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Incorporating  
'SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN'



## SHE WANTED TO BREAK BOUNDS—

But Babs & Co. Were Determined to Foil the Firebrand

(See this week's enthralling long complete Cliff House School story, by Hilda Richards)

COMPLETE: A Powerful Story of the Girls of Cliff House School,  
Featuring Diana Royston-Clarke

# The FIREBRAND'S FOLLY



Diana the Reckless

"O H, topping, Jean!"  
"Congrats, Jean!"  
"What's it feel like to be a full-blown film star, Jean?"

Jean Cartwright laughed happily. It was the first time that Jean had laughed like that for weeks. Her attractive face was flushed. There was a sparkle of health, of excitement, in her eyes.

Very pleased with the world did Jean Cartwright appear on that bright June morning.

And scarcely less happy, if one were to judge by the expressions upon their faces, were Barbara Redfern & Co., those staunch chums of hers who belonged to the Fourth Form at Cliff House School.

A radiant little group they made as they stood clustered round the Scots girl on the wide stone steps that led to ancient Cliff House's imposing Gothic entrance.

The sun glistened among Barbara Redfern's chestnut curls; her best chum, Mabel Lynn, despite the fact that she wore her left hand in a sling, was laughing, too. Mabs had only just been released from sanatorium, where she had spent some time waiting for a broken wrist to mend.

Tombey Clara Trevlyn was vigorously shaking the blushing Jean's hand. Gentle Marjorie Hazeldene was smiling. Even plump Bessie Bunter looked excited.

"It's ripping!" she enthused. "Yes, ripping, you know! Next to me, Jean is the best film actress in the school! Of kik-course, I ought to have had the contract, really. But I don't bear malice. But, I sus-say, you girls, I

By

HILDA RICHARDS

Illustrations by T. Laidler

**EMBITTERED** by her failure to win the film part on which she had so set her heart, Diana Royston-Clarke, stormy Firebrand of the Fourth, startles the school with her most daring and reckless exploits. But Diana had a reason—a reason Cliff House never suspected!

think we ought to celebrate this! Let's go to the tuckshop!"

"And you stand treat?" Clara Trevlyn asked teasingly.

"Yes, rather! Sus-somebody's got to! It's not every day, you know, that we have a full-blown film star in the Fourth. It'll stand treat—that is, of course, if one of you will lend me a pound or so! It's not," Bessie explained, with dignity, as four freezing looks were fastened upon her, "that I'm hard-up, you know. It's simply that I happen to be short of cash at the moment, because I'm expecting—"

"The postal order that never turns up!" Clara Trevlyn chortled. "We know!"

"Oh, really, Clara—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
But, in spite of Bessie's glowering indignation, it was obvious that the fat one had made the right suggestion. Certainly such an auspicious occasion

could not be allowed to pass without celebration.

Not every day, indeed, that the Fourth was able to welcome a full-blown film star to its ranks; and Jean Cartwright, having signed a contract with the Enterprise Film Studios, had every claim to that proud title.

Cause enough for delight, especially when it was remembered that, had it not been for her contract, Jean, whose family had suffered a recent financial collapse, would have had to leave school at the end of the term.

"Well, come on!" Babs exclaimed gaily. "Bessie, cut off and fetch the others—Leila, Jemima, Marcelle, and Janet—and— Oh, you know! But— whoa! Soft pedal, everyone! Jean is going to speak!"

Jean flushed.  
"It—it's frightfully nice of you!"  
"Bow-wow!" Clara said good-humouredly.

"And—and—well, you know what I think about it," Jean said uncomfortably. (Jean, if such a splendid actress on the set, was certainly not one in real life.) But—but there's one thing I'd like, Babs, if you don't mind—one thing that would make me happier than anything else."

"Granted!" Mabel Lynn cried recklessly. "And that?"

"That—that Diana should be invited to come, too," Jean answered. "I—I owe it all to Diana, really. It was Diana who got me the contract—Diana and her father! You see—"

And she faltered, eyeing them anxiously. For it was obvious that her suggestion did not meet with the cordial approval she had hoped for. Just for a second the happy faces in front of her clouded a little.

Diana Royston-Clarke, the tempestuous Firebrand of the Fourth, was not in the good books of the Form.

Stormy, irrepressible, Diana had recently been openly defying authority, contemptuously putting law, order, and her Form-fellows at defiance.

But there was no doubt that she had aided Jean; no doubt but that she had materially helped Jean to get the contract which was now hers. Babs paused.

"Well, if you like, of course!"

"You don't mind?" Jean asked anxiously.

"No. Of course not," Babs said doubtfully.

And for herself she didn't—not, really—even if Diana had been rather beastly to her just lately. There was no love lost between Babs & Co. and the Firebrand of the Fourth, though it was undeniable that Diana had her good points.

"Where is she?" Clara asked.

"In the study."

"Right-ho! Then let's go!" Mabs said.

And go they did—in a body, laughing and chattering as they tramped into the school, up the stairs, and along the Fourth Form corridor. Outside the door of Study No. 8 Jean paused. She tapped.

"Diana!" she cried.

"Hallo!" came a voice from inside. A rather irritable, peevish voice it was, followed by a pause. "Well, ninny, can't you come in?" Diana cried impatiently.

"Don't hit her lip. The chums looked at each other. It did not appear that Diana was in her most amiable mood.

Had they not been warned by the tone of her voice, the first glance at Diana's impatient face, crowned by its incomparable mass of billowy blonde hair, might have told the chums that they had chosen an ill time for their mission. That face, which could be so beautiful when Diana was in one of her best moods, was sullen, petulant, and defiant.

In her hand she held a letter. The very way in which it was crumpled up proclaimed the savagery of her mood.

"Well," she cried impatiently, "what do you want?"

"Diana," Jean said anxiously, "we were wondering if you'd like to come to the tuckshop?"

Diana stared.

"What for?"

"Well, you—you see," Jean faltered, "Babs & Co. think that—that it would be a good idea to celebrate—"

"Jean's contract, you know," Babs nodded, anxious for Jean's sake to pour oil upon water which showed every prospect of becoming troubled. "Several of us are getting together and standing treat, and, as you've been such a friend to Jean, Diana, we thought you'd like to come, too."

"Yes, rather, that's it!" Clara nodded relievedly.

"Oh!" Diana shrugged. For a moment she eyed them. "Rather sudden, isn't it?" she broke out then, and the old mocking smile came to her curved lips.

Babs' lips compressed. Clara flushed angrily. A glint of annoyance came into Mabs' blue eyes. But Babs stuck it.

"We thought," she said quietly, "that as you are also a friend of Jean's, you might be willing to let bygones be bygones." We're willing to bury the hatchet—"

"How sweet of you!" Diana mocked. "And—well"—Babs shook her head—"will you come?"

Diana's eyes flashed.

"With you! No!" she answered decidedly. "Thanks all the same! I'll

celebrate with Jean some other time. At the moment I'm not in the mood for high jinks in the tuckshop, and I'm not particularly keen to be seen in your company, anyway. There's the door!"

"Why, you—" Clara burst out.

"Close it as you go out," Diana added smoothly.

"Oh, let's get out of this!" Clara cried gruffly. "Come on, before I buzz something at her. We might have known!" she added bitterly. "We might have saved ourselves the trouble."

She caught Jean by the arm. "Let the surly animal sulk in peace!" she cried, and, turning, made a face. "This way, Jean!"

And Jean, crimson and hurt, was piloted out into the passage again.

Diana gazed after them, the cynical smile still on her lips. But when the door closed she took an impulsive step forward. No, that wasn't fair, she told herself. Immediately, in that impetuous way of hers, she was blaming herself for her own behaviour.

She was a cat—of course, she was a cat! Babs meant well, she knew that. What the dickens could she do to restrain herself from these fits and outbursts? And Jean—Jean had looked so cut up, so hurt.

And then, half-way to the door, she checked herself, caught in the storm of another mood.

Oh, bother! Why the dickens should she rush after them? Why the dickens should she? And scowling, Diana turned again into the study.

She became aware again of the letter in her hand. It was the fault of that—that, she cried bitterly.

It was from her father, Rupert Royston-Clarke, Mayor of Lantham and financial director of the Enterprise Film

Studios and its sister the All-British.

It read:

"I have just received a second report from Miss Primrose concerning your recent conduct, Diana. It appears, despite the warning I gave you, that you are still wilfully pursuing the course which will lead inevitably to your expulsion. I am not harsh, nor do I wish to make threats, but I really must warn you that you are trying my patience most terribly—"

More like that, a lot of it. Irritably Diana crushed the letter in her hand again; the fine, white, firm teeth showed, clenched tight beneath the red lips. A flash was in those lovely blue eyes, which for a moment changed her expression. Her father—to dare to write to her like that!

Diana's chest heaved. Deliberately she twisted the letter into a spill. Then from the silver case in her pocket she took a cigarette. She placed it between her lips, lit it from the spill, watching with hard eyes as the letter burnt down.

Callously then she tossed it into the fire, deriving a grim, futile satisfaction from watching it dissolve into flames.

That for her father's letter! That he should dare to write to her like that!

But she knew Mr. Royston-Clarke was fed-up. Always he had been lenient—showered money and gifts upon her. Until recently, indeed, even her own father had been a little afraid of his firebrand daughter. Never before had he shown himself proof against the moods of Diana. Yet now he was riding the high-horse with a vengeance. It was all over that idiotic film contract, of course. Diana had tried for that. He had stepped in and prevented her.

Diana, in order to spite him, just to



"STAND aside!" Diana snapped. "I won't, Diana—I won't!" Jean retorted. "You've gone far enough; I'm not going to see you expelled." Diana's answer was to thrust the Scots girl aside and make a dash for the door.



be perverse, had kicked over the traces, showing him by her mutinous attitude that she still had a will of her own. She had expected that letter, but she had expected it to be couched in conciliatory terms, asking her not to go on playing the silly idiot, and promising her all sorts of things if she would give up the path of recklessness which she was so bent upon treading.

In that case, Diana, feeling that triumph was hers, would have knuckled under. Once she had her way, Diana could be the sweetest girl on earth. But this—

A step in the passage. The door opened.

"Diana!" a sharp voice said. Diana lowered the cigarette, staring through the trailing wisps of blue smoke at the thin, sharp face of Sarah Harrigan of the Sixth Form.

"Diana, you are smoking!" Instinctively Diana made as if to throw the cigarette into the fire. Sarah was a prefect, and a very strict, unpopular one. Diana's arched brows came down at sight of her. The cigarette she would have thrown away remained held between her slim fingers. Her glance was mocking.

"I congratulate you," she said, "upon your powers of observation. And also—contemptuously—upon your soft-footedness. Don't they teach you in the Sixth that it's bad manners not to knock at a door before entering?"

Sarah flushed.

"Diana, you are being insulting!" Diana carelessly shrugged.

"And put that cigarette out at once!"

"When I've finished it," Diana said calmly.

Sarah's eyes glittered.

"I am ordering you!"

"And I," Diana said, deliberately taking a puff and blowing out another cloud of smoke, "am listening. As a prefect, of course, you feel entitled to give orders. As a free British subject, and your social, intellectual, and physical superior, I take unto myself the right to refuse to obey. And now," she added calmly, "will you please go, Sarah? Your face gives me a pain!"

Sarah glared. But Diana had straightened up then. There was something in her face—something challenging, forbidding—which made her pause. Very straightly Diana was looking at her, daring her to come on, daring her to take another step forward.

"I shall report you, Diana!"

"If that," Diana said disinterestedly, "gives you any satisfaction, by all means go and do so!"

She laughed as the door slammed upon the prefect. Well, that was that! More trouble, she reflected recklessly. But what did she care? She was up to the neck in it now. How many detentions she had been given she did not know. How many lines and extra lessons she had to do she had lost count of. Sooner or later, she supposed, Primmy would get fed-up and expel her.

Diana shrugged. In her present mood she didn't care a jot whether she were expelled or whether she remained.

Jessie Cranston of the Third Form, looking awed, popped her head into the study.

"Primmy wants you, Diana."

"O.K.!" Diana said resignedly.

She finished her cigarette, leisurely pushed up her hair in the glass, and sauntered out.

Miss Primrose was in her study. She looked up quickly at Diana's entry.

"Diana, you know why I have sent for you?"

"Sarah?" Diana guessed.

"Sarah!" Miss Primrose's lips compressed. "She has reported you—for smoking, for insolence, for disobedience. I am beginning to feel that the punishments meted out at this school are altogether inadequate to meet your case. But I must remind you most sternly that you are heading for expulsion as fast as a girl can go. My patience is wearing dangerously thin."

Diana's lips compressed, but she said nothing.

"I shall take this matter up with your father, Diana," Miss Primrose went on sternly. "I have already reported you to him twice. I feel it my duty to warn him exactly where you stand. In the meantime you will take a further two hundred lines, and your pocket-money for the rest of the term will be stopped." She glanced at the telephone. "I am going to speak to your father now. You may go!"

Diana shrugged. She went. Outside she came face to face with a sourly grinning Sarah Harrigan.

"Cat!" she hissed, and went off down the corridor, ignoring Sarah's furious exhortation to "come back!"



### The Breaking Point

"HAT, bag, gloves," Diana Royston-Clarke mused. "Yes, here they all are. Jean, will you lend me your copy of the 'Cliff House Magazine' to read in the bus?"

Jean Cartwright started up.

"But, Diana, you're never going out?"

"But, Jean, I am!" Diana mocked. "Now, please, no scenes," she said. "Oh, yes, I know I'm detained, and all that. I know I'm breaking school laws. But if somebody didn't break them, there'd be no need for laws, would there?" she asked flippantly.

Jean jumped anxiously to her feet.

"Diana, please listen," she pleaded. "No, don't go!" Desperately she interposed herself between the Firebrand and the door. No, don't be a duffer!" she cried. "Oh, I know you don't care—not now, not while you're in this mood. But think, Diana! When you come back to your senses. You'll be sorry then!"

"Stand aside, dear," Diana demanded, a whip-like note in her voice.

Determinedly Jean stared at her.

"Diana, I won't!" she said. "No, I won't! If you won't save yourself, somebody's got to do it. You're gone far enough. I don't want you to be expelled—I don't want you to—"

But Diana, though she hated herself for the action, really did lose her temper then. Fiercely she made one step forward, fiercely caught Jean by the waist and swung her round. Jean, with a "gasp," brought up against the table.

"Diana!"

But Diana was gone. Slam! That was the door banging behind her. Click! That was the key in the lock to prevent Jean following.

And Diana strode off. She strode off with brows knitted, her lips tight. Down to the servants' quarters she went, letting herself out of the tradesmen's entrance, nipping across the lane and so joining the Friardale Road. Just as luck would have it, a bus drove in sight. Diana hailed it and stepped in.

She completed the half-hour's journey

to Courtfield in a stormy mood. She was still thinking of that letter, of Sarah Harrigan, of Miss Primrose. Above all, of her churlishness to Babs & Co., that last hateful scene with Jean.

