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THE SCHOOLGIRL

No. 362, Vol. 14.
Week Ending
JULY 4th, 1939

EVERY 2ND SATURDAY

Incorporating
'SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN'



An incident from
**"THE GIRL WHO
BOUGHT FRIENDSHIP,"**
this week's grand long complete Cliff House School story

BEGINNING A NEW SERIES of Enthralling Long Complete Cliff



The GIRL WHO BOUGHT FRIENDSHIP

Nobody Knew Her

NEVER had Barbara Redfern, captain of the junior school at Cliff House, run more breathlessly or more quickly.

And never, surely, had Babs' pretty, oval cheeks been more fiery red or herself so full of quivering excitement.

Lightly she leapt down the stairs that led into Big Hall—three steps at a time.

And then—

"Jimmy, look out!" shrieked Babs.

That was to the girl who happened to be passing the foot of the stairs at that moment. A trim, neat, spick-and-span girl it was, whose clothes, exquisitely tailored, bore the obvious imprint of a most expensive London cut, who sported a monocle in one eye, and whose sleek brown hair was boyishly cut to form a perfect Eton crop at the back of her neck.

Jemima Carstairs—or Jimmy, as she preferred her friends to call her—was rather thoughtfully examining a letter which rested in her hand. She never saw Babs until that girl clasped her about the waist to stop her headlong rush.

"Sorry, Jimmy! Hope I didn't startle you?"

"Not me, fair one—not me!" Jemima shook her head. "Does one gather," she asked in that serious way of hers, "that our merry old Babs is in a hurry?"

Babs laughed.

"I've got news!" she cried. "Glorious, gorgeous news, Jimmy! Oh, my hat! Where's everybody? I must tell them! I must! But—she gulped. "Jimmy, you've heard about the Cliff House Jubilee?"

By

HILDA RICHARDS

Illustrations by T. Laidler

"What-ho!" Jemima concurred. "Primmy has just sent for me! Primmy—" And Babs, in her excitement, was hardly able to get the words out. "We're having a slap-bang celebration, old thing, to commemorate the first fifty years of Cliff House as a girls' school! There's going to be all sorts of things! Teas! Entertainments! Fireworks in the evening, and a whacking great exhibition of school work, past and present, in the new theatre!"

Jemima whistled.

"Sounds stirring—what?"

"Yes, but—oh, wait till you hear the rest!" Babs jerked. "We're going to have a sort of—of pageant. Every Form

is doing something. The Fourth is representing Cliff House in the Victorian age—costumes; all that sort of thing, you know. The Sixth are doing the Tudor period; the Fifth—But who cares about the Fifth? And, Jimmy—"

Jemima staggered.

"Fainits, old Spartan! Don't overwhelm me!"

"And, Jimmy, we—we're going to be excused prep every evening until the Jubilee takes place. And Lady Deanshire is going to be present. Primmy's got a special stunt on for me as junior captain, and Stella Stone, as head girl of the school, of opening the Jubilee with a presentation and an illuminated address. Primmy's also sent out invitations to all parents and every old girl all over the world. She sent them out weeks ago, apparently having this stunt up her sleeve all the time."

"Sly old Primmy!" Jemima approved.

"And now," Babs said, "I must fly! Jimmy, go to the tuckshop and round up everybody, will you? Meeting in the Common-room in half an hour. We've all got to get together and talk this out. I'll round up the girls in the studies. You don't mind?" she added breathlessly.

"Pleasure—what?" Jemima drawled. "What-ho! Anything to assist the march of merriment, and all that sort of rot. But, whoa, my old Spartan Babs! Don't mind if I tarry awhile to drop this missive in the nest of the Storke—which—Jemima beamed—"is a rather natty way of putting it, don't you think?"

Babs laughed

"You mean, take it to Eleanor Storke's study?"

ELEANOR STORKE was determined to become Captain of the Fourth, and so, in her own scheming manner, she set to work to oust Barbara Redfern. But Eleanor had reckoned without Jemima Carstairs, who had made up her mind that Eleanor should not have things quite her own way!

"Meaning," Eleanor sneered, "that in the meantime she had blued the half-crown which was in it."

"Oh be quiet!" Babs snapped. "Yes, Dolly!"

"And—and then I brought it to Eleanor." The little one's voice choked again. "And Eleanor looked in and wanted to know where the half-crown was. But there wasn't half-a-crown, Barbara, because there never had been half-a-crown."

"I see!" Babs regarded her searchingly. "Dolly, you're sure you're telling the truth?"

"Oh, Barbara, y-yes! Indeed I am!" "And your version, Eleanor, is that there was half-a-crown in the purse?"

"I've said so!" Eleanor returned bitingly.

"And that, I suppose, gives you the right to terrify this kid into fits?"

Eleanor scowled.

"Is it your business?"

"It is," Babs returned steadily. "I'm captain of this Form. I don't like to remind you of it, but one of my jobs as captain is to put down bullying. Striking terror into the heart of a kiddie half your age is a horrible form of bullying," Babs went on contemptuously. "Much worse, in fact, than twisting her arm. Haven't you any sense of decency, Eleanor?"

Eleanor flamed.

"Decency!" she snorted. "I'll jolly soon show you whether it's decent or not, Barbara! It's not a matter for you to settle, so take your interfering nose out of it. I'll have this out with Primmy. Come on, you!"

And she made a snatch at the terrified youngster's arm. But Dolly, with a cry, jumped behind Babs.

"All right, kid! Here, you go outside," and Babs, encircling the shaking shoulders with one arm, bundled Dolly into the passage. Then she closed the door. Shaken a little herself, she faced the other occupant of Study No. 12.

"Well, Eleanor?" she said.

Eleanor's grey eyes blazed.

"Look here, you interfering busy-body!" she grated, "let me remind you that I've still got right on my side, and I'll haul that kid up before the headmistress even now, if I want to. Fat lot of good your championship will be then, won't it? When the little thief's already been convicted of one crime. In any case," she unflatteringly flared, "what the dickens did you barge in for?"

Babs eyed her contemptuously.

"I came," she said "partly to give you this"—and she tossed the letter on to the table—"and partly to tell you about the Jubilee celebrations. I came to offer you a part in them. But not now, thanks! I'd hate—just hate," Babs added, with concentrated passion, "to be mixed up with the sort of girl you are—in anything! Good-bye!"

And she went

"Barbara!" Dolly cried, rushing to her directly she emerged from the study.

Babs patted the youngster's head.

"Now then, don't cry," she comforted. "It's all right, Dolly. Dolly, tell me, on your word of honour, mind—there was no half-crown in the purse?"

"N-no, Babs!"

"O.K.—I believe you," Babs said, but her lips tightened a little. "Now run along!"

Dolly regarded her with wide eyes.

"Oh, Barbara, you won't tell Miss Primrose?"

"No," Babs promised.

"Oh, Barbara, you're sure?" Dolly's lips quivered. "Because, if you did, Miss Primrose would send me away. And, daddy," she choked—"and I should lose my cruise, Barbara, and

daddy would send me to a nasty place like he threatened to send me last time, when I—I took Lydia's brooch. But I didn't mean to steal that," she added tearfully. "I—I only wanted to show it to Dolores—Essendon, and pretend it was mine."

"O.K., Dolly," Babs smiled. "Now please do run off. And don't be frightened any more. I'll see that nothing happens."

"Oh, Barbara, thank you! You—you're so kind!" Dolly burst out, with a glow of gratitude.

Babs smiled again, her tender heart touched. What a fragile, easily scared little mite she was!

