-Clarke to thank that I didn't."

Mabs stared.

"Diana? But what—"

"Miss Royston-Clarke," he grimly informed her, "very kindly stepped into the breach. She doubled for you in the masked girl shot, and so saved my afternoon and the work of my technicians. I hope," he added, "that when you get back to Cliff House you will thank her."

Mabs bit her lip. Diana! Diana had something to do with this!

"But wait a minute!" she cried frantically. "I don't understand. If I'd known you wanted me to turn up do you think I wouldn't have been here? I was on the point of coming, indeed, when I received your telegram."

"I sent you no telegram," Rynniman said.

"But I received one." Mabs faced him desperately. She saw the disbelief in his face. "Oh, I haven't got it! I—I lost it," she added, realising how feeble that must sound, and realising, too, that she was failing to impress. "Mr. Rynniman," she added, on a different note, "you don't think I'm telling you lies?"

His lips pursed.

"That is a question I am not prepared to answer, Miss Lynn. But the position, as I see it, is this. Yesterday, you will remember, you were rather annoyed with me because I would not give you part to Jean Cartwright. You deliberately—yes, I say deliberately—played below your best form afterwards. You left the studios still resentful. You did not keep your appointment in the afternoon, knowing very well what it would mean to us all."

Mabs turned white.

"I see!" she said slowly.

But her hands clenched, her face was hard suddenly.

If only—if only she had the telegram to disprove those words! If only she could convince him! How could she convince him?

But wait a minute—wait a minute. Strange it was that Diana should have arrived so opportunely upon the scene. In a flash suspicion darted and crystallised in Mabs' mind. Diana—Diana was at the bottom of this!

And yes! She remembered now. Hadn't Diana left the school before dinner in the company of Jean Cartwright?

Mabs' eyes gleamed. Well, she'd soon prove that! she told herself. She hadn't the telegram with her, but she remembered perfectly well the office at which it had been handed in. Courtfield!

Diana, if she were at the bottom of this plot, must have handed it in. Diana was a striking enough figure not to be forgotten by the assistant.

Full of that idea, Mabs rushed at once to the Courtfield Post Office. By the greatest of good luck she interviewed at once the same assistant who had received the telegram.

Yes, he remembered it, he said. He remembered it perfectly. Did he remember the girl?

Oh, yes, a Cliff House girl! Tall; a mole on the left side of her face. No, she hadn't blonde hair; red hair she had, and—yes, brown eyes. Could he do anything else for her?

But Mabs was staring at him dully, wide-eyed. She was staring at him dazedly. Then Jean Cartwright was in the plot. Jean, the girl whom she had so desperately tried to help, who during these last few days seemed to have turned away from her! Jean, who suddenly unaccountably had become Diana's friend. Jean had sent that telegram.

Jean, like Diana, had conspired against her!

Almost stunned, she turned away.



## The Letter



WHEN Mabs returned, passing through the gates of Cliff House just before morning school, Jean was on the steps that overlooked the quadrangle, talking to Diana.

Very bright, and very pretty, Jean looked in the morning sunshine, although the sun itself was often overshadowed by a wrack of dark clouds, the herald of coming storm.

Jean had fought her battles, and, like the dour, determined type she was, had won. She had been over everything. At last she was resigned to her future, and counted herself lucky, in looking forward to that future, that she had such a staunch friend in Diana, that she had such a pleasant job to do to.

Soon—very soon, she told herself—she would be leaving Cliff House. She wanted to part with everyone upon good terms. She was willing to forgive Mabs—to go on as if nothing had happened. Her eyes brightened when she saw her hurrying through the throng of girls in the quad.

"Oh, here's Mabs!" she said. "Diana, I want a word with her. Do you mind?" Diana pouted.

"But I was just going to suggest," she said, "that we went to the tuckshop, you know."

"Oh, later, please," Jean begged, and paused. Mabs had almost reached them now. Mabs, her face red, her breath coming rather sharply, as if she had been hurrying. Jean stepped forward.

"Mabs!"

Did Mabs hear?

But Mabs must have heard. For she stared directly at the Scots girl; she looked from her to Diana, her lips curled a little in the contempt she felt. Then, very deliberately, she turned her head away.

"Mabs!" Jean cried, in a startled voice.

But Mabs, with a hurried step, and a shrug of one shoulder, had disappeared into the school.

Jean stood still, stunned.

"Cut direct!" Diana enquired. "Mabs on her high horse." She could form a guess as to why, but, naturally, it was not in Diana's programme to enlighten her chum. "Can't see why she should," she added. "After all, she's done the bad turn, not you. It's her place to come rushing after you with apologies, not you running after her. Let her get on with it. Jiggered if I'd lose my pride falling over her!"

Jean drew a deep breath. That mention of pride stung her. Grim and stiff was that quality within Jean. Yes, Diana was right. "The colour burned in her cheeks. She said:

"Then let's go down to the tuckshop." And tuckshopwards they went. Diana smiled a slow, crafty smile. Inwardly, she was elated. The wedge in the friendship of Jean and Mabs seemed to have been driven in up to the hilt.

They reached the tuckshop, were about to enter, when, outside the gates, a girl appeared. A rather shabbily-dressed little girl, it was, aged between twelve and thirteen, with big, wistful eyes, and a small, pinched face, that bore tell-tale traces of want and poverty. Her eyes lighted up at sight of Diana.

"Miss Royston-Clarke—"

"Hallo! Somebody knows my name,"

Diana muttered, and swung round. Then she gave a jump. "Why, Nellie!" she cried. "Jean, excuse me! It's my little pal from the studios." And she hurried forward. "Nellie," she cried, "what ever brought you here?"

Nellie's piquant little face flushed a fiery red with admiration and pleasure.

"Please, Miss Royston-Clarke, I've come with a note from Mr. Rummikin to Miss Lynn," she said shyly.

"Well, well, then come in," Diana cordially bade her. "Give me the note. I'll take it. But wait a minute, Nellie, I've got something for you. A lovely new coat—and a macintosh. I bought them in Courtfield yesterday. No, no thanks, kid!" she added, with a laugh as Nellie choked between adoration and gratitude. "Just come in."

She took the child by the hand, Oh, proud was Nellie—and scared. Triumphant Diana led her into the school, characteristically forgetting all about Jean in the excitement of the moment.

Up to the study she took Nellie, and there, before her entranced and astonished eyes, laid out the garments. Nellie choked.

"Oh, Miss Royston-Clarke, are they really for me?"

"For you, and for keeps," Diana grinned. "But wait a minute, Nellie, you stop here. I say, you'll find some cake in the cupboard, if you're hungry. I'll just go and find Miss Lynn."

She hurried out, leaving the delighted Nellie in the room. But she did not go to find Mabel. She went to the Music-room. There she slit the envelope open. As she thought, it was a letter from Mr. Rummikin, asking Mabs to come to the studios at once.

Diana frowned. Quickly she threw the letter on the fire. Then, stepping to the Commercial-room, she picked up a typewriter, inserted a piece of Cliff House notepaper into the roller, and typed a reply.

She handed it to Nellie when she returned.

"Take that back to him. It's from Miss Lynn," she said. "And—Nellie!"

"Yes, Miss Royston-Clarke?"

"When he reads it, come back and tell me what he says."

Nellie agreed. She went back, glowing, delighted, clutching her parcel under her arm. With the shilling Diana had given her as a parting present, she took the bus to the studios, and there handed the director the reply.

He took it, read it, and gave an angry exclamation.

"She's sorry, is she?" he stormed. "Sorry she can't come! She'll look in this afternoon, if convenient!" Savagely he flung the letter aside. "If I hadn't shot so much of the film I'd scrap it and find a girl who was more reliable to put in the part!"

"Meaning?" Constance Thackeray asked, "Diana?"

"Yes, Diana," he gritted, between his teeth. "Even her!"

News of which was in Diana's possession immediately after morning school, thanks to the faithful and loyal Nellie.

Diana smiled.



## Lightning Flash!



"I CAN'T believe it! Jean would never stoop to a trick like that!" Barbara Redfern said warmly.

Mabs shook her head wearily.

"Well, I thought that, too, but how do you account—?"

"It's some trick," Babs said, and her eyes gleamed a little. "It's some trick," she repeated, with an emphasis that proclaimed the cementing of an idea in her mind. "Wait a minute, Mabs! I see the hand of Diana in this."

The conversation was taking place in Study No. 4, immediately after afternoon lessons.

Natural it was for Mabs to confide in Babs—those two inseparable chums who never had secrets or worries from each other.

Natural for Babs, who knew Jean almost as well as she knew Mabs, to refute the accusation which Mabs had made against her. And, to be sure, Mabs, thinking it over, had not been convinced in her own mind.

"Mabs," Babs said simply, "don't look worried. I tell you it's not Jean. Whatever Jean might be feeling against you—and goodness knows why she should feel bitter!—she's not done this. Diana's responsible—take my word!" She took her chum's arm.

"Come with me?"

Mabs stared.

"Where?"

"We're going," Babs said quietly, "to settle the matter—now." Diana and Jean are bound to be in their study. A clearing of the air will be good for everyone. Come on!"

Mabs nodded. That was the best way. Decisive action was always Babs' watchword, and Mabs, hating to feel the presence of this shadow which lay between her and Jean, was only too anxious to get it dispelled.

She followed her chum out.

