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An incident from

## **"DIANA THE DEFIANT,"**

the enthralling long complete  
Cliff House School story which  
appears inside.

# A Grand Long Complete Cliff House School Story, Featuring Diana Royston-Clarke

By **HILDA RICHARDS**

Illustrations by T. Laidler



# DIANA THE DEFIANT

Won By Trickery

"Oh, rabbits!"  
"But it's true!"  
"I don't believe it."  
"Well, I tell you—"

And Bessie Bunter, the plump, bespectacled duffer of the Fourth Form at Cliff House, stared wrathfully at the group of girls who were clustered in Study No. 4 along the Fourth Form passage. "I tell you it is true!" she insisted. "Diana Royston-Clarke is playing the lead in the film at the Enterprise studios."

But still Barbara Redfern, captain of the Fourth, looked unconvinced. Tomboy Clara Trevelyn, the redoubtable games captain of the Lower School, openly sniffed.

Even gentle Marjorie Hazeldene smiled, shaking her head as if in reproach at Bessie; while Lella Carroll, the elegant American junior, put one hand to the side of her head, wagged it at the furious fat one, and grimaced.

Jemima Carstairs, the sixth member of the party, merely put her monocle to her eye and surveyed the informer with a stare that should have broken that gold-rimmed ornament to fragments.

For, of course, Bessie, as usual, had got hold of the wrong end of the stick. Nobody doubted that.

The film to which she referred—"The Rebel Sister"—now in production at the neighbouring Enterprise studios, had certainly caused something of a furore at Cliff House School, and certainly, in the first place, the haughty, overbearing Diana Royston-Clarke, the Firebrand of the Fourth Form, had been one of the leading candidates for the title role.

But Diana, in her ruthless efforts to win that part, had so thoroughly disgraced herself that she was now considered as having completely sacrificed her chances.

Jean Cartwright, the Scots member of the Junior School, had been put out of the running by Diana, and the part had finally fallen upon Mabel Lynn, the chairwoman of the Junior School Amateur Dramatic Society, who at that

**BECAUSE** she has been forbidden by her father to act in the film, Diana is resolved to defy him and to achieve the ambition which is so dear to her heart. But the Firebrand's schemes recoil unexpectedly on her own head, as you will see when you read these exciting chapters.

moment was in the school sanatorium suffering from a broken wrist, the result of an accident in yesterday's thunder-storm. Mabs, indeed, had already appeared in the first scenes of the film.

"But it can't be true," Babs said. "If Mabs can't play the part, then Jean will get it again—that's practically an understood thing. And I, for one, am jolly glad she'll get it," she went on warmly. "We all know how Jean is situated since her mother lost her money. There's two hundred pounds going with the part in the film, and a whacking contract afterwards. If Jean doesn't get that—"

"If Jean doesn't get it," Clara Trevelyn piped in, "then Jean will have to leave Cliff House. But, anyway, Fatima, where did you get this prize information?"

"From Jean herself," Bessie Bunter said.

"Eh?"

"I said, from Jean herself." And Bessie's eyes gleamed. "Now perhaps you'll believe me, you doubting jack-ass!" she said warmly. "Jean herself told me this morning when I asked her if she were coming on the picnic tomorrow. She said she couldn't, as she was going along with Diana to the studios, you know."

"What? To watch Diana act?"

"Yes, of course!" Bessie glowered. "You see, there's been an accident at the studios. All the film which has been shot with Mabs in it has been ruined, so Diana's got the part."

"Which," a voice at the door drawled, "is true for once, Fatima. May I come in, Barbara?"

And, without waiting for the invitation, in strolled the Firebrand herself, followed closely by a tall, good-looking junior whose face was rather pale and bore manifest traces of recent strain.

"Quite true, old things!" And Diana, with a nod, smiled round at them all. "Bit of a shock—what? Come in, Jean, old top!"

Jean Cartwright came in, glancing rather hesitantly at the crowd. For some reason she flushed, biting her lip.

"Jean—is it true?" Babs asked bluntly.

Jean nodded without replying.

"But—but—" And Babs looked dazed. "Oh, my hat!" she got out. "How did it happen? We thought for sure, now that Mabs is crooked, that you would get the part."

Again Jean flushed. Uncomfortably she looked away.

"Well, it—it is true," she persisted.

"But how did they come to pass you over?"

"Because," Diana broke in, with a

sneer, "they preferred me. Isn't it plain? I wanted the part, you see. I asked for it. I'm entitled to it, especially as my father, the Mayor of Lantham, is one of the financial bigwigs at the studios. Apart from which," she added drawlingly, but here shot a look of quick warning at the Scots girl, "the film already made has been destroyed, owing, I gather, to a bottle of acid falling on it during yesterday's thunderstorm. Isn't that Jean?"

Again Jean, as if almost against her will, nodded. For once she seemed to be tongue-tied.

"And so—there you are!" And triumphantly, mockingly, Diana beamed at them. "To-morrow afternoon we start—" And she turned as the door opened and Mary Buller of the Sixth Form appeared. "Yes, Mary? Want me?" she asked pleasantly.

"I don't—headmistress does! It goes at once," Mary returned in that laconic way of hers. "Back up!"

Diana rose, with a sigh and a smile. Very pretty she looked in that moment, her startling mass of blonde hair forming a frame for her magnetic face, which could be so strikingly beautiful when she was in her best temper.

As if conscious of her attraction, she passed a hand over her hair, flicked a non-existent speck of dust from the extremely well-tailored tweed coat she wore, and, again beaming at them all, sauntered out.

Jean stood hesitant.

"I think I'll go, too, if you don't mind," she said. "I've a letter to write."

How unhappy she looked in contrast to the smiling, confident, and triumphant Diana!

"No, Jean, wait a minute." And Babs stepped forward. Impulsively she laid a hand on the Scots girl's arm, looking up into her face. "Jean, can I have a word with you?" she asked quietly.

Jean looked uneasy.

"Here!"

"Well, in your study, if you like. You don't mind, do you, girls?"

"I guess not."

So Jean and Babs left the room arm in arm. Along to Study No. 8, which the Scots girl shared with Diana and Gwen Cook, they went. Fortunately the study was empty at that moment, and Barbara, closing the door, turned and faced her chum.

"Jean, what is it?" she asked directly. "Something funny is happening, old girl. Something I can't get a hang of. I know how desperately you wanted that job at the studios. With Mabs crooked I should have thought it was yours for the asking. Why have you let Diana take it?"

Jean winced.

"Oh, Babs—"

"Please, Jean!" Babs went up to her. Her heart smote her at the expression of misery in the other's face. "Jean, you know I'm your friend—we're all your friends. We've tried to get you that job. Yes, even Mabs intended that you should have it. She only took it on herself because she wanted you to have it, and to keep Diana out of it. You're not telling me now that you still don't want it?"

Again Jean bit her lip. Her eyes were moody, despairing. If Babs wanted an answer, the expression which shone in the other's face provided it.

Easy to see that Jean still longed to go on the films. Easy to see that she would have given everything she possessed for the glorious chance which now, apparently without effort, she had allowed Diana to take.

For a moment she did not reply. She

stood gazing with hard eyes through the window.

Oh, how could she tell Babs? Babs, this splendid chum of hers! Babs, who had done so much for her! How could she tell Babs that she could have had that part if she had wanted it—that Diana had got it, not by honest methods, but by trickery!

But she couldn't. Honour, gratitude bound her to Diana. Diana, the Fire-brand—that strange, double-natured girl, who could be so generous and gentle one moment, so ruthless and unscrupulous the next.

Diana had helped her. Diana had already found her a job for when she left school. But more than that, Diana it was who had saved her mother's life by prevailing upon her wealthy and influential father to send her to the South of France.

"Jean, do you?" Babs pressed.

Jean flung round.

"I did, yes," she said. "But what's the use? I can't have it. I can't! Oh, Babs, you don't understand! You don't, and—and I can't tell you. But Diana"—she shook her head—"Diana's been so frightfully decent to me, and—and—Babs, please don't question me!" she almost pleaded. "Don't! I—I can't explain. Let Diana have the part."

Babs stood still.

She had the measure of the situation now. Still she did not understand, but she had more than an inkling. Like Jean, out of gratitude and loyalty, to step aside for Diana. Well, it wasn't just going to happen.

Back to Study No. 4 she went. There she put her head in at the door. The five girls stared round.

"Clara, Leila," Babs said, "come out in the corridor, will you?"

Rather mystified, Clara and Leila came into the passage.

"Well," Clara demanded, "what's the giddy secret?"

"There's no secret," Babs said—"at least, not yet. But there's something I don't quite get the hang of—about Jean and Diana. Jean's still desperately keen to take that part at the studios, but Diana's bagged it. She gave me the impression that she's holding back out of some sort of loyalty to Diana. She won't help herself."

Clara frowned.

"Well, what can we do?"

"We," Babs stated, "can do a lot—I hope. We're going to start doing it right away. We're still Jean's chums. It's up to us to stand by her, in spite of Diana. Jean wants that contract and the two hundred pounds. She needs them both urgently, desperately. It's a matter of her whole future. Diana only wants it, as we know, because she can preen herself in the limelight and give herself airs as a film star. Everything else in the world that a girl could possibly want, she's got. Of the two, Jean is far and away the better actress. Of the two Langley Runniman, the producer on the film, would prefer Jean. Well, we're going—we're going now—to see Langley Runniman himself!"

"Good wheeze!" Clara voted. "You mean, ask him if he can give the part to Jean, after all?"

"That's the idea."

"Sort of taking all the responsibility off from Jean's own shoulders," Leila interrupted. "Gee, yes, I guess that's the wheeze. Well, I'm with you, I guess. Lead on, sister!"

And Babs led on. She led the way first to the cloak-room. There the three of them donned hats and macintoshes—



"I DON'T care twopence about this rotten school!" Diana fired up. "I'm going on the films!" Her father's grey eyes glistened.

"And I say, Diana, that you are NOT going on the films," he snapped. "I absolutely forbid it!"

for it was raining slightly outside—and with determined steps set off towards the studios.

Half an hour later they reached them. The commissionaire, who knew them, let them in at the gates without question. Outside the entrance of Studio No. 1, Babs paused.

"Now, careful!" she said. "Leave me to do the talking."

"O.K.!"

The three stepped in, blinking a little in the dimness after the bright daylight outside.

Down the corridor Babs stepped, pushing open a door covered with green baize, and entering through that into the big main studio.

For a moment they stood gazing round, looking for the producer, who usually operated within this studio. It was as they hesitated that a man issued from the shadows near by. He paused at sight of them.

"Why," he cried, "isn't it Miss Barbara Redfern?"

And Babs, looking up, found her face flooding with colour.

For the man who was smiling down at her was not Langley Rynniman, the producer. It was Rupert Royston-Clarke, the Mayor of Lantham, and father of Diana, the Firebrand of the Fourth!



### The Amazing Firebrand

"WELL, Barbara?" And Mr. Royston-Clarke be a man o' down at her. He was a tall, thick-set man, with a grizzled iron-grey moustache, and blue eyes very reminiscent of his daughter's. They were smiling now with a kindly light, but they could be, as Babs well knew, hard and flint-like on occasions.

"This is a pleasure! Haven't seen you for months," he said. "How are you? And Clara and Leila?"

They shook hands. Certainly Mr. Royston-Clarke seemed pleased to see them. Certainly he seemed pleased with everything to-day. He had a sheaf of papers in his hands. A glance of the most cursory nature told Babs that it was a balance-sheet.

That plainly accounted for his pleasure. For Mr. Royston-Clarke, beside being the Mayor of Lantham, was an influential financial director of the studios.

"Brought Diana with you?" he said jovially.

Babs bit her lip.

"No, Mr. Royston-Clarke."

"Nor Jean—Jean Cartwright, I mean," he added, noticing Babs' start of surprise. "Nice girl, Jean. I only met her the other day. Diana brought her over to lunch. We had a business talk about—well"—he paused—"perhaps I'm giving secrets away. Is Jean a friend of yours?"

"Oh, yes, rather!" Babs said.

"You know about her—her—"

"Her mother?" Babs put in quietly. "Yes, we know about that." She eyed him askance however, wondering at the nature o' that business talk, details of which neither Diana nor Jean had divulged. "We all feel frightfully sorry about it. It seems so awfully beastly that it should happen just now. I suppose Jean told you that she would have to get a job if she didn't land this contract?" she added.

"Contract?" His eyes opened. "What contract? But I gave Jean a

job—at least, I promised her one. Didn't Diana tell you? Jean, when she leaves school, is coming to me as my assistant-secretary in Lantham. But look here, I'm detaining you. You didn't come here to see me, I know. Do you want anyone?"

"Yes, please, we came to see Mr. Rynniman."

"Then," the mayor said ruefully, "I'm afraid you're in for a disappointment. Mr. Rynniman has gone into Lantham, and won't be back for two hours. Still, if there's anything I can do for you—" He broke off with an inviting smile. "But come along with me," he added, in that usual brisk way of his. "Come into my office. I expect you could do with a cup of tea, couldn't you? I'm just about to have tea, and perhaps you'd like to wait."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Royston-Clarke!"

He led the way across the studios. Babs, Clara, and Leila glanced a little glumly at each other. It seemed that their errand was doomed to failure after all.

Into his office they went—a luxurious apartment, indeed, furnished in ebony and mahogany.

He drew chairs for them, took a seat with them, and when tea and cakes had been handed round, beamed again.

"Well, here we are," he said. "Tell me if you would like anything else. I'm really pleased that you've come, and I'm glad indeed to know that you are friends of Jean. I've been thinking a lot about that girl since I met her. Fine type! Nice girl. Glad that Diana has a friend like her. I don't know if I can do anything for you, Barbara. The financial directors and the producing directors are on rather different planes even in the studio, you know. But if you would like to tell me your troubles, I'll see. There's just a possibility—"

Babs shook her head. Anxious as they were to right the wrong which they felt Diana had done to Jean, they could hardly give the game away to the Firebrand's own father. Obvious it was that Mr. Royston-Clarke knew nothing at all about the matter which was pressing upon their own minds. Babs bit her lip.

"I'm afraid it is not in your province, Mr. Royston-Clarke," she said.

"But you can tell me, surely. What is this about Jean and a contract? I'd no idea, I assure you, that she was thinking of taking up film work as a career."

Then he paused, glancing at them sharply, perhaps discerning in their uneasy attitude that they were desperately trying to conceal something.

"But wait a minute," he added more thoughtfully. "Now I come to think of it, Rynniman did mention Jean—and Diana! I'm afraid I wasn't paying much attention at the time. I was busy."

He shot a sudden question:

"Barbara, how does Diana come to be mixed up in this?"

More crimson than ever did Babs become.