She went on down the corridor, knocking at the door of Study No. 11, while Eleanor, in Study No. 12, with a slow smile upon her by no means bad-looking face, straightened up.

She had heard that conversation—every word! And she chuckled to herself as she thought of the terror-shaken youngster and of her champion, Babs.

It had been a great joke, Eleanor told herself. It might be a useful joke if ever she wanted to get a hold on Barbara Redfern. For, of course, there never had been a half-crown in that purse. Pretending that there had been one, and scaring ten-year-old Dolly with visions of expulsion and prison had just been a product of Eleanor's rather peculiar and crafty sense of humour.

She took up her letter and sank into the armchair to read it.

There was a light of hope, of expectation in Eleanor Storke's face as she tore the letter open. Something crisp and rustling fell out with it. It was a ten pound note.

"So he swallowed it!" she murmured ecstatically.

She laughed. It was a laugh which had a triumphant note in it. Lovingly she smoothed out the note. Then she folded it, put it in her handbag, in which quite a few other crisp notes were contained, and sitting back in the chair, gave herself up to perusal of her letter.

It was headed with an address in Nigeria. It was from her uncle, Benjamin Storke, whom she had not seen since his departure to Africa four years ago, and whom she never expected to see again until she joined him there upon leaving school.

For Uncle Benjamin had gone out to Africa a chronic invalid, and had been warned by his doctor that he would be courting death to return before his cure to the changing climes of England.

But what was Uncle Ben doing in Nigeria? The last letter she had received from him had been from Rhodesia.

Nigeria! Wasn't that where Jimima's father was?

Eleanor frowned. She felt a sudden quick suspicion. Her Uncle Benjamin, Eleanor had kept a careful secret from everybody. Not that there was any real reason for keeping him secret. It was just Eleanor's nature to be secretive over the silliest and most harmless things, just as it was her nature to hoard up her money.

Always Eleanor had plenty and plenty of money. Though few guessed she was one of the richest girls in the school. This Uncle Benjamin of hers, owning one of the famous diamond mines in Kimberley, and having goodness knows what interests in the gold mines of the Rand, was one of Africa's millionaires.

In addition to her weekly allowance

of five shillings, he was for ever sending her extra pound notes, so that the accumulation in the bag of Eleanor Storke now would have put even the wealth of Diana Royston-Clarke or Lydia Crossendale in the shade.

Uncle Ben doted upon Eleanor, and, like a great many doting uncles, did all the wrong things to please her.

But—a tenner!

Eleanor chuckled. How easily he had fallen a victim to her wiles! In his last letter he had told her that he was anxious to hear of her doing big things. He had promised her a ten-pound note on the day she became Form captain.

So Eleanor very simply replied, saying that she was Form captain, and here, faithful to his promise, was the reward. A nice, easy way of earning ten pounds, Eleanor chuckled, and settled down to read her letter!

Then—

As if by magic that smug, self-satisfied expression was wiped from her face. At once her pleasure gave way to horror, despair, fluttering panic. What was this? Oh, gracious! What was this?

"You will be pleased to hear, Eleanor dear," Uncle Benjamin had written: "that my doctor over here declares I am perfectly fit again. He says, in fact, that it will do me no harm whatever to spend a holiday in England. Coupled with this glad news, I have received an invitation from your headmistress, Miss Primrose, who tells me that the Cliff House jubilee celebrations are to be held on July 19th, and asks me to come.

"Well, as you know, I am very, very anxious to see my dear niece again, and especially to congratulate her upon the high honour she has achieved in her Form. I shall be sailing a week hence from Lagos, and hope to arrive in England in about three weeks' time."

Eleanor froze. With glassy eyes, she stared at that passage.

Her Uncle Benjamin was coming here! Her Uncle Benjamin, cured of that mysterious malady which had forced his exile into Africa, was coming to see her!

Uncle Benjamin, when he came, would expect to find her Form captain, to be taking a leading part in these Jubilee celebrations. Oh, great goodness, what had she done—what had she done?

Agitatedly she rose to her feet, crushing the letter in her hand.

"And when he doesn't!" she breathed.

When he didn't! She winced at the thought. Too well she knew her uncle's hatred of liars. Many things her uncle could forgive, but deliberate lies such as she had written in her last letter—no, no! Never, never would he forgive that!

How could she prevent him from finding out?

Eleanor's thoughts in a moment were in turmoil.

Shame and humiliation confronted her unless she did something to avert this catastrophe. In her frenzy, she beat the fist of one hand into the palm of the other. What could she do? She, the girl who was regarded as the mystery, the girl who had always held aloof from the Form; from whom the Form held aloof. She had no friends.

If—

And suddenly she stopped; she stopped with a jerk, for a new, a startling, a daring idea had shot into her brain.

The celebrations! She had three weeks—three whole weeks! She had money, plenty—plenty of money. Money carefully hoarded for terms and terms.

Supposing in that time she could buy her popularity? Supposing, having achieved that popularity, she could oust Barbara Redfern from her position and instal herself in her place at the same time? Could she?

But she'd got to—she must! It was her only hope, her one means of salvation. She had no love for Babs! A slow, cunning smile overspread her face. She thought she saw a way.



"Can a Leopard—?"

"BABS! Babs! Here you are!"
"Come in, old thing!"
"Yes, rather, come in and tell us all about it. Jemima isn't pulling our legs, is she?"

Barbara Redfern laughed breathlessly. No more than a peep into the tuckshop had Babs intended. She had warned the girls about the meeting up and down the Fourth Form corridor. Just in case Jemima should have forgotten her mission—for Jemima could be surprisingly absent-minded at times—she had thought it best to make certain that Jemima had fulfilled her instructions. Obviously she had. The twenty or so girls gathered there were just bursting with excitement.

"No, I can't come in," she said. "The meeting—"

"Rats on the meeting!" Clara Trevlyn, the tomboy of the Fourth Form said boisterously. "That wants twenty minutes yet. Come in, you old duffer! I've got twopence left. Dashed if I don't blue it all on a lemonade for you! What's this Jimmy's saying? What celebrity is coming to open the Jubilee celebrations? And what's this about a British Empire exhibition in the theatre? And who's going to give the celebrity the gold casket sparkling with diamonds?"

Babs blinked.
"My hat, who's been telling you all that?"

"Why, Jemima said—"
"Not that!" Jemima denied, sadly shaking her sleek head. "Tut-tut! How Spartan old Clara does jump to conclusions! Those were figures of—or speech, as it were," Jemima went on. "A sort of illustration, flung out on the spur of the fevered moment, of what might not be. Still, come in, Babs, and with the hulling tongue of thine tell them in your own honeyed words. But hush!" she added dramatically. "Look who enters! Are my old and watery eyes deceiving me, or is it the ornithological? Eleanor I see?"

Everybody twisted round; it was! Eleanor Storkes; it was! Eleanor, who was hardly known to intrude into the tuckshop from one term's end to the other. Everybody blinked. Hardly could they have been more surprised if Miss Primrose herself had strolled in to join them.

"Well, my hat!" said Clara.
"Hallo!" Eleanor said brightly. "I say, I've just heard the news. Isn't it just ripping? Where's Babs? Is she here?"

Babs stiffened.
"What do you want?"
"Oh, Babs, I just wanted to see you!" Eleanor pouted. "Primmy told me about the Jubilee and I asked her if

there was anything I could do. She told me to see you, you know, as you were in charge of all the arrangements in the Junior School, and so I thought I'd better come before you filled the programme up. I'm dreadfully keen to do something, you know—really!"

"Well, shucks! Who said the age of miracles had gone?" murmured Leila Carroll.

"But I mean it!" Eleanor insisted.