Jean! It hurt her, that. Jean was so splendidly loyal, was so desperately trying to save her from herself! Perhaps she recognised the truth in Jean's words. When she came to her senses—

"But!" She would not allow herself to think further.

Courtfield was reached. She changed for Lantham. Twenty minutes later she surprised Parsons, the Royston-Clarke's butler, by ringing at the door.

"Why, Miss Diana, you?" he gasped.

"Me," Diana ungrammatically informed him. "Is Mr. Royston-Clarke in?"

Parsons gulped.

"Yes, Miss Diana, in his study. Shall I tell him?"

"Don't worry," Diana said. Haughtily she strode across the parquet floor. One brief knock she gave at the door of Mr. Royston-Clarke's study, then, flinging it open, she entered.

Her father, seated in an armchair at the side of his desk, spun round. His eyes rounded as he saw her.

"Diana, you here? I understood you were detained at school."

"And I am," Diana informed him. "Then what—?"

"I've broken bounds, played truant," Diana coolly returned. "Risking expulsion," she mocked, "just to come and see the dear old nasty-tempered dad. What was the matter with you last night, Curmudge?"

"Matter with me? Nothing!"

"When you wrote that letter I received this morning."

"Oh, that!" With a sudden change of expression, he got to his feet. Diana petulantly sat on the edge of his desk. He cleared his throat, a rumbling sound issued from his lips. "Diana!" he said ominously.

"I'm here!"

"Diana, look at me!" Diana looked at him, not a whit abashed by the storm clouds she saw gathering on his face. "I meant what I said in that letter—every word. I'm tired of these reports from Miss Primrose."

A flash came into Diana's eyes.

"And what?" she demanded.

"I hoped," Mr. Royston-Clarke went on, rising bitterness in his tones, "that when you returned to Cliff House you would settle down and behave yourself. I wanted to see you making something of yourself. I wanted you to be honoured, popular. I wanted to see you captain of your Form, head girl of the class. And what do I get? Reports! Threats of expulsion! Nice for me, isn't it?"

Diana drew a deep breath.

"Oh, don't mind my point of view," she mocked.

"Diana!"

"And don't," Diana exclaimed, suddenly giving way to the storm within her, "say 'Diana' like that! Oh, I know! All very well for you to sit there and say you want this, you want the other. We've been over that ground before. When I really wanted to be something—when I wanted to go on the films, and had my chance—who stepped in and put a spoke in my wheel? You! And who, behind my back, discussed my private affairs with Barbara Redfern & Co.? You! And you wonder why I've been kicking over the traces. Instead of trying to understand, instead of coming along and asking me to mend my ways,



what do you do? Send me insufferable letters. That's nice for me, isn't it?"

He gazed at her.

"Diana," he said quietly, "listen to me. In the past I've been indulgent; I've given you everything you could possibly want. And yet, despite all that, what has happened? For a time you've gone all right, with no complaints, then suddenly you flare out into one of those firebrand moods without warning. I've tried patience, I've tried kindness; this time I'm trying harder methods.

"Now, listen, Diana! I mean this! I've made up my mind. You've had fair warning, both from me and from the school. You are disgracing yourself. In disgracing yourself, you are also disgracing me. It's got to stop somewhere, and"—with a sudden quiver of passion—"if you're expelled, that's the end of it! If you're expelled, Diana, I shall disown you!"

Almost thickly he said that; quivering he was, but there was determination in every syllable.

Diana stared. For one sickening instant even she was afraid of this new father who so grimly confronted her. Disown her! Cast her off! He wouldn't, he couldn't—not her!

Then she saw that look in his face.

He could! He would!

What happened? Diana did not know. But something seemed to snap in her brain. For one moment she felt impotent, helpless. In the next, with a fiery surge her temper rushed to her rescue. The shock of the words brought out in sudden flaming passion all her worst firebrand qualities. White as chalk and as hard as marble that face of hers became. Inimically, threatening, father and daughter stood staring at each other.

Then—

Down with a bang went Diana's bag; it skidded across the table, sweeping with it a sheaf of papers. With one convulsive tug that snapped the moire band in half, she tore off her wrist-watch. Roughly she unpinned the brooch that was at the neck of her blouse, that she sent skimming after the bag. Fire was in her eyes.

"Thanks!" she said. The word shot from her lips like a tongue of flame. He started back as if scorched by the venom of it. "Don't trouble," she said biting, "to disown me! Here and now I disown you! There are your presents, and in that bag you'll find the money you've given me! I'll stop on at Cliff House until the end of the term, simply because the fees are paid in advance, but after that you can count your lucky stars if you ever see me any more! I'm quite capable of looking after myself, and I will look after myself—as I did once before! I want no more of your money, so don't send it! I want no more of your favours, so don't offer them! I want—" And then, feeling the choke coming into her throat, she flung out an arm at him and strode tempestuously towards the door. "Good-bye!"

Mr. Royston-Clarke did not reply; he stood like a man stricken.

Crash!

The door slammed to, and at that sound he jerked into life. One tottering step he took towards the door; a hoarse, croaking sound came from his throat.

"Diana!"

But Diana the tempestuous had gone. She did not even stop to collect her coat or her gloves. And she did not know that in the room she had left her father had collapsed.



## Aftermath

**A**FTERWARDS, when reaction had taken its grip upon the stormy Firebrand, when she had calmed down, when she reviewed in the clear, bright sunlight of the glorious June day that tempestuous scene in her father's study—



**WITH** a passionate gesture, Diana flung her handbag across the table. "I want nothing more to do with you!" she stormed at her father. "And you'll be lucky if you ever see me again!"

Anger was gone then. It was as if Diana had exploded every grain of it in that scene. Numbing the ache in her heart as she sat by the roadside and groaned to think what she had done.

Curmudgeon—he had turned upon her, and she upon him! Diana felt a lump rising in her throat.

Never in her life had Diana shed tears, but she was dangerously near to shedding them then. What an awful little cat she was!

Her first impulse was to undo the mischief she had wrought; to rush back and fling herself upon her father, to beg his forgiveness.

Then she stiffened. Back came the old obstinacy—an obstinacy stiffened by a starch-like pride.

Why should she? Into his face she had flung her defiance; she had declared passionately that she was no longer dependent upon him.

Not she to let him have the last laugh; not she ever to refuse to make good a dare!

She had no money. Henceforth she would have none. That didn't dismay her. She did not flinch. She meant what she had said. She would go through with it!

Ten miles she was from Cliff House, and, since she had abandoned her money, that meant she would have to

walk every inch of that distance—the walk the inevitable row at the end of it. Well—

She didn't mind the walk. It would help to clear her thoughts; it would, in some measure, do her good, keeping pace with the rioting thoughts that were now going on within her brain.

Courtfield, five miles away, was reached almost without her being aware of it. On she strode towards Friarado. She smiled bitterly as she neared the Enterprise Film Studios—that scene of

her former ambition, that imposing pile now dominated by her father.

She was drawing abreast of the entrance, when the little wicket-gate opened, and a figure stepped into the road.

A figure who, like Mabel Lynn, at Cliff House, had one arm done up in a bandage.

Diana staeed.

"Nellie!" she whooped.

Nellie Sharpe, daughter of one of the studios' charwomen, turned with a start, a happy flush coming into her pale little cheeks as she saw the Firebrand. In all the world Diana had no admirer like little Nellie Sharpe, the poor girl for whom, on various occasions, impelled by that curiously contradictory streak in her firebrand nature, she had done so many good turns. But it had been some time now since she had seen Nellie.

Unfeignedly glad was Diana to meet the little one again; for her part, Nellie seemed transported into raptures. "Oh, Miss Royston-Clarke!"

"Diana," that girl corrected her. "We're pals now, you and I. But how goes the merry old work?" she asked, beaming. "And—Yoicks! What on earth have you done to your hand?" Nellie's lips quivered.

"I—I've scalded it, Miss Roy—"

"Diana."

"Di-Diana," Nellie said shyly. "But, I say, that's a bad job!" Diana said concernedly. "How the dickens did you come to do that?"

And Nellie told her—a rather pathetic little story. Her mother, with whom she lived alone, her father being dead, had fallen ill on the very day little Nellie had left school.

Nellie, in addition to having to find a job to keep the little home going, had, at the same time, found all the work of the house upon her shoulders, and in upsetting a kettle of boiling water had so badly scalded her hand and arm that it was impossible for her to use them. Diana shook her head.

"Tough luck!" she said. "Tough luck!" She paused, on the point of suggesting that she should go to the studio restaurant together, and then remembering that she had no money, "but plucky, Nellie," she said—"very, very plucky!" And now tell me about the job you've got, you young Trojan. I thought I promised you a job when you left school."

Nellie smiled shyly. "Yes, Miss—Diana, I mean. But you—you've been so awfully kind in other ways that I just couldn't ask you. But I was lucky! I found a job—a nice job."

"Doing what?" Nellie's lips quivered a little. "Typing. But—" she broke off, looking at her hand. "Oh dear, I—I don't know what I'm going to do now," she said.

Diana felt a pang of compassion. She sensed real tragedy in the little one's face.

"Nellie, tell me about it," she said. And shakily Nellie told the sad little story. She had worked, she said, at home. She was typing a book in manuscript form for Miss Maida Smith, the novelist, who lived in Whitechester, doing all the work at home on a borrowed machine, and posting each day's batch of copy to the authoress as it was finished. Diana's eyes gleamed.

"And does Miss Smith know that you've had this accident?"

"N-no," faltered Nellie. "It—it only happened last night, you see."

"And if you can't get on with the job, she'll take it from you?"

Gulpily Nellie nodded. Diana stood silent. Her heart ached for the little one. For the moment at least she had forgotten her own affairs. She was telling herself that she ought to help Nellie, that she would help Nellie.

Had it not been for that stormy scene at home she could have helped Nellie. Her father would have done something for the little girl like a shot. But she was going to ask no more favours of him. She had said so. On the other hand, she could not give Nellie money, even if Nellie would have accepted it. She had none to give now!

Diana came to a sudden decision. "Now listen, Nellie," she said. "There's a way out—only one. No, don't interrupt. I'll do the talking, and you've just got to do what I say. Let me have the manuscript."

"You? But Miss—Diana—"

"Let me have the manuscript," Diana said firmly. "Tell me how much there is to be done every day, and I'll do it. I can get a typewriter at Cliff House. You can come—but no, you have your mother to look after. I'll bring you the batch every day."

"Oh, Diana—" Nellie stammered.

"Come on, get it," Diana said. "I'll come with you and get it!"

And Nellie, utterly under the Firebrand's influence, quivering with grati-

tude, took her along to her poor home. She protested still, but not Diana to listen to her objections. There and then she insisted upon taking the manuscript.

Poor little kid, she thought, as she strode Cliff House-wards again. And then, looking at the pile in her hand—it was the better part of an eighty-thousand-word novel—she felt sorry for herself. But she had promised. Nellie's job must be kept open at all costs. She'd do it!

She reached Cliff House just as the bell for dinner was going. She was smiling then, making plans for working that afternoon. Plenty of chances, she told herself, as she was detained; and reflected cynically that she must be careful not to get the sack before this job was finished, otherwise where in the world was she to obtain another typewriter?

But on the steps she paused. Sarah Harrigan, looking fierce, was waiting for her.

"And where?" she flared out, "have you been, Diana?"

Diana was instantly nettled. "And what," she replied snappishly, "is that to do with you?"

"You've broken bounds!"

"Well?"

"What have you got in that parcel?"

"Mind your own business!"

"Very well!" Sarah's teeth came together. "As you are adding this offence to your other offences, Diana, you can come to Miss Primrose. Perhaps you will tell her where you have been."

But Diana, from that moment, wouldn't. Her back was up. Plain it was from Sarah's look and attitude that she thought Diana had been playing the fool again. Just out of sheer perversity Diana wasn't going to tell her!

In the headmistress' study, with Sarah standing by her side, Miss Primrose faced her.

"Again, Diana? My patience is running out. Where have you been?"

Diana set her lips. "Had Sarah not been there, she would probably have answered. But she wasn't going to give Sarah that satisfaction."

"You refuse to answer?" Miss Primrose said.

"Yes," Diana boldly returned. "Very well! Go back to your study. I'm sure I don't know what I am to do with you. But you are nearing the end of your tether, Diana. Sarah, take her back to her study, and make it your business to see that she does not break bounds again. Meantime, send Jean Cartwright to me."

Diana stared.

"Jean? What has she done?"

"That," Miss Primrose said acidly, "does not concern you, Diana!"

But when, five minutes later, Jean presented herself to her she shook her head.

"I have sent for you, Jean, because I understand you and Diana are friends. If that is the case, then I hope you will have some influence with her. The girl is wayward and reckless."

Jean bit her lip.

"I have threatened her with expulsion. I intend to keep to that. As her friend I hope sincerely that you will be able to prevent it. I do not want to expel her. The girl has some very fine points, as well as some equally irritating ones. I am sure, as her friend, you can persuade her, though, perhaps," she added, "knowing Diana's character, it will be just as well if you do not mention this interview to her. You will do your best, Jean?"

Jean heaved a sigh.

"I will do my best," she promised. But she said it in dull, lifeless tones. Great goodness, hadn't she tried? What could she do?

In her extremity Jean thought of Babs, of Mabs, of Clara, and Margot Lantham. She felt that the task of keeping Diana in order was just more than one girl's work!



No Stopping Diana

"BUT, Babs, you've got to! You must help!" Jean Cartwright cried. "Oh, I know Diana's asking for it. I know, perhaps, that she doesn't deserve it. But, Babs, she's been such a friend to me, and—and I couldn't desert her now. Babs, please do help me."

Barbara Redfern bit her lip. The scene was Study No. 4. The time ten minutes later. In that study Babs, Mabs, Clara, and Margot Lantham, Diana's friend of her pre-Cliff House days, were gathered. They were looking serious.

Babs shook her head. "Well, of course we don't want to see the duffer expelled, even if she is asking for it," she said. "Diana's got her good points. If she only puts herself out she can be the most popular girl in the Form. It seems to me rather like trying to keep a bear in a cage of string. What can we do?"

"Appeal to her better side," Mabs suggested.

Clara shrugged. "And a fat lot of good that will do," she said crushingly. "The only way is to fully well stop her by force."

But Jean distractedly shook her head. "No, no," she said. "Oh goodness, wait a minute! Look here—"

And she gazed up with sudden hope in her face. "Clara, I've got the idea. Sooner or later she'll come out of this mad fit that's on her. Sooner or later she'll begin to see reason and tame down again. At the moment she's got no interest in the school. She's out of the film, she's out of the dramatic society. She's out of everything. Clara, why not put her in the cricket team on Saturday?"

Clara looked surprised. "Against Peggy?"

"Why not? If you went to her and told her that you wanted her, insist upon her training and practising and all that—you see?" Jean gulped eagerly. "That would give her something to take her thoughts off what she's doing now. Diana has to have a goal. Once she's got a goal she—well, you know what she is. Clara, please!" Jean said pleadingly.

Clara paused. She was considering the question. Certainly if Diana only cared to play up in the real school spirit, there was no other girl in the Form she would have welcomed more.