"Oh, Mr. Royston-Clarke, please don't trouble."

"But I do trouble!" He frowned. Obviously he was suspicious now; obviously he scented that they were withholding something from him. "Please," he said, "excuse me a moment!" And in that brisk, business-like way of his he stepped to the door and went out, leaving the three glancing in confusion at each other. In two minutes he was back. His face was grim.

"So that's it, is it?" he said. "I've

just been talking to Rynniman's assistant director. I admire you, Barbara, for not speaking out against Diana, but I wish I had known this before." So Diana wishes to deprive Jean of her chance in the film, does she?

"Oh, Mr. Royston-Clarke—"

He waved Babs impatiently aside.

"Thank you, Barbara!" His eyes narrowed a little. "Do not reproach yourself. I was bound, of course, to find it out. I must have been blind not to have realised it before. But Jean—Diana!" His lips pursed. "What does Diana want to act in a film for? Taking the livelihood out of another girl's hands. But the matter shall be put right! I'd like Jean to have the part. Diana; most certainly—" He took a turn up the room, and then flung round again, pressing a bell on his table.

The page-boy appeared.

"Send my secretary to me!" he ordered.

The page-boy withdrew. The secretary a capable-looking woman of middle-age, appeared.

"Miss Howard," he said, "I am going out. When Mr. Rynniman comes in, will you tell him from me that my daughter Diana is in no circumstances to act in 'The Rebel Sister.' I don't know if he has an alternative arrangement, but you might mention, without desiring to interfere in his business, that I should like him to consider Jean Cartwright of Cliff House for the part. That is all, I think," and he nodded curt dismissal, while Barbara, her face alight, sprang to her feet.

"No, no, don't thank me, Barbara, please!" he said testily. "I'm annoyed—very!" He flung upon her, "I'm going to Cliff House," he said. "Now, at once! Can I give you girls a lift in my car?"

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Royston—" "Then let us go," he said impatiently.

"A HAND, Jean, a hand," Diana Royston-Clarke called laughingly, and kicked on the panels of the door of Study No. 8 boisterously. "I'm loaded."

Jean Cartwright, standing by the window, came out of the brown study into which she had been plunged, with a start. She crossed the floor and pulled open the door.

Diana, rosy-cheeked, eyes alight, stood on the threshold, one great cardboard box under one arm, another of similar dimensions under the other. A third hung by its string from the fingers of her left hand, and a fourth—a small box wrapped in brown paper—dangled from the fingers of her right. Jean blinked.

"Why, goodness gracious, Diana, what have you got there?"

"Flowers," Diana chuckled. "Flowers for the merry old invalid, Mabel Lynn. That's what Primmy wanted me for. Apparently she intercepted the parcels when the florist's boy delivered them. A lecture, of course, on my usual extravagant spending, and so forth. But who cares about Primmy?" And she laughed again. "Open the boxes, Jean."

Jean stood astounded.

"But I thought you didn't like Mabel Lynn."

"Oh, I didn't, but I do now!" Diana nodded coolly. "I'm sorry, really. Awfully tough luck breaking a wrist. Oh, I'll own I had no love for her when she was up against me. But that's washed out now, Jean."

Jean stared, amazed, bewildered at

the peculiar complexities of the girl who stood before her.

"Diana! This perplexing Diana, who could be so generous, so sympathetic, yet who, when her mood was crossed, could be like a tigress unleashed.

Never, never would she understand Diana, she despairingly told herself, thought in this mood her heart irresistibly warmed towards her.

Not many days ago she herself had been at daggers drawn with this same Diana. She felt then that she hated her. Now—she felt amazed at herself. Wonderful Diana! Irresistibly, almost, she was going to love the girl.

"There!" Diana laughed. "Isn't that gorgeous?" And gorgeous it was—a bouquet fit for a queen, Jean thought. "Now, Jean, you take the chocolates—don't say they came from me. You just give them to her while I present the flowers. Ready?"

Bouquet in arms, she flung the door open. Jean, clutching the chocolates, followed her.

What a girl, Jean sighed again, and found herself thinking of Diana's generosity to her. How could she ever thank her—this girl who had fixed up her future for her, who had saved her mother's life.

And who had robbed her of her chance on the films!

But no, that wasn't fair! But it was true. Hateful, hateful to think such thoughts of this girl, so obviously now, bent upon doing everything in her power to make things up to her.

She owed Diana everything—yes, everything, she fiercely told herself. What was a film career compared with her mother's health? A steady, good job which, if it wouldn't make her fortune, would, at least, prevent her from suffering want when her school career ended.

Yet—and there again was that ache in Jean's heart—wistful yearning as she thought of the film career she had given up out of her generosity and her loyalty to this girl.

That hurt. It couldn't possibly do anything but hurt. But, after all, Diana was going to give her the two hundred pounds.

She didn't want it. Diana insisted upon her taking it, however—when she had earned it. Diana only wanted the honour, the glory, and the limelight.

Now here they were at the sanatorium door. Mrs. Twissites, the matron, blinked at astonishment when the flowers, almost hiding Diana, waved before her vision.

"Yes, Miss Lynn is in bed," she said, "reading and simply chafing with inactivity. She'd love to see you. Come in!"

In they went. There was Mabs, one arm in a sling, a book listlessly propped up with the aid of her knees on the coverlet in front of her.

"Well, well," Diana cried, "and here we are! Enter the garden of roses, to say nothing of the lilies. And how, Mabs," she added, playfully, "is the old wrist doing this morning? Shall I put these on the table, or would you like them by the window?"

Mabs stared. "They're not for me?" "But they are, every tiny petal," Diana gaily assured her. "On the table, eh? You'll get their fragrance better there. There, now"—and she dumped them in a vase. With a few deft, careless flicks of her fingers, opened them out so that they gracefully fell apart, nodding smiling and colourful heads above the edge of the vase. "Like them, Mabs?"

Mabs' eyes gleamed. "Did you buy them?"

"I did, with my own little money," Diana declared. "Now, now, Mabs, no churlishness, please! The past is wiped out. This is a sort of peace offering. Jean's forgiven me, so you've got to forgive me, too. Jean, forward to the chocolates, please, and then draw up chairs and let's relieve Mabs' boredom. Now, Mabs, let me rack my brains for the latest Cliff House scandal."

of confidence, "I don't like to be at loggerheads with Mabs. She's quite a decent sort, really. I have been a bit of a pig to her, but I couldn't help it.

"Well, here we are!"—as they reached the door of Study No. 8, and Diana boisterously flung it open. "And, I say—" She went off into a perfect shriek of delight. "Why, it's Curmudge! The old popskins himself! What the dickens, Curmudge?"



"JEAN, did you do Diana's lines?" Miss Primrose asked. The Scots girl was silent; for how could she admit that she had tried to shield the Firebrand?

Mabs smiled. Impossible not to smile at Diana when she was like this. Infectious her manner, her interest, her laughter! Amusing the way she had of relating anecdotes.

Such silliness she talked. But it did a world of good to Mabs. She didn't like Diana, and had never made any secret of the fact. But even she fell under her spell during that half-hour.

She felt quite cheered up when, at the end of half an hour, Diana and Jean took their farewells.

No mention of the film. Nothing at all. Mabs was completely in the dark about the latest developments, though she did once or twice sense the misery which Jean was so very valiantly trying to hide.

"See you to-morrow," Diana called from the door. "Meantime, keep the old pecker up, Mabs. Yoicks, look at the time! Tea, and I declare I'm absolutely famished. This way, Jean! Your turn to go down to the tuckshop to get in supplies. Bye-bye, Mabs!"

"Bye-bye!" Mabs smiled. A gay, careless wave of the hand, and they were gone. Diana, in the corridor, chuckled.

"Well, that's that," she said. "Silly old Mabs! Didn't want to take them at first, did she? But she's all right now. You know, Jean," she added in a burst

Her father, standing by the fireplace, his hands behind his back, frowned.

"I am here, Diana—" he began ominously.

"Yoicks, and how!" Diana laughed. "Well, don't look like an old boiled owl about it! What a face to put on to see your one-and-only well-beloved. What is the matter?" she added, staring.

"You," he said. "Well, naturally," she agreed, with a shrug, "as I'm the only interest you have at Cliff House—"

His lips compressed. "Diana," he said quietly, "I want to talk to you."

His eyes travelled past her to the embarrassed Jean, standing by the door as if she contemplated flight.

"Jean, will you put on your hat and coat and go to Mr. Runniman's office at the film studios at once? I think he will be waiting to see you. Please," he added as Jean, disposed to ask questions, hesitated. "At once!"

"But—" Diana stared. "Here, what's this?"

"You," her father flintily informed her, and Diana stared at him, aware now that something was dreadfully wrong, "will stay here. As I said, I want to talk to you."

He nodded dismissal to Jean, then

strode to the door. He closed it, turned back, and the two Royston-Clarke's financier and Firebrand-faced each other.



### To Spite Her Father

THE arched eyebrows of Diana came down in a frown. Gone now was her mood of happy, flamboyant gaiety. Gone that merry smile. She sensed strife in the air, and in a rush had called up her reserves to meet it. She said:

"Well, all this is a bit dramatic, Curmudge. I take back what I said about you not being a good film star. That was managed beautifully. But why the fireworks?"

His lips compressed. "I've come," he stated distinctly, "to see you about this film business. Why didn't you tell me, Diana, that you had persuaded Rummiman to give you the lead in 'The Rebel Sister'?"

"Oh, that!" And Diana laughed. "Is that all?" she asked. "Well, why didn't I, now?" she asked tantalizingly. Why should I anyway? I wanted to keep it up my sleeve, perhaps—perhaps I wanted to get the glory first and spring it as a surprise on you afterwards. Still, I don't see that's anything to look grim about!"

His face did not soften. "It is nothing to you that if you hadn't worked your way into the part, Jean Cartwright would have had it?"

"And who told you about that?"

"Never mind," he said. "I know, Diana"—and he gazed at her seriously—"is that playing the game?" he asked. "Is that what friendship means to you? Don't glare! I know the circumstances. You know that Jean has been reduced practically to poverty. You know that out of a false sense of loyalty—of friendship—towards you she has let you step in and take this part, when all the time her own heart is yearning for it."

Diana tossed her head. Her face was white now.

"And I know," she said bitterly, "that you are an interfering busybody. Well"—her eyes seemed to flame—"what of it? Yes, what of it?" she demanded passionately. "I've made it up to her, haven't I? I've found her a job. It was through me that you sent her mother to the South of France. I'm going to hand the cheque I shall get for my work on the films to her. Isn't that anything?"

"Less," he told her, "than nothing. Your generosity, Diana, has been flaunted at my expense. I'm glad to see, at least, that you have some sense of responsibility in this matter, but I tell you now, finally, that it's not going on. What do you want with acting on the films?"

"And what," Diana defiantly retorted, "do you want with making money? What did you want to be Mayor of Lantham for? To gratify your own vanity. Well, I'm just made like that, too!" she stormed on. "I've got ambitions. I don't want money, but I do want to be someone. I want to get on the films. I want to be a star!"

"And to do that," he said, without emotion, "you would rob a girl you call your friend?"

"That's bunkum! It's not doing Jean any harm!"

"But it is!" His eyes narrowed. "Diana, I've told you I've found out things. If Rummiman had a free choice, he'd choose Jean. She's a better actress

than you. That film will make Jean, and you know it. If she does well in it—and I hope to goodness she does!—then there's a contract waiting for her for another film of a similar nature—a film that's going to put thousands of pounds on to the profit sheet of the Enterprise. I don't know how you've done it, but I tell you, egad, that if I'd known all this was going on before I met Barbara Redfern this afternoon

I—"

In a flash Diana caught at the name. Her sneer was devastating.

"So that was the little traitress who gave you all this information!" "Barbara did not give me that information!" He drew himself up. "I discovered the facts for myself—although Barbara certainly knew something of what had happened. Barbara, without professing what you profess to feel for Jean, is very anxious to help her. Now please," he added appealingly, "be sensible. Look at things in the right light. Diana—"

Diana turned mutinously away. "Diana!" he said more sharply.

She turned, her face flaming, mutinous. But she fell back a little at the look she saw in his face.

"Diana!" He spoke grudgingly. "This has gone far enough! I won't have it! You understand, Diana? I want you to be a credit to the family—not the disgrace you are being at the moment!"

Diana sulkily shrugged.

"You talk of wanting to be somebody—of wanting glory!" He eyed her bitterly. "Has it never occurred to you," he asked scathingly "that you can be a somebody without getting such crazy dangerous notions in your head, as you've got at the moment? If you want to be somebody, why not seize your opportunities here? If you want to be an actress, why not find your own niche in the school Amateur Dramatic Society?"

Tempestuously Diana was on her feet.

"I don't want to be a good little milkop!" she flamed out. "I don't care a hang about this rotten school! I'm going on the films!"

"Diana!"

"And that's my final word!" she flung at him.

"I see!" His eyes gleamed. He picked up his hat. "And this is my final word, Diana!" he flung back. "You won't go on the films! I'm going to the studios now. I'm going to give orders that you're not to be admitted, even through the gates. But before I do that, I'm going to Miss Primrose, and I'm going to tell her to keep an extra special eye on you, and chain you down to the discipline you need!"

Again Diana furiously turned, kicking the cushion that lay in her path across the study. It hit against the mantelpiece and swept a vase with flowers in it from the shelf. They came cascading over the carpet, but Diana did not even notice.

"Diana, good-bye!" her father said. Diana coldly shrugged one shoulder and deliberately turned her back.

There was an instant's pause. Behind her the door slammed.

At that Diana jumped round. She stared at the door, now tightly shut.

Curmudge—her father—he so usually so sensible, so ready as a rule to fall in with her whims, so easy to be persuaded or cajoled—had turned his back upon her!

Something like a lump rose in Diana's throat. Instinctively she took a step towards the portal he had closed, then she stiffened.

Pride—that haughty, flaming, mutinous pride which had so often

been her downfall in the past—rose up to arrest her, to send that turbulent heart of hers bursting in a new storm.

Hang him! Hang Cliff House! Hang Jean!

Jean—her teeth came together. Jean had—

But Jean hadn't! No, no, no! Jean was loyal; Jean was true-blue. This mischief was not of her making.

Diana trembled in the access of the passion that was upon her, feeling suddenly, desperately that she had got to work it off on someone. She would work it off! Despite what her father had told her, she still felt furious with Babs—still believed that the Form captain had had something to do with all that had happened.

Crash! The door flung open.

Thud, thud, thud! And Diana, her anger overwhelming her, stamped off down the corridor.

Study No. 4 was reached. Crash! In went the door, and in stormed Diana.

Barbara and Bessie Bunter, at tea, looked up, struck into involuntary silence at the expression on the Firebrand's face.