"But, Babs—" Eleanor pleaded.
But Babs, to everybody's astonishment, turned her back. A low murmur went up. That was unlike Babs—very, very unlike Babs. Churlish, rather. Discourteous, certainly. But Babs, for the life of her could not have been cordial to Eleanor Storkes at that moment, with that scene in Study No. 12 still so fresh in her mind, with the real knowledge she had of this girl. She



"I TELL you I'm not going to apologise," Babs cried fiercely. She flung round on Eleanor.
"And if you knew the sort of girl she really is you wouldn't ask me to!"

There was a pause. Everybody was eyeing Eleanor with great astonishment. This was a surprise with a vengeance. Eleanor, the quiet and retiring, who had always given the impression of standing out of everything.

Jemima, indeed, so astonished and impressed was she, took out her monocle, absent-mindedly polished it on the end of Mabel Lynn's girdle, and put it back again.

"Rather a new departure—what?" she murmured.

"Eh?" Eleanor laughed. "Oh, don't jibe, Jimmy! Perhaps it is a bit sudden," she admitted frankly. "Oh, I know that I've been an old stick-in-the-mud! But, well—oh, I don't know! I just feel that I want to be part of the fuss, you know. Dash it all, one can't live at Cliff House with all you jolly ones without waking up at some time or another."

"Well, I guess not," Leila Carroll acknowledged. "Sure not—no, sister! Come in! Welcome the stray sheep back to the old fold!" she said heartily. "Here we are, Babs, another recruit for your party of celebrators, I guess."

She pushed her forward.
Eleanor smiled at Babs.
"Babs, you will find me something to do," she asked anxiously.

"I don't know," said Babs shortly.
"Oh, Babs!" murmured Marjorie Hazeldene.

realised that to the others her conduct must appear strange; but she certainly could not explain it now.

Clara frowned.
"Here, Babs, what's the big idea?"
"Dash it," Rosa Rodworth snapped, "you might be civil!"

But Babs' lips tightened. Eleanor, for a moment, looked dashed. So utterly forlorn and snubbed she appeared, that everybody's heart went out in sympathy to her.

A little silence settled in place of the merry din that had been going on before. Eleanor it was who broke it.

"Oh, Babs, what's the matter?" she asked, in hurt reproach. "What have I done to you? Barbara—"

"Please," Babs said bitingly, "don't speak to me!"

"Oh, come off it!" cried Freda Ferriers. "Bother it; Eleanor's never done you any harm!"

But Babs compressed her lips. That was true. Had Babs been her victim she might have found it in her heart to forgive her. But in front of her eyes was still that vision of little Dolly's tearful, frightened face.

She did not reply. Very quietly she drank up her lemonade. Dead silence there was as she pushed her way through to the door, and brushed past the dismayed-looking Eleanor. At the door for one brief instant she turned.

"Meeting in a quarter of an hour," she said.

"Well, my hat!"

"Babs!"

But Babs had gone. Eleanor sighed.

"I'm sure I don't know what I've done to upset her," she said. "Silly old Babs. But, never mind, everybody, she'll get over it. But, I say; you know—what about a little rehearsal of our celebrations? I've got some money. Look! A whole ten-pound note. Drink up, everybody! The treat's on me."

"My hat!"

"But I say—"

"Eleanor, this is frightfully ripping of you!"

"Rubbish," said Eleanor, with a laugh. "Haven't I said I've stuck in the mud too long? Come on—everybody! Auntie, there's the money!" And she banged down the ten-pound note in front of Auntie Jones' astonished eyes. "Give everybody everything they order!"

That was a knock-out. Again there were blinks. But Eleanor was obviously in earnest. She looked as if she enjoyed throwing her money about.

"Nice of you," Jimima nodded. "Generous—what? I'll have another ginger-pop. Come into a fortune, Eleanor?"

Eleanor laughed.

"Just a remittance."

"Tidy whacking sort of remittance," Jimima said. "One of your relatives broke into a bank or something? But jolly, yes—decidedly jolly. Mind if I have a doughnut, or a birthday cake, or something to go with it—just to stave off the old pangs of hunger until supper-time, you know? Thanks! What's it feel like to be rich, Eleanor?"

Eleanor gazed at the Eton-cropped one suspiciously, but there was nothing in Jimima's inscrutable face to suggest the thoughts which were passing in that sleek head of hers.

But Jimima was thinking, and her thoughts, if Eleanor could only have read them, would have disturbed her quite a lot.

But Eleanor shrugged. Jimima, watching her, shrugged, too. Great and admiring was the feeling now for the erstwhile recluse of the Form.

"Have another!" she cried. "Go on, please—everybody! Bessie, what about another plate of tarts? Margot, do have another sandwich. And I say! Here's Doris Redfern!" she added, as Doris, Babs' Third Form sister came into the tuckshop. "Treat on me, Doris," she said. "Have what you like."

"My only giddy slipper!" Doris breathed. "Honest?"

"Yes, of course!"

"Then, you said what you like, didn't you?" Doris asked slyly. "What about a pound box of chocolates?"

For answer Eleanor reached forward, and promptly took one off the tuckshop counter. She pressed it into the Third Former's hands.

"There!" she beamed.

Doris almost fell down with surprise. But Eleanor laughed. Bessie Bunter, who saw that, murmured.

"Oh crumbs! I sus-say, if you're in such a generous mood, Eleanor—"

"Well, Bessie, want me to advance a little something on your postal order?" Eleanor asked. "What about ten shillings?"

"Oh crumbs, I sus-say—"

"There it is!"

And, with another laugh, she pressed

the note into the astonished fat one's hand.

A buzz, then. Goodness! This was doing the thing in prodigal style, if you liked! Cordial, and more cordial, became the feelings towards Eleanor.

"Well—well, all very pleasant," Jimima said, glancing at the tuckshop clock. "But methinks, henchmen mine, we should be moving. Time and tide and Barbara's meeting wait for no man—what?"

Eleanor pouted.

"Oh, but Babs won't mind if we're just a few minutes late!"

Jimima shrugged. She had an idea that Babs would. She also had a shrewd suspicion that Eleanor knew that, and was rather playing to make the meeting late.

But nobody seemed anxious to tear themselves free. Babs meeting, indeed, in the Fourth's regard for the amazing Eleanor, and her ten-pound note, seemed to have been forgotten.

And more and more girls were coming in.

A quarter of an hour went; twenty minutes. The twenty minutes lengthened into half an hour, by which time the tuckshop was filled to suffocation point.

Not until Auntie Jones, with a shake of the head, refused the last order did they desert.

"Sorry, young ladies; but you've reached closing-time," Auntie Jones said. "Orders are that the tuckshop is to be closed five minutes before gates. Time is up. I'm sorry."

So was everybody else. Reluctantly they dispersed. Jimima, adjusting her monocle, sadly shook her head.

"Too tough," she said to Eleanor.

"Eh?"

"About the old meeting," Jimima said. "I mean to say, gates closing means that call-over's due. Your little spread, Eleanor, has put the merry old tin-hat on the meeting. I wonder what Babs will say?"

Eleanor smiled sourly.

"And I wonder," Jimima mused thoughtfully. "Er—you don't mind me wondering, Eleanor, old Spartan? Little weakness of mine—what!"

"Eh? No. What were you wondering?"

"Who wrote that jolly old proverb affair? You know—Jimima corrugated her brow—"the thing about the naughty old leopard changing his beastly spots? You ought to be able to tell me that—that!"

And she beamed up at Eleanor who, for the second time, was seized with a quick tremor of suspicion.