In the corridor the lights were switched on. Outside the storm, threatening since daybreak, was on the point of breaking. The clouds were as black as ink; a wild, chilly wind howled and whistled against the ancient walls, and already the first ominous rumbling of thunder could be heard away to the west.

The door of Study No. 8 was ajar when they reached it. Babs gave one knock and entered.

"Where's Diana?" she asked.

Jean was there at the table, writing a letter home. She flushed a little as she saw Mabs.

"Diana's gone to the studios," she said.

"Oh!" Babs and Mabs exchanged a significant look. Then Babs took up the question. "You don't know what for?"

Jean flushed.

"Why should I know what for?" "I'm sorry; I didn't mean to offend you, Jean, but—" Babs paused.

"Wait a minute," she said, as Jean half-rose from her chair. "There's just one little matter we want to clear up, and," she added significantly, "that we can only do if you will answer one question, Jean."

"And that?"

"Did you, or did you not, send a telegram from Courtfield yesterday afternoon?"

Jean looked surprised. "Why, yes!" she answered. "I sent one for Mr. Royston-Clarke."

"You didn't see what it was?"

"No, of course not. It was marked private." And Jean, wonderingly, stared from one to the other. "But why?" she broke out.

Babs smiled grimly.

"Tell her, Mabs!"

And Mabs told her—how she had received that telegram cancelling an appointment—how she had got into

trouble at the studios—how bitterly had been blamed Jean.

And Babs, following up, told Jean how Mabs, in spite of everything, had been standing by her—how she had begged and pleaded that Jean should have the part. How Mabs, worrying about Jean, had almost been a failure on her last appearance at the studio.

She told her how Diana, with suspicious opportunism, had turned up at the studios just in time to play Mabs' part. Jean listened wide-eyed.

What a fool—oh, what a blind fool she had been to allow herself to be so deceived!

Jean's face flamed.

"I see," she said, between her teeth—"I see." Well, I'm sorry, Mabs—really and truly, I'm sorry! I didn't know. I didn't guess. Diana—well, Diana's been so awfully decent to me."

A spasm crossed her face for a moment as she thought of the decency of Diana—that decency, however which, she now saw Diana had only been exploiting for her own ends.

There was a pause.

"And—and you say Diana's at the studios now?" Babs asked.

Jean nodded, then quickly, queerly she looked at the two chums.

Diana there—Diana fostering her plot against Mabs. For what reason should Diana have gone to the studios?

"Wait a minute," Jean said thickly—"wait a minute! Mabs, I'm going to have this out with Diana—yes, now!" She threw a glance through the window which rattled and shook under the tornado gusts which shook it. "I'm going!"

She jumped for the door.

"But, Jean, you can't—this can't!" Babs cried. "Not in this weather! Oh, my hat!"

But Jean, her face tense, was gone—gone as rapidly, as tempestuously as the storm itself. Along to the cloak-room she rushed. There she snatched her hat and macintosh and dashed out. A screaming gust of wind greeted her; a flash of lightning, stabbing out of the sky, seemed to hit the ground only yards in front of her. Then came the rain. Swish, swish, swish!

Jean set her teeth.

In Study No. 8 Mabs and Babs gazed at each other.

"Oh, the chump!" Mabs gasped. "The idiot! She'll get soaked through! Why—?"

And she spun round as the door came open, and Miss Bullivant, looking furious, came into the room. She frowned at Mabs; she glared at Babs. She said sharply:

"Where is Jean?"

Babs and Mabs glanced at each other.

"Jean," Miss Bullivant said gratingly, "was given lines by me yesterday. She has not done them, though they were due in last night. Will you tell her, Mabel, that if I do not have those lines within the next hour, I shall report her to the headmistress?"

She went out. Babs gulped.

"Oh, my hat! Now there'll be trouble!"

Mabs' lips set.

"Babs, I'm going after her. I'm going to bring her back," she said quickly. "Never mind Diana. She can't do much worse than she has done, anyway. No, don't you come, old girl!"

"But, Mabs, the storm—"

But Mabs cared nothing about the storm. Loyalty to Jean, the girl whom all along she had protected, came first. In a moment she was in the cloak-room, and in a moment Babs was after her.

"Mabs, you can't go!"

"I am going!" Mabs said.

"Right! Then," Babs declared, "I am coming with you!"

And together they went into the teeth of the howling storm.

Through the gates, out into Friardale Woods, heads bent, breath rasping, they pushed on. Then—

"Mabs!" screamed Babs.

She sensed it before she saw it. She stood petrified with fright. For out of the sky there flashed a great, forked tongue of lightning. Above the roar of the storm she saw a tree—a great oak suddenly ripped from top to bottom, as if split by the blow of a fiery axe.

Shaken, trembling, she looked round, gasping for breath.

Mabs! Mabs! And then she saw her—Mabs, her Mabs, lying on the grass, a great branch of the stricken tree lying across her.

The branch, broken off like a rotten twig when the lightning struck the tree, had hurtled through the air, bowling Mabs over and knocking her unconscious at the same time. Babs gave a sharp cry.

"Mabs!"

Mabs groaned.

"Oh, it—it's all right," she said. "But, Babs, my arm—my arm! Babs, can you move the branch?"

In frenzied desperation, Babs was working now. Desperately she caught the branch. Ugh! By a superhuman effort, she lifted it—by another tore it free. Mabs moved. Her face was deathly white.

"Mabs—"

And then Babs looked up. There was a swish of wheels from the nearby road. The station car, the driver in front, skidded to a slithering standstill in the broad river that was now the track. The face of a woman, faintly familiar, looked out. At that moment, fortunately, there was a lull in the storm. The woman's eyes widened.

"Great goodness! What has happened?" she asked. "Driver, will you please give that girl some assistance?" She opened the door, calling to Babs: "Can I assist you, my dear? I am going to Cliff House."

Babs blinked. Who was this woman?

"Oh, thank you! My—my friend has met with an accident," she said.

"Then bring her in, please."

The woman, frail and weak as she was, stepped out of the car into the blinding rain.

Then she started as she looked at Babs, from her to Mabs.

"Why, surely," she cried, "I know you both. I have seen photographs of you, and have heard so—so much about you. Aren't you my daughter's friends?"

Babs, helping Mabs to her feet, glanced at her.

"Are we? I don't know. Oh, Mabs, darling, can you walk? Who—who is your daughter, madam?"

"My daughter," the woman replied, and a tremulously proud smile crossed her lips, "is Jean Cartwright. I have come to see her."



Face to Face

"NOW," Diana Royston-Clarke softly chuckled, "is my chance."

Her chance—yes, her chance indeed! For an hour, Diana, trying

for once to make herself inconspicuous, had hung about the Enterprise Studios. But Diana was not thinking of the storm. For her, at least, the storm had no existence.

Diana's attention was concentrated upon the cutting-room.

Very patiently Diana had waited for the three men in that room to go out. Now, with the bell for lunch, they had gone. Diana had made up her mind, her plan of action was clear.

Langley Rumminal had said if he had not spent so much money on the film, that he would unhesitatingly have given the part to Diana. Right! That was enough for the reckless Firebrand. By the same token, she reasoned, if the film already taken were destroyed, lost, or rendered useless, shooting would have to begin all over again.

Then, with a new film, the part would unquestionably be hers. Now she stepped into the cutting-room—a small, dark apartment, reeking strongly of strange chemical smells. A crack of thunder drowned the noise that she made opening the door, a flash of lightning showed her vividly, piled up on a bench, the spool of film of which she was in search.

Above that bench ran numerous shelves containing jars, tins, and bottles, some of which were labelled "poison," some of which were warningly marked: "Do not handle without gloves." But Diana had no use for bottles. She wanted the films.

And when she had got them—

Then—well, she did not know. She would lose them, hide them, destroy them perhaps.

Now, stepping forward, she had touched the films. Three reels of them she took.

Then—

"Diana!" rapped a voice at the door.

Diana gave a jump. As if suddenly shot, she spun round. As if they had been red-hot, the films dropped from her fingers. Her elbow, swinging round with her, caught one of the bottles on the bottom shelf and brought it crashing down.

From Jean Cartwright—a wild enough apparition in her drenched garments, with her red hair flying in tangled masses about her head—came a shout:

"Diana, look out!"

Just in time she sprang forward. Just in time she caught the startled Firebrand by the arm. Then—Crash! The bottle fell and splintered into fragments. Out from its shattered remains the fluid rushed, making a hissing, sizzling sound as it ran over the bench.

"Oh, my hat! What is it?"

"Look!" Jean cried vibrantly. "Diana"—her voice quivering with horror—"Diana, what have you done?"

Like a teetotum Diana spun, dashing the gas-induced tears from her eyes. And then her face turned white as she saw on the bench a mass of curling, smoking things dissolving before her eyes in a terrible stream of running fluid.

They were the films—films no longer, but twisting, half-liquid things, giving off an indescribably pungent odour, ruined by the acid which had swamped over them.

"Oh, my hat!" Jean set her lips. "Diana, you did that?"

"Did I?" Diana's eyes gleamed. "Well, who knows about it?" she retorted breathlessly. "Only you saw,

## 12 "The Daring of Diana"

Jeann. "But come on," she added quickly, "let's get out of here!"