"Why—"

"Look out!" shrieked Bessie. Not a word did Diana utter. Three strides took her towards the table. One end of the table she gripped, then—up it flew!

Crash! Clatter! as the crockery fell to the floor. Up from Bessie Bunter went a fendish howl as the teapot emptied its contents into her lap. And back went Bessie, her head enveloped in a flood of jam tarts, one of which clung stickily to the left lens of her spectacles.

Up jumped Babs.

"Diana—"

"That," Diana said, between her teeth, "is to teach you not to meddle in my affairs!"

"But—"

But Diana, with one bitter, contemptuous look, flung towards the door.

"Diana!"

Babs, her own face white with anger now, was across the room. She gleamed the Firebrand by the arm.

Diana turned. In her face gleamed the fury which had her in its power.

One push she gave Babs. Babs went staggering back.

And then, down the passage came footsteps. Sarah Harrigan, eyes gleaming, confronted the Firebrand as she would have stepped into the corridor.

"Diana!" she rapped.

"Oh, shut up!" Diana said. Sarah's eyes flamed.

"Diana, are you—are you—are you—the shocked, glaring. She pointed into the student's face. "You did this?"

"Of course I did it!" Diana assured her.

"And you insulted me."

Diana shrugged.

"For that," Sarah said, between her teeth, "you're coming to the headmistress."

Diana simply laughed.

"Is that so?" she mocked. "Well, now let me tell you one! I'm not going to the headmistress—no! I've my own affairs to attend to. I'm going—"

she rapped, and before Sarah realised her intention, Diana had added one more offense to her already lengthy record by pushing Sarah into Study No. 4

—out!

Sarah staggered back into the arms of Babs.

"Diana, you dare—"

But Diana did dare. Diana was in her most furious, her most reckless mood. She caught the door of the study. She slammed it hard. Then swiftly she

turned the key. With a laugh on her lips, she flew to the cloak-room.

In a trice she had on her hat, her coat. Out of the school she flew.

In the drive was her father's car.

"Thanks," she said to Jarvis, the chauffeur, "I'll have this. Take me to the Enterprise studios—and step on it!"

"Yes, Miss Diana," the scared chauffeur gulped.

She jumped in. The car slipped off down the drive. Diana laughed—on a bitter, grating note. Well, that was better. This was one up on Curmudge, anyway.

Give orders that she shouldn't be admitted to the Enterprise, would he? She wouldn't go on the films! Wanted her to be a good little girl at school, did he? She laughed recklessly. Well, there was a nice little sample of her goodness to be going on with!

But her father, had she only known it, had seen that frantic departure of his harum-scarum daughter from Miss Primrose's window, and, being her father, perhaps he guessed her intentions.

At the moment he was in frenzied conversation with the Enterprise studios on the telephone.

The result of which—

When the car reached the Enterprise and Diana haughtily stepped down, she was met by a regretful shake of the head from the commissionaire.

"I'm sorry, Miss Royston-Clarke, but you can't come in!"

"And why not, pray?" Diana demanded haughtily.

"Well, miss, I don't know. But your father just telephoned strict orders from Cliff House."

Diana's eyes gleamed.

"And you're taking notice of that?" she asked scathingly. "Let me in!"

"I'm sorry, miss, it's more than my job's worth," the commissionaire told her uncomfortably.

"It'll be more than your job's worth if you don't let me in!" Diana stormed, glaring at him through the iron bars of the gates. "Open these gates—this instant!"

But the doorkeeper, if against his own impulses, was adamant. He had his orders to carry out, and he was going to carry them out.

Diana, humiliation added to fury, turned away.

Both her!

"You want me again, miss?" Jarvis asked anxiously as she stood frowning at the side of the car.

"Eh? Yes. Just a minute!"

Diana's eyes were gleaming. So her father meant what he said! He had made the first move against her. He had determined that she shouldn't be a film actress, had he? He had barred her, from the Enterprise!

Well—she shrugged. There was more than one fish in the sea. There was more than one studio in England. She remembered her producer friend, Bill Bentley, at the All-British studios near Latham.

Just to spite her father, just to let him see that she did have a mind and a will of her own, she would act on the films. And if she couldn't do it for his beastly studios she'd do it for someone else's!

Back into the car she climbed. Curtly she ordered:

"All-British!"

"Yes, miss?"

She shrugged as she lay back. In sheer defiance she lit a cigarette.

She reached the All-British, a smaller, less pretentious studios than the Enterprise, at the moment only in the process of development.

But it already considered itself as a

rival to the Enterprise, and she knew from conversations she had heard that the Enterprise did not view its growing development without uneasiness.

There were some who said that the All-British would become an even bigger concern than the Enterprise before it was much older.

Well, if she could help in that good work, she would!

What a joke, she reflected, to work for studios which her father considered a real rival. To work against his interests, as he had worked against hers!

Swiftly the car flew. Out Diana stepped. Into Bill Bentley's office she was shown, to be informed there that Mr. Bentley himself was not expected back for an hour.

An hour! Diana laughed. What did time matter? She said she would wait.

She did, reading a film magazine to while away the time.

Jarvis, meantime, torn between duty to the father and obedience to the daughter, had taken the law into his own hands, and had gone back to Cliff House with the car.

Bill Bentley, an untidy, rotund little man, with a shock of startlingly black hair, came in presently, obviously tremendously employed with his own thoughts.

He said, without emotion or pleasure, in a flat sort of voice:

"Hallo, Di!"

And then, dropping into a chair, gave out a hollow groan.

Diana blinked.

"Yoicks, Bill, what's the matter? Pain?"

"If I could get her!" Bill said.

"Eh?"

"That girl!"

"What girl?"

"The girl at the Enterprise. I've just been in there. Rynniman"—Bill gulped—"Rynniman put her through a test, and you should have seen her! He wants her for 'The Rebel Sister.'"

Diana started up.

"What? Bill, what's her name?"

"Jean—Jean C a r t w h e e l—Wheelwright—something on other!" he said. He stared at Diana. "Rynniman's hooked her. She's a find—a find! He's got her in this film, and then he's signing her up for some other picture afterwards—just when," he groaned, "I'm looking for a lead like that for my new film, 'Nursing Home'! Do you know, if I could get a girl like that, I'd give her a contract, not for one film, but for fifty—"

He raved on.

But Diana wasn't listening now. Her brain was racing.

Yoicks, what a chance! What a score against her father! Gone in a flash were her own film ambitions; gone in a flash was every other motive save that of making her father sing small!

Supposing she could get Jean over to All-British studios! Supposing she could get her signed up behind the back of the Enterprise! What a smack in the eye for everybody at the Enterprise then!

What a laugh for her! The Enterprise, stranded, without their schoolgirl star, would have to call in someone else! That would be her chance to step in—to show her father how indispensable she was!

She stood up.

"Bill," she said quietly, "she shall be yours!" He started up. "She shall be yours!" she repeated, her lips firm. "I happen to know her. She's my best friend, Bill, and she isn't signed up by Enterprise yet! I'll get her for you, Bill!"

"When?" Bill asked eagerly.

"In time," Diana assured him, "for you to sign her up before you start your 'Nursing Home' film. Leave it to me, Bill! I promise!"

And she nodded her head grimly, a glimmer in her eyes.



## Doing Her Best

AND at almost the same time as Diana Royston-Clarke left Bill Bentley and the All-British studios, Jean Cartwright, her face still fiery, her head in a whirl, was tripping out of the Enterprise.

To Diana, Bill Bentley had fore-shadowed her success. Bentley might be erratic, he might be excitable, but he knew an actress when he saw one.

Jean, fired with renewed ambition, had put her whole heart, her whole soul, and every ounce of her energy and her art into the test.

Result—

Langley Rynniman, her producer, had been enthusiastic. Constance Thackeray, the beautiful star who played the part of her unknown mother in the film, had been delighted.

No doubt from that moment about her fulfilling her part in the film. The part which would follow was as good as hers already. So she was told, though Jean herself was too Scottishly cautious to count her chickens before they were hatched.

But, in spite of her flush of success, she was still rather confused.

Two hours ago she had been resigned to a drab future in Mr. Royston-Clarke's office, stifling her ambitions, wisely saying good-bye to all those dreams which had so startlingly come true without any effort from herself.

Was it too good to be true, after all? Was she really dreaming all this, to awaken presently to the bleak realities of the real situation?

And then she thought—Diana! Diana, of course! Wasn't it Diana's father who had sent her to the studios? Would it have been just like Diana to prepare this surprise for her, never saying anything until it was accomplished? That was it! Jean found her heart warming, and ever warming, to the Firebrand.

As Diana had entered into a benevolent conspiracy with her father to send Jean's mother to France, so had Diana planned to give her this greatest of all chances.

Diana had deliberately sacrificed her own whim—had handed back to Jean the ambition of her life.

Jean felt quite breathless as that realisation came home to her.

She must see Diana; she must thank her; tell her how happy she had made her.

Almost at a run, she hurried back to Cliff House.

But Diana, when she burst into Study No. 8, was not there. Nor was she to be found anywhere else in the school.

Rather dismayed, Jean went out of the school and down to the gates, hoping to catch Diana as she came in. But the gates closed; call-over bell went. No Diana!

Rather apprehensively she trailed into the school.

Call-over register was read without the Firebrand. The school was in a buzz. Diana was certainly asking for trouble, and Diana was likely to get it when she came in.

Call-over was dismissed. Those girls who wanted supper trailed off to

dining-hall. Those who did not forthwith gathered in the Common-room.

Jean, biting her lip, her own satisfaction overshadowed completely now by her anxiety for her friend, joined Babs and Bessie and Marcelle Biquet.

"Oh, where can she be? You—you don't think anything has happened to her?"

"Not Diana!" Clara said scornfully. "But—but—"

And then the door opened, and there stood the truant herself—Diana, a rosy flush on her cheeks, a sparkle in her eyes, not a whit, apparently, disturbed; not an atom of anxiety or of apprehension in her face. She might have just strolled in from her own study, indeed, instead of from outside.

She beamed.

"Lo, kids!" she said loftily, and strode across at once to Jean. "Jean, old thing," she cried, "how did you get on?"

"Oh, fine! But"—Jean shook her head—"Diana, where have you been?"

"Oh, out—just out!" Diana answered off-handedly.

"Looking up a few friends, you know. Standing myself a feed in the Royal at Courtfield, she nothing exciting, I'm afraid," she added. "But never mind me. I want to hear all about the studios. What did Runniman say? What test did they give you?"

"No, Diana! Wait a minute!" Jean said distractedly. "Oh, my hat! Di, Primmy's looking for you!"

"Then let Primmy look!" Diana retorted defiantly. "She's been waiting three hours, hasn't she? It won't hurt her to wait another ten minutes or so! Bother Primmy! I want to know—"

And then she stopped as the door opened, and into the room stepped Miss Primrose herself. Her eyes were like dagger-points.

"Diana!" she rapped.

There was a breathless gasp from the girls in the room. Slowly Diana swung round. Her eyes fastened upon the headmistress standing still behind her. She gave a resigned sort of smile. Not a whit taken aback was she, however. She nodded coolly.

"Good-evening, Miss Primrose!"

"Well, the nerve!" Lydia Crossendale muttered.

"Diana, I overheard your remark!" the headmistress said harshly.

"Just my luck!" Diana said.

"You were being extremely impertinent!"

"Oh, Miss Primrose!" And Diana looked suitably shocked. "I didn't know you were there, you know."

The tension was electric. Miss Primrose's lips closed like a trap.

"Diana, you are being insolent!" she said quietly. "I will deal with you! Meantime"—her chest heaved a little—"there are several things I want to see you about! This afternoon, Diana, you deliberately attacked Barbara Redfern and Bessie Bunter in their study!"

Diana shrugged.

"After which," Miss Primrose went on, "you were extremely insolent to Sarah Harrigan! You refused to obey Sarah's orders!"

Diana merely smiled. The coolness of the girl!

"After which," Miss Primrose continued relentlessly, "you assaulted Sarah. In deliberate defiance of her orders, you went out. You remained out until gates were closed. For those offences you will consider yourself confined to school bounds for the rest of the week, and you will write two hundred lines every evening, delivering them to me before call-over. Meantime"—her

lips compressed—"you will go to your study—immediately!"

Diana shrugged. Still she wasn't repentant. She didn't care. Why should she care? There was a carefree smile on her lips.

This was the result of her father's conversation with Miss Primrose. Miss Primrose, playing up to him, was trying to discipline her.

Diana laughed cynically. Well, let them keep at it! Let them! She'd show her father if she were going to be the good little girl he wanted her to be!

All the same, she went to her study. Jean, fluttering with anxiety, followed her.

"Oh, Diana!" she cried. "What came over you? Di, you'll get yourself expelled."

"And who?" Diana asked lightly, "would care about that?"

"Diana, I would!" Jean faced her. "Diana, oh, please!" she begged.

"You've been so frightfully decent lately. You—you—" she floundered, for Jean was not good at expressing the things nearest her heart.

She came forward, her face very pale and pleading.

"Diana, isn't it enough that it's making me unhappy?" she asked, in a different voice. "Diana, I don't want to see you getting into everybody's bad books. Especially after what you've done for me."

Diana eyed her. Some of the defiance went out of her face. For a moment a look of repentance showed in her face. But the tenderness came and went in a flash. The softened face of the adorable Diana merged at once into the muttonous mask of the hotheaded Firebrand.

She shrugged.

"And what have I done for you?" she asked. "Oh, I know, I promised you a job. I persuaded my father to send your mother away—but that," she added lightly, "cost me nothing."

"And it didn't cost you anything, I suppose, to throw up your film chance and give it over to me?"

"Oh!"

"Diana, don't pretend you know nothing about it!" Jean cried. "Oh, I know! You and your father planned it. I know you were keen to have that part at the studios, but you gave it up for my sake. Well, I've got it! I'm doing well at it. But I shall never cease to be grateful!"

Again Diana eyed her. She eyed her queerly. For a moment she spoke no word. She was weighing with sudden alertness in her mind the exact significance of those words.

So Jean thought her film chance was due to her! Jean thought—Oh, yooks! What a weapon she had put in her hands!

"Oh, that!" she said, as if it were a matter of smallest importance. "That's nothing, Jean. I should have done it before, only—well, you know the sort of little cat I am when I've set my mind upon a thing. And, anyway, it isn't such a big thing," she added. "And it's not the easy job that it appears to be. Jean, sit down," she ordered, in a new voice. "I want to talk to you about that film."

Jean blinked.