When Jimima spoke in riddles like that, it was pretty certain that some deep scheme was being thought out in the sleek one's mind.



All Against Babs

THERE was no meeting, at least, not that evening.

But Babs, contrary to expectation, did not take umbrage. Perhaps she guessed something of Eleanor's game. Until call-over she waited patiently alone in the Common-room, and then, deciding that it would be impossible to hold the meeting, went off to her own study.

She felt a little nettled, a little angry, but she realised that she could hardly

accuse the Form of allowing itself to be led away by Eleanor, for all that.

Call-over came. Supper. In the few minutes' interval separating that from bed, Barbara drew up a few details she had in mind. By that time the news of the celebration had spread throughout the school. Cliff Higgs from end to end was agog. Certainly nothing on such an ambitious scale had ever been proposed before.

With the rest of the Form Babs went up to bed. There, while she was undressing, she was besieged by excited questions. Everybody now was sorry that the meeting had been a wash-out, but, as Lydia Crossendale said, gifts didn't drop from the skies every day.

Babs understood that, of course. She admitted to herself that had she been one of those other girls she would have been tempted to let the meeting slide. She waved them aside.

"Oh, we can't discuss it now!" she protested. "It's lights out in five minutes. You won't turn up at the meeting, you duffers!"

"Oh, Barbara!" Eleanor interrupted.

Babs glanced at her.

"Babs, I—I'm sorry. I—I hope you don't blame me," Eleanor said uncertainly. "But we were having such a jolly time, you know—it simply seemed to whiz by. I suppose it was my fault in a way."

Babs compressed her lips. She was not deceived by that falsetto.

"Thank you. We can have the meeting to-morrow."

She said it shortly. She said it with an intonation which plainly reflected her hostility towards Eleanor. Babs had not to be a hypocrite. The things she felt showed in her face. She knew very well that Eleanor was not sorry. She suspected shrewdly that Eleanor had egged the Form on.

But her hostility was noticed.

Rather constrained in its attitude towards Barbara Redfern was the Fourth after that. Barbara, as if the matter were closed, climbed into bed. Sarah Harrigan came round to turn out the lights, and the dormitory was plunged into gloom and silence. It was a silence, however, which was presently broken by the voice of Eleanor Skake.

"Babs!"

Babs did not reply.

"Babs—" Eleanor's voice was anxious. "Please, Babs, do answer me. You haven't gone to sleep, have you?"

"No," Babs said.

"It—it's about the celebration, Babs. You know, I think it's a lovely idea about you and Stella presenting the address and the presentation to Lady Deanshire. How's it going to be done?"

"That," Babs said, "is to be decided. Now please let me go to sleep."

"Yes, Barbara, but I—I was thinking," Eleanor said, perfectly aware that everyone else was listening to the conversation. "This affair embraces the whole of the Junior School, doesn't it? Now don't you think it would be a ripping idea to get some of the kiddies from the Second into the opening scene. You know how kiddies love colour and all that. My idea was that we should have about six of them dressed as little heralds to announce the entrance of Lady Deanshire."

There was a buzz. From Lydia Crossendale's bed came:

"Well, that's a jolly good idea."

"Yes, rather," said Bessie Bunter.

"Babs, what do you think of it?"

Eleanor asked.

"I think the idea's good—but expensive," Babs replied. "As it is, we shall want all the money we can raise. The school is making a grant towards the

hiring of costumes for the Victorian table, but only a grant. That means that we shall have to take funds out of the dramatic club. There'll be nothing left for extra stunts."

"Oh, but Babs, that doesn't matter!" Eleanor said eagerly. "I've got plenty of money, and I'm really anxious to do something. I'll pay for the hiring of the costumes."

There was another murmur. Really, that was jolly sporting of Eleanor. That she had money, there could be no question. That she was in a position to carry out her promise also, there could be no question. But Babs for the costumes Eleanor proposed would cost at least five pounds. Eleanor, plainly, was spending her money to ingratiate herself with the Form.

"Well, we'll talk about it to-morrow," she said.

But Eleanor had made her impression. The whole Form, with the possible exception of Jimima, was on her side.

When the meeting was held next day, Eleanor, the one-time recluse, found herself very much in the limelight.

Eleanor it was who suggested that the whole of the Lower School be invited; Eleanor who suggested that a committee should be formed to do the work of organising; Eleanor who enthusiastically offered there and then to embark upon a banner embroidered with a suitable inscription that should be hung across the main entrance of Cliff House School, executed in her own inimitable raffia work. And quite naturally Eleanor was voted to the committee.

That meeting, indeed, was a triumph for Eleanor. It was something of an ordeal for Babs.

She was trying hard to be fair, trying hard not to be uncharitable, but knowing Eleanor as she knew her now, she wondered in the back of her mind what inspired this sudden flood of generosity.

Obviously, however, Eleanor was going to mean a great deal to the celebrations, and obviously, if preparations for the celebrations were to be conducted in harmony, she had got to make her peace with Eleanor. For the sake of the school and the Form they must all pull together. It was a fight for Babs to overcome her natural repugnance to the girl, but if Eleanor were sincere—

Before tea she sought her out. Eleanor was in her study, sorting out her raffia materials. She turned as Babs came in.

Honey-sweet as she was to Babs in front of the other girls, falsely anxious as she seemed always to please Babs, there was no indication of that upon her face now. She scowled indeed. "Well, you," she said mockingly. "We'll wait! And to what," she asked goadingly, "am I to ascribe the honour of this visit? Come to see me about Dolly Drew again, Miss High-and-Mighty Redfern? Or just to pal up with me because you feel I'm putting your nose out of joint?"

Not an auspicious start was that. If Babs had had any doubts that Eleanor was courting popularity without an ulterior motive in view, that immediately dispelled it. Her eyes gleamed a little.

"I see!" she said quietly.

"What do you see?"

"Never mind!" Babs compressed her lips. "I was rather wondering," she said contemptuously, "if I had made some sort of mistake in you, Eleanor Storke. I see I haven't!"

She turned on her heel. "Here, wait a minute," Eleanor snorted. "You're not going yet, Barbara Redfern. What did you come for?"

"Never mind."

"But I want to know."

"You," Barbara told her scornfully, "wouldn't understand. I came here with the intention of offering friendship!"

"Your friendship—what a prize!" Eleanor scoffed. "In other words," she added mockingly, "you felt that my power in the Form was growing a little too much for you, and so you came along, anxious to get on my right side. Well, thanks," she added scornfully,

but I don't want your friendship, Barbara Redfern. As you will have observed, I'm quite capable of making friends of my own. You're beginning to see," she added sneeringly, "that the Form prefers me to you, eh? Getting the wind-up about it, eh? It would be just too bad, wouldn't it," she mocked, "if the lowly Eleanor pushed you off your high pedestal? But get out now. And don't," she added with a flash of venom, "come in here again with sticky offers of friendship!"

Babs turned crimson. She had the door in her hand now. She flung it open. But she couldn't resist one parting thrust.

"I wouldn't," she flung out bitterly, "be a friend of yours if I were offered a thousand pounds, Eleanor Storke, and if you want to know, I think you're the nearest the slyest, most grubbing little popularity-seeker I've ever met. Now—"

And then she started, her face reddening. For those words had not been heard by Eleanor alone. Down the corridor came four girls. One Connie Jackson, the disliked prefect of the Sixth Form, Jimima Carstairs, Rosa Rodworth, and Beatrice Beverley.

They all stopped, staring at Babs, and very plainly showing by their attitude that they had heard every word of that last violently flung statement.