"O.K.," she said, "we can try, at all events. Come on, all of you! We'll go along and talk to her now."

In a body they went out. Up the corridor they strode. Clara lifted a hand to knock at the door of Study No. 8, and then paused.

"My only giddy aunt," she breathed, "listen to this!"

They stood listening. From inside the room came plainly the click-click of typewriter keys.

"Diana?" Margot asked. "Must be Gwen," Babs said, referring to the third girl, Gwen Cook, who

shared Study No. 8. "Anyway, knock."

Clara knocked. There was a brief silence. Then Diana's voice, snappish, impatient:

"Who's there?"

"It's me, Clara Trevlyn," the Tomboy called. "Diana, I want to speak to you."

"Well, I'm busy, go away!"

Clara's lips compressed.

"About the cricket."

"Oh!"

There were footsteps. Then the key turned in the lock. Diana stood there regarding them.

"Well, can we come in?" Babs asked.

"No, you can't!" Diana looked peevish. She had been disturbed in her work and Diana did not like being interrupted when she had set her hand to a task. "What do you want?"

It was by no means an auspicious beginning. A flush showed in Clara's face. But Jean shook her head.

"Diana, please!" she pleaded.

"Well, buck up. Get it over!"

"Wait a minute," Clara said. She eyed the Firebrand steadily. "Diana, we've called to ask you if you'd like to play in the Junior Eleven against Pegg on Saturday?"

Diana glanced at the Tomboy quickly at that. Some of the petulance left her face. Just for a moment an expression appeared which made Jean's heart beat high with hope. And, indeed, Diana would very much have liked that opportunity.

Had she obeyed her own instinct in that moment she would have said "Yes!" But she remembered suddenly, and stiffened in the memory—that playing cricket was one of those things her father wished her to do. Besides, she had Nellie's work to think about.

"Thanks!" she said shortly.

"Will you?" Jean asked eagerly.

"No!"

And, without further ado, Diana slammed the door, locked it, and returned to the study. They heard the keys of the typewriter clicking away once more.

"Well!" breathed Clara.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Diana!" Margot cried.

But Diana only typed the harder. It was plain that the Firebrand was not to be won over by honeyed promises.

"YOICKS!" DIANA breathed, and fanned herself as she sat back in her chair, her fingers numb and her back aching. There was a smile on her lips, contrasting oddly with the tired, concentrated expression in her eyes, for Diana had worked hard, had worked almost without stopping,

behind the locked door of Study No. 8. In front of her the pile of typed sheets bore testimony to her endeavours. Right through tea she had worked. It must be goodness knows what time now! But the day's quota was finished at last, thank goodness.

Again she smiled. Triumphant she collected the sheets together. She was tired, but also she was supremely happy—that happiness which comes in the knowledge of a good turn done, and done well. She was sorry now for her rudeness to Clara, but that couldn't be helped.

Instinctively she glanced at her wrist, and then scowled as she saw that wrist unadorned by the gold watch which usually rested there.

Gracious, what was the time? She had promised to get this stuff to Nellie so that she could catch the post.

"Oh, yoicks!" And Diana bit her lip. That meant breaking bounds

again, of course—not that that mattered. But the long walk into Friarisle did matter—considerably, especially after her effort of this afternoon, and her trot from Lantham this morning.

If only she had money!

But she hadn't.

She gathered up the sheets. In the corner she deposited the typewriter which she had borrowed from the commercial-room. She went to the door, unlocked it, and stepped down the passage with the intention of glancing at the clock in Big Hall.

Quite a collection of girls there were in Big Hall. They all turned, staring rather curiously at her as she came down. For everybody knew now that Diana had spent the half-holiday typing in the confines of her own study, and everyone, always interested in the famous Firebrand, was wondering what she betokened.

Diana saw the curiosity in their faces, and smiled grimly to herself. Jemima Carstairs, of the inevitable monocle and the sleek Eton crop, grinned at her.

"What-ho, industrious old spartan! Merry old clatter you've been making all the afternoon. What's the meaning of the industry, anyway? Writing a novel?"

"Your business?" Diana asked cuttingly.

"Well, no," Jemima shrugged. "Just interested, what? Little demon of curiosity, and all that. Don't tell me if you don't want to, of course."

"Of course," Diana said, and glanced at the clock and jumped. "Seven o'clock!"

She turned to retrace her steps, to come face to face then with Sarah Harrigan. Sarah's face was sour.

"Diana!"

"You have been typing all the afternoon."

"Strange, isn't it?" Diana mocked.

"But true."

"Did you get permission to use the typewriter in your study?"

"I did!"

"What have you been doing?"

"That again," Diana said, between her teeth, "is my business. Now go on and report me to Primmy for insolence. Oh, Jean!" she added, catching sight of that girl as she passed the head of the stairs. "Jean, wait a minute; I want to talk to you."

And, leaving Sarah groping furiously for repartee, she flew.

Jean obediently paused.

"Yes, Di?"

"I want some money," Diana said breathlessly. "Just a shilling. Can you lend me one? Or no, perhaps." Diana added, with a rueful smile, "I'd better ask you if you can give me one. I'm broke."

"Why, of course," Jean said. "You know, Diana, you can have as much as you want."

"Thanks; but I'm not going to sponge!" Diana said dryly. "I wouldn't mind borrowing if I could pay you back, but at the moment—"

She shrugged. "I suppose I'd better tell you," she added, "you'll probably find out next time you see my father, anyway. We had a row this morning —he and I. He threatened to disown me if I got expelled; but I took the old bull by the forelock and disowned him. You needn't, of course, let that get about" (As if Jean would).

"And for goodness' sake don't look so horrified! Give me the boblet."

"But Diana—"

"And lend me that bus-time-table of yours, will you?" Diana asked,

Jean blinked.

"But why?"

"Why?" Diana said impatiently. "Because I've got to catch a bus, ninny. Do you think I read time-tables as a light form of entertainment? I've an appointment—urgent!"

Jean quivered. Something that had not been in her face before came into it as she followed Diana into the study. She said:

"Diana, you're not going!"

Diana laughed.

"O.K., old thing! Stop me, if you can. But where's the time-table?"

"The time-table's in the desk." But, Diana, for goodness' sake listen to reason!" Jean pleaded. While Diana, just as if she had not existed, pulled open the drawer of the desk, and snatched the time-table. "Diana!"

"Twenty past seven," Diana murmured. "That'll do. Jean, sneak along to the cloak-room and get my hat for me, will you? Sarah Harrigan's prowling around."

"Diana—"

"Oh, please go! Or do you want me to go myself?"

Jean compressed her lips. She went out. But she did not immediately go to the cloak-room. She went to Study No. 4, where Babs, Mabs, Clara, and Margot Lantham were still talking. They gazed at her white, strained face as she came in.

"Diana!" Clara gasped at once.

Jean nodded.

"She says she's going out," she told them.

"Well, jolly well let her," was Clara's remark.

"But, Clara, no!" Jean looked distraught. "You did promise to help me," she flashed out. "You said if Diana couldn't be cajoled, we'd have to use force. Well, we've got to use force."

The chums looked at each other. But Babs, a peculiar glint in her eyes, nodded her head. They had promised to support Jean; they had promised to save Diana from her own self at whatever cost. She rose.

"Come on!" she said.

Meantime, Diana, gathering her sheets in the study, was slipping them into an envelope. She glanced impatiently at the door. Jean—where the dickens was Jean? It must be ten past seven now.

Well, blow Jean! And boldly striding out of the room, she slipped along to the cloak-room herself, put on her hat, and slipped out of the school down the servants' stairs.

tradesman's door; was about to let herself out, when—

"Collar her!" cried a familiar voice.

Five shapes rose up in front of her. Five girls, faces grim, intent, gathered in a semicircle about her. The five were Babs, Jean, Margot, and Clara, with Mabel Lynn, her bandaged arm conspicuous, hanging in the background. Two pairs of hands caught at Diana's right arm, two at her left. She flung upon them passionately.

"Let me go, you idiots! I've got a bus to catch."

"We know that," Barbara Redfern said grimly. "But this time, Diana, you're not going to catch it. You're going to knuckle under for once, and save yourself from expulsion, and the Form, from the disgrace of having you expelled. Back into school with her!"

"Look here—"

"Back!"

"Wait a minute—wait a minute!" And Diana, her cheeks red, her eyes flaming dangerously, twisted herself round. She glanced bitterly at Jean, perhaps reading in her face the guilt



which was hers. "Jean, are you responsible for this?"

"Diana, I'm sorry."  
"Sorry! Bah! Well!"—and Diana panted—"I'm not going back! I'm not going—see? Clara, let me go!"  
"Not yet."

"Let me go, I tell you!"  
Diana, furious, fought like a wildcat. She had that bus to catch. The work must be delivered. This way and that she flung herself.

"My hat!"  
"Hold her!"  
And then from Mabel:  
"Cave!"  
And immediately afterwards:  
"Girls!" a shocked and horrified voice vibrantly rang out.  
As one, her captors released Diana as though she had suddenly become red hot.

For round the angle of the building strode a forbidding figure. It was Miss Primrose. She stared in stern disapproval at the six girls. "Clara, Barbara, Margot, Jean! What is the meaning of this? Am I to understand that you were deliberately bullying Diana?"

"Oh, my only giddy aunt!" Clara muttered.

"What is that, Clara?"  
"Nun-nothing!" Clara stuttered.  
"We—were just having—having a little argument," she said sheepishly.  
"There was no harm, only—only fun, Miss Primrose."

She smiled at Diana, who smiled scornfully as she pushed her hair back into place.

"Indeed, it seemed a very, very boisterous and ungrish exhibition to me," Miss Primrose replied.  
"Diana—"

Diana grinned. She felt she had the situation in her hands now. She looked at Jean standing there, strained-faced and anxious. She understood. Jean had concocted this plot. Jean, as usual, was thinking only of her welfare, trying to protect her from the consequences of her own recklessness.

For one moment Diana was tempted to land the whole party in the soup. Then she shrugged.

"It's all right," she said. "Just a lark, Miss Primrose, as Clara said. I was showing these girls a new jiu-jitsu trick," she went on, "depicting how one girl escapes the clutches of four others."

Miss Primrose stared. Babs licked her lips. Mabs, Margot, and Clara exchanged a glance. Really, this was very sporting of Diana!

"I see!" Miss Primrose's lips pursed. "Well, in that case, of course," she said. "I am glad you selected a quiet spot in the school for your demonstration. I'm sorry if I jumped to hasty conclusions. All the same, I do not approve of this boyish horseplay. You may return to your studies."

"Yes, Miss Primrose."  
But Diana hesitated.

"Oh, Miss Primrose, do you mind—I want to go to the tuckshop!"  
"Why, no, Diana, no!" Miss Primrose said, and looked at Barbara & Co. while Diana grinned at them behind the headmistress' back, and, waving a hand, walked away. "Barbara, you heard my order," she said authoritatively. "Return to the school at once!"

"Yes, Miss Primrose!" Babs said. But she gazed after the now rapidly retreating form of the Firebrand, with feelings too deep for words.



Diana Undaunted

**B**UT most surprisingly Diana, for once, at least, was not missed. This was mainly due to Nellie, who, expecting her arrival, had posted herself at the bus stop in Friar-dale in order to meet her.

As luck would have it, another bus was in the act of returning school-wards, and Diana, by jumping on it immediately, was back within half an hour, and was in the school ten minutes ahead of call-over bell.

Jean blinked her relief and surprise at sight of her in Big Hall. After call-over, instead of going into the Common-room with the others, Diana went directly to her study, anxious to get on with the next day's work. The Fourth, hearing the familiar sounds of the typewriter, glanced at each other in puzzlement.

"What the dickens is Diana doing?" Beatrice Beverley asked.

"Sure is industrious," Leila Carroll remarked. "I've never known our little Di to put her back into anything so hard before. Do you know, Jean?"

Jean shook her head.  
"What was Diana doing? It was a mystery not only to the Form, but to the school. But Diana, who must have known that her industry was causing comment, vouchsafed no explanation.

Supper came. Diana was not present. Bed-time came, and only at the very last minute was Jean able to drag her from her labours.

Next morning, before the rest of the Form were down—even before rising-bell—the mysterious tap-tapping of the typewriter in Study No. 8 was echoing to all corners of the Fourth Form corridor. Just before breakfast, Freda Ferriers, the "Paul Pry" of the Form, poked a curious face in at the study door.

"Hallo, Diana!" she said ingratiatingly.

"Shut the door," Diana said, typing away busily.

"But, I say, you know"—Freda looked dashed—"I just came along to see if I could help you."

"You can't, thanks! Only by buzzing off and not interrupting."

Freda smiled.  
"I say, Diana, what are you doing?"

"Freda"—Diana turned to face the other girl—"will you please go?"

"Oh, bother it, old thing—"

But she broke off there as Diana picked up a ruler that lay on her desk. With a sudden grim frown upon her face, the Firebrand advanced. Freda liked neither the frown nor the attitude of the fiery one. She backed hurriedly into the corridor.

And then—  
"Oh!"—came a shriek. "Freda, you clumsy girl! Must you come out of a study backwards? You've trodden on my toe!"

"Oh crumbs, I'm sorry, Miss Bullivant!"

"Your sorrow," Miss Bullivant said grudgingly, "will not ease the considerable hurt that you have inflicted upon me. You will go to your study, Freda. You will write out a hundred lines."

Freda Ferriers, crimson and fed-up, slipped off, while Diana, grinning quietly to herself, shut the door and got on with her work.

Freda, however, was furious. Not

Freda to blame her own devouring curiosity for that incident. Freda blamed Diana. It was Diana's fault. Diana should have come forward, she told herself. That cat, with her mysterious typing! Never mind, she'd find out!

Late at breakfast was Diana, earning a sharp reprimand from Miss Charmant.

Early in rising from the table was Freda, whose curiosity was now almost overpowering. Off she slipped at once to Study No. 8, was grinningly and hurriedly picking up the sheets that still lay on the table, when a soft foot-fall sounded behind her, and a hand closed like a vice upon her shoulder. Freda howled.

"Spy!" Diana hissed softly.  
"Here, let go! You're hurting!"  
Freda shrieked.

"Sneak!"  
"Let go, I tell you!" Freda, more frightened of Diana than because her arm was being pinched, tore herself loose. "You bully!" she choked out, her voice rising to a shriek. "You—"  
And she spun round as another figure appeared at the door, and stopped, staring with a grim frown.

"What's all this row?" asked Stella Stone, school captain and prefect.

"Diana, she—she pinched me!"  
Freda howled.

"Diana!"  
"I did!" Diana nodded coolly. "Because I caught her prying and nosing into my private affairs—that's all!"

Stella Stone's eyes gleamed. She knew Freda.

"I see!" she said. "Very well, Freda. You will do a hundred lines. Diana, you will also do fifty, not for checking Freda, but for taking it on yourself to administer a punishment that should have been made the subject of a complaint. Go now, Freda!"

And Freda, more vindictive against Diana than ever, went white, while Diana smiled—a slow, gratified smile.