"Now, listen!" Diana said. "Listen carefully! I didn't give up that film out of entirely unselfish motives, Jean. Don't think that. I found out something—about the money, about the contract—and—well"—she shook her head—"I hate to tell you this, but there may be no money and no contract at the end of the film, because"—with a flash of inventiveness—"they've already lost pounds and pounds on it, and they've

got to make up the loss somehow. I've been along to the studios this afternoon. I've been pulling strings here and there, and I've found out quite a lot—"

Jean's eyes widened.

"The idea, as I get it," Diana went on thoughtfully, "is to get this film finished as soon as possible. After that—well, out you go! There'll be no contract. Jean—no! with them, at all events."

Jean's lips quivered. Not for a moment did she doubt that Diana was doing anything but warning her in her own best interests.

Diana was in a position to know these things. Diana, having relinquished her own ambitions, had no axe to grind. Jean had no inkling yet of the row Diana had had with her father, of her determination to take Jean away from the Enterprise at all costs!

And, after all, Diana assured herself, she really was doing Jean a great good turn. With Bill Bentley so enthusiastic about her prowess, Jean would be made for life on the screen. She had signed a contract with the All-British.

"You see?" she asked gently.

Jean nodded rather miserably. It had all seemed too good to be true to Jean. There was bound to be a catch in it somewhere. She looked at Diana, smiling, calm, confident.

"But," Diana said, "there's no need for you to worry, Jean. As soon as I found out all that, I took steps. I've got something else in view for you, a new film contract with the All-British. Bentley, there—he's a friend of mine—was on the Enterprise set this afternoon. He saw you, and he went mad about you. He's willing to give you a five year contract at least on the strength of what he saw. But don't worry about it now," she added generously, "just think it over."

Jean did think it over. Oh, could she be sure? What a girl Diana was—but— And she shook her head, feeling uneasily that Diana was painting the All-British offer in hues just a little too brilliant.

All that night, between fitful slumber, she thought about it. She was thinking about it all next morning in class.

What should she do? See this Bentley man, or carry on with the Enterprise? Instinct told her that her duty to the Enterprise came first.

After morning lessons—which finished school for that day, as it was a half-holiday—she sought out Diana.

Diana was in the study, when really Diana should have been doing her detention task in the Form-room. She had on her strikingly smart cream linen suit, and she was buttoning up her monogrammed gloves as Jean entered the study. The Scots girl stared.

"Diana, you're never going out?"

"I am," Diana said calmly.

"But you're gaid."

Diana shrugged.

"That makes no difference."

"And your lines—"

"Blow the lines! How do you like this new hat, Jean?"

But Jean was not looking at the hat. She was not in that moment thinking of her own perplexities. She was staring at Diana—Diana, the determined one—Diana, who had a hundred lines to do before call-over!

Oh, goodness, what a duffer the girl was! She was just running her head into trouble! At this rate, she would be expelled before she knew where she was.

"Diana, don't go!" she pleaded.

But Diana had made up her mind. Out of sheer nervousness she was bent on breaking rules and disobeying orders. Her father had cavilled at her reports.



Right! He was going to have something to get really annoyed about at the end of the term.

She didn't care. She had no affection for Cliff House, she told Jean.

And out, despite Jean's protests and pleadings, she went.

Leaving Jean—distracted and anxious—behind her.

Diana was! A reckless, wayward girl.

Jean bit her lip. She glanced at the clock. She had an appointment at four o'clock at the Enterprise, to start shooting "takes" of "The Rebel Sister." She knew Diana. She knew that this mood would pass, leaving her full of bitter regrets, of repinings. But by then the mischief would be done. Diana might already find herself sentenced.

No; she couldn't let her do it! Diana had done so much for her. Surely now it was up to her to save Diana!

Where had she gone? When would she be back?

She thought of Diana's lines. She groaned. Idiot! Idiot the girl was! Even if she were not missed during the afternoon, failure to deliver those lines would betray her, for a certainty.

Not very well could she drag Diana back, but she could save Diana the consequences of this afternoon's folly—by writing the lines herself and handing them in as her clum's. Desperately Jean got to work.

Three o'clock—half-past three. One eye on the clock, she worked. At last! Done! But, goodness, she'd have to hurry! Her appointment was at four. She bundled the lines together. Now—thank goodness that Primmy had gone out! She had seen her car in the drive earlier in the afternoon. Easy enough to slip up there and put the lines on her desk. Better not wait till she can back for Primmy was sure to be in her study then.

With the lines in her hand she quitted the study. Upstairs to Miss Primrose's quarters she ran. She knocked on the door, gulped her relief when no voice answered, and slipped in.

The study was empty. Good! On the desk she deposited the lines, was turning to go out, when she fell back. In the doorway stood Miss Primrose herself!

"Why, Jean!" she said.

Jean stood crimson and petrified.

"What are those?" and Miss Primrose went to her desk. She picked up the lines and swiftly, searchingly her glance flew from them to Jean's face.

"Why hasn't Diana delivered these?" she asked.

Jean gulped.

"L—I thought—"

"Will you send Diana to me? No, wait!" And Miss Primrose, scanning the lines again, started. She looked at Jean penetratingly. "Jean, did Diana do these lines?"

Jean gulped.

"Jean, answer me!"

Jean shook her head. But her eyes flew to the clock. Goodness, five-and-twenty to four!

"Miss Primrose—"

"Thank you!" Miss Primrose sat down. "I rather suspected, Jean, that this was not Diana's handwriting. I think I see. You are friendly with Diana, aren't you? You would like to save her the consequences of her own delinquencies. Diana is out—has deliberately defied my orders. Is that so, Jean?"

Jean's face was ashen.

"Miss Primrose—"

"You need not answer," Miss Primrose went on quietly. "I happen to know. I have just come in myself, in

my car. I thought I passed a girl who looked like Diana, on the Friardale road. I wasn't sure then, but I am now. You knew she had gone out. In order to cover up her misdeeds you did the lines for her. Jean, that may be the act of a loyal friend, but it is an act entirely contrary to the discipline of the school."

"Yes, Miss Primrose. But—but—oh, goodness, may I go?"

"You certainly may not go!" Miss Primrose said sternly. "As you are so fond of doing lines, Jean, you will go to your classroom now and do a hundred more."

"But my appointment!" broke in Jean wildly. "Mr. Runniman expects me at the studios!"

"I am," Miss Primrose informed her, "aware of that. I will phone up Mr. Runniman myself and tell him that you are not coming. Enough, Jean! Go now and report to Connie Jackson of the Sixth Form. Bring her back to me."

And in despair Jean went out. What an end to her scheme to save the wilful Firebrand!



### From Bad to Worse

**W**HILE Diana— Happily humming a tune, Diana Royston-Clarke swung on down the road that led to the Enterprise studios. She had seen Miss Primrose's car. She had seen Miss Primrose in the car, but she had not by an inch diverted from her path.

She had deliberately, and most compositely smiled at Miss Primrose as she passed, a piece of cool insolence

which would have brought that car to a halt and Miss Primrose turning out hot on her track had the headmistress but seen it. The car, however, was travelling rather fast.

Diana had no plans except to make herself as big a nuisance as possible to the school.

Out of sheer perversity she was playing truant. Had she not been gated she would probably have never thought of stirring out of the school gates.

She was trying to decide in her mind how she should spend the afternoon. Go along to see Bill Bentley? Or pop over to Lantham, telephone for the car—or look in at Whitechester? The whole problem was solved for her, however, when she reached Friardale village.

It was solved at the sight of Nellie Sharpe—Nellie, the shy, white-faced little daughter of one of the charwomen at the Enterprise studios.

Diana in spite of her hauteur and her overbearing ways, was no snob.

She knew little Nellie, shabby, poor, down-at-heel. She had formed an attachment for her, produced possibly by Nellie's worshipping adoration of her own dazzling self. In a few weeks Nellie would be leaving the council school she attended during the day, and Diana had promised to get her a job. She was standing outside the window of the Hathaway tea-rooms now, looking wistfully at the good things displayed. Diana touched her on the shoulder.

"Nellie!"

The little one jumped, then her face turned scarlet.

"Oh, Miss Royston-Clarke!"

Diana laughed.

"Hungry, Nellie?" she said. "Well, well, what price a feed at my expense?" she asked laughingly. "Lovely cream



"DIANA, come back—come back!" Jean panted. But the Firebrand took no notice. "You coming, too?" she asked, and held the car door open invitingly. Diana was determined to go her own way, whatever the consequences!

tarts they've got to-day, haven't they? And such topping meringues. You love meringues, I bet. What are you doing here, by the way?"

Nellie gulped.  
"Well, miss, you see it's a half-holiday at the school to-day," Nellie said shyly. "Is that so?" Diana grinned. "Now, by the same token it's a half-holiday at my school," she said happily. "So what say, Nellie, we celebrate together—just you and I? Tea here—eh? Then we'll find a taxi and we'll pop into Courtfield. Look around the shops, and perhaps after that we'll go to the first house of the variety show in Courtfield."

And linking her arm in that of Nellie, she led the way into the shop. That afternoon stood out as the most memorable in the life of Nellie Sharpe. Heroine Diana had been to her before. After that afternoon Diana was almost a goddess. What a lovely tea they had together in the Hathaway tea-rooms. And that lovely ride to Courtfield, that trip round the shops!

Just, Diana said, as a little keepsake, she bought Nellie a new frock. Such a lovely thing of blue taffeta, which, it seemed to little Nellie, a sacrifice to wear. But wear it she did. Even Diana's large-hearted chumminess was not equal to the strain of dragging Nellie around in her present shabby garments.

Then off to the theatre, and then a taxi home. Ten o'clock it was by that time. At Cliff House call-over, supper and dormitory bells had come and gone. She said good-bye to Nellie outside the door of the little girl's home.

"Enjoyed it, Nellie?"  
"Oh, Miss Royston-Clarke, it's been wonderful!" Nellie breathed.

Diana laughed.  
"Good girl! Same to-morrow, then," she said. "We'll go to the Courtfield Astoria and see the new film. I'll call for you here, kid, and mind you're wearing that new frock. Good-night!"

And off she trotted, before blushing and tongue-tied Nellie could even stammer her thanks. Back gaily to Cliff House she went, taking a malicious satisfaction in waking the echoes by jangling the bell outside the gates.

Piper, the porter, came out, breathing unutterable things under his breath.

"Ho, it's you!" he growled. "Which it's my duty to take you to the headmistress!"

"Piper, my arm!" Diana said grandly. "Let us go!"

They went, though to be sure Piper did not accept the arm offered. Into the school, into Miss Primrose's study. Miss Primrose was awaiting her.

"Thank you, Piper, you may go," she said to the porter. Her eyes fastened angrily upon the unruined delinquent.

"Diana, what have you to say?"  
"Oh, nothing!" Diana said.

"But I have!" Miss Primrose was storming. She said it. There was a lot of it, and its tone and tenor would have burned the ears of any other girl. But Diana stood smilingly unmoved.

"Diana, I am tired of your escapades," she said. "I must warn you most seriously now, that if you persist in these mad escapades, you will leave me no alternative but to expel you. As it is, you are gated for another week and I shall send a special report to your father."

"Thank you," Diana said urbanely, and grinned in anticipation as she left the room, pleasantly visualising her father's face and his reactions when he received that report.

In the morning:  
"Diana," Jean said. "Oh, goodness,

Diana, where did you get to yesterday?"

"Just out—out with a friend," Diana answered casually. "A very nice friend, too, Jean. Quite a little sport. No end of a good time I had. I'm meeting her again this afternoon."

"Diana, you're not!"

"No?" Diana glanced at her.

"Who says I'm not?"

"But, Diana, what will Primmy say?"

Diana laughed.

"Primmy has already threatened to expel me," she said amusedly. "Also Primmy has increased my detention."

She chuckled. "Yaicks! You should have seen her face when I strolled in at half-past ten last night. But don't you be silly," she added disdainfully; "there's nothing whatever for you to worry about, Jean."

But there was. Jean was worried. Diana was heading for disaster. Apart from which she had received quite a curt letter from Langley Rummiman by the morning post, reminding her that her promise to play in the film was serious business, and if she couldn't keep herself out of trouble, he would have to think about finding someone else for the part.

That, in view of her conversation with Diana yesterday, seemed ominous to Jean. But still she considered her first duty to the girl who had done so much for her, to whom she owed everything, who was willing to do more. She couldn't let her go her own mad way like this. She just couldn't! She would be failing in friendship's duty.

In the afternoon she waited when Diana came out of the class-room.

"Diana, you're not really going?"

"I am!"

"Diana, for my sake—please!" Jean faced her. "Diana, listen!" she said. "I didn't intend to tell you this, but yesterday, trying to save you, I did your lines."

And then she related what had happened; how Primmy had prevented her from going to the studios; the curt letter she had received from Langley Rummiman that morning.

Diana shook her head.

"Silly!" was her verdict. "Jean, you're a chump! Let the bad old Diana go her own way. Don't worry about her. But I'm in a hurry," she added. "I phoned the car to be waiting at the gates at four. So-long!"

"But Diana—Diana, wait!"

Diana did not wait. Jean desperately ran after her. Diana quickened her steps, breaking into a run as she reached the quadrangle, and saw Miss Primrose leaning out of a window, obviously on the look-out for her.

Miss Primrose called something, but Diana pretended not to hear. She reached the gates. Outside her father's car was drawn up.

Quick—in!

Then she heard footsteps behind her. Jean, her face distraught, came running out.

"Diana!"

"What—coming, too?" Diana asked, deliberately misunderstanding. "Good old Jean! Here we are!" And she held the door open. "Jump in, old thing! Buck up!"

Jean did not want to jump in. She had no intention of accompanying Diana on her ride. But she must plead with her—must turn her back from this mad purpose. Hardly realising what she was doing, she jumped in. Diana laughed as the car glided off.

"Done her!" she cried gleefully, and chuckled. "Did you see Primmy hanging out of her window like a lily sticking out of a flower-pot? Well, I must say this is nice of you, Jean—yes! Thought any more about that All-British offer yet?"

"Diana, I want to talk to you."

"But don't! You're the interesting one," Diana told her. "I'm anxious for you to make up your mind; Jean. Of course, Rummiman would send you that note. He's that sort. Shouldn't take any notice of it if I were you, Jarvis!"—she rapped on the window—"drive in the direction of Pegg."

Jean blinked:

"But, Diana, I don't want to go to Pegg. I've an appointment at the film studios."

"Oh, it won't take long!" Diana said offhandedly. "Ten minutes or so. I want to get something there—for a little friend of mine. I'll run you back—never fear!"

But she was thinking, to herself that to get Langley Rummiman's back up a bit more by making Jean late, would be all to her advantage; would more than ever increase the friction which had begun between Jean and the producer, and ultimately lead Jean to deserting the Enterprise in favour of the Enterprise's rival, the All-British.