Jimima frowned queerly. Rosa Rodworth looked angry. Beatrice Beverley stared, with parted lips. But Connie frowned.

"Barbara!" she rapped.

"Yes?" Babs said.

"That was a very nasty thing to say."

Eleanor appeared at the door. She shook her head sadly at Babs.

"But Barbara, I only meant it for the good of the Form," she said wheedlingly, "and you know I do so long to be friends with you. Barbara, won't you—please?" she asked wistfully, and extended her hand. "Barbara, please do let us be friends. Let's pull together for the sake of the Form."

There could be no doubt to an outsider of her earnestness, her utter sincerity as she stood there now, that outstretched hand so friendly—such a world of wistful appeal in her eyes. But Babs, instead of taking that hand, froze. Her eyes flashed.

She turned deliberately.

"Oh, my hat!" Rosa burst out.

"Babs, don't be such a beast."

"Yes, rather, Babs," Beatrice put in reproachfully.

"Barbara!" Connie's thin lips compressed. "Wait a minute, don't walk away," she said. "What is all this? What have you two been quarrelling about?"

"Well"—and Eleanor looked uncomfortable. "Barbara, you don't mind, do you?" she pleaded. "It's—nothing much. But—but I did so want to be friends with Barbara, you know. It seems to me that if we are going to make the celebrations a success, we've got to pull together," she went on, using Babs' own words. "For some reason Babs doesn't like me. She—she resents my interference, she says."

"You fibber!" Babs cried bitterly. "Quiet, Barbara! And so?" Connie asked.

"Well, I—I was unhappy about it," Eleanor said, her eyes downcast. "I felt that we all ought to be jolly chums, you know. So I—I asked Babs to come along—and see if we couldn't be friends."

"I see! And that was the answer," Connie looked grim. Her eyes fixed upon Babs with an expression of scorn. "A fine thing," she cried blithely. "I must say. And that from you, Barbara—captain of the Form, supposed to show a good example and be friends with everyone. Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

Babs flushed hotly.

"If it were the truth, I'd have reason to be," she retorted. "But it's not. She's telling lies!"

"Oh, Barbara!" Eleanor cried.

Other girls were gathering now. Jessie Cranston, that incurable little gossip of the Upper Third, came up. Clara Trevlyn was there, frowning. So were Bridget O'Toole and Gwen Cook of the Fourth, and Freda Ferriers. Freda broke into a scornful laugh.

"Look here," Connie said abruptly. "It's my job to put down quarrelling, Barbara—"

Babs heaved a deep breath.

"You will apologise to Eleanor!"

Babs started.

"I order it," Connie insisted.

Babs turned quite white. She stiffened. Apologise to this two-faced sneak! Apologise for having been insulted, for having been put in the wrong!

"I'm sorry," she said.

"What?"

"I'm not going to apologise!"

"Babs!"

"I'm not going to apologise!" Babs said firmly, and then suddenly her control broke. She flung round. "I tell you, she's lying—lying!" she cried.

"She's been lying all along the line! If you knew the sort of girl she really is—if you could have seen her yesterday afternoon—" And then suddenly she bit her lip, realising in her hot anger, what she was saying, realising just before it was too late that to go back to the beginning of her feud with Eleanor would involve little Dolly Drew—Dolly, who had so pitifully besought her to keep this matter secret.

She fastened a look upon Eleanor—Eleanor coolly, calmly inviting her to say what was on the tip of her tongue. Eleanor quite obviously prepared with her own retaliation—that little Dolly was a thief, that her goodness of heart she had been giving the child a lecture for her own benefit.

No! Eleanor would turn even that against her.

"Well, never mind," she flung out savagely. "I'm not going to apologise!"

"All right!" Connie gritted. "Then for defying me, Barbara, you can do me a hundred lines. For quarrelling with Eleanor you can do another fifty. And I want them in—all of them," she added viciously, "before call-over this evening."

Eleanor stepped forward, her face wrung with pity, with pain. She turned appealingly to Connie.

"Oh, Connie, please don't make her do them. Please! I—I hate to feel that I've got her into this."

"She's only got herself to thank," Connie said gruffly, and with that strode off, leaving the others clustered round Eleanor—all except Jessie Cranston, who, unable to keep any news secret for a moment, rushed off to

sprang tidings of the latest sensation in the Third Form Common-room.

Barbara, left studiously alone, turned on her heel and walked away—head erect, lips set.

Jemima sighed as she watched her go. "Too tough, what?" she said.

Eleanor gulped. "I'm sure I don't know what's come over her," she said distressfully. "Oh dear! It's beastly to feel that Barbara's against me like this. Clara, you're her friend—"

Clara turned her head. "Clara, couldn't you put in a—a word for me?" Eleanor pleaded. "It's so silly going on like this. Ever since I've asked her to let me take part in the pageant—and, after all, we're all in it, aren't we—she's acted like this. Clara, put in a word for me. And Jimmy, you too!"

"What-ho! Put in two words if you like," Jemima replied agreeably. "Too utterly amazing and mysterious, what? Not like Babs—decidedly not," and Jemima, wagging her sleek head, thoughtfully polished her monocle.

Clara shrugged. "I'm blessed if I understand it," she said.

"Exactly! Just," Jemima gently purred, "what I've been trying to say in that short, nippy, nutty, crisp-like way of mine. Solution to mystery is obviously in Study No. 4. Let us, therefore, totter Study Forwards. In which," Jemima beamed inanely, "you might discern a rather good joke if you look for it. Forwards—not backwards. Rather good, what?"

But Clara grunted. Rather perplexedly she grunted. And Rosa and Freda and Beatrice, clustering round Eleanor, clustered still closer—as Eleanor, with trembling lips and wistful eyes, suddenly put her hands to her face and burst into tears of unhappiness.

Truly she was playing her part well.

delicate, what? Fact of the matter is, old Babs—"

"Well, yes?" Babs said, a trifle impatiently.

"We've been asked, or perhaps we should say we volunteered, and as a volunteer is worth ten pressed men, you can consider that twenty of us have come to you, beloved. Fact of the matter is, we've come to see you on Eleanor's behalf."

Babs' face took on a different expression at once.

"H'm, not making a good impression, what?" Jemima asked.

"Oh, cut it, Jimmy," Clara said impatiently, and came to the point in that direct, blunt way of hers.

"Babs—"

"Well?" Babs asked in a restrained voice.

"Why are you so down on Eleanor?"

"I am not," Babs stated distinctly, "down on Eleanor."

"Well, why won't you be friends with her?"

"Because," Babs said shortly, "I don't want to."

"But what has she done to you?"

"It's not what she's done to me."

"Exactly," Jemima said. "Everything becomes as clear as the sediment in the merry old river-bed. You don't want to be friends with Eleanor. Good! Point No. 1. But Eleanor, beloved, does want to be friends with you."

"Eleanor doesn't!"

Clara blinked.

"But, Babs, how can you say that?"

Babs rose. Her face was very resolute.

"Because," she said, "I mean it. I know it! Oh, you can't see how that awful hypocrite is twisting you round her little finger. You can't see—well, never mind," and Babs shrugged. "If I tell you what I know, it involves someone else, and that means trouble for someone else. I'm not prepared to say more than that."

Clara stared at her. She looked at Jemima, swinging her monocle at the end of its cord.

Plainly Clara did not understand. Plainly Jemima was being given food for thought.

Very deliberately Babs seated herself at the table, half angry that she should be called to account for her action, more than angry because she sensed in Clara, her own loyal chum, that misunderstanding. Obviously nothing else was to be gained. Jemima looked at Clara. Clara looked at Jemima. They went out.

Babs got on with her lines.