"But—"  
"Oh, come on!"  
"But Diana, aren't you going—"  
"To give myself away? Diana sneered. "Do I look a fool?" she asked. She was shaken inwardly, but no sign of it appeared on the surface. "Jean, don't be a fool!" she cried impatiently. "Come on! I tell you—"  
"And she dragged the girl towards the door. "Now, quickly—outside! Oh, never mind the storm!"  
Jean gasped.

"Look here, Diana—"  
"But Diana was doing anything but looking there. Feverishly she was pushing Jean out of the room. She paused a moment to lock the door behind her, then swiftly caught the Scots girl's arm and piloted her across the studio.

"Outside they rushed into the road, where Diana's car was waiting. She bundled Jean in.

"Now," she said between her teeth. "What the dickens did you show up for?"

Jean looked at her strangely. "To find you."

"And how did you find me?"  
"I heard a sound—in that room." Jean looked at her. "Diana, do you know what you've done to that film?"

"I know what you've done, you mean. You meddling idiot," Diana's eyes flashed. She forgot for the moment that she was this girl's friend. "If you hadn't jumped in on me like that, no harm would have been done. Hang it, I only wanted to look at the film. You didn't think I was going to steal it, or eat it for lunch, did you?" she demanded savagely. "But you haven't answered my question yet. What the dickens did you come down for?"

Jean goggled. Astoundedly she eyed the girl beside her.

Furious she had been, tempestuous she had been. "But now she found herself in Diana's presence once more—how hard somehow to gush forth those words of vitriolic condemnation which she had been rehearsing in her mind.

Diana had played her false. Diana had played her traitor. But Diana also, in that queerly mixed way of hers, had been her friend—Diana had tried, according to her lights, to balance the harm she had done by assuring her future.

But it had to come out. Even with such considerations weighing her, Jean was not the girl to balk issues. She said:

"I've found out, Diana."  
"Oh, what?"

"About—about—"  
"About you!" she flamed out suddenly, finding new courage. "Oh, don't look at me! I know! That telegram, that lies you told me about Mabs. Yes, I know," she went on, her anger boiling up. "You tried to put Mabs against me. You tried to put me against Mabs. And why—"

"Well, why?" Diana asked icily.

"Because you wanted the part in the film yourself."

"You seem to know a lot," Diana sneered. She shrugged. For a moment she remained in moody silence, then she turned. "Well, all right," she said. "Supposing I did do it. Supposing I have. No, half a minute," she cried, "let me have my say. I wanted that part in the film, yes. I meant to have it—still mean to have it. I should have had it in the first place if Mabs hadn't barged along."

Jean's lips compressed.  
"Diana, you know that's a fib."

"I know nothing of the sort," Diana flamed out. "Voicks! Why must you rush in spoiling everything—yes everything," she cried. "I did my best for you, didn't I? Oh, I know I stopped your film chances, but I did, didn't I, find you another job, and I did persuade my father—but no," she added, checking herself. "I'm not telling you about that. You wouldn't understand. You'd just think I was trying to curry favour with you. Well, I've succeeded. The film's gone now. It's ruined, bust. The thing will have

"Mother!" she cried. "Mother—"  
and flung herself upon her, rapturously and passionately. "Mother!" In a voice shaking and quivering with her surprise and delight. "How did you come here!"

Mrs. Cattermole smiled.  
"Jean, didn't you hear?"  
"Hear what, dear?"  
"The doctor—he said that unless I had an immediate trip abroad, I might lose my life." She paused, gasping a little. "Well, Jean, something like a miracle happened. A friend of yours—a girl named Diana Royston-Clarke—"  
Jean swung round slowly.

"Yes?" she cried in a stifled voice.

"She—she prevailed upon her father, the mayor of Lantham, to let me use his bungalow in the South of France. Mr. Royston-Clarke sent his agent to see me, and fixed everything up. He even paid my fare, Jean. The bungalow's ready for me, I'm on my way there now, but I felt I just had to come and say good-bye to you before I went. Oh, Jean, I would so like to meet your friend Diana. I would like to, thank her, Jean. And I know, my dear, that you would like to thank her, too. It means saving my life, Jean."

And she smiled again while Jean, staring at Diana, feeling suddenly as if every ounce of resistance had dropped out of her, swung round.

Diana! Diana, without a word, had done this. Diana, the girl she had vowed to betray!

SHE DIDN'T! She couldn't! Rather would Jean have betrayed herself, after that. And, as it happened, there was a fresh sensation.

Mabel Lynn—with a broken wrist—was in the school sanatorium. It would be a week, they said, before Mabs was able to be about again, without having her arm in a sling, and that meant that Mabs' film acting, as far as the Rebel Sister was concerned, was at an end. From the studios next day came the news she expected, yet dreaded, to hear.

The film itself had been ruined, the whole thing would have to be re-taken. Yet, marvellously enough, Diana's name was not mentioned in connection with that. It was presumed that a heavy clap of thunder had shaken the bottle of acid from its resting place.

Jean hardly knew whether to be glad or sorry, when she heard that.

But Diana was glad, unfeignedly glad. For that same morning Diana received a message from Langley Rummman.

"It was brief and to the point. "Re-taking Rebel Sister with you as the juvenile lead. Let me know if you can manage."

She showed the message to Jean.

"Well," and her smile was triumphant. "Here it is, old thing. I told you, didn't I, that I was going to triumph? Here's the proof. I'm sorry in a way, that you can't have the part, but you've got a job, after all, haven't you? And by the way," she fished a telegram from her pocket, "your mother sent this this morning."

Jean read it. It was addressed to Diana, from Folkestone.

"Again, Diana dear, a thousand, thousand thanks. Neither Jean nor I can ever repay you for your great kindness. I hope you and Jean will always remain the best, and most loyal of friends."

Jean with a lump in her throat, turned away. Surely Diana's triumph was complete!

## NEXT WEEK'S

brilliant long complete

Cliff House School story,

featuring Diana Royston-Clarke,

is entitled:



## DIANA THE DEFIANT

By HILDA RICHARDS

to be shot all over again, and this time, it won't be either you or Mabs who'll have the leading part. It'll be—me!"

Jean stared at her in horror.  
"Diana, you don't mean to say—"

"I mean to say," Diana said between her teeth, "you ought to know, Jean, that when I set my mind on a thing, I don't allow much to stand between me and the objective. I made sure if that film went west when it was re-shot, little me would be in the part. I wanted—"  
and then she stopped, aware that she had said too much, aware suddenly in her arrogance that she had betrayed herself. "I mean—"

"You mean," Jean breathed, "Diana, you mean you—you deliberately meant to get rid of that film?"

Diana did not reply.  
Jean paused, then added bitterly:

"I see. That's why you went down to the studios. You were going to destroy that film so that it would have to be shot again. You wangled yourself into the part. And that," she cried vibrantly, "is the girl I took to be my friend! Very well, Diana, I warn you, if you don't give up the idea of playing this part, I—I shall tell them what I know!"

The car stopped as Cliff House was reached.

Diana did not reply. She flounced out, Jean following her, slowly, mechanically, appalled by what she had found out, but her determination unshaken. Up the steps Diana went, into Study No. 8. Jean, behind her, heard her give a cry.

She rushed forward, and then stared—then herself gave a glad, choking cry of welcome at sight of the frail little woman, who, her eyes misty with tears, rose to meet her.

## Exciting Chapters of This Unusual Thrill-and-Mystery SERIAL



# THE PAGODA OF PERIL

CATHERINE STERNDALE, together with her cousins, MOLLY and CHARLES, are staying at a queer Chinese house owned by their UNCLE GERALD. Catherine makes a friend of a little Chinese girl, KWANYIN, whom Uncle Gerald seems to mistrust. The cousins defend Kwanyin against a crafty Chinaman—KAI TAL. The latter, mistaking Catherine for Kwanyin, forces her into the "dungeon of the sacred crocodile." (Note read on.)

## Unmasked

AS Catherine Sterndale felt herself tottering over space into the dungeon of the sacred crocodile, she threw out a wild, despairing hand.

It caught the tunic of the villainous Kai Tal.

She clung on, and tried to scream, but her throat was parched. No sound came.

Kai Tal moved his foot, and Catherine dropped, down into the darkness.

She landed on her feet, toppled, and fell, sprawling on hands and knees. The drop was a slight one, and she was unhurt. But she did not move. For somewhere in this dungeon was the crocodile.

She was still on her hands and knees, her heart hammering so that it shook her whole body, when a light came on. A Chinese lantern, painted gold, and ornamented with the red image of a crocodile, hung to her left.

Catherine stared about her. There was no sign of a crocodile. She was quite alone in this small dungeon.

She stood up, and breathed in relief. To be in a dungeon alone, was not so bad. The talk of the crocodile had been mere bluff, Catherine assured herself.

Kai Tal had intended to send Kwanyin into this dungeon, and it was by mistake in the darkness that he had got hold of Catherine.

But why had the little Chinese girl, Kwanyin, been so terrified of this dungeon if there were no crocodiles?

Catherine, studying the dungeon more closely, then noticed that over her head was a square thick board, on which was a handle. She could hardly believe

her eyes. For this was the trapdoor through which she had fallen. It must, therefore, be a way of escape, too.

There were thick wires running under the board along the ceiling, and down the wall behind her; but she could not guess what they were for.

"Any way, there's no crocodile," she told herself, in excited relief.

Reaching up, she found that she could just touch the handle of the trapdoor. She jumped, caught it, and, to her joy, the trapdoor came down.