Once that happened, her revenge on her father would be complete. And it would not hurt Jean. Jean, in fact, Diana privately considered, would be better off with Bill Bentley, who had already shown himself so enthusiastic about her talents.

They went to Pegg. Rather longer than she had done, did Diana linger in the shop. Jean, having given up all attempts to dissuade Diana from her mad pursuits, hung on in the car, a prey to the most tumultuous anxiety.

She did not see Diana when she came out suddenly swoop towards the rear wheel of the car. She did not see her as, with one swift glance at Jarvis, she unswerved the valve at the top and flung it into the gutter. Jean was in a fequent then.

"Oh, Diana, I shall be late!"

"Keep calm!" Diana advised, with a sly smile.

Keep calm! How difficult that was with the minutes slipping away. Keep calm, when five minutes later, the car slowed and stopped, and Jarvis got out to announce that he would have to change a wheel.

Ten precious minutes wasted; then on again.

When Jean reached the studios Rummiman was raving.

"Nearly an hour late!" he stormed, glaring at her. "Is this how you intend to go on, Miss Cartwright?"

Jean gulped.

"I'm sorry; I was detained."

"Detained, were you? And so am I! Here we are, deliberately keeping these sequences late to accommodate you. What do you think we're here for?" she demanded.

Jean bit her lip. It wasn't her fault. She tried to explain; but Rummiman was mad.

Yesterday everything had been spoiled. To-day everything was late. The picture, owing to the destruction of the first sequences, was hopelessly behind schedule, and he had other work to do.

Perhaps it was natural that he should lose his temper, and perhaps it was natural that Jean should feel stung and hurt.

She said, trying to keep the temper out of her voice, but failing to hide her resentment:



JEAN flung herself forward, determined to stop Diana. But with an angry push the Firebrand sent her flying. There was a crash as the wash-basin overturned, and then a cry: "Cave! Miss Primrose!"

"Well, here I am now! Let's get on with it."

He stared at her.

"That's not the tone, young lady!" he said sharply. "I don't take back-chat, even from my stars! I'm your producer in the studios, remember, and in that I rank with your headmistress at school. I don't like temperament, so cut that out at once! Now get off to the make-up room!"

And Jean, feeling snubbed and small, went to the make-up room. She was made-up, and then stepped on to the set. But she knew she was not doing her best. She knew that Rummiman was frowning. Four times they went through the first scene, five times through the second. He groaned.

"O.K.; cut!" he said. "That'll do. It'll have to do; but I shall want better stuff than that, Miss Cartwright, if you're going to have the contract which goes with this film. I'll be glad when this picture's over—by gad, I will! There's been nothing but fuss and bother ever since we started. Turn up at four to-morrow!" he ordered.

Jean went, wretched, disheartened, feeling humiliated, wishing almost that she had never met Rummiman.

She thought again more temptingly of Diana's offer. Should she go and see Bill Bentley? Should she ask Diana?

She went back to Cliff House. Diana, however, had not returned. Again call-over came; again supper-time. Miss Primrose, furious, was going the rounds. Just before dormitory bell Diana strolled in.

"You," Miss Primrose said bitingly, as she met her in Big Hall, "come with me!"

Diana went. Smiling, she returned to the dormitory half an hour later.

Jean glanced at her apprehensively.

"Diana, what happened?"

Diana shrugged.

"Usual stuff," she said lightheartedly, as she undressed. "The end is getting nearer. I'm to be booted out next time I'm caught—then good-bye to Cliff House!"

And into bed she got, while Babs, shaking her head, looked at Jean.

Jean, who was standing there, gazing dumbly at her firebrand friend.

Sarah Harrigan came up to put out the lights. The dormitory settled down to slumber. Half an hour went by, then Diana rose.

"Jean!" she whispered.

"Yes!" came a tired voice from Jean Cartwright's bed.

"There's a dance on at the All-British studios. If you'd like to meet Bentley now's your chance."

"Diana, you're not going?"

"I am!" And Diana deliberately rose.

Jean gasped. In the darkness she stared wild-eyed.

Good gracious, what a girl this was! Diana was just potty—potty! After being threatened with expulsion she was deliberately planning to break bounds. Jean's lips set.

Well, she had tried pleading, cajoling. This time, if Diana wouldn't be sensible, she would stop her by force!

She rose as the Firebrand stepped towards the door, planting herself in her path.

"Di," she said, "you're not going."

The tone, the attitude, stung Diana. She liked Jean, she sincerely was Jean's friend, but not even a friend was going to speak to the haughty Firebrand like that. She glared.

"And who's going to stop me?"

"I am!"

"I see!"

Diana showed her teeth. Then suddenly she made a rush. But Jean was watching. Forward she jumped with arms outstretched, intent upon stopping Diana at any cost. Diana, in sudden fury, pushed her. The two went staggering back. Then—

Crash! Bang! Over went a jug, and, smashing, awoke the echoes. Up jumped girls in their beds.

"My hat!"

"Diana!"

"Jean!"

And then:

"Cave!"

But it was too late. Swish went the door, click went the lights, and Primmy, in her dressing-gown, her expression stern, flounced into the dormitory.

"Diana! Jean!"

Jean, with a gasp, flung round. Diana shrugged.

"You two—what were you doing?" Miss Primrose's eyes took in the scene. "Jean," she said tartly, "get back to your bed. Diana, get back to yours. I will see you to-morrow morning. Meantime, Jean, you will consider yourself gated for to-morrow for daring to create a disturbance like this in the middle of the night."

From Jean, white-faced and stricken, came a cry:

"But, Miss Primrose, the film!"

"Your duty," Miss Primrose informed her icily, "is to the school, not the film. If you cannot learn to behave yourself, Jean, then you must take the consequences. I am sorry, but discipline must be maintained. Good-night!" And she switched out the lights.



Her Chance



"JEAN!" Jean Cartwright did not turn round.

"Jean!" Barbara Redfern said again.

It was the following morning, and the sunlight filtered through the window of Study No. 8 in the Fourth Form passage.

It shone upon Jean's face as she stood by the window, a white, strained-looking face with telltale rings about the eyes, plainly proclaiming Jean's restless night.

Down in the dumps with a vengeance was Jean that morning. Bitter indeed was Jean. What a mess everything was! To-day she had an important appointment at the studios. She was gabled. That, coming on top of the trouble already started between her and the studios—

Babs came farther into the room. She touched the other's arm.

"Jean—"

Jean did turn then; she smiled without life.

"Oh, Babs!" Babs' lips compressed. The ache in her heart reflected in her eyes. She looked very thoughtfully at the Scots girl.

"Jean, I had to come to see you," she said. "I—I just heard Primmy phoning to tell Mr. Rummiman that you wouldn't be at the studios this afternoon. Rummiman seemed to be mad on the phone." Jean winced. "But, Jean, old thing, why are you doing all this?" she added pleadingly. "Why are you deliberately throwing away your chances, old girl, for Diana? She's not worth it, old girl."

Jean stirred restlessly. She looked that instant, despite her Scots hardness, as if tears would have given her welcome relief.

Babs' words, kindly meant as they were, sounded like reproach. She knew she was ruining her chances. She knew that it was only a matter of moments before Langley Rummiman, growing more and more fed-up, would throw her out altogether. Perhaps, she reflected dismayedly, annoyed with her for this latest delinquency, he was already making up his mind to do it. But Diana?

She flung round. At the same moment the door opened, and in came Diana herself.

One quick look she flung at Babs. One questioning look at Jean. Her lips compressed a little.

"I'm sorry," she said; "I didn't know you were engaged, Jean. If I'm in the way—"

"No, no," Jean said. "Come in, Diana, please. Babs"—and she gazed appealingly at the leader of the Fourth—"will—will you excuse us?"

Babs bit her lip. She threw a glance at Diana. It was a glance which expressed many things—bitter, contemptuous things. It told Diana as plainly as anything that were it not for her consideration for Jean, Diana would have been treated there and then to a piece of her mind.

Diana read it aright; but Diana, conscious of her power over Jean now, simply shrugged. Very pointedly she opened the door and stood with the knob in her hand until Babs passed through.

"Good-bye, sweetheart!" she mocked. The door closed. She turned back into the room. She crossed over to Jean, put her arm about her shoulders. "Hold up, old thing!" she muttered. "Take it easy now. I've some bad news."

Jean's eyes widened.

"I've just been on to my father at the studios."

Jean held her breath.

"And—and—" Diana hesitated. Perhaps in that moment she felt uncomfortable meeting the expression in the other's eyes. But she steeled herself. She had her big card to play now. She felt that the moment was opportune.

For Diana, in that mysterious way she got to know most things she was really interested in knowing, had heard all about the conversation on the phone between Miss Primrose and the producer at the Enterprise studios.

She knew that Rummiman was aware now that Jean, owing to her punishment, would not be turning up at the studios to-day. She knew that Rummiman, in consequence, was on the point of tearing his hair.

"Rummiman's fed-up," she said, while Jean flinched. "He—he's dropped you from the part."

It was not true. Diana hated herself for telling the fib. But it was for Jean's good, she told herself—and if

Jean fell for it, then her own revenge against her father was complete. Jean's face went the colour of chalk.

"But—but he's not even told me."

"He will—later." Diana's lips set.

"But here's your chance, Jean—now. Don't wait for him to come and tell you you're sacked. Let him know when he does come to see you that you've got a contract which puts his entirely in the

## "THE FIREBRAND'S FOLLY"

is the title of the grand long complete Cliff House School story which Hilda Richards has written for next Saturday's gift number of the

## SCHOOLGIRL

Do not miss this fine tale of  
Diana Royston-Clarke

shade. But you'll have to work quickly," she went on glibly. "Bill Bentley—the producer I spoke to you about—is going off to-day to London, and goodness knows when he might come back. There's a contract waiting there for you now, Jean. Come on! I've got the car waiting at the gates."

"But we're detained."

"Rats to that! We can get there and back before lessons. Come on!" She tugged at the other's arm. Jean, her head whirling, hardly knowing what to say or do, found herself rushed outside. Down the passage they went, into the quad, and down the drive.

The car, as Diana said, was waiting. They clambered into it. A quarter of an hour later they stopped outside the All-British.

Bill Bentley, more untidy than ever, came out to meet them. He jumped at sight of Jean.

"Oh, gee, Miss Cartwheel!" Diana said gleefully. "Here she is! I told you I'd get her, didn't I? Did you get my phone message?"

"Why, yes!"

"And you've got the contract ready?"

"Of course, but I can't believe—"

"Come on!" Diana said feverishly, and Jean, hardly knowing whether she were on her head or her heels, went in and signed.



After All—

**T**RIOUMPHANT was Diana. She had succeeded! She had robbed Enterprise of their schoolgirl star! Not only that, but she had robbed them of her services in that other film which was going to put thousands of pounds on to their profit sheet. Rummiman, in the quandary which Jean's contract with the All-British placed him, could not possibly refrain from engaging her—Diana—now.

That was triumph number one.

But greater even than that was triumph number two—the paying off of the score against her father. She had beaten him!

Ecstasies was Diana as she was whirled to Lantham in Bill Bentley's car. Jean she had already sent back to Cliff House in her own. She hardly recollected that she was playing truant again, and if she thought had crossed her mind, she would have laughed. Her father, when she strolled into his study, almost fell down.

"Diana, you! I thought you were at school!"

"Sit down," Diana invited—"sit down now." She sat down calmly, crossing her legs. "I've come," she said calmly, "to talk business—picture business. Curmudge, what about me for 'The Rebel Sister' film now?"

"I don't understand."

"No?" Diana laughed gaily. "I didn't think you would. But supposing I told you that Jean Cartwright has left the Enterprise?"

"But she hasn't!"

"But she has!" Diana mocked. How she was enjoying herself! "She left this morning. She got a better offer, Curmudge, with your deadly enemies and rivals, the All-British."

Mockingly she laughed again, but she frowned the next moment. She had rather hoped her father to jump at such news.

But he did nothing of the kind. He just gazed at her very searchingly and unrelentingly from under his eyebrows, and then said slowly.

"You're wrong, Di!"

"Eh?"

"We have got somebody for the part."

In a moment Diana was flamingly on her feet.

"You mean you've hired someone?"

"No. I mean," he said quietly, "that we've got her—we've had her all along. I refer to Jean Cartwright."

Diana stared at him.

"Oh, don't be silly, Curmudge! Haven't I told you—?"

"You've told me—yes!" he laughed. Then he came over to her. "Di," he said, with amusement, "you've saved me and the studios a lot of trouble! Thanks for it. Because, you see," he added, smiling at her stupefaction, "though it is not generally known, the All-British studios really belong to me. I invested in it at the same time as I invested in the Enterprise; but, as rivalry is healthy for competition, I never let it be known that the Enterprise and the All-British were sister companies."

"He smiled again.

"Which means, of course," he added, "although Jean has signed a contract for the All-British, she is still in my employment. She will finish 'The Rebel Sister' as instructed, then she will go on to the making of the new picture I had in mind for Bentley—'Nursing Home.' After that—"

"He smiled. "Well, whatever the terms of the contract she signed will have to be fulfilled, of course. But, Diana, you don't look well!"

Diana didn't. Diana, indeed, in that moment was looking and feeling quite sick. Rage, choking and furious, was welling up within her. It was her father, not she, who had triumphed in the end. Her father had the last laugh!

But was this the end?

Not if Diana knew it! Even yet, she vowed, cost her what it might, she would get her own way—somehow!

THE END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

Further Thrilling Adventures Befall Betty Barton & Co., Who  
Feature in This Vivid Jungle Serial

# MORCOVE in UNKNOWN AFRICA



FOR NEW READERS.

**BETTY BARTON, POLLY LINTON, NAOMER NAKARA & CO.**, of Morcove School, together with members of Grango-moor, 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.

During a long trek through the jungle, Pam and Jimmy—who have become separated from the others—are set upon by hostile natives, and made prisoners.

(Now read on.)

## Comrades in Peril

"WHEN I'm a prisoner!"

Pam Willoughby muttered the words to herself, where she lay in darkness.

Her eyes had just opened, her senses had come swirling back to her, after a period of complete unconsciousness due to shock.

Instantly she realised that the grass walls of a native hut surrounded her.

She sat up on the caked earth, and was finger-combing disordered hair away from her forehead, when she felt a bruise at her left temple.

That hurt, evidently, had been sustained in the first moment of her falling into enemy hands. She could remember being thrown to the ground. It was not a bad bruising, but it had been severe enough at the time to rob her—mercifully, perhaps—of her senses. Afterwards, weariness and the general upset must have caused her to be almost oblivious of all that was happening.

A captive! And in the hands of whom? This native hut—was it one of many forming a tribal village? Or had she been seized by some native who was only a lone hunter in that apparently desolate wilderness across which she

and her friends had been making their forced march?