**TAP, TAP, TAP!**  
Diana Royston-Clarke was still typing.

Once again the tea interval had come and gone unheeded. Once again Diana's fingers were numbed, and her back, through the stiff attitude she was forced to adopt, was almost breaking.

The machine had gone wrong earlier in the afternoon, and Diana, losing a precious hour in putting it right, had leeway to make up.

Half-past six it was now. Half-past six! She had to meet Nellie at half-past seven, and there were still ten pages of the day's quota to be done.

And she couldn't let Nellie down—she mustn't!

Diana typed on hard, her face set, her eyes fixed. She did not heed the knock that came at the door.

Tap! it came again.

"Diana!" the voice of Sarah Harrigan cried from outside.

"Run away and play!" Diana muttered, and went on.

"Diana, if you do not open this door, I will have the lock broken!"

Diana rose. With a scowl, she flung the door open. Sarah, her eyes glittering harshly, stood before her.

"Well, what is it now?" Diana snapped.

"That is not the way to speak to a prefect!" Sarah said grudgingly. "Where are the lines that Miss Primrose gave you yesterday?"

Diana shrugged. She had been much too busy to think about lines.

Characteristically had they faded from her mind as soon as ever she had received them.

"I haven't done them," she said.  
 "No?" Sarah grinned triumphantly.  
 "Then in that case I shall make it my business to see that you do them!" she said gratingly. "And you will do them, Diana, not in this study, but in the Form-room! Go there at once!"

Diana compressed her lips. That was tantamount to a detention. She looked at Sarah. Without a word, she went back into the study. Again she seated herself at the typewriter. Tap, tap, tap! and her fingers skimmed the keys. Five minutes went by. Then—

"Diana!"  
 Miss Primrose's voice called from outside.

Diana rose wearily. Miss Primrose stood there with Jean Cartwright, who had just come up the passage, and was anxiously hovering in the background.

"I have received a report from Sarah! Why aren't you in the class-room?"

"Because," Diana flashed, "I'm busy!"

"Indeed?" Miss Primrose stiffened. "Diana, be careful!" she warned ominously. "Your affairs cannot be allowed to interfere with our orders! You will report to Sarah in the class-room in a quarter of an hour!"

Savagely Diana went back to her task. Jean followed her in. She sat down. Taking no notice of her chum, furiously she tapped at the keys. Two, three, four pages! Jean, watching, marvelled at the intensity of her concentration, at the miracle of her industry.

Here was a new Diana. What was the girl doing?

Diana tore the last sheet from the machine. She passed a hand across her brow. Then, for the first time, she seemed to become aware of her study-mate.

"Done, thank goodness!" she said. "Hallo, Jean! Oh, my hat! I say, help me to get these sheets together. I've got to catch that seven-twenty bus."

Jean stared in horror.

"Diana, but Primmy—"  
 "Can't help Primmy! Just got to do it!" Diana jerked.

"But you've got to report to Sarah," Diana laughed.

"Well, what of that?" she asked lightly. "Oh, all right! I'll report to Sarah if it'll ease your mind; but I'm not sticking in that class-room! Sarah won't stop. It'll be as easy as winking to slip out as soon as her back is turned. Do those sheets up, like a good old Jean, and stop worrying about me, for goodness sake!"

"Oh, Diana, why are you doing all this?" Jean asked.  
 "Because I like it."

And Diana flew to the class-room. Sarah was awaiting her. She received her with a leering grin, set her her task, and went out again.

Diana chuckled softly. She rose in her seat. Two minutes after Sarah's back was turned she was sliding back into Study No. 8. Jean jumped as she came in.

"Diana!"  
 "Got that stuff parcelled up?" Diana asked.

"Yes. But, Diana, don't go!" Jean pleaded. "Please don't go!"

"Oh, don't worry! I shall be back before call-over."

And, with the parcel in her hand, Diana went out, leaving Jean gazing dumbly at the door as it closed upon her.



## The Last Straw

WHAT a fool! What a reckless, idiotic fool!

Jean Cartwright was almost in despair. What now? Had another prefect but Sarah Harrigan been in charge of detention, Diana might have got away with this. But Sarah, as Jean had told the Firebrand, had her knife into Diana. All the time that Diana was supposed to be in the class-room, Sarah would be prowling round.

What could she do?

She had to do something. Not so tamely could she leave the reckless one to her fate. And then Jean sat up, a sudden idea taking shape in her mind. Could she do it? Supposing she rigged up a dummy in the Form-room?

Jean's eyes gleamed. Well, that was better than nothing. It was a shaky chance, but even a shaky chance had to be taken. As long as she was satisfied that Diana was in the class-room, Sarah was hardly likely to interfere, and, being Sarah and very short-sighted, there was hope of the ruse succeeding.

Jean allowed herself to think no further. Without preamble she rushed up to the attic. There, among the props of the Junior School Dramatic Society, she found one of the wooden, jointed figures which were used for draping costumes, hastily dressed it in school uniform, and, borrowing a blonde wig, took it down to the Form-room.

Her heart was in her mouth lest she should meet someone, but luck seemed

to be on her side. The school on this bright and sunny evening was apparently deserted.

Feverishly she worked. In Diana's desk she propped the figure up, adjusted the wig, and bent it forward. That would do, she thought, and was in the act of straightening up when the door opened, and in stepped Sarah Harrigan herself. Jean hung round with a gasp.

"Oh, my goodness!"

"Jean," Sarah rapped, "leave Diana alone!"

Jean stood still.

"But—"

"Leave the room this moment!"

"Yes, Sarah!" Jean gulped, then, just for effect's sake, bent down and whispered something into the figure's ear. But her heart was jumping, her pulses racing.

Sarah did not suspect. One short-sighted glance she cast at the industrious-looking figure, and, with a firm grip upon Jean's arm, left the room. Back the latter went to her study, posting herself at the window to watch for Diana's return. Below in the quadrangle outside the class-room a game of rounders was going on. Clara Trevlyn, looking up, saw her and waved a hand.

"Coming down, Jean?"

"No, thanks; not yet."

"But you're fond of rounders."

"Yes, but I don't feel like it at the moment," Jean replied. And then: "Excuse me, someone at the door."

She turned at the tap which had sounded on the panels.

Bessie Bunter came in. Bessie blinked.

"Oh, hallo, Jean, all alone?" she asked affably. "Ahem! Ahem! I sus-say, Jean, have you had tea?"



ENGROSSED in examining the sheets of paper, Freda did not hear the door open. But a moment later a hand fell upon her shoulder and Diana's voice said grimly: "You spy! What are you doing here?"

"Hours ago!" Jean laughed.  
 "Well, I haven't," Bessie said lugubriously. "At least, not what you'd call tea. Mabs and Babs were hard up, so we had tea in Hall to-day—mouldy dishwater!" she added disdainfully. "And I'm simply starving, not know. In—in fact, Bessie added pathetically. "I fuf-fee so weak that I might collapse at any moment."  
 Jean smiled.

"Which means," she guessed, "that you want to borrow some money to go to the tuckshop? Sorry, Bessies; lent my last shilling yesterday!"

Bessie blinked dismally through her thick spectacles.

"Oh crumbs!"  
 "If I'd got any money you could have it like a shot," Jean told her. "But I'm broke."

Bessie sighed. She drifted out. Just her luck, she dismally told herself, and wondered now who else she could tap. She had tried Clara, she had tried Gemina and Beatrice Beverley. She had even tried Lydia Crossendale, the snob of the Form. But it was Thursday, and everybody was "stony."

Still—and she brightened—there was Diana. Diana always had plenty of money to spare. Not often was it that Bessie succeeded in raising a loan from Diana, but there were times when Diana, in one of her generous moods, had lent her a shilling or two.

That where was Diana?  
 She ambled about in the quadrangle. Hopefully Bessie blinked round. But of Diana there was no sign. She approached the group that was playing rounders outside the Fourth Form classroom, and at that moment Clara, who had the bat, made a terrific swipe.

Bessie jumped back with a howl as the ball whizzed within an inch of her nose, and, flying on, disappeared through the open window into the classroom. From inside the class-room came a sudden bump, followed by a crash. Babs stared.

"Oh my hat, Clara, now you've done it!"

"Sounds as if you knocked something flat, I guess," Leila Carroll put in, with a grin.

Clara pulled a face. She went to the window and drew herself up.

Actually Clara had knocked something over. The ball, catching Jean's dummy full on the side of the head, had sent it toppling into the alleyway between the rows of desks. It lay now in an ungainly, sprawling heap upon the floor, but hidden from Clara's view by the desks themselves. She grinned breathlessly.

"Seems O.K., but can't see the ball," she said, and then twisted as Joan Charnant's voice hissed a warning: "Cave! Sarah!"

Sarah Harrigan it was—Sarah, her face dark, coming round the angle of the building. She glared suspiciously at the rounders players and quickly at the window.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded.

"Nothing, Sarah," Clara answered meekly.

"Then buzz off!" Sarah said.

"Yes, Sarah!"

And Clara, with a wink, nodded to her chums.

They buzzed off—all except Bessie. Bessie paused.

"Oh, Sarah!"

"Well?"

"I sus-say, I suppose you couldn't lend me—" And Bessie recollected.

"Ahem! No, perhaps you kix-couldn't," she added. "But kix-can you tell me where Diana is?"

"ingly, "is in detention. What do you want her for?"

"Oh, non-nothing!"

But Bessie, on the trail of that loan, smiled smugly to herself. Off at once she bowled to the Fourth Form class-room. She pushed open the door and blinked.

No Diana was to be seen.

"Oh, I sus-say!" Bessie stuttered in dismay, and instinctively her eyes travelled to that place in class which Diana occupied. Then she stood petrified.

What was that lying motionless between the two rows of desks?

Bessie froze. Her eyes, magnified behind her round spectacles, opened so wide that they almost popped out.

For a whole half-minute she held her breath, too paralysed to move. There was Diana—Diana, with one leg still on the seat of her desk, with her head touching the floor, with her arms looking shattered and broken, flung out helplessly in all grotesque directions. And Diana was still, as awful as—

Instantly thoughts of hunger vanished from Bessie's mind. She shook with terror.

Then—

"Help, help!" she lustily yelled, "Oh, g-g-goodness, Diana's been killed! Help!"

There was a step in the passage. Sarah Harrigan came in. Angrily she shook the gasping Bessie by the shoulder.

"Bessie, you idiot, what's the matter?"

Bessie, her teeth chattering, her limbs trembling, pointed.

"Lull-look!"

Sarah looked. She gave a jump. For a moment even she looked startled. Another step sounded outside. Miss Primrose came in, her face wearing an expression of annoyance. She glanced sharply at Bessie.

"Bessie, you foolish child—"

And then she, too, noticed the huddled figure in the alleyway.

"Good gracious, what is this?"

Hardly need for the question, however. Sarah, going forward, bent over the dummy.

"I think I see what it is, Miss Primrose," she replied. "This dummy has been rigged up to look like Diana. Diana was here."

Miss Primrose's face grew thunder.

"You mean Diana rigged it up?"

"Either that or—" And Sarah, remembering how she had seen Jean Cartwright bending over the dummy, looked strangely at the headmistress.

"Either her or Jean Cartwright," she said. "I caught Jean in here a few minutes ago, Miss Primrose."

"I see! Very well. Bessie, fetch Jean."

Bessie went out. In a few minutes Jean, biting her lip, came into the room. Miss Primrose frowned.

"Jean, did you rig up this dummy?"

"Well, Miss Primrose—"

"Did you?"

"Of course she didn't!" a mocking voice at the door said.

And Jean, starting round, saw Diana, who made a swift face at her.

"I rigged up that dummy, Miss Primrose!" And Diana smilingly nodded at the figure in Sarah's grasp. "I rigged it up because I had to go out, and I wanted to lull Sarah's suspicions while I was gone. Jean had no more to do with it than Bessie Bunter here."

Miss Primrose looked astounded.

"Diana!"

"But—" Jean stepped forward.

"Miss Primrose! Please don't blame Diana. It was I!"

Diana shook her head.

"Dear old Jean," she said, "that's nice of you. But take no notice of her, Miss Primrose. She's only trying to screen me, as she has tried to screen me all along!" And she smiled at Miss Primrose, frowned warningly at Jean, and stepped into the corridor. "Shall we go now?"

And she went. While Miss Primrose, with a frown at the stupefied Scots girl, followed her out.

In ten minutes Diana returned to Study No. 8. Her face was a little white.

Jean, already there, jumped to meet her.

"Diana—"

The Firebrand smiled twistedly. She dropped into a chair.

"Diana, why did you do it?"

"Why did you do it, you mean?" Diana asked. "Oh, don't be a chump! My number was up, in any case. You didn't think that I was going to let you take the blame for trying to shield me, did you? Well"—she shrugged—"there'll be no need for you to worry about me in future!"

Jean started. She felt almost afraid to ask the question that leapt into her mind.

"Diana—oh, Diana, what—what happened?" she said at last.

"What happened was that"—and again Diana smiled—"I was sacked," she added solemnly. "I'm to leave Cliff House at the end of the term!"



The Watcher in the Darkness

**D**IANA was expelled! The school buzzed with the news.

Yet there was little sympathy for Diana. Everybody agreed that if ever a girl had asked for it, Diana had.

It did not seem to affect Diana, however, and Diana, for her part, refused most ungratefully to comment upon her sentence, or even to be affected by it.

All that evening her typewriter was busily clicking away in Study No. 8. Next morning, before breakfast, she was at it again. At lunch-time she returned straight to her study, and click-click went the typewriter once more. The whole school was baffled.

And so Diana toiled on.

She hated it, really. Hard, grinding work such as this did not come easy to the flamboyant Firebrand of the Fourth. But it was for Nellie's sake—Nellie, whose job depended upon her efforts. She stuck it.

Afternoon lessons. Tired, she went into the class-room, avoiding the wondering looks which greeted her, quietly taking her place in class.

She felt bone-weary. Reaction was setting in now, and in her more selfish moments she found herself reviling herself for ever having agreed to undertake such a colossal task as the typing of that manuscript.

Truth to tell, the Firebrand outburst which had so sustained Diana these last few weeks was wearing to its thinnest edge. Storm after storm, culminating in that fiery scene with her father, had taken it out of even her.

She was thinking now of her future—that hopeless future which loomed ahead of her—penniless, with no prospect of anything that made life worth while. What should she do?

And her father—how she hated



herself for turning upon him! How she longed in her secret heart of hearts to be able to make it up! But she wouldn't. No, not even though her heart was breaking would her pride allow her to go back upon her word.

If the first move should come from him—well and good. She would make it up like a shot, and be happy and glad to do so. Small prospect of that, however, when she had got herself expelled.

She set her teeth. Miss Bullivant, taking the lesson, droned on. Diana only half heard her. It didn't matter, she told herself. Nothing mattered very much now.

But she hated herself somehow. She felt disgusted with that Diana Royston-Clarke whom she reviewed during the last few weeks, kicking over the traces. What actually would she not have given to undo all the mischief she had done—to wipe the slate clean and start with a new record!