But as that trapdoor moved down, it pulled the strong wires she had seen. The wires pulled a panel at the foot of one of the walls.

Catherine remained still, with the handle of the half-open trapdoor in her grip. She stared at the rising panel at the foot of the wall. Then slowly she pulled the trapdoor lower.

The panel at the foot of the wall was lifted, higher, higher. A light showed, and there came a flood of warmth into the dungeon.

What Catherine saw next froze the blood in her veins.

It was the head of a large crocodile, the jaws agape, the eyes half-closed. It was motionless; but the eyes glistened.

With a gasp of horror, Catherine released the trapdoor.

But it did not shut; and the panel at the foot of the wall remained open.

At any moment now the crocodile might stir, might crawl out into the dungeon. If it moved forward even a short distance, the panel could not be lowered. The crocodile itself could keep it open.

Catherine, with desperate energy, pushed at the trapdoor. She pushed and strained. Very slowly the trapdoor moved, but it seemed weighted with lead.

She saw now how she had been fooled. For even with that trapdoor wide open there was no escape. Another door was above it. All she had done by pulling the trapdoor down was to release the crocodile.

It was just such a device that would appeal to the Chinese mind. For just when the victim imagined there was

By  
ELIZABETH  
CHESTER

Illustrations by Baker

hope of escape, and pulled open the trapdoor, she would release what she dreaded most, the crocodile. Sudden hope and joy would always turn, as it had in Catherine's case, to utter despair.

Straining, pushing, at last Catherine closed the trapdoor. The crocodile, motionless as a log, made no effort to crawl out.

Panting with exertion and the effect of her horror, Catherine stood trying to control herself. For now she must think carefully. It would not do to act rashly. For there might be other traps in this awful dungeon.

She began to understand how Kwanyin had been made to suffer by Kai Tal, her uncle's evil, Chinese servant. But after this, surely, she told herself, her uncle would no longer doubt that Kai Tal was evil, and must go.

Catherine paced round the dungeon, and then called and called again, but only the echo of her own voice in the small confined space answered her.

Somewhere above in her uncle's strange Chinese house, the others would be searching for her, Molly and Charles, her cousins, would be waiting for her in her bed-room as arranged. They might wait for a long time before realizing that something was seriously wrong.

They might never guess that she was in this awful dungeon, for even Kai Tal might not know. For he had pushed her down into it, thinking that she was Kwanyin.

Kwanyin, of course, had warned Catherine. She had told her that Kai Tal was evil, that he was acting against Uncle Gerald, whom Kwanyin admired and loved.

But Uncle Gerald would hear nothing against Kai Tal.

He always took Kai Tal's word against hers.

"But after this he will know Kai Tal is evil," Catherine reasoned. "He'll see that poor Kwanyin is being misjudged. Oh, if only someone would come!" she added, with a groan.

She reached up to the handle of the trapdoor, but she did not grasp it. The terror of the crocodile, the possibility of his crawling out, was too much for her.

But as she took back her hand, something startling happened. The trapdoor started to move of its own accord. And the panel that hid the crocodile lifted, too.

Then came a click. And Catherine took her horrified gaze from the crocodile to look up.

The panel above the trapdoor had been slid back, and there, framed in the opening, was the pale face of Kwanyin.

"Oh, Moes Cateen," Kwanyin whispered. "All seekee you. Muchee wailing, many gnashings of teetees. Me tinkee you here. Me remember bumping someone—"

Catherine could have danced with joy at this wonderful chance of escape; but although help was so near so was peril. The crocodile was already on the move.

"Kwanyin, oh, help me up, quick, quick!" she cried.

She threw up her hands. Kwanyin, leaning down, caught them, but almost lost her balance in doing so. She was not strong, and Catherine's weight was too great for her.

A strange sound below made Catherine look down. The crocodile, jaws agape, was wriggling out!

"Kwanyin—quick, pull—call for help!" she screamed.

Kwanyin screamed shrilly. Almost immediately footsteps sounded, and Catherine heard her Cousin Charles' voice, Molly's, and then Uncle Gerald's. A wave of relief swept over her. Help was at hand.

"Kwanyin," she heard her uncle cry, "what wickedness is this—"

"Next moment he was kneeling beside the Chinese girl. Leaning down, he took Catherine's wrists in his strong hands, brushing the Chinese girl aside.

Then with all his strength he hauled at her, and Catherine, giving a spring to help, found herself drawn clear of the ground and clear of the ugly reptile that was squirming across the floor at her feet.

With the help of Molly and Charles, she was bumped on to the floor, and Uncle Gerald shut the trapdoor with a kick, and then sent a small rug shooting across the polished floor.

He turned to Kwanyin, his eyes ablaze.

"You again! Always you make mischief. I will put you under lock and key! I will let the gods punish you, and—"

"No, uncle," Catherine burst out, scrambling up, "it was not Kwanyin's fault. Kai Tal sent me down into the dungeon."

"Kai Tal?" was her uncle's incredulous cry. "Impossible! You are mistaken!"

The curtains just behind them rustled, and a silent figure came through. It was Kai Tal himself, his evil face wearing a false smile. His whole attitude was one of humility, with his hands folded in front of his rich blue-and-gold tunic, his head so bowed that it showed the tassel on his velvet cap.

"Very miserable and humble Kai Tal hears evil spoken of him by honourable and beautiful niece of highly esteemed master," he purred slyly.

Catherine turned on him in fury. "You only heard the truth!" she

flushed angrily. "I know how cruel you are. I saw you twisting Kwanyin's wrists. I heard you threaten to throw her into the dungeon. But it was me you threw—"

Cousin Charles gave a gasp.

"He threw you down into the dungeon?" he said, and, putting his glasses straight, glared at Kai Tal. "Why, you unutterable brute! How dare you treat my cousin in that manner—"

"We'll jolly well push you down into the old dungeon," said Molly, in fury.

Uncle Gerald clapped his hands. "Please, please, children!" he said sharply. "This is beyond all reason! Really! You are in my house. This is Kai Tal, a nobleman of China and a respected and loyal retainer of mine. I cannot hear you talk to him in this absurd and vulgar way."

The cousins were silent and amazed. It was beyond their imagination that Uncle Gerald could take the part of Kai Tal. He looked so intelligent and keen that they could not believe Kai Tal's humbug could fool him.

"But, uncle," said Catherine at last, in reproach, "he did throw me into the dungeon!"

Her uncle smiled rather grimly. "Yes, yes, Catherine, so it seemed to you. But let Kai Tal explain."

Kai Tal looked at Catherine, and then at Kwanyin.

"Very loyal but of-no-consequence Kai Tal," he said sadly, "is much saddened by false stories of wicked Kwanyin who makes witchcraft—"

"Witchcraft fiddlesticks!" said Catherine impatiently.

"Who makes witchcraft," repeated Kai Tal, as though she had not spoken. "Fascinate beautiful and noble niece of highly esteemed master. Kwanyin beckon—niece follow. Why? Niece not know. Kwanyin very cunning, very artful, cast the intangible mysterious and unworlly spell—"

He looked at Catherine, whose expression had changed.

For Kai Tal spoke half the truth! Kwanyin had indeed beckoned to Catherine to leave the dining-room for their forbidden chat. There had been no witchcraft, naturally. But—

"Is this true?" asked Uncle Gerald, while Charles and Molly looked at their cousin in a puzzled way.

"Not about witchcraft. I followed Kwanyin—but—"

"Against my orders—my request, anyway," interrupted her uncle. "I find it hard to believe that, knowing that I have placed Kwanyin under a ban of silence and explained fully that I wish to keep her away from you—knowing all this, surely you did not follow her when she beckoned?"

Catherine was at a loss to know what to say. She had to admit that she had in a way defied her uncle, although, of course, she had not meant to do anything against his interests. Her belief was that Kwanyin meant to help him.

"Uncle, you don't understand," she said. "You misjudge Kwanyin—"

"Catherine," he said gently but firmly, "you must answer me, my dear. Did you follow Kwanyin—here—to this very spot?"

Catherine nodded her head, and her cheeks flushed.

"Yes, uncle; and I heard Kai Tal—"

"Very unimportant Kai Tal," cut in that smiling rascal, "hear Kwanyin talking in unworthy manner to noble niece. He go to inform his master—"

"Quite right, Kai Tal, and very proper," said Uncle Gerald. "And in your absence Kwanyin pushed Catherine down into the dungeon, doubtless, by

some clever trickery, making Catherine think it was Kai Tal—"

"But, uncle, I saw him," protested Catherine vehemently, with a flash in her eyes.

"She was not going to let the yellow rascal wriggle out of things in this way!"

But Catherine had reckoned without Kai Tal's snake-like cunning.

"Congratulate noble young lady," said Kai Tal, clapping his hands and bowing. "To see in the ink-black of night, great gift!"

He smiled blandly and seemed to shake with amusement. Catherine was so furious that her cheeks crimsoned and her hands clenched tightly until the nails hurt her palms.

"There," said Uncle Gerald, in triumph, "that settles it! It was inky dark, so how could you possibly see?"

"I saw him before. Besides, I know!" insisted Catherine quite angrily.

Her uncle held up his hand. "Come, come, Catherine!" he said.

"Enough of argument! It was too dark for you to see anyone, Catherine. You were terrified, quite naturally. You are a girl, and because of that I suppose you are more likely to think evil of a Chinese man such as Kai Tal than of a girl, Kwanyin. But, remember, Kwanyin is not an English schoolgirl; she is Chinese. She is artful. Please let me know best, Catherine. You really must allow me to do so after all my years of experience with these people."