"And—Jimmy?"

He—of all her chums the most devoted—had certainly been seized along with her.

He had tried to save her, but had been captured himself!

Hark! She became quite rigid, after silently getting to her feet in the black darkness.

There was a sound now—the only sound she could hear. A faint scratch—scratch it was, such as an animal might create by gnawing and scraping its way through the thatch-like hut wall.

Her heart was beating fast as she wondered. Supposing the entrance to the hut were closed by a mere hurdle of plaited twigs? In that case, this noise might be due to the removal of the hurdle, to let someone come in.

But the faint sound ceased for a few moments, then went on again.

Some prowling animal? How dreadful was the uncertainty, the suspense! Until suddenly—

"Pam!" A whispering of her own name! Jimmy, who had been captured along with her—close to hand now!

Quick as a flash she dropped upon hands and knees, and then crawled to where he seemed to be trying to get to her.

"Jimmy," she spoke back, under her breath. "Yes, here I am."

His refraining from any response showed how intensely cautious he was being.

On hands and knees, close to that part of the circular hut wall, through which he was making a tiny opening, she heard only the faintest rustling of his busy hand, as it dealt with the dead grass and twigs.

"Jimmy, are you in the open, then?" she ventured to whisper again.

"Yes, Pam. I got out of my hut. It's only a few feet from me now. Lucky I saw where they'd put you."

"Native village, or what?"

"About a dozen huts, I reckon. Are you all right?"

"Oh, yes—yes! And, look here, Jimmy! Don't you—"

"Sh!"

But Pam had not needed to be warned to lapse into complete silence. She, too, had heard a sudden guttural jabber-jabber from somewhere in the night-bound, native village.

For a few moments it continued—and then died down. Jimmy's whisper came again.

"Pam? They were some of the women. I fancy all the men and youths have gone off hunting. Did you hear, a while back, a great to-do—sort of parting cries?"

"No, Jimmy. I—I was—kind of asleep. What do you want me to do? Are we to get away together, when you give the signal?"

No answer! And by his silence she guessed that he knew escape to be impossible.

Doubtless the prison huts were in the very centre of the village, and so Jimmy, even at this moment, could see the dark shapes of all too many black people moving round about.

But Pam, wisely deciding to wait for Jimmy's "Go!"—if any going there were to be—did not mean to remain

By  
MARJORIE  
STANTON

Illustrated by L. Shields

idle. If the hole could rapidly be made big enough for him to get to her—so much the better.

On her inner side of the wall she began to pick away at the thatch-like substance. Stealthily, but with desperate eagerness, she worked on. Suddenly she saw his hand come through the hole; but it was not nearly big enough to permit him to wriggle through to her.

She put her own white hand into the one that was reaching through like that. And, oh, how inspiring to have that hasty handclasp at such a time!

Then she hastened on with the urgent task which they were sharing. The wall was really easy to pick to bits; only one had to be careful not to make a noise.

"Here—take this!" he suddenly whispered through to her.

A pencil! Of all things—a pencil! "Quick!" he breathed towards her again through the enlarged hole. "Remember the sign of the Kwamba tribe, Pam? Two hawks facing each other."

"Yes; their tattoo mark?"  
"That's an indelible pencil, Pam. Can you draw something of the sort on your arm, in the dark? Try," his whispering voice urged. "It's an idea of mine. In case—in case we do get away."

Then he was in hopes of their escaping, the dark night aiding them!

"Wet your arm with your tongue, Pam, to make the ink-pencilings last."

"Oh, I get you! Bluish, just like a tattoo-mark—yes," she voiced back to him, ever so guardedly. "Have you done your arm?"

"Yes. I don't know, Pam; but—I'm only thinking; all black people are superstitious."

Up till now, the hut had seemed to be as dark as ever, but at this moment, when she had to start making such strange use of the pencil, Pam was aware of the darkness being less deep.

Glancing about, she saw a chink in the wall, and it was there a reddish light was stealing in. Although every moment was so valuable, she felt compelled, if only for Jimmy's sake, to put an eye to that cranny, and so obtain a peep into the open.

The narrow aperture was really a horizontal slit in the thatch, due to the brittle effect of age. She found herself peering through, using only one eye, straight towards a wood fire from which heavy smoke rolled away.

A couple of swarthy black women, very fat, had just thrown on more fuel. Now they were, standing in the fitful glare from that communal fire, jabbering together. Some of their utterances were more quaint.

The smoke lifted, and Pam saw two or three other grass huts and black figures squatting in the dark entrances. Women and small boys and girls—but no men. The children seemed to be dull-sleepy—and were morosely sucking their thumbs.

Dear! Pam would have liked to go on watching; but she had to put every available moment to better use. It was nothing wonderful that Jimmy had had a pencil upon him, and an indelible one at that. He, like several others belonging to the expedition, had kept a notebook going. But how wonderful of him to have hit upon such a clever idea!

The gleam of firelight, coming in at that chink, helped her greatly. Then, too, the device was such a simple one—merely an outline. She had nearly completed it, standing there so, as to get the full benefit of the chink of

light, when she gave a slight, excited jump.

Jimmy had crawled into the hut, and was standing beside her.

Her eyes were ready to give him a grateful look but he did not meet them. Instead, he eagerly peered at what she had drawn upon her arm.

"Yes, that's fine!" he whispered. "I've done mine on my chest. These blacks, Pam—they're not Kwambas, I—"

"Oh, no!" She had not been supposing that they might be. "Even so, you think that the Kwamba sign may protect us?"

"I figured it out like this," his guarded voice answered in the gloom. "They're what you might call near neighbours of the Kwambas. So they must know about the Sign of the Double Hawk. It only we can get them to believe that we are somehow connected with the Kwamba tribe, one way or another, it may—"

And there he broke off, paying eager heed to sounds from outside which evidently held, for him, a dread meaning. After a brace of seconds:

"Someone's gone into my hut!" he whispered to Pam, as she held herself mute and still beside him. "Well!"

"Yes, well," was her equally resigned murmur. "Here we are, Jimmy—together, anyway."

He plucked her by the arm, as a sign that she should get more behind him. But she stiffened, stirred not an inch from his side.

Someone had gone into that other prison-hut, and finding it empty, had rushed out again, jabbering the alarm. Now a voluble mumbling of many voices warned Pam and Jimmy how—instantly—this hut was being surrounded.

Suddenly a stick-framed mat was dragged away from the hut's low doorway, and girl and boy saw a couple of the black women silhouetted against the light of the fire.

And, women though they were, one grasped a death-dealing club and the other a long-bladed spear.

## The Sign of the Double Hawk!

THE smoky fire supplied a lurid light for this strange, barbaric scene.

Others belonging to the tribe loomed behind those two foremost women, and there were black children pushing between their grown-ups to try to get a look at Pam and Jimmy.

Behind the hut, too, a loud gibberish was going on, evidencing the number of women and children who were out and about in the night.

And Pam wondered: "What's it to be, then?"

She and Jimmy could have had more than the average share of British courage, and yet have been alive to the deadly danger in which they stood.

It was upon him the women at the hut-entrance concentrated their angry, threatening looks. At him that heavy club was flourished menacingly, and the long spear levelled as if to make an impaling thrust.

Then the woman with the spear made a sign with it that clearly meant the girl captive was to return to his own hut.

Jimmy shook his head. Instantly the packed mass of black humanity broke into angry cries. A third woman pushed between the armed pair, and, glaring at Jimmy,

jabbered fiercely. He was to obey, or it would be the worse for him!

But there he stood, unmoved, except that suddenly he pulled open his shirt at the chest and let a forefinger indicate the device which he had drawn there with the indelible pencil.

The Sign of the Double Hawk!  
The red glare of the fire came in over the heads of the savage mob, rendering the sham "tattoo mark" clearly visible to many a pair of goggling eyes.

Pam herself glanced at the pencilled outline, and a closer resemblance to actual tattooing she could not have imagined. She dearly hoped that her own "tattoo" looked just as real.

Next moment Jimmy caught hold of her left hand to hold it forth in his, so that her left forearm could be seen by the women. As Pam was joyfully realising, the blacks had been greatly startled at first sight of his "tattoo." There had been a sudden hushing down of angry voices—even a slight recoiling from the doorway.

Now the mob closed in again; but there was still an impressive silence as Pam's "tattoo" was gazed at.

Presence of mind told her to follow up the advantage gained, and so she nodded vehemently, implying:

"Yes; and you had better be careful what you do to us!"

As for Jimmy, he now made most impressive signs, all which certainly put the tribeswomen still more in awe of him and Pam.

He struck an attitude of self-importance and pointed to Pam in a way that suggested she must be treated with the greatest respect!

He went on, to point behind him, in that direction where he thought the Kwamba country lay. And this last expressive action of his, as Pam noticed, threw the tribeswomen into quite a flutter.

After a few moments of guttural talk amongst themselves, two or three of them went away, as if to consult with somebody who had not yet come upon the scene. The rest remained, staring at Pam and Jimmy in mingled awe and amazement.

Pam turned to him, with one of her serene smiles. Nothing could be better than a display of composure.

"Seems to have done the trick, Jimmy! Bravo, you, for having that idea!"

"I'm wondering if it will get them to give me back my gun. If it does—"

"They may even let us go free, straight away," was Pam's sanguine remark. "Anyhow, doesn't it show what a magic-worker the sign is?"

Of a sudden the bunched-together tribeswomen opened a way to let a newcomer upon the scene advance to the hut-entrance.

An old, infirm man he was, his once jet-black, fuzzy hair now a white wig. A ragged white beard hung down to his chest. He nobbled with the aid of a stick, and his gaunt face gave an enlarged look to his deep-set eyes.

Pam and Jimmy saw how he fell to nodding in a convinced manner as he stared fixedly, first at one "tattoo," and then the other.

At last, with a few feeble, querulous utterances, he turned and hobbled away. The group remained split apart, and Pam and Jimmy could see the old man go to a circular hut, from which, most likely, he had been fetched. "Head of the tribe, most likely," Jimmy said to Pam. "And he seemed to think there's something in it all about our 'tattoos.'"

"Yes, well! Do you think, then, we might try—just walking out, to walk away?"

"Pam, I don't want to make a mistake, but I feel it will be better at present not to—not to seem to care—if you get me?"

"Just as you think best, Jimmy."

"There are a few of them, by the look of it, going to get food for us. 'Look here, Pam,' he spoke on briskly, 'thing to do now—insist upon privacy, because that will square with the notion they've got about both of us.'"

"'Heap big' people in the Kwamba country?"

"Goodness knows what their idea is exactly. There is some superstition accounting for it all. The sign has done the trick—nothing else but the sign. They can't imagine that we are Kwambas ourselves, of course. Anyhow, well."

He paused, and Pam saw his eyes frowning in a hard-thinking way.

"Here it is, as I see it, Pam," he soon resumed. "I want at all costs to keep near you, and so I'm going to have a shot at guarding you myself. I don't know, but I may be able to carry off the bluff. Here, quick!" he counselled, and surprised her by drawing her as far as possible away from the hut entrance, where women and children still gaped in at them both.

But that staring curiosity was exactly what Pam, a few moments later, was being spared, thanks to one of Jimmy's brainwaves.

No sooner had he shown her where to stand than he boldly walked back to the hut entrance and reached for the hurdle-like panel which served as a door. He fetched it inside the hut, and contrived to set it up as a screen behind which Pam would be concealed.

"I'll be improving upon this, I hope, before the night's out," he said to Pam whilst fixing up the screen. "And no one is to come in, except to bring you food and water. Sorry, Pam. You're going to feel it, being cooped up—"

"Oh, Jimmy, as if you aren't thinking of things all the time!"

"What I hope; we stand a chance of being taken along to the Kwamba country. If only it can turn out like that for us, then we'll yet see all our friends again. If I had been captured alone—"

"Yes, what?" For he had paused.

"I dare say I would have done a bunk when I got away from that other hut. But I couldn't have you taking such a big chance—with the wild beasts and thirst."

"You've thought of everything, Jimmy."

"I've tried to decide for the best. Here's a woman with a couple of bowls. Food, I suppose."

He stopped to meet the ebony dame in a challenging manner, and sure enough the imperious policy still answered. Quite meekly she submitted the two wooden bowls of food—one for him, evidently, and one for Pam. He thought it would be a good plan to appear very fussy about Pam's ration. So, after taking his own bowl from the woman, he let her see him sip some of the gravy which was in Pam's.

With a nod to imply that it was "not so bad," he grandly waved the negress to pass on.

"Better not appear too grateful, Pam," he called out. "Dignity—that's the thing!"

"Right-ho!"

But Pam, when the woman came to her behind the makeshift screen, had hopes of standing on her dignity without being too aloof.

She made a sign for the excessively

fat creature to eat something from the bowl. It had scraps of meat floating in the gravy. The woman could either suppose that she was being commanded to prove that the food was good to eat, or else imagine that one was graciously pleased to be friendly!

In the deep gloom Pam saw her swarthy "waitress" take a bit of the stewed flesh from the bowl and—very agitatedly—devour it. The whites of her eyes were showing whilst she chewed away. Most amusing, in fact! But Pam took care not to smile. She set the bowl to her lips and sipped down some of the gravy, and really it seemed quite tasty.

And now, as the negress seemed to be awaiting any commands, Pam daringly made signs that she wished Jimmy to have his gun restored to him.

It was not easy to get the woman to understand; the trouble being that she, like the rest of the tribe perhaps, knew not the nature of the weapon which had been taken from Jimmy.

Yet in the end Pam succeeded in her purpose by taking the negress to stand by whilst Jimmy was pointed at and much else was done by pantomime action.

Suddenly the black woman nodded, and then hastily waddled out of the hut.

and I hope you sleep well."

She felt like laughing. He had spoken as if he and she were fellow-guests at some country house in the homeland. Amusement, however, instantly changed to an emotional feeling that very nearly caused tears to glisten along her lashes.

All the boyish chivalry which she had discerned in him, in other and happier times, how well it was being demonstrated now, and quite unconsciously, too!

Shy, plain Jimmy, with his modest belief that he always made a "mull" of things; he simply didn't know what there was in him for others to admire.

"I'll do as you say, Jimmy. Snatch a bit of sleep whilst one can—it has been a good working rule, hasn't it, these last few days and nights? But what about you?"

"I shall lie down here by the doorway. I may get a bit of a rest. But you can trust me, I hope, to be ready if—"

"Of course I can trust you, Jimmy. So good-night, and—and thanks for— for everything!"

"Good-night, Pam! And I'm pretty certain we shall come out of this all right."

She nodded, flashed him a smile



IN the fire's lurid glare Pam and Jimmy stood unmoved, while the natives crowded nearer. There was nothing they could do but wait—and hope for the best!