Her thoughts switched off. The door opened. Lady Patricia Northanson, duty prefect of the day, came in, throwing a sharp glance at her. She went and spoke to Miss Bullivant.

"Diana," Miss Bullivant said, "you are wanted in Miss Primrose's study!"

Diana nodded. Almost listlessly she dragged herself from her seat. She went out. More trouble, she thought wearily, and wondered what escapade of hers had come to light now.

But when she opened Miss Primrose's door she started. Her face went white; her frame stiffened. Miss Primrose was not alone. Diana's father, Rupert Royston-Clarke, was with her.

"Diana!" he said. He rose. The look on his face, white and wretched as her own, impressed Diana.

She looked at him quickly. "Curmudge!"

"Diana, I—I had to come!" He lowered his head. "I would have come before, but I—I've been ill. I got Miss Primrose's letter this morning, Diana, in which she told me you were expelled."

Diana's heart smote her. "Curmudge!"

"Diana, I'm sorry," he said. "Oh, I know I shouldn't give way, but—but—" He shook his head. "Oh, I don't know, I can't help it! You're my own, my own little girl. If you're expelled—I know—I—I suppose it's my fault, but Di—"

Diana's face softened a little. "Yes, Curmudge?"

"Can't we be friends? Can't we make it up again?"

Diana's heart throbbled. "Curmudge, of course!"

"And—and—" He faltered. "Di, I've been talking to Miss Primrose here. Miss Primrose"—he looked at her appealingly—"has agreed to give you one last chance. If you'll promise not to kick over the traces again until the end of the term, she says she'll reconsider your expulsion."

Diana's face flamed.

"Oh, Miss Primrose, you mean that?"

"I mean it—yes!" The headmistress' lips were tight, however. "But only on that one condition, Diana. If I have another single bad report about you—only one—then I shall not hesitate to expel you. And, furthermore," Miss Primrose went on firmly, "I shall not, next time, wait till the end of the term. I shall expel you publicly."

But Diana was not listening. She was not hearing. At once a great load lifted off her mind. Once again she was the old happy, dazzling Firebrand. She had got her way. Conciliation had overcome her father, her past was wiped out. No need for Miss Primrose to



EVEN as Jean was frantically rigging up the dummy, Sarah Harrigan appeared in the doorway. "Leave Diana alone!" she snapped. Jean's heart pounded. Her plan to shield the absent Diana seemed almost certain to be found out.

warn her. No need for her to exhort her to her best behaviour. In her rapture Diana could have hugged her. She didn't deserve such a break. She didn't deserve such good luck.

Almost treading on air, she walked out of the room, to be met again by Lady Patricia Northanson, who told her that she was wanted on the phone in the prefect's room. Happily, if a little wonderingly, Diana went off. The caller was Nellie.

"Yes," beamed Diana. "What is it, old thing? No complaints about the copy, I hope?"

No, there were no complaints about the copy, but—and here Nellie's voice faltered a little—Miss Smith, the authoress, had sent her a letter. She said that she must have the whole of the story first thing to-morrow morning as the publisher had put forward the date on which the novel was to be issued. Could Diana possibly manage it?

Diana could, so she told Nellie. But when she reviewed the case she paused. Oh, great goodness! What had she promised? "Thirty pages to do—the stuff, if it were to get to the authoress to-morrow morning, must be in Nellie's hands to-night. That meant— And Diana winced, her face whitened as she thought of it. It must mean breaking bounds!

She couldn't! Not after her promise to her father. She remembered Miss Primrose's threat. "The very next misdemeanour on your part, Diana—"

Expulsion! She shuddered at the prospect now. Not now!

But she couldn't let Nellie down. She couldn't! That poor little mite! And Diana, thinking of her, found a mist in front of her eyes. It must be managed! It must be!

And, after all, there was no harm in it. She could slip out after lights out. She had done it before without detention. It would be the hardest of hard lines if she should be caught this once.

Straight to her study Diana went. There savagely she worked. Page after page! How her fingers ached! But she stuck it.

Dormitory bell. Thank goodness it was finished! At eleven o'clock in the darkness she rose. She tiptoed out, letting herself into the cold night through the window in the lobby.

There! But she did not know that a pair of crafty eyes had been watching; she did not see the figure which followed her to the head of the stairs.

While Diana, unutterably relieved to feel that her gigantic task was finished at last, tramped the dark road to Friar-dale, caught the last Courtfield bus, and presented the copy to a trembling Nellie just before midnight.

Nellie was overwhelmed.

"Oh, Miss Diana, however can I thank you?"

"By just," Diana smilingly told her, "saying nothing at all, Nellie. It's been a pleasure, I assure you. Now I must get back."

"But Miss Diana, you must have broken bounds! Don't you get into fearful trouble!"

Diana laughingly patted her head. "Don't worry, Nellie. Good-night!"

And she was off again—giving Nellie no time to reply.

Well, that was that, she told herself. Her job was finished. No more breaking bounds now. No more playing the fool!

For the time being, at least, all the Firebrand instincts had died within her!

Without mishap she reached the school. With a sigh of relief, found that the lobby window was still unlocked. She climbed in over the sill in the darkness, was turning to close the window after her, when—

A hand fell upon her shoulder; and spitefully glittering eyes met hers in the darkness.

And Sarah Harrigan's voice, from which she strove to keep the timbre of triumph, growled at her in the darkness. "Out of bounds, Diana," she said. "Come with me to Miss Primrose at once!"



### At the Eleventh Hour

"O H, my hat!"

"Diana!"

"Look at her!"

A hush fell upon the assembled girls of Cliff House School.

It was the following morning. The school was gathered in Big Hall for assembly.

Assembly had come and gone—the routine part of it, that was. It had been a distracted assembly, for everyone knew now what had happened last night. They had all heard how Diana had been caught breaking bounds, how she had spent the night in the punishment room, how she was to be publicly expelled.

Diana came in between Stella Stone, captain of the school, and Dulcia Fairbrother, the games captain. Everyone became hushed and silent.

Very erectly, very proudly, Diana walked. There was hauteur upon her proud, cold face. There was disdain in the fearless glance with which she swept the school. Very stiffly and very uprightly she stopped in the centre of the platform, facing them all, not a trace of fear or shame in her bearing, a figure defiant and proud to the last.

Miss Primrose, upon whose shoulders the unpleasant duty of expelling her devolved, looked much the more upset, the more agitated of the two.

"Girls," Miss Primrose said, her voice vibrating in the unearthly silence. Every eye was fastened upon the Firebrand.

"It is my unpleasant—my extremely unpleasant duty," Miss Primrose said, with some agitation, "to execute a task which, among the many onerous duties that befall a headmistress, is the most hateful of all. You see before you Diana Royston-Clarke of the Fourth Form, a girl who, as you know, has been given many chances. Diana—"

And she paused.

"I am not going to recapitulate all her offences," she went on after a while. "I fancy they are all well known to all of you. A day or two ago, as you know, this girl was ordered to leave the school at the end of the term—"

There was a heavy silence. Diana, unflinching, smiled scornfully.

"At her father's request, however, and accepting Diana's own promise that she would behave, I withdrew that decision—with the proviso that should this—this wretched girl offend against the rules in the interval, she should suffer the ignomy of a public expulsion. You understood that, Diana?"

"I did!"

"And yet—" Miss Primrose's voice quivered, "less than twelve hours after giving that promise you were caught in the act of breaking into the school at night!"

Diana compressed her lips. A murmur went through the school.

"Diana, have you anything to say?"

From between Diana's teeth:

"No!"

A pin could have been heard to drop in Big Hall.

"Then," Miss Primrose resumed, "it is my duty—my very, very reluctant and painful duty, to announce that you are ex—"

The school drew a deep, deep breath. Jean Cartwright closed her eyes, swaying upon her feet.

But the word, begun, was never finished. From the passage that led to the headmistress' quarters, came a sudden commotion. Then before the astonished and electrified school realised what was happening, a woman dashed on the scene.

"Wait!" she cried vibrantly. "Miss Primrose, you can't, you shan't expel that girl! Nellie, come this way!"

And while Diana gave a jump, and the school, as one, stared in goggle-eyed surprise, little Nellie Sharpe, her face white, her hand still in its bandage, stumbled on to the scene. She gave one look at Diana and tottered forward with a choking cry.

"Diana!"

**CONFUSION! CONSTERNATION!** A buzz of wonder-stricken voices; a sudden cry. While Diana, standing there with Nellie's hand in hers; with Nellie's worshipping little face looking up into hers, smiling scornfully at them all.

While the woman who had so dramatically burst upon the scene—it was Maida Smith, the authoress—took agitated and excited counsel with Miss Primrose, while Miss Primrose, goggling first at her and then at Diana, like a woman in a dream, alternately gulped and shook her bewildered head.

Then a murmur, a shuffling of feet as the head's pointer rapped upon the desk, and speculative, excited, Cliff House eagerly fixed their eyes upon her.

Then, what a buzz when Miss Primrose, emotionally clearing her throat, announced:

"Diana—" and paused to glance at the composed and unruffled Firebrand once again, "will not be expelled!"

Stupefaction! Bafflement! Until the headmistress went on to tell them how Nellie, delivering the finished manuscript to the authoress, had blurted her confession that Diana had done it

all; how Miss Smith had rung up Diana, only to be informed that Diana was to be expelled that morning. And how Miss Smith, to prevent that injustice, had hurried with Nellie to persuade Miss Primrose to change her mind.

Cliff House was stunned. Cliff House blinked. Now at last, it understood! Diana's mysterious tapping of the typewriter; Diana's apparent insane flouting of law and order.

Diana, instead of playing the "giddy goat" (Clara's expressive term!) had, all the time, been carrying out this humanitarian task! Diana, the Firebrand, had in reality been just Diana, the Good Samaritan!

A murmur welled up. The murmur became a shout, a roar! "Diana! Diana! Diana!" And in one miraculous bound Diana was swept to the pinnacle of Cliff House' popularity! Diana should not, would not be expelled. Not after that.

Diana, standing there in front of them all, with Nellie's hand confidently clasped in hers, just laughed!

**SHE WAS** not to be expelled. She was congratulated. The day, so far from seeing the final crushing humiliation of Diana, was the most jubilant day that Diana had ever known.

Miss Primrose of course, forgave her, and on a promise that she would behave herself for the rest of the term, cancelled all her previous punishments.

Later when she entered the Fourth Form Common-room, she found herself besieged by a clamouring throng of girls.

"But, Diana," Babs said, "why didn't you tell us, you cuckoo?"

Diana shrugged.

"Perhaps," she said, "I didn't want to."

"And," Jean said anxiously. "Oh, Diana, I'm so glad! Di, you'll never play the fool again, will you?"

"That," Diana assured her with that slow, enigmatic smile of hers, "depends! At the moment, no—but, well, one never knows, does one?" She laughed lightly.

"Still, away with worry and dull care, my hearties. I've a whole fiver to blue in celebration of my escape, and I feel the call of the tuckshop singing through my perverse veins! Who comes to celebrate with the Firebrand?"

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

## NEXT WEEK:

The first of a new series of long complete Cliff House School stories featuring Barbara Redfern and Jemima Carstairs, entitled:—



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# THE PAGODA OF PERIL

## FOR NEW READERS.

CATHERINE STERNDALE and 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.

Early one morning Catherine and Molly see Uncle Gerald made captive by Kai Tal. He is put aboard a junk, which sets sail across the lake in the Pagoda grounds. Catherine rushes to the rescue!

(Now read on.)

## The Menace of the Lake

"S TOP!" Heedless of the warning cry, Catherine Sterndale, flinging her bath robe from her, dashed into the cold, clear water of the lake.

It was a Chinaman standing just behind her who had cried the warning, but she did not hear. If she had heard, she would not have heeded; for she had only one object in mind—to catch up with the small Chinese junk that was drifting out on the lake.

The Chinaman on the shore of the lake watched for a moment, then turned back as he saw Catherine cleaving the water with strong, easy strokes.

It was Catherine's belief that in the small junk her Uncle Gerald was a prisoner, bound hand and foot.

But what she was to do when she did reach the junk she had not yet decided. As far as she knew, there was only one Chinaman on board. If she could reach the boat unnoticed by him she could, perhaps, take him unawares and push him into the lake.

She had to trust to luck that there was something on board that would serve to cut her uncle's bonds. At least, she would be with him, and could take his advice how to act for the best.

Meanwhile, the junk drifted on, given an occasional punt by the Chinaman on board. He was chanting songs, and so did not hear the shouts of the others on the shore.

It was well for Catherine's plan that he did not.

An onlooker might have supposed that this was a scene set in China, whereas it was actually in the heart of England.

Except for Catherine, there were only Chinese people in sight. The boat on the water was Chinese, and through the trees surrounding the lake could be seen a high, strange building—a Chinese pagoda. It was the central structure of Gerald Sterndale's house—Pagoda Place.

Catherine's Uncle Gerald had spent practically all his life in China, and when he had returned to England he had taken over this old house, built originally some sixty years ago.

He had brought Chinese servants with him, and had filled the place with rich Chinese furniture and *objets d'art*.

Catherine—with her cousins, Molly and Charles—was on a visit to him for the first time. She had never seen him before, but this Chinese holiday had promised to be a thrill. It was a promise completely fulfilled. It had, so far, been one long thrill.

For Catherine and her cousins had decided that Kai Tal, an evil Chinaman whom her uncle trusted beyond all others, was really his enemy.

He had refused to listen to the suggestion, and had put the real blame for strange happenings on a pretty little Chinese girl, Kwanyin, who was a guest in his house.

But now Catherine hoped to prove the truth. It was Kai Tal who had bound her uncle and put him aboard the ship.

It remained only to be seen if her uncle knew who his captors were.

Everything, however, depended upon Catherine. She had to save her uncle;

then she and he could find out just what was going on in the house—just what the rascally Kai Tal was doing behind his master's back.

It was with triumphant strokes, therefore, that Catherine swam towards the junk.

On the bank stood Kai Tal, some other Chinamen, and with them the little Chinese girl, Kwanyin. They were all shouting out excitedly.

Catherine could not hear for the noise of her own splashing as she swam.

But now another figure joined the others on the shore. Catherine's Cousin Molly had been released by the Chinaman who had captured her behind Catherine's back. She had been released a moment after Catherine had dived into the water.

"Kwanyin," cried Molly, "what's wrong?"

"The little Chinese girl turned to her in great distress.

"Speakee louddee!" she urged. "Calle—sayee—crocodile!"

"Crocodile!" Molly gasped, and stared across the surface of the water.

She remembered then the crocodile which had been in a small dungeon under Pagoda Place. It had not occurred to her that the lake was the reptile's natural haunt; but now, staring across the water, she saw it.

And Catherine was swimming on, unware of the danger!

Molly put her hands to her mouth and yelled: "Catherine! Cath! Cath! Crocodile!"

But Catherine Sterndale, unconscious of her peril, swam steadily on.

Kai Tal clasped and unclasped his hands. For once, he seemed not in control of himself. For Kai Tal to be so concerned, Molly realised, the peril itself was real.

"You—you—you fiend! You're to blame!" she cried in frenzy. "I could shake you!"