And in a very kindly manner he patted Catherine's cheeks. The matter was ended. There was finality in his tone.

Catherine wanted to object, to insist, to persuade him that he was wrong, but common sense stilled her tongue. For she knew that nothing would convince her uncle that Kai Tal was his enemy.

He seemed to be almost under the spell of the yellow rascal. Everything that Kai Tal did was for the best. But everything that Kwanyin did—that was fog the worst.

Catherine looked at the little Chinese girl with intense compassion; but Kwanyin's face, though downcast, showed nothing of what she really felt, whether she were deeply moved or not.

But, looking more closely, Catherine fancied that she saw the glint of tears. "Take her away, Kai Tal!" said Uncle Gerald.

Kai Tal's hand dropped to Kwanyin's shoulder. And Catherine saw that she winced. She seemed to recoil. It was as though she wanted to whisk herself free, yet dared not.

It was all Catherine could do then to master herself. She wanted to snatch Kai Tal's arm away. But her self-control won, and she stood mute and motionless as Kwanyin went through the curtains, Kai Tal's hand firmly on her small, frail-looking shoulder.

Molly and Charles, who had been silent, except for an occasional soft exchange of whispers, now spoke up.

"Poor old Cath!" said Molly.

"What an awful experience."

"Most alarming—for a girl, anyway," said Charles solemnly. "Of course, I doubt if I could have been frightened myself; but then, I am a boy with an exceptionally iron nerve, you know."

Uncle Gerald smiled faintly, and Molly gave a sniff.

"You," she said—"you'd have swooned right off!"

"I swoon? What utter rot!" said Charles indignantly. "I should have

fixed the crocodile with a look—an unblinking gaze."

"The most dangerous thing to do," said Uncle Gerald, shaking his head. "Ignore the animal—yes. But don't stare at it. That's a tip, just in case you do get in a similar plight. But if you don't concern yourselves with what goes on in the house, uninvited, then you need fear nothing."

"Quite, uncle! We shan't meddle," said Charles.

Catherine took that as a rebuke; but she did not wince. She felt that she had done the right thing. In the same predicament, she would behave in the same way again.

Uncle Gerald seemed to guess what was passing in her mind. He gave her a keen glance.

"So you see, Catherine," he said, with a faint, mysterious smile, "the Chinese proverb tells us: 'Seek not, and you will not find danger,' meaning, of course," he added, "that only the adventurous and inquisitive become involved in unnecessary peril."

He then bade them good-night, and hoped they would sleep well. He spoke kindly, but Catherine could not forget the rebuke, and the proverb he had quoted.

"In other words," she said, when they were going along the corridor to bed, "mind your own business! Is that what he meant?"

"Yes," said Charles, frowning. "And I think it's a broad hint. Personally, I think uncle's misguided about Kai Tal, and to-morrow I intend to point it out to him. But reasoned argument, you know, will be far better," than all your vehemence, Catherine.

"In words of one syllable," said Molly, with a wink at Catherine. "Charles says 'leave it to me.' But what I say is, Kai Tal's a nasty, villainous old rascal who's up to something. And it's against uncle, as well as against Kwanyin."

"And probably against us, too," said Catherine grimly. "If I can really prove that old rascal—"

There was a faint sound behind her, and she turned.

Not a yard away stood Kai Tal, bowing obsequiously.

Catherine was startled; but she tried to hide the fact from him.

"Oh, I thought you would be listening!" she said cuttingly.

Kai Tal smiled, as though he had been paid a compliment.

"This very despicable and greatly despised person," he said, "wishes to tell the honourable and very courageous young ladies and gentleman that it is very dangerous to stay where there is much danger."

"Another broad hint," said Molly.

"What do you mean?" asked Catherine, in her direct way. "Is that a warning, or a threat?"

Kai Tal did not give a direct answer.

"Danger and grave troubles are like unto the sea, which seeks us not to drown us. For whosoever would be drowned in the sea, must go down to it."

"So, indeed it is also with danger, which we must seek to find."

"So what?" said Molly brusquely.

"If I don't mind danger—well, it's my own look out," said Catherine.

Kai Tal inclined his head.

"The beautiful and exalted young lady has great wisdom, and to-night she will sleep well, and in her sleep all will become resolved in her mind. She will see, after the darkness of sleep, the bright light of good sense. So perhaps the humble and despicable Kai Tal say now not only good-night,

but good-bye. The fool stayeth in a land of trouble, the wise man departs."

He turned on his heel, and padded softly away.

His words had but one interpretation. Carefully veiled, they were still a threat. For the cousins to stay here was dangerous. They were not wanted. Kai Tal had said not only good-night, but good-bye.

It was Catherine who recovered from the shock first.

"Good-night, Kai Tal!" she called. "We shall see you in the morning!"

But neither Molly nor Charles spoke for a moment. Charles, for all his vaunted courage, looked a little pale. But Molly, when she had recovered from her surprise, laughed.

"Poof! Ordered out of the house by Kai Tal! If uncle wants us to go, I'll go, and not before!"

"Absolutely!" agreed Charles. "How absolutely preposterous! I shall report this to uncle in the morning. If uncle didn't want us here, he wouldn't have given such a pressing invitation."

"Uncle! It's nothing to do with uncle!" said Catherine. "He wants us here! But Kai Tal is up to something. He's poisoned uncle's mind against Kwanyin; next he'll make him turn against us. Unless we're too clever, he'll—"

Charles was startled.

"By Jove!" he said, in complete astonishment. "Do you know, Catherine, I believe you're right."

"Of course I'm right!"

"The rotten boulder!" said Charles, frowning.

"Scheming cad!" agreed Molly.

"But he won't find us so easy to deal with as Kwanyin."

"No fear," Catherine agreed. "And

we're not leaving this house until uncle makes us. And before we go we're going to find out just what Kai Tal is up to."

## The Idol's Head

IT was past midnight, and Catherine Sterndale and her cousins had been asleep for some time. Their sleep was a little fitful, disturbed by strange dreams; but they were tired out after a long train journey, so were not likely to awaken at the slightest sound.

When Kai Tal paused outside the door of Catherine's room and listened, she turned over in her sleep. But she did not open her eyes.

Kai Tal, however, crept away.

"She is still awake."

He spoke in Chinese, but the shadowy figure in the darkness understood.

"It is well."

The speaker was the little Chinese girl, Kwanyin, and she drew back as Kai Tal approached. But he snatched out his hand and caught her wrist.

"Listen, Kwanyin, whose ancestors are illustrious and of great renown, this person whom you despise will suffer no disobedience. There is nothing that shall stand in his way. For as the tempest overrides all in its path, without ruth, so Kai Tal sweeps on to the inevitable end. Therefore, Kwanyin, it is well to obey."

Kwanyin lowered her eyes.

"Kwanyin," she said in Chinese, "does not live to do evil to the noble English girl who has shown kindness. Rather would Kwanyin go to the land of her fathers."

"Kwanyin stays here," said Kai Tal.

"Kwanyin shall obey. Kwanyin shall



"KWANYIN, pull—pull!" Catherine screamed as she saw the crocodile edging across the floor. Gripping Catherine's wrists, the Chinese girl pulled with all her strength.

go to the room of the English girl and awaken her from sleep. She shall wear the huge hollow head of the idol, Ts Tsiang."

"No."  
Kai Tal's hand tightened on her wrist. The long nails dug in until she winced, and had to bite her lip to keep back a cry of pain.

"Kwanyin will show great wisdom. Contemtable Kai Tal advises her well. Come."

Kwanyin pattered with him, her small feet touching the ground so lightly that they made only the faintest sound, and her legs, to keep pace with his, had to move quickly, for her dress was long and tight.

Kai Tal went into the Pagoda, and up the wooden steps to the first floor. It was dark, but he knew his way by instinct, and cleverly avoided the many obstacles.

He led Kwanyin up the two flights of steps, and then switched on the light. The whole of the Pagoda was wired for electricity, but the bulbs were concealed in the old-fashioned swinging lanterns, brightly ornamented, and of strange shape and pattern.

Kwanyin covered her eyes as the light came on.

For in that small room was the head of the idol Ts Tsiang. She hated it. The mere sight of that idol sent a shiver of dread through her.

Kai Tal, turning to it, showed no trace of emotion at all. But when a yard from it, he bowed.

"Mighty Ts Tsiang, this miserable mortal asks pardon for making use of your fearful visage," he said humbly. "Yet it is to bring craven fear and dread of our wonderful China that I implore your generous and all powerful services."

Kwanyin took her hands from her eyes and shuddered. The head seemed more hideous than ever, with its great glaring, jewelled eyes, and the hideous carved grimace. It was made of wood, wonderfully carved, but horrible. There were golden ear-rings, and gold wire for hair and beard. But what made the head seem so like a phantom of nightmare was its enormity. It was three times the size of an ordinary human head.

But although it was so large, it was hollow and strangely light. Kai Tal lifted it, and carried it to Kwanyin. He held it high, so that he could drop it over her head.

Kwanyin drew back, her mouth agape with horror at the idea, her eyes staring and without expression, save wild fear.

"No, no. It is impossible. It is wicked. Never—"

Kai Tal made a sudden movement, and the head descended over Kwanyin, drowning her voice.