She returned, bringing Jimmy's gun, which he received with a stern look.

It seemed a shame to him and Pam that they had to be so ungracious; but there it was—their very lives depending upon a high-and-mighty bearing consistent with the magical Sign of the Double Hawk!

The village was quiet now, and the hot meal had made Pam feel sleepy. She patted back a yawn.

"Any idea of the time, Jimmy?" Her platinum wrist-watch had gone wrong days ago.

"It can't be very late, but you must get some sleep. So good-night, Pam,

eloquent of her own calm confidence, and went away to lie down. No further talk was exchanged, although he was remaining within easy speaking distance, carrying out useful activities in the hut.

### Now—or Never?

PAM dozed off.

She sank into that deep sleep which must overtake anyone at last when excitement and peril have taken utterly wearying effect upon mind and body alike.

She awoke, and it was still dark night.

Not a sound was to be heard, and so she wondered why she had awakened. It must have been that the spirit within her had said: "Now then, Pam!"

Her refreshed mind became instantly active. She suffered no terrifying fears for the safety of herself and Jimmy. Captives though they were, they seemed to be enjoying charmed lives!

But she was greatly wondering. Her mother and all those dear chums of Morcove from whom she had been snatched, along with Jimmy—how were they faring to-night? Were they still safe?

In any case, how anxious they must be! Bad enough it had been when the expedition lost all its menfolk, as the result of hostilities which never would have occurred only there had been that Frenchman, Dupont, to stir up native tribes. And now—this!

But Pam felt there must be something better for her to do, surely, than lie here in the hut only thinking—thinking.

She got to her feet, stretched, then stepped silently to where, in the darkness, she expected to find Jimmy.

That darkness, there was only the starlight to lessen now. The fire in the centre of the rough circle of native huts had been allowed to die down.

"Jimmy," she whispered. He was in such a posture at the hut entrance as meant, she could tell, a desperate determination not to fall asleep. His upright back was against the framework of the "doorway" on that side, and he was nursing his rifle. Now that she had come stealing out to him he stood up briskly.

"Not a wink?" she inferred. "Oh, I don't know, Pam! Yes, I suppose I have—"

"Jimmy, you're to get some proper sleep now, and I'll keep watch." She held out a hand for the gun. "Come on, now!"—with an insistent smile. "I'm as fresh as paint. Oh, and, besides, everything is so peaceful! The hunters—not back yet?"

"That's just it," he muttered. "They must be due back by now; the night nearly past."

"What! Have I been sleeping several hours, then? Oh, get down to it at once, Jimmy!"

Reluctantly, but very sensibly, he

obeyed, leaving her there at the hut entrance with the loaded rifle; and it was with a satisfied smile that she began her share of the vigil.

Such an intense stillness as there was during the next half-hour might well have got upon her nerves. Only a schoolgirl, and yet what a strange and fearful position she was in! But she, wanting Jimmy to go on sleeping, was nothing but glad at the way time crept by, and still no disturbing sound came.

An hour—and another half-hour—it must have been after that—with the night still as quiet as ever. But then—how intently she must have been listening all along, that she heard, of a sudden, such a very faint sound, from a good way off.

Pam stepped clear of the hut entrance to be able to pay better heed to the sounds coming to her from out the night-bound African bush.

Natives! A band of them, coming this way. The men and youths of this very village, most likely, returning home.

The significant sounds had endured only a minute longer, growing scarcely more distinct; when she heard rousing-up noises in some of the other huts.

Then, in the darkness, a few of the women came looming into view.

Pam instantly drew back into the hut and stood peering out—seeing, yet unseen. But soon the half-dead fire had been roused fully to life again, and she had to stand still farther in from the doorway to keep out of the fitful glare. It seemed to her also, that the dawn was at hand. The stars were paling—going out.

Gun in hand, Pam waited and watched on, leaving Jimmy still asleep behind her. One of the women came across to the hut and peered in. She stared at Pam in the dim light, and Pam stared back at her. After a moment Pam made a "Go away!" sign, and the woman went away.

Suddenly an uncanny drum-beating started in the village. It was the dull dub-dub-dub of a tomtom, to which voices began to sing—some screechily, others in a murmurous way.

"The gun, Pam."

Jimmy's asking her for it was the first she knew that he had risen from his sleep. She handed him the rifle.

"But we shall be all right," she smiled.

Jimmy nodded.

"All the same, Pam," he muttered, "we're going to get away."

"What! I thought you said—"

"That's what I said when there would have been hours of darkness for us to go, if we had got away. And neither of us fed or rested! It's different now, Pam! This is the time—just before daylight!"

"Oh, yes—yes!" she instantly agreed. "If you feel that way, so do I, Jimmy. I'd much rather take a chance—"

"We must, Pam. Listen here! The women are getting all worked-up about their men coming back from hunting. Those men will be dead-beat, I reckon—and that's in our favour, too. Are you all right, Pam—fit?"

"Fit for anything, Jimmy!"

"That hole in the wall that I made last night—we go out that way, Pam," he whispered on. "You'll go first. The screen I put up in here prevents anyone from seeing that opening at the back of the hut."

*Dub-dub-dub!* the drum went on; and the women's singing grew ever instant louder, wilder. *Dub-dub-dub!* And a weird "Yah—rah, yah!" of those barbaric voices.

Jimmy stepped to the hut entrance, from where he spoke back to her without looking round.

"O now, Pam—now! Quick as you can!"

*DUB, dub, dub!*  
"Ya-rah, ya-rah, ya-rah!"

That monotonous chanting and drum-beating in the village itself, and less than a mile away now the queer hulla-balloo of numbers of black men and youths homing after their night's hunting.

PAM, head and shoulders through the hole in the hut wall, peered about with intense anxiety.

Anyone about to see her? No—everything seemed still.

She writhed clear of the hole, but was suddenly determined not to go a yard farther without Jimmy.

Twisting about, still without rising, she spoke in to him through the rent in the wall.

"Jimmy, come on! You must!"

To her immense relief, he was next moment whispering out to her:

"Right—ho!"

Head foremost, out he crawled.

"All clear, I think," she breathed.

On hands and knees they crawled for perhaps half the distance to where a large area of outcropping rocks held out the hope of good cover.

Then they both rose up and ran.

As for dear life itself, they streaked across the last of the open grassland. And like that they were still running, when suddenly a head bobbed up from behind one of the rocks.

It was a head with a black face, and it instantly bobbed down again out of sight.

Pam and Jimmy stopped dead then.

Go on—or not? Which were they to do?

In the very moment when they had hoped that escape was certain, Pam and Jimmy have been seen! What can they do—turn back, or make a desperate dash for safety? Continue this vivid serial in next Saturday's SCHOOLGIRL, with every copy of which there will be presented a superb FREE photo-postcard of ROBERT DONAT. Order at once.



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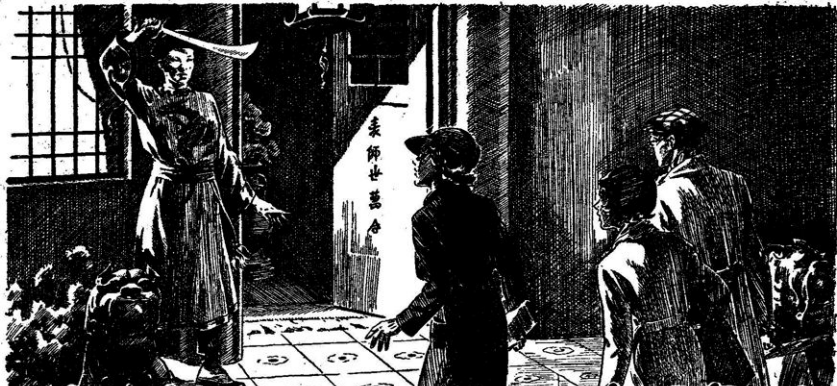
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## Deepening Mystery Provides New Thrills in This Unusual and Romantic Serial



# THE PAGODA OF PERIL

FOR NEW READERS.

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 suspect. The cousins defend Kwanyin against a crafty Chinaman—KAI TAL, whom they strongly mistrust. Uncle Gerald, however, appears to have the greatest faith in Kai Tal, and has little sympathy for Kwanyin.

Catherine dons the mask of an idol which Kai Tal had made Kwanyin wear, to frighten the cousins. She hopes, by thus being able to impersonate Kwanyin, to learn something of Kai Tal's activities.

(Now read on.)

By

ELIZABETH  
CHESTER

Illustrated by E. Baker

Kai Tal, but a man so like the others that Catherine could not have known him again.

He stood before her and bowed his head.

Then he spoke rapidly in Chinese.

Catherine stood stock still in dismay. Naturally, she did not understand one word of Chinese. But what this man said was of importance, and his tone was friendly.

Suddenly his eyes looked right and left, warily; he put a finger to his lips and beckoned Catherine to follow him. In some way he knew that Kwanyin was wearing the head, but he had not guessed that someone had changed places with her.

What was it he whispered in Chinese that was so important? Was it something vital to Kwanyin? Something she ought to know?

With deep dismay, Catherine realized that she had prevented Kwanyin hearing this message! But was it best to keep silent, or speak in English and explain?

"No speaks Chinese. Me nottee Kwanyin," she said.

The Chinaman seemed not to heed, but turning, he put a finger to his lips and beckoned her, walking back silently to the curtains.

Catherine hesitated, and then turned to look for Kwanyin. She was not to be seen. There was no sound of footsteps, either.

Should she follow, or not?

The Chinaman did not wait, but walked on, and Catherine, feeling that she might learn something to Kwanyin's advantage, followed. What she learned might help her, too!

She followed the Chinaman to a wall, and then he turned off the light, and from the darkness came a sharp click.

A pocket flashlight showed for a moment, and Catherine saw a long corridor, covered with small rush mats.

After a moment's hesitation, she stepped into the corridor.

And he looked at the little Chinese girl with compassion.

"Please no let lady wear headdee. Unlucky," said Kwanyin, clasping her hands.

"I am not afraid," said Catherine. "Kai Tal will think it's you inside this head. He'll give himself away. He'll call me Kwanyin. Then I'll lead him to uncle, and he will be shown up!"

It was a plan which needed courage and determination, but Catherine was not lacking in either quality. With sudden decision, she raised the giant hollow carving and placed it over her own head.

Kwanyin whimpered with fright.

"No, no!" she begged.

But Catherine hurried forward down the corridor. She wanted, above all, to prove that Kai Tal was evil. Her Uncle Gerald refused to believe it. He thought the evil Chinaman was his loyal servant and friend.

He had refused to believe that the rascal bullied pretty little Kwanyin. He preferred to believe that Kwanyin was a scheming, worthless girl!

Now, however, Catherine thought that she could prove the truth to him.

Groping cautiously, guided only by the view she had through the two small slits in the idol's head, she went down the long, narrow corridor to the central hall of her uncle's house, Pagoda Place.

There she paused, hearing a slight movement. Then a voice spoke.

"Kwanyin," came a soft call.

Curtains at the side parted, and a Chinaman came through. It was not

### Seen and Heard

"I AM going to wear the idol's head.

Catherine Sterndale spoke firmly. But she could not repress a shudder as she looked at the enormous and hideous head of the idol, Ts Tsiang.

It was three times the size of a normal human head. The wonderfully carved face wore a hideous grimace. The eyes, cleverly jeweled, had a wicked flash. The unexpected sight of it would be enough to startle a man even of iron nerves!

To add to the effect, there was a dark cloak splashed with luminous paint.

"If we had seen this suddenly in the dark," said Catherine, with a shiver, "then that rascal, Kai Tal, would have had his wish. We should have been scared—so scared, we might even have packed our things and left."

"Golly, yes," agreed her cousin Molly.

She spoke with unusual restraint. The effect of the idol had dampened even her gay spirits.

"That fellow, Kai Tal," said cousin Charles grimly, "ought to be horse-whipped. Fancy sending poor little Kwanyin to try to scare us."

All was silent, save for an odd, clinking sound. It paused now and again, but always restarted with greater vigour.

Catherine's curiosity changed to alarm, and now she told herself that she had acted foolishly and recklessly. The Chinaman leading her had flashed on his torch again.

Was it best to turn and run now? Should she go on? Catherine could not make up her mind. In a moment, however, she was spared the need, for the Chinaman stopped and put a finger to his lips and switched off the torch.

What it was that alarmed him Catherine did not know. But his ears must have been sharper than hers, for suddenly a patch of light showed in the dark corridor, and the sound of clinking was louder.

In the patch of light was a crouched figure, which came through into the corridor. Catherine, leaning forward, saw through that hole in the wall. She saw Chinamen with pickaxes and tools. She saw a stone wall, on which they were hacking.

So this was the heart of the mystery! In the dead of night men were working secretly—where—at what?

Suddenly the lights flashed on. There was a yell, and Catherine saw Kai Tal. It was he who had come through the wall.

She saw the flash of a sword, and next saw the Chinaman who had led her here drop to his knees, hands clasped. He babbled shrieking words of appeal.

"Kwanyin!" cried Kai Tal, and pointed to Catherine.

Then he gave an order in Chinese, and two men appeared through the hole in the wall.

Catherine's legs seemed turned to lead as she saw Kai Tal, with upraised sword, make for the Chinaman who had led her there.

But she soon took her eyes from that dreadful scene, for the other two Chinamen were running straight for her, crouching low.

Catherine suddenly came to life and turned.

She forgot, in that moment, all about her plan. She was not prepared for the climax.

But the head hampered her. Her escape was cut off. The two Chinamen, with lithe, animal-like springs, drew level and caught her arms through the cloak.

Catherine did not struggle. She was too frightened.

The men spoke to her in Chinese, but she did not answer. They turned her round, however, and now she was looking again at Kai Tal, and the cowering, pleading Chinaman, who pointed to her. She guessed that he was trying to put the blame on her.

It was easy to see that this was a forbidden spot, where not even Kwanyin was allowed to venture.

Whatever work was done here, was done secretly.

Did Uncle Gerald know about it? Catherine asked herself. She decided that he did not. This was a plot of Kai Tal's, and she had come upon it unexpectedly.

Stiffening, she waited for the moment when Kai Tal would find that she was not Kwanyin at all, but Catherine.

It would be a shock for him, made twice as intense now that Catherine had stumbled upon his secret.

He came forward, arms folded, the glittering sword in his right hand. Catherine waited. He stood silent, glaring at her in anger. When he did speak, she did not expect to be able to

understand, for she knew no word of Chinese.

But, to her surprise, he spoke in English, in his usual flowing, fluent, hypocritical manner.

"Illustrious and persevering Kwanyin," he said, "has forgotten that she is in very grave peril in this house where she is a guest."

Catherine did not reply. She was not sure that she could imitate the Chinese girl's voice.