"Oh, Kai Tal miserable, unhappy man, but he gave the warning!" he groaned. "He tell Kwanyin. Kwanyin, the despicable, did not warn you—"

"We were warned, but nothing was said about the crocodile!" panted Molly.

By

ELIZABETH

CHESTER

Illustrated by E. Baker



With a sudden impulse she hurled off her own bath wrap and ran out into the water, making splashing strokes that cut her through the water at top speed.

"Catherine!" she screamed.

"Catherine heard now, for she was floating, in order to decide from which angle to board the junk.

Now she looked back and saw Molly. "Crocodile!" Molly yelled and pointed.

Catherine heard and looked in the direction Molly indicated.

Then she saw the crocodile. Catherine trod water. At first she could not believe her eyes. A crocodile in an English lake was an incredible thing. But that doubt lasted only for a flashing moment. The awful creature had turned towards her. She could see it quite distinctly.

Catherine turned. All thought of going to the rescue of her uncle vanished. Escape from that dreaded creature was all that concerned her now.

She swam her fastest; she swam with almost wild strokes in the most desperate race of her life. Not even when she had won the hundred yards' championship at school had she put on such a spurt.

News of the happening had been taken to the house, and now Uncle Gerald's secretary, Miss Smith, came on to the scene, and hard at her heels was Cousin Charles.

Cousin Charles was a serious-minded fellow not given to athletics. But he was no coward.

Unlike Molly, however, Charles was not impulsive. He did not rush into the water. He could see that the crocodile was gaining; but he could also see that he could not swim to the rescue in time.

Turning aside, he seized a large stone, took a run with it, and sent it hard as he could towards the air.

It fell some yards short of the crocodile, but it went into the water with a tremendous plomp!

The sudden sound, and the ripples that spread from the spot, startled the reptile, and its speed momentarily slackened.

That moment gave Catherine a chance to spurt on; and before the crocodile had regained its former speed Molly had reached her.

Charles hurled another stone, and now the Chinamen started to throw. A barrage of stones entered the water in front of Catherine and Molly. The aim was poor, but the splashing was enough to scare any creature.

With an armful of heavy stones Charles rushed into the water up to his waist. The third stone he threw hit the crocodile full on the snout. It dived instantly.

"Look out!" yelled Charles, in horror.

Now the peril was as great, but invisible.

Charles splashed on, caught Catherine's hand, and dragged her, half exhausted, to the bank. "All in," Molly flopped down and lay back, unable to speak.

"O.K.," asked Charles anxiously. Assured that they were, he turned to Kai Tal.

"So this is what you meant?" he asked. "This is the danger of the lake. This is what you meant Kwanyin to tell us?"

Kai Tal bowed his head.

"Very evil Kwanyin not tell," he said, shaking his head.

"I not know," wailed Kwanyin.

Then Catherine, mastering herself, sat up. She spoke with difficulty, gasping out every word.

"These rascals—Kai Tal—the others—

tyed Uncle Gerald up. He's on the junk—that's why—I was swimming!"

There was a heavy silence, and Charles, startled, turned upon Kai Tal. He looked from him to a new figure just arrived—a tall man in sports jacket and flannel trousers, a gray-haired, sun-tanned man!

"Uncle Gerald!" gasped Charles.

### Cousins in Doubt

"UNCLE GERALD!"

As Catherine heard her Cousin Charles' excited cry she sat up. The shock seemed in some way to ease her exhaustion. With round eyes of surprise she stared at him.

"Uncle, why—why I saw you! You were carried on that boat!" she gasped. And she stared across the water of the lake to make quite sure that the boat was there.

It was drifting along as before, just as though nothing exciting had happened, as though peril had not been near.

Molly sat up, and stared, too.

"But we saw you," she said.

"Then Kwanyin sprang forward."

"No speaker," she cried.

That was as far as she got. For Kai Tal, with a sudden snatch, seized her by the waist, and swung her round, almost pulling her into the bushes. She staggered, and only the hurried intervention of Miss Smith, the secretary, prevented her falling.

"Uncle, stop him! Oh, you can't allow that!" Catherine cried, in horror.

Her uncle turned to Kai Tal, and spoke rapidly in Chinese. Kai Tal answered meekly, and bowed.

"I allow it, Catherine, for, as I told you, that girl is evil. Did she warn you not to bathe in the lake?"

"No, uncle. She warned us not to come here."

"And I did, too," Uncle Gerald added.

Catherine could not remember his doing so, but she could not contradict. He had certainly warned them not to interfere, not to pry. And, in a sense, they had been prying, for their main reason for visiting the lake had been to watch Kai Tal, and to see what he was doing there.

"But, uncle, I did not guess!" she protested.

"And I did not think, Catherine, that you would rise early in the morning and go for a dip. Now, of course, I do realise," he said gently, "that it was a reasonable thing to do. Kai Tal apparently guessed that you might, and very wisely told Kwanyin to warn you."

He looked severely at Kwanyin.

Catherine did not speak. She could not deny that she had been warned. But there are warnings and warnings. And the one that she had been given by Kai Tal had suggested that he had reasons of his own for not wanting her at the water's edge, watching!

"I—I'm sorry uncle," Catherine faltered. "But—who was it that he taken on the junk if it wasn't you?"

"How on earth could you make such a fooling mistake?" cut in Charles.

Molly stuck up for Catherine:

"I saw him, too. It was uncle, or else—"

"It was I, yes," said Uncle Gerald quickly, then laughed. "You did not see it all through. Naturally, it did not occur to you that it was just playing-acting."

Catherine and Molly blinked. Things seemed to become more mysterious every moment.

"Play-acting, uncle!" said Catherine. "Why ever do you mean?"

"Merely, my dear, that you have built up ideas in your imagination. I have been requested by a film company to take a shot of a Chinese junk being sent off on a lake, taking an Englishman captive. It was that scene which you have just witnessed."

There was a moment's silence, and then Charles laughed. Catherine and Molly blushed in confusion and felt ridiculous.

"A film. Great Scott! And they thought it was real," chaffed Charles. "What a pity I wasn't here! It would have deceived me!"

Catherine stood up shakily with Charles' help, and wrapped her bath robe about her. She felt she had been very foolish. That she had made a complete idiot of herself, and yet—and yet—

Yet there was some kind of doubt and uneasiness in her mind.

"Only a film. I—I'm awfully sorry, uncle," she said.

Uncle Gerald patted her wet head.

"That's all right, my dear. I suppose that in this Chinese atmosphere you'd naturally get strange ideas. But even if you had, why on earth did you think Kai Tal was trying me up and letting me drift away in that old junk?"

Catherine did not know. She had not been able to guess.

But she was a girl who could stand up for herself and defend her own actions. And there was a good enough defence to this one.

"Well, uncle," she said reasonably.

"I had to go to the rescue. I couldn't inquire what it was all about first. After all, suppose everyone had made inquiries as to why I was in the water before rescuing me. I should have been eaten up by the crocodile."

"Yes, I suppose so," said her uncle, rather taken aback. "You acted wisely—according to your judgment. However, let's forget it. It was a bad blunder, and the person chiefly to blame—"

Catherine looked fixedly at Kai Tal, whose face wore an evil and triumphant smile.

"No, no, not Kai Tal," said her uncle shortly. "Kwanyin—"

Everyone turned to the little Chinese girl.

"Kwanyin, Kai Tal told you to warn my nieces of the peril. He would have done so himself in person, but he knew that he was misjudged and mistrusted. Therefore, he was left to you."

"Oh, but uncle—" began Catherine.

He cut her short and faced Kwanyin, frowning.

"Me fly," faltered Kwanyin. "Me sayee—no go water—"

A Chinese voice cut in. It was not Kai Tal who spoke, but another, and Uncle Gerald listened to him.

"There! This man says he heard you tell the girls to go down to the water and watch Kai Tal. Is that so?"

He looked at Catherine and Molly. They could not hedge. They had to speak the truth. And the truth was—

"Yes, uncle," admitted Catherine. "She did say something of the sort."

"Me sayee," said Kwanyin miserably—"me sayee wathee Kai Tal. Me meanee," she added, with a faint smile, and a look of artfulness—"nice girls wathee makee picture show."

Catherine heaved a sigh of relief. It was a good way out.

"There, uncle," she said. "Kwanyin merely thought it would be nice for us to watch the performance. She knew that you were making a film, you see. She did not tell us to go into the water. That's definite."

"No, she didn't urge us into the water," said Molly eagerly.

Uncle Gerald made an impatient gesture of the hand.

"I'm afraid you are just as much prejudiced in the favour of this little Chinese witch as you are against my most loyal and faithful Kai Tai. It is useless to argue. No one is hurt, no one is any the worse for the adventure. Let's go into breakfast and forget. You girls had better get dry—run all the way."

Catherine and Molly were only too glad to run and get warm, and they turned together and ran, with Charles bringing up the rear.

"I told you—I warned you," he said. "I told you last night to keep away from the lake. You're a pair of duffers—"

"Bow-wow!" said Molly. "You didn't know the old crocodile was in the lake."

"Of course not," said Catherine. "Still, Charles helped with the stones. Thanks, Charles."

"That was nothing," said Charles. "But I want you girls to give your word of honour not to—"

Molly sighed. "This was another lecture from Cousin Charles, their elder by a few days. And she wasn't having it."

Pulling up suddenly, Molly stared at the ground.

"Can you sus-see a half-kik-kicrown?" she chattered, and winked at Catherine, who at once saw the joke.

"Nun-nun-nun—let's look," she chattered, making her teeth click.

Charles peered at the ground.

"I'll look for the half-crown," he said.

"You run in and get dry. Go on—There was no half-crown to look for. Molly hadn't said that there was. She had merely asked if anyone could see one. But looking for that half-crown kept Charles from lecturing and demanding promises. So Catherine and Molly ran on without him.

It was not until they had bathed and dressed that Charles returned to the house. He met them in the corridor as they made their way to the breakfast-room.

"I say! Funny about the half-crown—I couldn't find it," he said.

"You didn't see a half-crown where I said?" asked Molly, her eyes glimmering.

"No."  
"Well, it was one chance in a million billion trillion you might," said Molly. "After all, why should a half-crown be there?"

It slowly dawned upon Charles that his august leg had been pulled. He became very stiff and formal, and but for the fact that he had sent them both to Coventry for a bit he would have given them a lecture on the stupidity and lack of humour of practical joking.

But he did not send Uncle Gerald to Coventry; so, although he ignored Catherine and Molly completely at breakfast, he had someone to talk to.

"Uncle," he said, "I have decided that we owe you an apology."

"Indeed!" said Uncle Gerald.

"Yes. Kwanyin is the one causing all the trouble and mischief. I have been thinking things over, and we—"

"Speak for yourself, Charles," said Catherine.

"I am speaking for us all. In view of the fact that uncle has assured us of Kai Tai's worth and integrity, and has given good reason for thinking Kwanyin is a mischief-maker, I think it most improper, not to say wrong, for us to hold a contrary view."

"Hear, hear!" said Uncle Gerald, smiling. "Good for you, Charles. And you—"

He gave Catherine and Molly a keen look.

"Oh, well, uncle—" demurred Catherine, rather guiltily, and with colour rising to her cheeks. "You see. I—"

She wondered how to express herself tactfully, but Uncle Gerald held up his hand.

"I want to be perfectly fair. No one convinced against her will is really con-

vinced. The pagoda itself, the tall tower-like structure, built in tiers, each tier having its own roof and own balcony.

The pagoda, they learned, was a kind of temple, but the particular cult followed by Uncle Gerald's servants was one peculiar to a certain part of China.

He told them something of its origins, but it seemed so complicated that they could not follow it.



IT was a strange sight that met the cousins' gaze. Standing in front of the curtains was Kwanyin, her eyes blindfolded—awaiting her trial.

vinced; she is, so an old proverb tells us, 'of the same opinion still.'

"That someone evidently knew my cousins," said Charles, giving his most superior and unbearable smile.

"Gurcher!" said Molly.

"That apart," said Uncle Gerald. "I don't want you to be convinced in that way, so I am going to give you a chance to see things exactly as I do. I'm going to give you definite proof—Kwanyin is going to confess."

That was a shock for Catherine and Molly.

"Confess, uncle—" said Catherine.

"What to?" asked Molly.

But they had to control their eagerness.

"After breakfast you shall know. It is all arranged. We'll have Kwanyin on trial, and I think I know a way of persuading her—owing to her Eastern superstitious—to speak the truth."

Catherine gave Molly a puzzled look.

"Until that time—no more about it?" asked Uncle Gerald.

"Yes," was the cousins' instant agreement. And the meal went on uninterrupted.

### The Trial of Kwanyin

IT was an hour after breakfast that the trial of Kwanyin took place. It was arranged in what the cousins were told was the traditional manner, and it was to take

"Most interesting," was Charles' verdict.

"You followed it all!" asked Molly, pretending to be eager and thirsty for information.

"Well, naturally," said Charles, in his loftiest manner, taking pity on them, and letting them out of Coventry for a spell. "Surely it's not difficult?"

Molly winked at Catherine.

"Good. This unintelligent and feeble-witted creature, who is only a girl, didn't understand one word, so she asks the superior and high-power-brained cousin Charles to spill a mouthful."

Charles hunched his shoulders.

"It's like this. The fact is—now, these people," said Charles, trying three openings. "You know what they believe. Well, I should say— Now, suppose we start it this way—"

"Oh!" said Molly. "Well, of course! Uncle didn't put it as clearly as that, did he, Cath?"

"Only skirted the fringes," chuckled Cath. "Trust Charles for sorting it out and making it clear."

Charles sniffed.

"I haven't told you anything yet. If you'd listen—"

But at that moment the gong sounded the "assembly," and it was time for them to go into the pagoda. When they entered the small main hall they found two armed Chinamen, carrying heavy polished swords and wearing strange masks.

Uncle Gerald was talking to Kai Tal, who stood beside an enormous idol's head—the head of *Is Tsiang*.

The cousins did not tell anything that was. For that was the head which according to Kwanyin's story—Kai Tal had told her to wear. At any rate, she had been wearing it. And it was in that head, wearing it, that Catherine herself had been mistaken for Kwanyin by Kai Tal.

"You had better wait behind the guards," Uncle Gerald told them. "Kai Tal will go first and put on the head."

Catherine stood behind the guards, and Charles and Molly followed her. They could hear a distant drumming, a mournful beating, and now they could sense the solemnity of the occasion.

This was to be a real trial, and much depended upon it. Kwanyin's fate had to be decided. If she failed in the test, if despite themselves their verdict went against her, then they must in future shun her.

But they did not want to believe her guilty.

"Uncle, is Kai Tal to be her judge?" said Catherine, a little sharply. "He's her accuser really—"

"He will wear the head. He will not speak. And, remember, you are not to speak. Not a word after this, unless you are addressed—"

He spoke so briefly that they were silenced, for it was quite obvious that he was taking this trial with deadly seriousness.

Catherine now grew really concerned. It was all she could do to bottle up the question that arose in her mind. What would happen to Kwanyin if she were guilty? What was the punishment to be meted out?