"If the clever Kwanyin should fail to frighten the impetuous, trouble-seeking and inquisitive girl Catherine, it will be much the worse for both. Go."

He took Kwanyin by the shoulders and pushed her to the head of the stairs, and then guided her down.

Kwanyin did not know where she was, but she had walked a good distance. Suddenly Kai Tal stopped her.

"Here! The door is in front of you!" he whispered. "Walk in!"

As he spoke, he draped a black cloak about her.

The cloak was splashed with phosphorescent paint, and as Kwanyin moved, it gave a strange, eerie light.

Kai Tal opened the door and slipped softly away.

Kwanyin stepped into the room, and then stopped. She turned and went

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back into the corridor, groping her way along.

If Catherine had awakened and seen that hideous face, the shock might have had a terrible effect on her, and Kwanyin wanted to spare her that.

She was disobeying Kai Tal, and it meant that by so doing she must infuriate him. But that was better by far than scaring Catherine, who had shown her kindness.

Kwanyin turned aside in the corridor, and, walking blindly, bumped against another door.

Catherine heard that bump, and awakened. She sat up in bed with a fast-beating heart, and groped for the light.

There was a switch near her bed, and she blinked in the brightness of the sudden light. It took her a moment or two to make sure that she was no longer dreaming. Then, staring towards the door, she realised that it was open.

In sudden alarm, she jumped up and pulled on her dressing-gown.

Almost at the same moment there came a scared yell from Charles.

"Help—gosh—help!"  
Catherine ran into the corridor, wondering what on earth had happened.

Charles, in his dressing-gown, stood there shaking with fright, and his hair standing on end.

"Gracious! What's wrong?" asked Catherine. "Charles, what was it?"

Charles found his hideous and gulped.

"A head—a hideous head—three times human size!" he panted. "I heard a bump on my door. I got up, looked into this corridor, and saw it!"

"A head? You were dreaming," said Catherine. "I had a horrid nightmare, too."

"I wasn't dreaming," said Charles indignantly. "It was just a head with a hideous grimace and flashing eyes. I know I wasn't dreaming! But it's gone now—"

Molly came from her room, rubbing her eyes. And Charles explained it all in greater detail. Now his imagination came to his aid, and he claimed that the head had spoken to him, that the eyes had blinked.

"Just a nightmare. I've been dreaming about an enormous Chinaman," said Molly.

At that moment there came a bump farther down the corridor, and a human gasp.

Catherine turned, and, without hesitation, ran towards the source of the sound.

But when she rounded the corner she had a shock. She saw a huge, shadowy shape in the faint light that came through the curtains from the starlit sky.

Moreover, there was a strange, flickering light below it.

Catherine could not see the head clearly, but her heart was thumping madly.

"Charles—Molly!" she called. Her feet seemed turned to lead.

But before either Charles or Molly were on the scene, the head spoke.

"Not afraid, please, not afraid," came a muffled voice. "Me Kwanyin, Kai Tal he makee me do."

Charles turned on the light, and Catherine, even though she had heard Kwanyin's voice from inside the head, was somewhat repulsed by what she saw. Charles breathed hard. His story had been proved to be true. But he was immensely glad that the head was simply a cover for Kwanyin.

"How dare you walk about like this?" he asked angrily. "You might easily have frightened my cousins."

Catherine put up her hands.

"Steady, Charles," she said. "This is Kai Tal's doing. And I can see a trick we can play—"

"We don't want to play tricks," said Charles.

"Kwanyin," said Catherine, not heeding his hint. "Does that head come off easily?"

She lifted the head and found that it was quite light. To the surprise of Charles and Molly, she then put it on her own head.

"Now the cloak," said Catherine, in muffled tones through the head. "I'm going to give Kai Tal a shock."

Kwanyin looked puzzled, as though she did not understand what Catherine intended to do. Besides, she was so eager to explain that this was not her idea that she did not concern herself much with Catherine's intentions.

But Charles did.

"Catherine, you can't do this. I forbid it. I say, you know—"

But Catherine groped her way forward in the darkness.

What will be the outcome of Catherine's daring venture? On no account miss next Saturday's enthralling chapters of this brilliant thrill-and-mystery serial. A superb photo-postcard of **JOAN BLONDELL** will be given away with every copy of next week's **SCHOOLGIRL**—so order your copy at once.



FEATURES BETTY BARTON & Co., of Morcove School Fame: A  
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# MORCOVE M in UNKNOWN AFRICA



BETTY BARTON, POLLY LINTON, NAOMER NAKARA & CO., of Morcove School, together with members of Grangemoor, 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. The expedition camps on an island, but they soon suspect that enemy natives are on their trail. Suddenly two of the Grangemoor boys—on guard—give the alarm: "We are being attacked!"

(Now read on.)

## Alarm at Dawn

"POLLY! Paula! All of you, wake up!"

"Eh? What—what—"

"The blacks! We are going to be attacked, I tell you!"

"Goodness, Betty! They're here, then, are they?"

"In the forest—on the other side of the water!"

And Betty ran out of the tent, leaving four of her Morcove chums to call anxious inquiries after her. Not a moment longer must she stay, she felt, to amplify the alarming news. Dave had told her to rouse the occupants of other tents also.

But no sooner was Betty clear of that tent in which she herself had snatched some rest, during this fateful night on the tiny island, than she realised that the whole camp was already astir.

That one rifle-shot, fired by Jimmy Cherrol, had inevitably awakened even the heaviest sleepers.

She rejoined Jimmy and Dave, who were side by side again, rifles in hand.

Betty even had some idea of taking up a gun herself to help in a desperate defence.

And then both Jimmy and Dave lowered their rifles and turned round

to speak, with calm smiles, as if no danger existed, after all.

"Sorry!" Jimmy blurted.

"What!"

"Yes, it's all right—for a bit, anyway," Dave carried on the reassuring remarks. "That noise over there just before Jimmy fired—it couldn't have meant a crowd of blacks. Listen! It's dead quiet over there now."

"Thank goodness!" gasped Betty, whilst she, like all others who were here, stared anxiously across the narrow strip of water to the dense trees on the other side. "Quiet enough now. But just then—"

"Perhaps I shouldn't have fired," Jimmy mumbled, with his usual belief that he always did the wrong thing. "But it was going on before my eyes."

"What was, Jimmy?" clamoured the fast-increasing crowd, which included the two mothers. "Explain!"

By

MARJORIE  
STANTON

Illustrated by L. Shields

"Yes, queek—queek!" shrielled Naomer. "Bekas, what ze diggings? You never know!"

"There'd certainly been one black fellow spying from amongst the trees over there," Dave said steadily.

"Jimmy and I, as Betty knows, saw him draw back, as if to go away and report to others. So I ran to tell Betty to rouse you all. Then Jimmy saw the man again."

"I saw him pounced upon by a wild beast, and—and, somehow," Jimmy blurted again, "I felt I must do my

best for the poor beggar. There was just a chance I might shoot the animal, and so the black might be saved; fetched across afterwards by some of us, only mauled, perhaps."

"So you fired?"

"Yes; I'm afraid I did."

"And if you did," exclaimed Pam's mother, suddenly smiling, "is it anything to be ashamed of, Jimmy?"

"The shot may have given us away. That's what I'm thinking now."

"My dear boy, don't you think about anything of the sort!" broke from Mrs. Cardew. "Would any of us have had you not fire? But did you hit the animal?"

He shrugged, looking as glum as ever. "I don't know. And it's impossible to tell from here. It's such thick cover over there."

"I'll swim across and get a look," Jack said cheerily. "Oh, don't stare, all of you. It's nothing—to swim those few yards!"

"But you'll be unarmed when you do get across."

"Nunno!" he blandly answered Betty's concerned cry. "I can float my rifle across. This is where you want it!" he grinned, tapping his forehead as a jesting indication of special mental powers. "As for me, I don't want a crowd watching."

"As brave as they make them!" So Betty and many of her Morcove girls were thinking in regard to Jack and the fine deed for which he was volunteering, as they now turned away to do their best in the crisis that it was.

That shot fired by Jimmy just now—pure humanity had necessitated it; but it must mean a desperate speeding up of all efforts to get away from the island.

And their only way of escape was by means of a raft that had yet to be constructed.

Some task for Morcove, that! But if

the team spirit of Morcove School counted for anything, they would not fail to accomplish it.

Half a dozen of them, next minute, were hard at work on the outer bank of the tiny island, felling trees which grew there at the water's edge.

Betty herself wielded an axe—heaviest implement of all—until she found her energies flagging. Then she let Polly have it, and took a billhook from some other chum who needed a brief breathing-space.

The chips flew right and left. Hack, chop, and hack again. Clefs in foot-thick stems grew deeper and wider, and soon one tottering tree, by its first warning c-rack, caused a darting clear by the toiling girls.

Then, with a swooshing crash, down it came, a great mass, upon whose main branches some of the girls fell to work instantly, whilst others laboured, a safe distance away, to bring down another tree.

"Look out, there!"

More lively darting to be out of the way. Crash again! So the work went on, whilst there were those who, with the camp-fire made up, boiled coffee and prepared an early morning meal that must be snatched now whilst the chance offered.

Even now, by daylight, it was impossible to tell whether the great sheet of water was a river or a lake. If the latter, then it was certainly a lake several miles in length, but only a half-mile or so wide.