"Never again shall your folly be so unquenchable as to lead to the edge of a precipice, over which the slightest false step would project you to oblivion," said Kai Tal evenly, but with mockery in his voice. "For Kwanyin would then be dealt with as the others whom she knows so well. For their nobility and their splendour were even as a silk cloak in the tearing rage of a blizzard, giving no protection. Kwanyin has seen nothing, though her eyes have been opened, and she has looked diligently. She remembers nothing, for she is not in any way like the braying ass."

Catherine made an inclination of the enormous head.

"The silence is agreement," said Kai Tal, "but there is one thing more which the much despised and unworthy Kai Tal has wish to mention. On the morrow it may be that the noble cousins may seek diversion near the lake in the heat of the day. Kwanyin, being wise, will make subtle and ingenious mention of the dangers, should she by chance artfully speak to them against the expressed contrary orders."

Catherine translated that polished and smooth speech to mean that Kwanyin had to keep herself and her cousins away from the lake.

Why? Was there something mysterious happening at the lake? That was the question she burned to ask, but, in the circumstances, she dare not speak.

"It is understood," said Kai Tal. And then, with a sweeping gesture of the hands to the two Chinamen, he gave an order which Catherine understood to be of dismissal.

Something was thrown over the great idol's head, and she could then see nothing. Thus blindfolded, the Chinamen led her away.

### More Mystery

**B**UT now came the greatest danger.

Would they make her take off the head? Was she to be imprisoned? Catherine, on the alert, prepared to escape.

Catherine's Chinese captors walked her along in silence. Now and again they helped her to avoid obstacles by stooping or turning, but they did not speak.

Then, after what seemed a walk of several hundred yards, they released their grip of her. She heard them move away. Next came the sound of a door being closed.

Raising her hands, Catherine whipped the covering cloth from her head, and eagerly stared about her.

She found herself in a tastefully furnished room. It was richly furnished in Chinese, with ornaments more luxurious even than those she had seen before.

Greatly surprised, she removed the idol's head, and placed it on the ground. The room was deserted.

When the first surprise was over, and she had given an admiring glance at the room, Catherine went to the immense mahogany door.

Her cousins, Molly and Charles, must be anxiously awaiting her, and the sooner she got back to them the better.

But even before she tried the door she guessed the truth. It was locked. She was a prisoner.

In deep dismay Catherine looked about her, seeking a means of escape, wondering if she could possibly climb out of the windows.

For now she had been warned about the lake she did not want Kai Tal to learn that it was to her that he had given the secret warning. And if she remained here, sooner or later someone must come—perhaps Kai Tal himself—and then the imposture would be known.

Catherine turned to the door again, and she was again trying the handle, in case she had made a mistake, when she heard a soft, rustling sound behind.

She turned, and then gasped aloud. For there, stepping from behind a curtain, was Kwanyin, finger to her lips.

**K**WANYIN ADVANCED to Catherine, hands clasped.

"You safe? Nottee hurt?" she asked, with tender anxiety.

"No, not hurt; but how did you get here?" asked Catherine, in wonder.

"Loom belongee me," said Kwanyin. "Mo here."

"Oh!" said Catherine, thinking of the magnificence of it. "Very lucky, Kwanyin." And then she added: "Do you know there is digging going on here?"

"Digging? Me no savvy digging."

"Oh dear—with spades, you know!" said Catherine, and tried by using dumb show to make her meaning clear to the little Chinese girl.

But Kwanyin either did not wish to understand, or else Catherine was not being very clever at charades. For the little Chinese girl watched her with perplexity, and kept saying "me no savvy digging."

Catherine gave it up. She wanted to get back to her cousins as quickly as possible, so she decided to leave any enlightening of Kwanyin, or any explanations, until the morning.

"I go," she said. "Good-night, Kwanyin. Sleep well."

"Sleepee well, too," said Kwanyin, and then produced from the folds of her gown a small key, with which she opened the locked door.

Catherine gave her a puzzled look. Had Kwanyin locked the door herself? If she wondered, she had the little Chinese girl a key without Kai Tal's knowledge? Catherine could believe that possible, for Kwanyin was very deep and mysterious.

When she left Kwanyin's room, Catherine hurried at once to find her cousins. They had not gone to bed, but were in Charles' room awaiting her return and discussing what had happened.

Their relief when they saw Catherine was enormous.

"You're back," said Charles. "My word, Catherine, I was beginning to think you were lost. You know, you oughtn't to do these reckless things—"

"What happened?" asked Molly eagerly, cutting Charles' lecture short. "Anything exciting?"

"Yes, plenty," nodded Catherine, and then recounted everything that had happened, after first making sure that the door was tightly closed.

When she came to the digging operations, Charles and Molly sat upright, startled and intrigued.

"What were they digging for? Where? How?" Charles asked.

"Can't say. They were just digging

at some rock and earth in a sort of tunnel," said Catherine. "Then Kai Tal ordered me off, and ticked me off, thinking I was Kwanyin. After that he warned me about to-morrow."

Charles and Molly spoke with one voice.

"To-morrow! What about it?"

"Well, it's to-day," said Catherine, looking at her wrist-watch in dismay. "It's one o'clock in the morning! Anyway, to-day we mustn't go near the lake. Kai Tal doesn't want us to. He told Kwanyin, as he thought, to tell us to keep away."

Molly's eyes glimmered. She loved fun and mystery and excitement, and she had always, from her earliest years, ignored warnings and done forbidden things.

"My goodness! Warned not to go near the lake! That means we're going, Gosh, now for some excitement! What's going to be done at the lake that we mustn't see, I'd like to know?"

But Charles frowned sternly. He was always conscious that he was a few days older than either of them, and that seemed to give him a tremendous sense of responsibility.

"One thing is certain. I am not going to the lake," he said. "Nor are you. But we're going to tell uncle."

Catherine quickly countered that.

"No fear. Uncle will want to know why I dressed up as Kwanyin. We've got to keep him out of this until we have proof. Kai Tal might easily wangle some story about it. He'll put us in the wrong, and we may be sent packing, which is what that rascal, Kai Tal, wants."

Charles argued, but Molly, picking up his pillow, swung it round, and gave him a playful thump that sent him gasping back.

"Come on, Cath!" she squealed. "Quick—"

And before Charles had recovered from the buff, they were gone.

"The lake!" said Molly in a whisper, as she kissed Catherine good-night.

"The lake," agreed Catherine, and then they both jumped into their rooms and shut their doors, as Charles, adjusting his glasses, glared into the corridor, holding his pillow ready to give them a return swipe.

"The lake, is it?" he frowned, as he got into bed: "Not if I know it. Those girls will have to be kept in order, and it's lucky I'm with them. What-  
ever happens, we steer clear of that lake to-morrow."

And with that firm resolution, Charles went off to sleep.

### Adventure at the Lake

WHEN Catherine Sterndale awoke on the morning following her adventures, it was to see a Chinese girl standing beside her bed with a tray.

Rubbing her eyes sleepily, Catherine stared at the girl in wonder. It was not Kwanyin who stood there!

"Another Chinese girl?" said Catherine in surprise. "Good-morning, and what is your name?"

"No savvy English," said the girl haltingly.

"No talkee one word?" asked Catherine, yawning.

"No talkee," said the girl shyly, backing to the door. She had put the tray on a small bedside table, where Catherine could reach it.

"Oh!" said Catherine, in disappointment. "I was hoping for a chat."

Sitting up, she gave her attention to the tea-tray.

The sight of it woke her up completely. For the tray itself was of wonderfully inlaid mother-of-pearl, with a design composed of little Chinese people, bridges, trees, houses, and birds. The cup was in Chinese pattern, no thicker than an eggshell, and without a handle.

It was a beautiful morning, and they were both keen swimmers.

Molly hurried off then to get into her bathing costume, and Catherine rooted amongst her luggage, which she had only partly unpacked.

She found her bathing costume and



THE bushes parted and Kwanyin appeared.

"Kai Tal say not goee lake," she whispered. Catherine tensed. Was Kai Tal trying to conceal something by forbidding them to go near the lake?

The tea was a rich, golden colour, and showed through the very thin cup, and looked more delicious than any tea Catherine had seen before.

There was no milk, but thin slices of lemon were in a delicately made and painted saucer.

The tea itself was delicious, and Catherine began to lose her tiredness.

"It's going to be fun here," she decided. "And if only we can get rid of Kai Tal—"

Kai Tal was not a pleasant waking thought, but the sun was shining brightly, and the birds were singing so gaily that Catherine even took a brighter view of the yellow rascal.

She was just getting out of bed and wrapping a dressing-gown about her when Molly looked in.

"Hallo, Cath! I say, what marvellous tea," she said. "And how on earth did that little Chinese girl get in? I locked my door and left the key in the lock."

"Goodness—so did I!" gasped Catherine, taken aback. "How odd. I didn't hear a sound, either. I just woke up and found her beside my bed."

Molly laughed.

"Well, isn't that just what you'd expect here? It's the queerest place I know. Everything is done—well, sort of like a conjuring trick. It's uncanny. But how about the lake?"

"I'd love a swim, certainly," yawned Catherine. "Let's go before breakfast. Charles won't be up to interfere. Let's go now."

put it on, but Molly was already at her door in a bath wrap, beach shoes, and with a large towel over her shoulder.

"Uncle's downstairs," said Molly. "Better tell him we're going. I suppose?"

"Don't know. He said in his letter we could have swimming. Let's slip out and see the lake."

They went into the corridor, which was deserted, and hurried downstairs and into the garden.

Glorious flowers, brilliantly coloured, were everywhere. Strange trees of unusual shape were artistically placed, having been transplanted from Chinese soil.

Tending some flowers in the garden was an aged Chinaman with a wrinkled face, and Molly went up to him.

"Oh illustrious and noble gardener," she said, "this utterly ridiculous person would like to bathe here silly self in the magnificent and wet lake hereabouts. Where is it, prithee?"

The old Chinaman's face wrinkled more, and his dark eyes looked swiftly from one to the other of the two girls.

"Swim in lake?" he asked, in a high-pitched voice. Very dangerous. Water deep. Some drowned. Not nice. Do not advise."

He saluted, and went on with his gardening.

Molly looked at Catherine, with a frown.

"Sounds hopeful," she said. "But who cares about deep water?"

Catherine, before answering, tackled

the gardener again. His quaint, high-pitched voice and jerky speech amused her.

"Mr. Sterndale, him bathe?" she asked.

"Mr. Sterndale," said the gardener, "not swim."

"Not swim?" said Catherine, in surprise. "Oh, but I know he does. Of course he does. He often swims."

The gardener did not seem pleased by the reply.

"You know? Not ask me," he said coldly. "You go lake swim. Me go fetch boat. Save you once. Not twice. Much trouble. Rowing make back ache."

He bent over his flowers.

"Poof!" said Molly. "You won't have to come to save us. And don't be so jolly grumpy. Can I pick a flower?" she teased him.

"No pick flower," said the gardener tersely. "Please go away. Wang Fu busy."

Catherine nudged Molly, and laughed.

"We're only annoying him," she said. "Let's go down to the lake. I've just seen it through the trees."

A shining patch of water, like a mirror, could be seen in the direction she indicated, and Molly gave a skip of joy, then, looking back at the gardener, after they had gone a few paces, picked a poppy.

But the gardener had moved.

"Gone!" said Molly.

But Catherine guessed the answer. "He's gone to warn them that we're going to the lake. Come on. There's something fishy about this lake, or Kai Tal wouldn't be so eager to keep us away from it."

Suddenly the bushes beside them rustled, and someone called.

Catherine turned quickly.

The bushes parted, and Kwanyin's face showed between the leaves.

"Kai Tal say not goe lakee," she whispered.

"Oh! So you know. Kai Tal has told you," said Catherine quickly.

"But honlable miss go lakee," said Kwanyin eagerly. "Go soft—likee snakee—go spy, watchee—watchee!"

Without another word, she disappeared, and when Catherine pushed through the bushes to find her, there was no trace that the little Chinese girl had even been there.

"Well," said Catherine. "That's a broad enough hint. Kwanyin wants us to keep our eyes on him, and that's what we're here to do. Come on! This is getting exciting. Perhaps we'll find out now just what the rascal is doing."

They reached the waterside and found a beaten track. Going along it softly, it was not long before they heard the sound of voices.

"Talking Chinese," said Catherine. They stopped, and presently they were able to see a group of figures some yards away. Kai Tal was one, but they could not recognise the others.

Then suddenly Catherine gave a jump. "My goodness! Uncle!"

"Uncle—here? I can't see him!" Molly whispered.

Catherine stood on tiptoe. The Chinamen were grouped round about a figure that lay on the grass. She could see the iron-grey hair and the European clothes. It was not a Chinaman that lay on the grass. It could only be one person—Uncle Gerald.

"Something's happened. An accident," said Molly.

She pressed forward, but Catherine caught her arm.

"Shh, quiet! Can't you see? He's bound. Tied up!"

Molly stood stock still, and both girls stared round-eyed as they realised that the figure on the ground was indeed a prisoner.

Kai Tal was out in the open at last, it seemed. His evil hand had struck.

"What are we going to do?" wondered Molly. "Rush to the rescue, Cath?"

Catherine's thoughts were racing; desperately she was trying to think of a way out.

"No, that'd be no use," she said, at last. "Better get help, either from the village or some neighbours."

Molly turned.

"Let's get—"

But that was all she said. For suddenly a yellow arm was thrust through

the bushes behind her, and a hand was placed over her mouth. With scarcely a sound she was dragged back.

Catherine, intently watching what was happening to Uncle Gerald, moving to get a better view, did not hear the very faint sound as Molly was dragged back.

When she turned, a moment later, Molly was not there.

"Molly!" she called.

Her blood seemed to freeze in her veins. She was not a nervous girl, but this sudden amazing disappearance of her cousin struck new dread into her heart.

Down at the water's edge she could see a boat drawn up. It was an odd-looking craft, and she guessed that it was what the Chinese called a junk. It had a strangely shaped sail, and somewhere on board, a cabin.

But Catherine gave the craft no more than a cursory glance. What held her rapt attention now was the group of Chinamen who were carrying the European to the boat.

"It's Uncle Gerald! And they're taking him on that boat!" she panted. "But why? Why have they turned against him?"

The Chinamen put their prisoner on board, and then stepped hurriedly back.

But there was one man on board, and he pushed the junk from the shore with a long pole.

Behind Catherine a Chinaman crept stealthily forward, arms bent.

But Catherine made a sudden decision. In the water, swimming, she would be hardly noticeable. She could reach the boat, swim ahead of it if it went slowly—and then board it.

Even as the Chinaman grasped at her, Catherine tore off her bathing wrap.

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