The Chinese were cruel and vengeful, Catherine had heard. Would they be cruel to Kwanyin? There is no trial without judgment, and no judgment without sentence.

A slight shiver ran through Catherine as she thought of Kai Tal's cruel face.

"March!" said Uncle Gerald suddenly.

The armed guards moved forward. They wore brass helmets of strange pattern, surmounted by a serpent, and they carried polished breastplates. The swords were very sharp and highly burnished.

Uncle Gerald disappeared from view for a minute. When he reappeared he was wearing a long Chinese robe which gave him an almost Chinese appearance.

The cousins entered the pagoda in silence, and mounted the stairs with one guard in front of them and one behind, as though they might at any moment try to escape.

When they reached the judgment chamber, the procession halted, and there for the first time they saw Kwanyin.

The little Chinese girl stood with head hung. Behind her were heavy curtains of black velvet divided into two portions.

Her hands were behind her back, and, most dramatic of all, a scarf was bound about her eyes.

The three cousins, in obedience to Uncle Gerald's signal, seated themselves tailor-fashion, squatting on cushions against one wall.

Even Molly managed to hold her tongue; for the atmosphere was most impressive.

Suddenly a tall, lean Chinaman stepped forward with a furl of parchment and unrolled it. In a singsong voice he read out the indictment.

"In English now," said Uncle Gerald. "Kwanyin, you are accused of telling untruths, of making my guests, my nieces and nephew believe that Kai Tal is evil, that he is trying to get them from this house, whereas it is you who are working this evil, and sowing the seeds of mischief. The head of Ts Tsiang faces you. If you should tell a lie, then will it haunt you all the rest of your life, and there shall be no peace for you. You understand?"

"Me savvy," said Uncle Gerald.

"Take off the bandage," said Uncle Gerald. The bandage was taken from Kwanyin's eyes, and she saw the head. Her eyes widened for a moment. Her breathing was unsteady. She showed fear.

Catherine watched her closely, as a cat might watch a mouse. She wanted to be just. She wanted to be sure.

"Kwanyin," said Uncle Gerald, "are you a teller of lies?"

The Chinese girl stared fixedly at the head of Ts Tsiang.

"Me no tellee lies," she whispered. "Me love Uncle Gerald. Me love uncle of girls. Me loyal, me true. Me give lifee savee Uncle Gerald."

"Answer my questions, and don't talk humbug!" said Uncle Gerald. Kwanyin stiffened. She winced as

though in pain, and her shoulders braced. It was as though a sudden spasm had taken her.

"Now," said Uncle Gerald, his tone grim, "do you tell lies?"

Kwanyin wriggled slightly, and put up her head. Her voice was but a whisper.

"Yes."

Catherine clenched her hands and stared. There was something about this trial that frightened her, that seemed wrong and wicked. But she did not quite understand why.

She wanted to intercede, to plead with her uncle.

"Kwanyin, you were false to the head of Ts Tsiang. You wore that head to frighten these young people!"

Catherine saw the little Chinese girl stiffen again.

It was as though something had pricked her, as though she were suffering. Catherine, watching closely, detected a slight movement of the black velvet curtain behind the little Chinese girl.

Then something came into her mind, a dark suspicion. She suddenly realised that Kwanyin was standing close to the curtains just by the opening, that her hands were behind her back.

Catherine slowly shifted her position; she edged sideways gently, until she could see just behind Kwanyin's back.

What she saw then made her gasp in horror. Kwanyin's wrists were held by a cruel hand, the nails of which were digging into her flesh. The hand came through the gap in the thick velvet curtain.

Catherine's eyes blazed.

Now was her chance to prove to her uncle Kwanyin's innocence—to reveal the enemy who was making her give false answers. Without a word of warning Catherine sprang to the curtains.

Will Catherine succeed in her bold bid to save the little Chinese girl? And who is the mysterious enemy who is trying to make Kwanyin appear guilty? You'll know the answers to these questions when you read next Saturday's exciting chapters of this fine serial. A beautiful photo-postcard of MYRNA LOY will be given a way with your SCHOOLGIRL next Saturday, so order your copy at once.

**MY DEAR READERS**,—I hope none of you is going to miss the lovely photo-postcard of MYRNA LOY, which is given away with every copy of next Saturday's SCHOOLGIRL.

This attractive postcard of a very favourite star completes the set of eight cards, and I think you'll agree that it's a most fascinating collection.

Besides this charming gift, there is another extra-special attraction about next week's SCHOOLGIRL—the first of a new series of long complete Cliff House School stories, by Hilda Richards.

You've enjoyed the Diana series, I know; and I'm perfectly certain that you're going to be just as enthusiastic about the next series, which features that famous favourite, Jemima Carstairs.

With her sleek Eton-crop, dashing monocle and quaint ways Jemima is one of the most outstanding and popular girls at Cliff House. You'll admire her still more when you read the first of the new series, in which—with characteristic poise and astuteness—she sets the "old brain" (as she'd say) working on a problem that vitally

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affects the happiness of one of her own chums.

You'll adore reading about Jimmy in this new series; and all your other favourites of the Fourth—Babs, Mabs, Bessie, Clara and the others—are well to the fore.

Look out for this exciting new story in next Saturday's issue under the title of:

**"THE GIRL WHO BOUGHT FRIENDSHIP"**

By Hilda Richards.

Long instalments of our two popular serials, "MORCOVE IN UNKNOWN AFRICA" and "THE PAGODA OF PERIL," together with a sparkling complete tale starring Princess Cherry, make up the story programme in next week's issue.

But in addition to all these good things there are Patricia's entertaining articles, which are just brimful of bright ideas and suggestions for these summer days.

So you see what treats await you next Saturday! It's a long time to wait, I know—but meantime, take my advice and place an order right away for your SCHOOLGIRL to be delivered to you. It's well worth it!

Miss Hilda Richards has asked me to print the names of the following readers who have written to her; she was unable to reply through the post as the letters bore insufficient addresses:

Irene Margo (Edinburgh); Christine Tressilian (Cardiff); Babs' Admirer (Sydney); Madge and Eirlys (Amlwch); Phyllis (Acton); Admirer of Clara (Dorset).

With best wishes,  
YOUR EDITOR.

# MORCOVE

By MARJORIE STANTON

# IN UNKNOWN AFRICA



## Betty Barton & Co. Feature in This Vivid Serial of a Thrilling Quest in Wildest Africa

### FOR NEW READERS,

**BETTY BARTON & CO.**, of Moreove School together with members of Graangemoor, are in Africa, seeking a mysterious Golden Grotto in the Kwamba country. They have a rival—a Frenchman named DUPONT.

Through his villainy two of the girls' fathers 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.

They escape—but, at a vital moment, are seen by a native scout!

(Now read on.)

### The Path to Freedom

**D**EADLY though the danger of going on seemed to be to Pam Willoughby and Jimmy Cherrill, only for a moment did they hesitate.

"Chance it, Pam!" her chum gritted; and she responded quickly:

"Yes, come on!"

"If there's trouble I shall fire!"

So on they went again, and every hasty, courageous step took the girl and lad straight towards the very rocks where that head with the black face had bobbed up just now.

They might have gone a little to the right or left with the idea of skirmishing past the lurking native, but they could not believe that he was the only one to be reckoned with; the rocky ground might even be alive with natives belonging to the village, who had been skulking amongst the rocks all night, keeping watch.

In that case, to bear straight towards the spot at which that one native had betrayed his presence was certainly the shrewder course.

And now, as they so quickly reached the broken ground, Jimmy had his gun ready for lightning-swift action. Pam was aware of this, although she was so anxiously looking before her.

Suddenly there was an outcry from the village behind them—that huddle of grass huts, from one of which they had just made their daring escape, after being captured by the natives.

All those women and children who during the last few minutes had been keeping up a barbaric chanting were now screaming and yelling, for a reason that was tragically apparent.

The escape of Pam and Jimmy had been discovered.

Even the drum-beating changed from that dull dub, dub, dub! to a wilder note, like a beating to arms.

Pam glanced back over her shoulder.

Only women and children of the tribe back there in the village—but some of those women, what furies they were! Instantly they had snatched up knobkerries and spears, and now they were rushing this way.

Pam looked to the front again just in time to see Jimmy, who had got a couple of strides ahead of her, dart fearlessly between two masses of rock; his gun was butt to shoulder.

For a few yards farther they rushed on, zigzagging between the rocky mounds; then he, still in front of her, stopped dead.

But he did not fire.

Instead of the bang of a rifle-shot, there came to Pam, behind him, only a queer cry or his—very faint, as heard amidst the mad clamour of the pursuing horde.

Then Pam saw someone showing head and shoulders above a mass of rock directly in front of Jimmy. The face was black—but it was not the head of a nigger.

"Jack!" was Pam's recognising cry. "Jack!"

Polly Linton's brother Jack—he it was, his face and bare shoulders and chest all blackened, as for a nigger troupe!

"This way, Pam; you got on past me and Jimmy and run!" Jack cried. "Jimmy and I'll take our stand here."

"No," Pam spiritedly refused, "you don't, either of you! I won't go, unless—"

Bang!

Jimmy had fired at last. Mounting to the top of a rock mound, he had aimed towards the native village. A shot fired over the heads of the oncoming women, that was all, but it had certainly taken daunting effect.

His excited smile was assuring Pam and Jack that a check had been put upon the pursuit as he jumped down.

"Come on, then!" Jack cried.

How unlike Jimmy, this boisterous brother of Madcap Polly! Something of the typical storming sergeant-major about Jack in any time of desperate adventure.

"The others—not far off!" he panted, as Pam and Jimmy sped along with him, darting this way, that way, so as to gain all possible advantage from cover. "I was scouting to try to get trace of you."

So that was why he had blacked himself like that!

"Dave and 'om, Tubby as well," he further imparted during the furious scrambling along, "we've been out and about all night; have had the village under observation since three in the morning."

"Oh," Pam next moment cried out joyfully, "and here is one of the others—Tubby!"

She laughed; perhaps because she was rather overwrought. But fat Tubby Bloot, another of the lads who had "gone black" for scouting purposes, really was a sight to compel laughter.

He came stumbling from some concealing place, to join the other three and then run on with them.

Then, as they thankfully dropped at last to a brisk walking pace, Pam saw both Jack and Tubby stare amazedly at Jimmy's chest; they had suddenly observed how it was tattooed.

"What on earth's the idea?" Jack gasped.



"That's the Sign of the Double Hawk," Jimmy smiled. "Indelible pencil-imitation tattoo. Pam did her left arm the same."

"What!"

"And a fine idea it was, too—Jimmy's!" Pam promptly declared. "It probably saved our lives. Anyway, as soon as the blacks in that village saw the sign they left us alone."

"Is that so?" gaped Jack. "Then that's the thing for all of us to do! We won't stop now, but as soon as we've had brekker."

Pam could imagine how little there was to justify Jack's cheery, careless allusion to "brekker" as a meal to be enjoyed presently with something of the leisure of holiday-time at home. But she admired him for retaining a joking tone.

Over the broken ground, offering ample cover, for an hour they flogged along, with Dave and Tom as companions who had suddenly appeared upon the scene.

A constant looking out for danger—especially from behind—resulted only in an ever-increasing sense of security.

But scarcely ever were they going at less than a hasty walking pace. Again and again they went at a trot, putting mile after mile between themselves and the native village.

The ground traversed still remained a grassy plain, considerably broken by jagged rocks, and growing a few flat-topped trees. But in the distance were the mountains of the Kwamba country, hazy in the morning sunlight.

Constantly Pam was sending an eager look towards that craggy range.

The Kwamba country! It had been their fascinating objective from the very start, from Croydon, by plane to the Central African airport of M'Geya.

Yes, and with any luck, by to-morrow afternoon, Pam! Jack presently broke out, guessing her thoughts. "But here we are, in the meantime—smoke, see it? So you can soon get a rest—and brekker. Hurrah!" Pam saw it—the thin streamer of smoke, rising from a fire burning upon the open ground, only a short distance ahead.

"Morcove!" she shouted. "Mor-cove!" Then she and the boys heard familiar voices answering that recognised halting cry of the expedition.

"It was 'Morcove!'" and a joyful "Hurrah!" from Betty and Polly and other chums, not yet in sight, but evidently darting this way amongst the rocks to meet Pam and the boys.

A minute later, and the sensational reunion was taking place. Naomer, for one, behaved like a wild thing, out of whose way Paula Creel had to keep for fear of being bowled over during the dusky imp's joyful antics.

Bunny Trevor, failing to get the Morcove School song taken up in chorus, sang two verses of it solo. Madcap Polly became the effective imitator of a very irate headmistress, demanding to know what Pam had to say for herself!

In contrast with these absurdities there was the quiet way in which Mrs. Willoughby took this safe return of Pam and Jimmy and the "scouts."

Pam herself was manifesting a good deal of her habitual serenity as she returned her mother's kisses.

"I'm afraid it was worse for you, musie, than for me, really," Pam said quite simply, all emotions kept under.

"Jimmy was so frightfully efficient."

"Good old Sir James!" roared Jack. "Up with him, boys—come on now!"

"Hurrah, yes!"

Then, not to be outdone, Betty and others saw to the "chairing" of Pam.

The way to the camp-fire was taken in professional form, with great cheering.

Even some band music was forthcoming. Jack, when in the mood, could supply a close resemblance to drums and brasses. He was in the mood now!

Ah, but what unspeakable relief it was that they were all safely together again! In a little while Pam and Jimmy could between them give account of what had happened to them.

They did this while a welcome meal was being enjoyed by all. And there were moments during the narration when every listener's face was a study in emotions too deep for words.

No camp had been made at this spot where so many had spent the night. A fire had been kindled, but the haver-sacks and bundles of equipment and stores mostly lay just as they had been dumped twelve hours ago.

Ready for going on again! For push on they must as soon as those who so stood in need of a rest had been able to enjoy one.

The rocks, at this early hour of the morning, afforded some shelter from the burning sun. There in such shade as was to be had, without unpacking tents, the resting-time was spent.

Pam soon dropped off to sleep, when she would much rather have remained in talk with her mother and Mrs. Cardew and the girls; and in her sleep she dreamed very confusedly. No wonder, after all she had been through.

In her dream the Sign of the Double Hawk seemed to shine before her out of black darkness—perhaps because, just before she fell asleep, she had seen one chum after another "tattooing" an arm with that device.

Then it was as if she were back in that native village, still shut away in darkness so that nothing could be seen. Nor could a sound be heard, apart from that din which the villagers had made just before dawn.

The tom-tom again, and the "Ya-ra-ra!" of chanting women; growing louder and louder until at last it rose to a droning roar more like that of an aeroplane.

And so Pam, in her sleep, was suddenly back in the Homeland, at Croydon Aerodrome, ready to start with the rest of the party for Africa. A machine was whirring somewhere in the sky, circling about, roaring erratically. Something wrong with it? For now there were sudden shouts of excitement.

Pam awoke with a start, and yet she still heard those noises that had come to her in her dreaming. Instantly she saw that all her chums were on their feet, gazing upwards to the brassy sky, and theirs were the excited cries which had helped to awaken her.