In either case, the far bank had to be reached by a raft which had not yet begun to take shape even. The only alternative—to go back to the nearer bank, off which they had come in the night—was not to be considered.

Betty, pausing to fling straying hair back from her forehead after a second spell with the axe, found Dave and Tom coming across to the working party.

"Take a spell, some of you girls, now," Dave said, and took the axe from Betty. "Brekker. We chaps are free."

"Jack's back then?" Polly inferred. "Did he do any good?"

"He only found a dead leopard. Jimmy's shot must have killed it stone dead. The nigger evidently got away; crawled away, most likely. It's a pity; badly hurt he wouldn't crawl far."

"But if he has been able to struggle on, he may have got back to his party. Oh, well"—Bunny shrugged—"better get some breakfast while we can!"

From where the girls sat during the next few minutes, getting a rest that was as much needed as the food and coffee which came to hand, they could see four of the boys slopping away at that outer bank; the fifth—Jimmy—was still keeping guard on that other side, where danger at any instant might present itself.

"Wonder how soon we'll be able to get away?" voiced Tess Trelawney in between hasty sips at steaming coffee.

"Perhaps there's no need to be in such a hurry, after all," Betty suggested, for the sake of striking a cheerful note. "If there really are blacks over there in the forest, they may be lying up to wait for another night."

"Yes, there's that," Polly agreed quite blithely. "All the same, girls—"

And suddenly she was on her feet again, rest and meal alike ended. Back she went to "take on" once more—and just as eagerly all the others did the same. The boys came under orders to go and get their breakfast now. But did they obey? Not likely!

Hence the arrival of Naomer presently with a metal jug full to the brim

and some biscuits and meat, into which the lads struck their teeth whilst remaining "on the job."

And in spite of their sense of ever-present peril, how the girls laughed at sight of fat Tubby holding a biscuit sandwich at least an inch thick between his teeth, because he needed to use both hands just then for the work he was doing!

Morcove's own share in the task now became one of keeping the boys supplied with useful bits of timber stripped of all twiggly stuff.

Betty & Co. prepared by the dozen branches lopped off the felled trees in this way. The main stems themselves were, of course, put to important use; they became the framework of the raft afloat in a good depth of water. Then the larger branches—all so twisty though they were—went to form the floor.

By-and-by Betty became the first Morcovian to "go aboard," and the whole contraption seemed to wallow so heavily in the water that she wondered how on earth it was going to serve the purpose, after all.

Dave must have read an unvoiced anxiety in her looks, for he said quite confidently:

"It'll be all right."

"But there's such a crowd of us for the raft to have to take," she could not help whispering to him. "Can't make several trips, can we? Will she really bear us all, Dave?"

"Yes—the way we are going to do it."

By that "we" he meant Grangemore. Some brainy idea of the "Die-Hards," evidently! And, sure enough, wonderful things were done during the next hour to help the raft to bear up.

The boys utilised all the rubber groundsheets which formed part of the camp equipment to contrive so many watertight bags.

Each sheet was made into as big and light a bag as possible by having the four corners gathered together, with all manner of Bulky objects inside to help to form an air chamber.

In some cases there were empty pots, jugs, and enamelled cups, helping to "inflate" a waterproof bag; some chopped brushwood served splendidly to render two or three of the makeshift air chambers particularly buoyant.

The girls, as they saw one buoy after another being effectively lashed into position, were seriously impressed with the vital value of this "wheeze." It was a clever contrivance that would, they felt sure, make all the difference between success and failure. The huge raft—quite twenty-five feet long and nearly as broad—was going to take them all so long and their belongings easily.

So as long as the moment came for rushing all those belongings on to the raft.

It was getting on for midday now, and the African sun was blazing at its hottest, yet the juniors tore about as if it were a summer morning in England. The furious work of loading the raft went on, to an accompaniment of jokes and laughter.

There had been hours of such strenuous labour—a frantic working against time. Every passing minute had meant a proportionate increase of danger. All had been thinking it, but had bravely kept silent about such thoughts.

"The enemy—they must be getting nearer every minute. They must be on our track when we were bound to leave such a trail behind us in the forest."

But now the very moment was at hand for a triumphant casting off. A few more things to be bundled aboard the

raft, and then—good-bye to Morcove Island, as Betty had christened it overnight. Splendidly the island had served them during the night, but there could be no getting away over the water too soon.

"Anything to declare?" Jack jested, turning round on the raft, after dumping some of the tenting, to find Polly staggering aboard with a huge armful of kit.

"My cabin, purser?" she joked back. "A first-class."

"What?" he snorted. "Don't you know this ship's captain when you see him? Find Tabby! Zooo-omph!"—as he pretended to pull the string of a steam siren.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Last loads!" Betty joyfully announced, as she and a few others swarmed aboard with remaining armfuls. "But don't go without Jimmy."

"No, for goodness' sake!" was the chorus, although there was no apparent risk of such a thing occurring. "Jimmy!" half a dozen of them hailed him at his watch-point on the island's other side. "Ready!"

"Hurry up there, please!" Jack yelled. "Pass right down the cat! All Morcove excursionists steeage! Outside cabins for Grangemore only! Zooo-omph! Bah! Tang, tang! Shiver my timbers! Is that my old friend Sir James—school tie and all?"

And Jack, as Jimmy Cherrol came running to get aboard, playfully drew himself very erect and saluted.

Jimmy, however, had good reason for regarding this as a moment to be done with nonsense.

"They're coming!" he said, as he jumped aboard.

"What?"

"No error this time," Jimmy insisted. "I've just seen as many as fifty at least—on the main bank. And they're not exactly—friendly."

Betty and Polly were two Morcovians, who happened to be near enough to hear this said.

They felt their hearts miss a beat; saw how Jack, who had been grinning at his own fooling, changed to a fierce smile; and then—

Quick as a flash those two girls joined in the urgent task of floating the raft away from the island's bank.

## Can They Escape?

JUST in time? Or were they only to realise, before another minute had sped, that it was a case of—just too late!

That terrible uncertainty remained, even when the first desperate use of poles—kept in readiness for such a task—had enabled Morcove & Co. to punt the raft away from the bank.

Nothing could be seen of that main bank on which, according to Jimmy, hostile natives were congregated. The wooded island intervened. Nor could any outburst of savage cries be heard. There was silence, except for the weird creakings and squeakings which the rough-and-ready raft gave out, and the splash, splash, splash of those crooked poles with which she was being worked into deeper water.

But that very silence might, they all realised, portend a coming fight for life.

If the blacks, swiftly and silently, had taken to the water, knowing themselves to be capable of swimming out to the raft! What then—

"Anyway—keep at it, all," Betty said, through clenched teeth, as she herself dragged up her all-too-crooked pole

after one more furious thrust, and then plunged it down again for another hard push. "None in sight yet!"

"No—hurrah!" roared Jack. "Stick it, chaps! Shove harder. I tell you—harder! That's the stuff!"

Slowly—oh, so slowly, the unwieldy, freakish raft was kept moving. Excited eyes, as they watched for where the black heads of swimming natives were likely to be first seen, could not help noticing at the same time how the island's bank seemed to remain within mere jumping distance.

Yet it was only what they had been bound to expect—this inch-by-inch movement, when the raft itself was so like a floating island.

Another factor with which shrewd minds had reckoned was that the water would soon become too deep for further punting.

Every one of the lopped branches which had been kept aside for plying the raft away, had been left as lengthy as possible. Those which some of the sturdy lads were wielding must have been fully fifteen feet in length.

Yet already the water was becoming almost too deep for even those, the longest poles. They were going down and down, before they struck—hard rocks, sometimes, enabling a mighty thrust to be made; but more often there was only soft mud, into which a pole would sink still deeper.

Suddenly one of the girls lost her pole. It was Bunny who, with a sudden dismayed yell, had to let go, or else she would have been off the raft and left clinging to the stuck pole.

If all this had been happening during a day's fun in the summer holidays at home—what shrieks of merriment there would have been! But this was the heart of Wild Africa, and it was for their very lives, and with this hope of saving the lives of others, too, that they were all so desperately employed.

"Dash!" Polly fumed, "why isn't there a current to help us? Oh, look—look!" she gasped, next instant. "There's one of them—there, see him!"

"Ow, and there's another!" wailed Paula, at sight of the glistening, ebony head-and-shoulders of a second native.

Both men were swimming strongly, their muscular black arms making quick, clean strokes.

"O.K., boys!" Jack shouted. "A couple of 'em are nothing. If they do reach us—knock 'em on the head."

Even as this was said, however, all on board the raft became aware of a swarm of blacks on the island itself.

They came swarming to the outer bank in numbers amounting to two score at least. Their half-naked bodies glistened with water after hastily swimming the narrow channel between the island and the main bank.

Every man amongst them had brought with him either knobkerry or spear. The primitive weapons were brandished, and with sudden, menacing cries, a few of the bludgeons were hurled towards the raft.

Skillful, too! It was as much surprising as appalling to Morcove, how truly the hurled clubs were aimed. For a few moments spinning knobkerries seemed to be raining about their heads.

Paula was hit, and went down like a ninepin; but she was soon up again, little hurt.

Then a flying spear nearly touched Betty.

It flashed by within an inch of her right shoulder, striking into one of the latticed branches of the raft, stuck there, upright. A terrible reminder of the deadly skill with which the blacks could use their weapons.