For five minutes she wrote. Then—

Tap!

"Oh, come in!" Babs said resignedly.

This time it was her sister—cheeky, cheerful little Doris of the Redfern ilk, from the Upper Third. But Doris looked neither cheeky nor cheerful, at the present moment. She looked sorely puzzled.

"Oh, Babs, what's all this?" she cried.

"What's all what?"

"Jessie Cranston! She's spreading a vague horror about the school that you and Eleanor have had a row. She says that you called Eleanor a beastly little popularity grabber."

Babs' lips tightened.

"Is that what you came to see me about?"

"Of course!"

"Well?"

"Well—" Doris stared. "But it's rot, you know," she burst out.

"Eleanor's a jolly decent sort. Either it, Babs, it's not like you. I know Eleanor hasn't taken much part in Form matters, but now she is sitting up you

can't jolly well get down upon her like that. Look at her yesterday, in the tuckshop—"

Babs smiled a little. It was a hard smile, however.

"When she bought you a pound of chocolates," she guessed. "Oh, I know! She checked herself from uttering the natural reply to that, but perhaps her rather bitter look that crossed her face revealed it, all the same. 'You like her?' she asked.

"Of course I like her!"

Babs breathed a little heavily.

"All right—" she said resignedly.

"But, Babs—" Doris came forward.

"Oh, bother it!" she cried. "What the dickens is the matter with you? We all like Eleanor. She's a ripping girl, really, and—so are you. And Babs, you know what they're saying? That you're jealous of Eleanor!"

Babs smiled tenderly.

"Dear old kid!" she said. "But do run along now."

"But aren't you going to be friends with her?"

"No!"

And Babs very deliberately sat down at her work again. Doris gave her one puzzled look and went out.

Another five minutes. Then in drifted Bessie. Rather uncomfortable did Bessie look, and rather forlorn, too. She blinked at Babs through her large spectacles.

"Oh, hallo, Babs! I s-say, Babs!"

"Yes, old Bessie!"

"Oh, crumbs, you know, I dud-don't like it," Bessie said unhappily. "What they're saying, you know."

Babs' face froze.

"What are they saying?"

"Well, about you and Eleanor. Everybody's saying it," Bessie sighed.

"Babs, you do like Eleanor, really, don't you?"

But Babs did not reply.

"Because," Bessie went on, "she seems to be a jolly decent girl, Babs. She lent me ten shillings yesterday, you know. Of course, it was only a loan, Bessie added hastily, "but—but well, I mean to say! Babs, you aren't listening."

But Babs was listening. She was listening grimly, impatiently. First Jemima and Clara, then her own sister.

Now Bessie—all, it appeared, taking sides with the girl who was her enemy.

Mabs came in presently. She said nothing, but the queer glance she gave her chum showed Babs that she, too, was rather unhappily wondering.

Obviously, the story of the recent scene was common knowledge now—Babs told herself she did not care. But she knew that she did.

Hateful to have to fend off her chums like this. Hateful to feel there was even the slightest misunderstanding between them and herself. She wondered as she wrote—should she tell them?

If they only knew the truth!

She thought it over. No! She had promised Doris that this should not come to Miss Fritrose's ears. She was in honour bound to keep that secret for the little one's sake.

"Well," she said, finging down her pen at last, "there's fifty, thank goodness! That leaves another hundred to do. Shall we have tea now, old things? Bessie, you lay the cloth, will you? Mabs, put on the kettle. I'll amble off to the tuckshop to get supplies. I could do with a leg stretch."

Mabs nodded. Bessie mournfully blinked. Babs went out, mentally calculating the time to the committee meeting.

But in the corridor she paused. A diminutive figure was there, her little



Tea for Two

SCRATCH, scratch, scratch! Barbara Redfern's pen flew industriously over the paper.

She was writing her lines desperately against time. The first committee meeting was due to be held at seven o'clock, and Barbara, who had been made chairwoman of the committee, very much wanted to officiate.

That meant to say that she had two hours in which to do her hundred and fifty lines—with the tea interval taking a good slice out of that time.

She sighed a little as she worked. Her lips were pressed together rather grimly. But there was no help for it.

Connie, she knew, would be down upon her like a ton of bricks if she failed to deliver those lines to time.

Scratch, scratch, scratch!

Tap!

"Well? Door open!" she cried.

The door opened. Jemima and Clara entered; Jemima, her monocle gleaming, Clara with a baffled expression upon her face. Babs swung round.

"Well, here we are," Jemima beamed. "Busy, old Spartan? Pushing the merry old pen and all that sort of thing, what? Don't worry about us. Just write as we talk. Er—rather

face white and strained, her lips quivering. She gulped as she saw Babs.

"Oh, Barbara!"

"Why, Dolly!" Babs greeted, with a smile.

"Oh, Barbara!" Dolly quavered, and in a scared way looked round. "Barbara, I—I had to come and see you. You don't mind, do you? I—I've heard what's happened between you and Eleanor."

Babs patted the youngster's head.

"Don't worry, Dolly!"

"But I—I do worry!" Dolly said, and her eyes, so tragic, yet so worshipfully adoring, caused Babs' heart to give a pang as she looked at her. "It—it's hateful! Barbara, it's not because of me, is it?"

"Of course not!" Babs reassured her.

"Oh!" Dolly gulped. "I—I'm so glad," she whispered. "Barbara, you are nice," she added shyly. "And I don't believe a word of the nasty things everybody is saying. But, Barbara, I had a letter from my daddy this morning. He says he's coming to take me away on the cruise in three days' time, and he says," Dolly went on, with a rush, "that he's going to make very careful inquiries about me having been a good girl while he's here. Barbara, you—you haven't told anyone?"

"Not a soul," Babs said.

"And you won't? Barbara, promise—please!"

Babs paused.

"Now, Dolly, do run away."

"But, promise," Dolly entreated. "Barbara, please! Promise me that you'll say nothing, Barbara, not even to Mabel or to anyone." She caught at Babs' hand. "If daddy should even get to hear a whisper about me—" She shuddered. "Oh, Barbara, please—"

Babs was touched.

"Very well, then," she said. "I promise! Yes, I promise, Dolly—on my word of honour! So there! Now, off you go, like a good little kiddiekins, and for goodness' sake, don't go wearing yourself to a shadow. If your father sees you like that when he comes, he'll suspect that something is wrong."

And Barbara, with a tender smile, watched the youngster go happily down the corridor.

She was committed now. On her word of honour she had promised; and not Babs at any time to break so solemn a word.

In a much more thoughtful frame of mind Babs wended her way to the tuck-shop. Quite a crowd of girls was gathered there. All were talking and laughing all surrounding a laughing figure who seemed to be the centre of attraction. A little silence fell, however, as she entered.

And Babs became aware, her colour heightening a little, that every girl was staring at her; some questioning, others resentfully, the rest curious. Only Jemima, standing near Eleanor Storke in the centre, greeted her with a friendly grin. Eleanor herself, twisting round, shook her head.

"Oh, Babs, I'm standing treat. Will you have something?"

"Thank you; no," Babs replied.

"But, Barbara, just a little—"

But Babs ignored her. She went to the counter, gave her order, tucked the parcel under her arm and went out again. Eleanor bit her lip.

"Oh dear, she's still annoyed with me. What have I done to her?"

Jemima shook her sleek head.

"Mysterious," she said, "rightfully. Still, don't worry, Eleanor. Everything will come white in the wash. Er—I was thinking." And for a moment Jemima glanced thoughtfully at the girl next to her. "Too tough that you should do all

the merry old treating, Eleanor—too utterly tough. Suppose you join me in Study No. 10 in a spot of tea, and a wafer of bread and marmalade or something? Love to have your company, Eleanor."