Giving a quick rub to her own eyes, she herself gazed upwards.

And there, circling about at a mere couple of thousand feet above the sun-scorched wilderness, was an aeroplane, its engine giving trouble, missing fire badly!

## Out of the Sky

BETTY, first to notice that Pam was up from her sleep, called across to her:

"What do you think of this, Pam!"

Then there was Polly's excited cry: "A plane, just fancy—out here!"

"She's got to come down, too!" yelled Bunny. "Engine trouble!"

"Looks like being a bad landing, then!" shouted one of the boys. "Rough ground, even over there where there are no rocks."

"But whose machine can she be?"

Betty loudly wondered. "We're a great way off from any air route."

"She's no liner off her course," Dave quietly declared. "Small machine—private most likely."

"Oh, look—look now!"

That was voiced tensely by several of the girls in chorus. The plane, its engine spluttering worse than ever, had suddenly lost height.

At any moment she might nose-dive, to become a blazing mass of wreckage.

The anxious watchers saw her "flatten out" and go skimming on again; but she could not recover the lost height. She suddenly banked and came round in a half-circle, and then they saw her tilt forward, and dip as if she must at last plunge down.

But before Pam could scramble to join them those who were already standing on the tops of some of the rock mounds shouted that the plane was down!

She had not nose-dived, after all, and there had been no crash. But it had been, inevitably, a bad landing amongst deep grass.

"Come on, girls!"

Betty, so accustomed to take the lead at school as Form captain, was jumping down from a rocky perch, to go rushing off.

Instantly she had her more athletic chums keeping up with her in the dash to the plane. Betty felt sure that everybody else was following; but this was not the case. Mrs. Cardew and Judy and Dave stood by at the resting-spot, to remain on the look-out in case of natives.

For their first few hundred yards of floundering on over the rough ground, all those who were racing to find out how matters stood could see very little of the plane. Then, however, they crossed land that was a little higher than the spot where she had come to rest, and they could tell that she was right side up.

"Wonderful!" Polly panted. "I expected her to turn over."

"See anyone yet?" Betty panted. "I can't!"

"No!"

"The had been ample time, during this race of theirs to the spot, for anyone unhurt to scramble out of the plane. So, although the machine seemed to have survived marvellously well, they were kept in as great anxiety as ever for its pilot.

At last, quite half a mile from where they had seen the plane come down, they were close up to her. The pilot, they realised, must have acted with extraordinary judgment and skill. The ground just here was the best that anyone could have picked at only a few minutes' notice.

Mrs. Willoughby and the hurrying girls and boys had still seen no sign of life. But now, when only a stone's-throw from the machine, someone in pilot's overalls came round from the far side of it.

At first they took the pilot to be a man. What with the helmet, the overalls, and the casual cigarette, the survivor had all the appearance of a typical British airman.

But Betty was voicing a conviction which had already seized others when next moment she gasped out:

"Why, it's a woman!"

Something in the gait as the pilot sauntered to meet them all; something in a smile that was distinctly feminine; and then the clear, high-pitched voice which said:

"Bon jour!"

"Oh, good-morning!" Mrs. Willoughby cordially responded. "French, then!"

"Oui! But it is, I think, that some of you will remember me—yes!" smiled the woman pilot, without removing the cigarette from her lips. "The wife of Pierre Dupont!"

### MADAME DUPONT!

The wife of that unprincipled, ruthless man to whom the Morocco expedition owed so many of its disasters of late!

Madame Dupont, every bit as daring and unscrupulous as the man whose wife she was! Here she stood, confronting them all like this, out here in the heart of wild Africa, only a day's march or so from the Kwamba country!

"And my husband—you can perhaps give me news of him?" the woman's cool impudence enabled her to ask. "I was to await him at Kwamba—oui! But now—voilà!" she laughed, gesturing round to draw attention to the plane.

"First, let me say, Madame Dupont, if you are feeling at all shaken—although you do not appear to be—"

"Oh, no—merci!"—with a little bow. "I am what you call O.K.! There was a bump when I hit the ground, and perhaps for one minute I have to sit quite still. Then I find that I have been most lucky; my machine also, perhaps. But that remains to be seen. Things do happen! You also have found it to be so?"

"Is this a time, Madame Dupont, for you to twit us about our own difficult position?" Pam's mother returned. "You have had the greatest good luck to escape unhurt. But isn't it obvious that we must now have you upon our hands?"

Madame Dupont shrugged and smiled. "That, as I say, remains to be seen. I was taking a look round my machine when you all came up, and, really, I cannot believe that she is done for. I know why my engine failed, and that I can attend to myself. As for taking off from here—what is the saying you Britishers have? 'Many hands make light work'—*n'est ce pas?*"

"You mean, some of these girls and

boys can help you there? I am sure," Mrs. Willoughby said icily, "they will be only too pleased to do their best to help you to take off! We can hardly be expected to want you with us when it is your husband who is responsible for the loss of our menfolk! Perhaps you do not know—"

"Oh, I have some idea!" was the shameless interruption. "My husband discussed his intentions with me weeks ago! It is why I myself was making for Kwamba!"

"He has endangered the lives of every one of us!" Mrs. Willoughby bitterly exclaimed. "My own husband and another gentleman who was in charge—a Mr. Minden—they are now the helpless captives of blacks whom Monsieur Dupont has bribed into his service! The man Kwamba, whom we brought out with us from Croydon—he also has been carried off! Madame Dupont, the loss of our men has created such a state of danger as may yet—"

"Oui!" The Frenchwoman again nodded and smiled. "And so you feel that I should at least do my best for you all! *Tres bien!* You will find me quite willing to get you out of your fix! For a consideration—"

"What! Going to try to strike a bargain, are you?"

"Again, I think you British have a saying: 'One good turn deserves the other'! So, then, you will all do your best to help me with my machine. If I am able to take off again, then I fly back to the nearest airport from here—you know it, of course! M'Geyra—oui! I obtain help for you all. I get you—rescued!"

"And your price for doing all that?" "Truly not a great one," Mrs. Willoughby was airily answered. "All I ask of you is—the Ankh necklace!"

"Thank you! I thought that would be it!"

The juniors saw Madame Dupont narrow her eyes as she received that hint of a refusal.

"So!" she said. "You value the Ankh necklace as much as that—even

more than the safety of these young people!"

"By no means!" Pam's mother flashed. "I only refuse to part with the Ankh necklace because I know you would never keep to your part of the bargain! Is it to be supposed that you would really do anything to help us win back to safety—to civilisation—when our doing that would certainly mean a day of reckoning for your husband? You want the Ankh necklace badly enough, I don't doubt. But you



are not going to get hold of it, and then snap your fingers at us!"

And here, Polly, like the hothead she was, burst in:

"You're like your husband, Madame Dupont—a swindler! Oh, all right, Betty!"—as that chum nudged her to be quiet. "But look at her—laughing!"

"Come away, all," Mrs. Willoughby compassionately advised the juniors. "Madame Dupont cannot want you to do anything for her immediately. I assume," she turned to say to that woman, in the act of stepping away, "you wish to join us for the present? We shall be over there—you can see the smoke of our fire—"

"Oh, thank you; but I much prefer not to trouble you with my company," Madame Dupont haughtily smiled. "If two or three of the boys, perhaps, could lend me a hand by-and-by? In the meantime, I have, I assure you, everything I need."

Mrs. Willoughby nodded a dignified "Very well!" She was intending all the juniors to go with her; but the four boys begged to be allowed to stay on, and so make themselves immediately useful. If Madame Dupont was to get off again in her machine, the sooner she did so the better.

Then Betty and some of her girl chums, guessing that the boys were to be allowed to have their own way, clamoured to be allowed to stay on as well. But Mrs. Willoughby would not hear of this.

"No, my dears; at present I really don't think you can be spared!"

There was enough indeed for Morocco to do now in other directions. Unless Madame Dupont did succeed in making further use of the plane, she would simply have to be taken along with the expedition. So they must wait to see how matters went, and this meant making a camp, after all.

"Looks like our being home again in time for next term at Morocco, doesn't it?" Polly grimly jested.

"So long as we get to Kwamba," Betty panted.

"And how soon will that be?" questioned the Madcap furiously, "when we're having to hang about like this—for her?"

### "Stop, Thief!"

ALL through the grilling morning Betty & Co., with Pam's mother and Mrs. Cardew, were kept very busy.

Once more the baggage had to be undone, tenting put up, fuel collected, and cooking on a large scale undertaken.



WIDE-EYED and amazed, the chums gazed upwards. 'And suddenly, out of the blue, there came an aeroplane; circling, it came lower and lower, and they knew that it was going to land.

"There was Dave to lend a skilful hand at times, but he was chiefly concerned with keeping a sharp look-out for danger.

He would not come down from his watchpoint—at the top of a mound of rocks—to sit for the midday meal with the others. So his sister Judy took up a ration for two, and there they sat together, a serious-minded pair, mixing no flippancies with their talk.

"Just one upset after another, Dave, isn't it? But—Great blessing, those natives haven't come after us!"

"Not a sign of them, thank goodness!"

"Waiting for another night, perhaps? But I'm not bothering about that so much," Judy hastened to add. "I feel that so long as we are all together, we'll be all right. About this Dupont woman, though; horrid if she does have to keep with us! Yet, of course, to leave her to fend for herself—not to be thought of!"

"No. There are times when you've got to help an enemy. And I don't suppose," Dave murmured on, "we shall lose in the long run by doing that."

He laid aside his finished dixie-lid, and reached for his ration of tea. The enamelled mug which held it was standing on rock, almost hot enough to keep it boiling. Flies buzzed around in maddening numbers, but he and Judy were calm natures, given to ignoring anything merely vexatious.

"Whose brew, Judy?"

"Polly's. Isn't it all right?"

"Fine!"

"She's been doing everything in one of her real rages," Judy soberly smiled. "It's a good job for the Dupont woman's sake that she was not allowed to stay over there at the plane."

Dave set down his emptied mug and got up. There was his sun-helmet to shield his eyes from the blinding glare as he stood gazing in all directions over ground that looked colourless and molten in the heat. He could just see the aeroplane where it had made its forced landing.

"Seems to me they have turned her round a bit," he remarked to his sister. "Reckon Jack and the others are hard at it still, levelling the ground a bit. And they wouldn't be doing that if the woman hadn't good hopes of being able to take off."

"Then she is to have a try at getting away? How soon, I wonder!"

Presently all four lads came into camp, perspiring at every pore, and more than ready for a rest in the shade, a meal and a drink of tea—especially the tea! They brought a message from Madame Dupont.

"Her compliments to you, Mrs. Willoughby," Jack said, with a grimace, "and she's coming across for a private talk with you before getting away."

"She is leaving, then!" Polly cried.

"Having a shot for it, anyhow," Jack nodded. "Gee, but the woman has nerve: I will say that for her."

"'Courage worthy of a better cause,'" fair-minded Betty quoted. "And good luck to her over the attempt!"

"Bekas we don't want her having to sit down to meals with us!" Naomer shrilly rejoined. "I zink I would choke eef I had to put up with zat!"

"I will see her, of course," Mrs. Willoughby calmly remarked. "Although I really don't see what good it can do. Then, with a smile, as she saw how Polly and some of the others were simmering with anger against the Duponts: "And I think you young people had better, perhaps, not be in her way when she does come across!"

"Oh, I've no intention of answering the door, anyhow!" Polly mock grimly stated.

As it happened, she and several of her girl chums were very busy washing-up and putting things by, after the midday meal, when Madame Dupont came into the camp. The girls went on being busy.

Mrs. Willoughby at once stepped to meet her.

"You wish to speak to me, Madame Dupont?"

"Thank you—alone, could it be?"

For answer, Pam's mother conducted the woman to one of the tents. Pam herself effected to go to that very tent, presently, to lie down during the extreme heat of the afternoon. All the Morcove girls were under strict orders to get a rest as soon as possible, so that the urgent march could be resumed towards evening, and continued during the night.

At last the girls' work was finished. The boys set off to scout around for possible danger.

Not wanting to interrupt the private talk, Pam would have gone to one of several other tents; but at this very moment Madame Dupont came out into the dazzling sunlight.

As she stepped away from the tent to return to the distant aeroplane, she looked aside at the girls, and nodded and smiled, as if in careless farewell.

None answered her, either by word or look. Pam decided to make for that tent, after all. As she stepped across to rejoin her mother, she was within speaking distance of Madame Dupont, who was sauntering away.

The woman turned round and spoke,

with a smile that was peculiarly sinister.

"Good-bye, then, my dear! And if—I should be seeing your father in the course of the next few days, any message?"

Pam, her lips pursed, looked away from that undeniably lovely face, with its cruelly mocking smile.

"Go in quietly, I suggest," Madame Dupont voiced, as she herself moved on again. "Your mother is lying down—a little overcome, I fear, by this great heat."

Quickly and silently Pam entered the tent, and there, sure enough, her mother was lying upon her side, the head pillowed, her eyes closed, just as if she had felt bound to lie down at once, to ward off an attack of faintness.

Or had she gone off into a dead faint even whilst Madame Dupont was still with her? Had Madame Dupont, catching her before she fell, laid her down like this? It might be so. This was the hottest time in the African day.

"Mother—are you all right?"

Pam whispered the anxious inquiry, kneeling beside that reclining form.

There was no response, no flicker of the lowered eyelids.

"Mother darling!"

Then Pam, in her loving alarm and pity, felt the tent to be unbearably hot and airless. Her first thought was to give her stricken mother more air. Gently she turned her upon her back, and loosened some of the clothing, although that was of the lightest kind, suited to the climate.

Pam was doing this—without having yet called for help—when she suddenly realised that something was gone that her mother had been wearing about her neck.

The Ankh necklace!

That vitally important trinket had been in Mrs. Willoughby's possession, not Madge's, ever since the scare over Madge's temporary loss of it. Madge herself had urged it was only right that Pam's mother should have the care of it after that. But it was gone now—missing again! And this time—*stolen!*

Pam stood up, reeling round to get outside the tent.

"That woman!" she was panting, as she lurched into the open air. And then she saw Madame Dupont—hurrying now to get to the plane. And that plane fit and ready to be flown once more!

"Morcove—help!" Pam called out frantically, for her wild eyes, as she looked about, could see no one. "Help, Betty—all of you, help! The Ankh necklace!"

"What? What?"

Instantly half a dozen of Pam's chums had rushed forth from the tents.

"The Ankh necklace—she's stolen it!" Pam shouted on. "Madame Dupont—look! Running now, to get away with it in the plane!"

"Oh!"

And the girls, as they voiced their dismay and fury, were off at top speed after the thief, who, looking back and seeing that a pursuit had started, only ran on all the faster.

So the unscrupulous Madame Dupont has triumphed; she has got away with the Ankh, which means so much to Morcove! Are the chums successful in getting it back? Do not miss next Saturday's vivid chapters of this powerful serial, which are packed with dramatic developments. With your SCHOOLGIRL next Saturday you will receive a superb autographed photo-postcard of MYRNA LOY.

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