What made the situation all the



A HORDE of natives suddenly appeared on the river-bank, and a second later a spear skimmed towards the raft. The attack had begun!

uglier was the likelihood of the blacks all swimming out to try to board the raft.

"Have to shoot, that's all," some of the Morcovians heard Jack say grimly. "Look out, chaps; have your guns ready."

"It's all right," Betty called out, with desperate composure. "We'll manage. We're farther out now, anyhow."

This, however, was the moment for several who had been so strenuously punting the raft away from the island to be unable to continue with that work.

Pam, Tess, Jimmy, Tubby—these four were all forced in the same instant to give up. The water was too deep.

Then Betty and Polly and Bunny were similarly balked. There remained only Jack and Dave, each with an extra-long pole, to go on thrusting with all their might.

In such a crisis as it was, Jimmy did the very right thing when he snatched up one of the rifles and, levelling it, fired.

Bang! The girls could see that he had purposely fired over the heads of the blacks on the bank, to intimidate them all. The shot certainly gave them pause. Some who obviously had been minded to dive in and swim after the raft abandoned the intention.

He reloaded, and took aim as if to shoot one of those two blacks who had swum right round from the main bank.

They instantly dived to be out of sight. Both men went under, and an oily swirling of the stagnant surface revealed their underwater swimming—to the island's bank.

"Good! Stuff to give 'em!" Polly exploded joyfully. "We've done them—beaten them!"

"With a hip-hip, all!" Betty applauded, feeling sure that triumphant shouts would further deter the blacks. "A real Morcove one, girls—"

"Hurrah!"

How they cheered—convinced that safety really was theirs again. The raft, although the water seemed quite stagnant, was drifting farther and farther out.

"I know what it is!" Jack gaily ended some puzzling about this continued drifting. "We're catching a breeze now we're farther out!"

"But we've no sail, goop!" Polly wretchedly commented.

"Goop yourself!" her brother retorted. "Aren't we all standing up, offering enough resistance to the breeze? But it's not enough!" he roared, a skipper to the life. "All hands to the mainmast, there! Come on, you sons of guns!"

"Ay, ay, air!" Tom suitably responded.

Method in Jack's madness—as was so often the case!

Instantly, most of the girls were every bit as active as the boys, the idea being to fix up a mast and contrive to spread a sail.

There was one of the "punt-poles" to serve as a mast. As for a sail, a few yards of tenting would serve admirably.

"The last of the wind-jammers!" Bunny joked, when the mast was up, well "for'ard." "A bit clothes-proppy—but still!"

"Not a word against a boat bearing such a name!" Betty protested. "The Morcove Belle!"

"Ooo! Gorjus name for her, yes!" Naomer yelled. "Bekas eet will bring us luck, you see! What ze diggings, we are as safe as ze houses already! And so I zink we ought to have a hand-roud, to celebrate!"

"Hungry again!" Polly snorted at the dusky one. "But don't think there's going to be a hot dinner, anyhow. Even if the dixies weren't helping to serve as floats, we couldn't light a fire without setting the jolly old ship alight!"

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## WHISPERS from the DEN

**M**Y DEAR READERS.—Three more superb photo-postcards of your favourite film stars are to be given away with THE SCHOOLGIRL. With your copy next Saturday you will receive the autographed postcard of

JOAN BLODELLE,

and with subsequent issues cards of Robert Donat and Myrna Loy will be presented.

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Skill determined to win success, to shine in the limelight, the Firebrand of the Fourth thinks she sees a new way of achieving her ambition. But, alas! Diana's plans do not all turn out as she hopes, with the result that— But read for yourselves what happens in next week's enthralling story, the title of which is:

### "DIANA THE DEFIANT."

Ililde Richards is the author of this stirring tale, which also features Barbara Redfern & Co. Make sure you don't miss it—by ordering your SCHOOLGIRL at once.

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So take my tip and order your copy right away!

With best wishes,

YOUR EDITOR.

P.S.—My very-nearly-grown-up niece Claudine—whom many of you will remember—sends you all her best wishes. Chum does too—or so I gather from his exuberant barking! I hope to be able to write about them in my Chat in the very near future.

## Into Darkness Unknown!

**T**HE makeshift sail, so cleverly rigged up, caught more and more of the breeze. After their days and nights in the airless forest, it was a real treat to be out here on such an expanse of open water, over which a gentle wind passed.

Soon the Morcove Belle was more than half-way across.

Now it was the far bank of the wide stretch of water which all on board the raft were intently watching. A landing there—what revived hopes and fresh activities it was going to mean!

Instead of more forest, there was open country over there. It appeared to be of the true "bush" type—a mixture of rank grass and tough scrub, broken up by outcrops of rock. Rough going! But somehow they felt confident of getting on much faster than the forest had ever allowed them to do.

In any case, from their landing-place at that far bank, it promised to be but a couple of days of marching to the Kwamba country, their longed-for journey's end, because, once among the Kwamba tribe, they could rely upon being amongst friends!

Never for a moment had they doubted that, nor were they going to doubt now. In their possession was the "Ankh" necklace, an object capable of working like a magic charm upon the Kwambas.

"Another thing, don't forget," came from Betty, at her blithest. "This wide river, or long lake, or whatever it is, may prevent that Dupont rotter and his blacks from keeping quite so close upon our heels as they have been. We turned to and jolly soon made this raft. It's not so certain that Dupont will be able to get those blacks of his to do the same."

"He may even lose his hold on 'em, because they don't care to leave the forest," Jack hopefully argued. "In which case, he'll be in a cleft stick—and serve him right! I mean about his captives—Mr. Willoughby, and Madge's father, and our own Kwamba Johnny. If the Frenchman leaves those three in the hands of the blacks, then he'll have to come on, alone, the rest of the way to Kwamba."

"I can't see Dupont caring to do that," Dave quietly joined in the debate. "More likely he will be forced to come to terms with his three prisoners. So as to get them to help him make a raft and cross with him—"

"In which case, why, they'll not be really his prisoners any longer!" Bunny sparkled. "Anything they do will be as much for their own good as his—more, in fact!"

"That's it," Betty nodded and smiled. "Whenever it suits their convenience they'll be able to walk away from him! And so they'll turn up safely at Kwamba, quite likely, soon after we have got there. And then—hurrah!—we shall be able to have a go at solving the secret of the Golden Grotto!"

Then came, at long last, the joyful landing. So hard up against the bank did they finally bring the raft, indeed, that they could even jump ashore. No wading—not even the wetting of a single foot!

And yet, after all, they stayed only a few minutes on land, returning then to the raft for a much-needed rest and a meal. It seemed advisable to use the raft for this purpose, in case natives should drop up on this side of the water, to threaten trouble.

But in the late afternoon they could start their march across country which

had not yet provided any sign of tribal life.

Pam Willoughby glanced round to see who had the glasses, and found that Jimmy was using them. He had stopped for a few moments to spy out the face of the distant Kwamba Mountains, which towered still many a mile away. So Pam went up to him.

"Anything special, Jimmy? Signs of life over there?"

"None, Pam. But I have seen a kind of precipice, which may be the 'heap big' cliff our Kwamba told us about. Care to look?"

Pam, taking the glasses, first used them to bring the mountains all so much closer. She soon saw Jimmy's precipice, and she spent a half-minute trying to get the glasses to show her, perhaps, a chiselled device upon that vast wall of rock. If that were Kwamba's heap big cliff, then it was there that exploring Egyptians, thousands of years ago, had carved the emblem of the two hawks facing each other, thus marking the site of the Golden Grotto!

But she could not detect any mark made by the hand of man, powerful though the lenses were.

Then Pam walked out to where a mound of rocks offered a good viewpoint. By doing this, she was dropping behind all others in the party, with the exception of Jimmy, who kept with her, in his usual, devoted way.

Suddenly it seemed to him that she had slipped, and was falling, because of an insecure footing. She had tumbled heavily, as if a bit of rock had slipped or rolled from under her.

Then, as he quickly reached to help her up again, he saw with horror that she was gripped about one of her ankles by a great, dark hand.

A black man, lying snake-like amongst the rocks, had snatched at her like this! Had pulled her down, and was meaning to bear her off.

Jimmy saw Pam, already struggling, looking up at him with eyes full of mute appeal.

With a desperate action Jimmy swung his rifle up above his head, intending to bring it down—club fashion—on the negro's head; but even as he brought it down he himself was gripped about an ankle by some other enemy hand. It was his turn to be overthrown, pulled down, overpowered!

He fell heavily still retaining his grasp of the rifle, and instantly a black figure was on top of him. There was a mangling weight to keep struggling Jimmy pressed flat upon his back, and a black hand was clapped over his mouth.

"Jimmy!" Pam was able to cry out at last, but only faintly. "Jimmy—help!"

But no answer came, and it was for her to realise that he—a chum who would so gladly have given his life for hers at any time—was able to do nothing for her now.

And so, when she called out once again: "Jimmy!" it was only in a piteous tone, for she knew that he was likely to meet with a fate no less cruel than the one which wild Africa now had in store—for her!

Captured! Prisoners in the heart of widest Africa—not knowing what terrible fate may be in store for them! You will be longing to know what happens to Pam and Jimmy, so do not fail to read next Saturday's magnificent instalment of this fine serial. Order your SCHOOLGIRL now—and make sure of securing the beautiful photo-postcard of JOAN BLODELLE.