Eleanor blinked.

"Oh, Jimmy, you don't mean that?"

"What-ho!"

Eleanor flushed then. This was a new feather in her cap. Not often was it that Jemima extended such an invitation outside her own little circle. In her quiet way Jemima was a power in the Fourth Form. Most girls liked her, and a few were afraid of her because of the things she said, and because of the fact that they never quite understood her.

The very fact that she never went out to make friends, made girls who were the subjects of Jemima's favours looked on in envy by the rest of the Form. Hardly could Eleanor conceal her delight. But she remembered the role she was playing.

"Oh, Jimmy, that's frightfully nice of you. Love to, of course. But look here," she added eagerly, "can't you invite Babs, too? Babs is your friend, and Babs would hardly refuse an invitation from you."

Very queerly Jemima gazed at her then. For a moment even she looked taken off her balance.

Jemima was fond of Babs' company, but on this occasion at least, Jemima did not want Babs' company.

All was not well with Barbara Redfern, and as Barbara Redfern was the girl Jemima admired most in the school, as Babs was her best, her most staunch friend, Jemima in her own way had decided, if it were humanly possible, to put it right.

She was intrigued by that blurted an-

nouncement of Babs that someone else was involved in this feud between Babs and Eleanor. She did not believe for one instant that Babs, soul of friendliness that she was, would have turned against Eleanor for no apparent reason at all. She did not believe that Eleanor herself was actuated by the best of motives in suddenly coming into the limelight like this. A mystery there was, a big, big mystery. It was a mystery which, Jemima saw, was rapidly leading to Babs' downfall.

Having failed to obtain any clue to it from Babs, the next move, naturally, was to try to surprise Eleanor into betraying it.

That was Jemima's sole object in inviting Eleanor to tea. Babs, even if she agreed to come, would rather spoil things.

"Well, no. Perhaps in the circus," she said wisely, "we'd better not invite old Babs. Let's be pals together, what? Just a little tete-a-tete between ourselves. Clinking cups and cheery conversation and all that, you know—at the Carstairs' groaning board. Shall we hoof it, fair one?"

Eleanor laughed. This was delightful. But outside, Barbara, who had paused to fasten up a stocking, heard every word of that. She winced a little. For a moment the colour fled from her face. So Jimmy—Jimmy whom she had always looked upon as one of her staunchest friends—was turning against her, too. Jimmy was taking up with Eleanor Storke.

Quite jerkily Babs straightened up. With the red mounting in her cheeks she strode off towards the school, her parcel under her arm. Not until she reached the school steps did she turn, and then she bit her lip as she saw Eleanor and Jemima strolling up the drive close together, apparently on the most amiable of terms.

But if Jemima hoped to get anything out of Eleanor, she was disappointed. If Eleanor were flattered and pleased to be so suddenly taken up by Jemima, she was still a little mistrustful of Jemima.

Over tea Jemima tried to draw her out; tried by every means in her power to force from her some unguarded



"I DIDN'T know you were such friends with Eleanor," Babs said, rather bitterly. Thoughtfully Jemima adjusted her monocle. "Don't worry, old Spartan," she murmured. "I'm still on your side—even though you might not think so."

confession as to her relations with Barbara Redfern. But Eleanor was watching; Eleanor was on her guard. She spoke enthusiastically about the pageant. When she spoke of Babs it was with only the most profound regret that Babs wouldn't pull in with her.

Jemima, for once in her life, confessed herself baffled. The net result of her careful invitation was just—nothing.

After tea Eleanor left, and the Eton-cropped one sat for a long time in meditative silence, endlessly polishing her monocle, which showed that her thoughts were very preoccupied indeed. Then with a shrug she got up and strolled along to Study No. 4.

"Busy, old bean?" she asked genially as she looked in, and Babs was busy, having been left alone by Bessie Bunter and Mabel Lynn to finish her lines. "Don't want to interrupt or anything like that."

Babs bent to her task again. "I am rather busy, Jimmy." She averted her face. "Er—" She bit her lip. She didn't want to say what she said then, but for the life of her she could not help her words slipping out. "Enjoy your tea," she asked. Jemima started.

"Eh?"

"Your tea—with Eleanor." There was a trace of bitterness in Babs' voice. "I didn't think you were so great a friend of hers, Jimmy."

Jemima did not reply. Very deliberately she polished her monocle. Very straightly and thoughtfully she looked at Babs, and then sadly and reproachfully shook her head.


"So-ho, that's how you feel, my old Spartan," she said. "Naughty! Tut-tut. Jump not, fair maiden, to the hasty conclusion. Through appearances be against me, I'm at one with your side, old Spartan, fighting under the merry old English flag, sticking by you through thick and thin and fast and loose, what?" She came over to Babs, dropped one hand upon her shoulder, and shook her head. "Babs, old topper," she said, "look at me, if you can bear the strain. You believe that, don't you?"

Babs bit her lip. Then she smiled. "Well, Jimmy, if you say it. But I don't understand."

"Of course," Jemima said, "you don't. And I don't understand either. But I mean to understand, old Spartan, and in understanding dissolve these fierce old shadows of gloom and darkness which hang over your cheery old nutskins. I walk," Jemima expounded, "in devious ways—gloomy, untrodden paths, and all that. The goal at the moment is rather obscured by depressions from Iceland or the Azores, or somewhere, but we shall doubtless get there. Rely on me, old Babskins. Meantime, chin up, and stiff upper lip, if you know what I mean!"

And nodding pleasantly, Jemima, the amazing, went out.



Eleanor's "Helping Hand" 

IN her own study, Eleanor Storke was also writing lines.

Amazing that, considering that Eleanor had been given no imposition. More amazing the speed with which she was writing—just, in fact, as if she had not a moment to lose.

She was a swift writer, with a very distinctive hand, and the words flew from under her pen at an incredible speed. Ever since she had left Jemima in her study she had been writing.

Sheet after sheet lay by her side. She glanced at the clock. A quarter to seven. Then, with a satisfied, rather crafty smile, she rose, carefully put the lines in the drawer of the study table, and went along to Study No. 4.

Babs, with thirty lines still to do, was writing against time. She did not look too pleased at Eleanor's interruption.

"Oh, hallo!" Eleanor said brightly. "All alone? Finished your lines?"

Babs' eyes glistened a little. "Will you please get out?"

"But, oh," Eleanor pouted, "I just came along, you know, to ask if I could help you. Can't I help you, Babs?"

Mocking the tone, jeering the expression which belied the words as she stood there, her back to the door, looking at the girl she had vowed to humiliate. Babs' face set.

"Will you go?"

"But do let me help!" Eleanor pleaded. "Please, Babs!" And she came forward towards the table, a honeyed smile upon her face.

Babs' face was red now. She knew that Eleanor was just baiting her. Eleanor had come here deliberately to annoy her. Eyes gleaming, she rose to her feet.

"Get out!" she rapped thickly.

"Oh, but not yet—not till I've done them for you!" Eleanor said, with mock reproach. She stepped towards the table, idly toying with the ink which stood there. "Got quite a lot done, I see," she said. "Your industry does you credit, Barbara. Now—"

And then she jumped back as Babs' hand grimly fastened upon her arm. "Oh, my goodness!" she cried. "You shouldn't have jerked me like that, you know, Barbara! Look what you've done!"

Babs spun round. And at sight of the table her face went white. She had not jerked Eleanor's arm, she knew that. The arm which she had taken, indeed, was not the arm which held the ink.

But that ink—oh, goodness gracious, look at it now! All over the table, it was, completely smothering all those carefully covered sheets of impot paper on which she had been working against time.

It was trickling between them. It was running in rivulets over them. Her work of the last hour and a half was utterly and completely destroyed.

She uttered furiously. "You beast! Here, come here!"

But Eleanor at that moment was at the door, a laugh on her lips, malicious triumph in her eyes.

Babs made one furious step in her direction, then paused. No! That would be playing Eleanor's game for her again. Eleanor would love her to chase her, to provoke another scene, giving renewed colour to the impression that was gaining ground that Babs was jealous of her—was hostile towards her. She turned instead back into the study.

Babs gritted her teeth. She thought she saw why Eleanor had done that. Just the sort of trick she would play, of course! The committee meeting was due in five minutes' time. No earthly chance of getting those lines finished in time for that now—no earthly chance of getting them in to scheduled time!

Eleanor, of course, fancied she would do them again—fancied that she would miss the committee meeting.

Well, Babs thought stormily, she shouldn't have the laugh on her like that. Blow the lines! She wasn't going to miss the meeting.

But Babs, for once, had under-

estimated the profound cunning of Eleanor. Eleanor's subtleties went deeper than that. She did not guess that the tricky girl had all the time been working to a carefully pre-arranged plan.

With a light laugh upon her lips, Eleanor had darted out of Study No. 4. She went straight to her own study and there, collecting the lines upon which she had been so carefully working that afternoon, tripped off with them under her arm to Connie Jackson's study.

The somewhat surly voice of that prefect growled a "Come in!"

She stared at sight of Eleanor.

"Please, Connie, I've brought Barbara's lines," Eleanor said meekly. Connie's eyes snapped.

"Why couldn't Barbara bring them herself?"

"Well, she's busy, you know. Got a committee meeting in the music-room. She asked me if I'd mind trotting them along for her. Will you take them, Connie?"

She handed them towards the prefect, making no mistake that Connie should glance at them. Not that Connie Jackson, suspicious of all Fourth Formers in general—of Barbara Redfern & Co., in particular—was likely to overlook that. One searching glance she gave at the lines, and then gave a little jump. She stared at Eleanor.

"Eleanor, this is not Barbara's writing!"

Eleanor pretended to be overcome with confusion.

"Oh, Connie—"

"Wait a minute!" And Connie, studying the writing again, fastened a sharp, suspicious look upon the girl before her. "Eleanor, this is your writing!"

"Oh, C-Connie!" stammered Eleanor, and hung her head.

"Tell me the truth!" Connie rapped. "Oh dear!" Eleanor sighed. "I—I'm sorry, Connie. But—but I thought—as I was the cause of Babs getting those lines, that it was up to me to do them. I told Babs that I would do them, you know!"

Connie glared.

"I see. And Barbara let you do them?" she asked. "A fine example as a captain she is to the Form! Very well, we'll see about this!"

Eleanor, apparently overcome with dismay, followed her out. But her eyes were shining as she trailed off in the furious prefect's wake.

Like a bloodhound scenting its prey, Connie stormed off. The music-room was reached. Connie, without the grace of a knock, flung the door open.

"Barbara!" she rapped.

Barbara, sitting at the head of the table, was on her feet in a moment.

"Barbara!" Connie's voice was like a rasp. "Where are your lines?"

Babs bit her lip.

"I'm sorry."

Connie sneered. "I'll say you are."

"But—but there's been an accident," Babs said. "I couldn't miss the meeting—"

"Exactly! So," Connie sneered, "you got another girl to do them for you, hoping—with a burst of passion—to take me in! That's your idea of being a captain, is it? That's your idea of setting an example to the Form. Do you take me for a fool?"

"Well, she's said it," Jemima murmured.

Babs blinked.

"But—"

And then Eleanor came forward—Eleanor looking distressed, Eleanor wringing her hands nervously, her face the picture of bewildered consternation.

and contriteness. She looked appealingly at Babs.

"Oh, Babs!" she faltered.

Babs' lips grew tight.

"What has this to do with you?"

"But surely," Eleanor said, "you remember, Babs? I—I told you I would do those lines for you. I—I did them, but Connie has spotted my handwriting. Oh, Babs, it—it wasn't my fault. I tried ever so carefully to copy your hand."

A low gasp came up from the meeting. Everyone stared at Eleanor, from

did Babs lose her temper; but she was filled with wild, ungovernable rage now.

Eleanor, playing her part well, shrank back, wide-eyed, dismay upon her face. Rosa Rodworth, her own face flaming, jumped up at once, and Lydia Crossendale sprang to support her.

And at once there was babel.

"Wait a minute!" Rosa cried angrily. "We know all about it, Barbara Redfern. You've had your knife into Eleanor from the start. The whole school's seen it. Eleanor has done her best to be friends with you, and how

almost in tears. "We can't get on with the meeting without Babs!"

There was silence. Again Jemima, eyeing the hypocrite, polished her monocle.

That was true. Babs, as chairwoman of the committee, arrangements had been left in her hands by Miss Primrose. And Babs had turned them down.

Jemima frowned.

"Perhaps," she suggested, "a gentle word of wisdom in Barbara's shell-like ear might not come amiss at this



Eleanor to Babs. Babs herself looked astounded, however.

"You what?"

"Oh, Babs, you remember!" Eleanor cried. "You agreed to let me do your lines for you, for, after all, it was partly my fault you got them, wasn't it? Well, I did, and—and—"

"And I spotted it," Connie put in, with grim satisfaction. "And a fine thing it is, I must say! Here!" She flung the sheets towards Babs, who blinked at them like a girl who cannot believe the evidence of her eyes. "You will write three hundred lines before call-over-to-morrow—in your own handwriting this time! And you, Eleanor, can do a hundred lines for helping in the deception!"

And with that she flung out, slamming the door behind her.

"Oh, Babs," Eleanor faltered—"oh, Babs, I—I'm frightfully sorry! But I didn't dream, of course, that Connie would spot the difference in the writing!"

Babs swung round in an instant. She saw it now. The treachery, the cunning of it! Eleanor had had this scheme up her sleeve all along. Eleanor had deliberately spoiled her lines in order to foist these—her own—upon Connie. A gust of fury shook Babs. Her eyes blazed.

"You cat!" she got out, between her teeth.

Eleanor started back.

"You scheming little beast!"

"Oh, I say," cried Clara. "Babs! Dash it all, Eleanor was only trying to do you a good turn!"

"A good turn!" Babs' face was bitter. "A good turn!" she choked furiously. "A good turn—to destroy my lines and put those in their place! If that's your idea of a good turn—" She took a step forward. Not often

"SO you haven't done those lines," Connie blazed. "You got someone else to do them—hoping to take me in!" Babs was silent. Eleanor was to blame for this—but how could she denounce her rival?

have you treated her? By snubbing her, by trying to keep her out of things!"

"Yes, rather! Hear, hear!" Frances Frost chimed in.

"You are being rather a sneak, Babs!"

Babs stood still. She looked at the hostile faces around her.

"I see!" she said. "You think that of me, do you? You think—you think that I'm jealous of her, that—that—"

Her chest heaved. "Very well," she said, between her teeth. "Go on thinking it! Some day you'll find out your mistake! You'll know her for the sort of girl she really is! But, in the meantime—and her lips quivered—"I refuse to sit at the same table with her! And if you don't like that—"

"We don't!" Rosa Rodworth said dangerously.

"Then," Babs cried, "you can jolly well get on without me!" And, turning passionately, she vanished through the door, leaving the committee in dumb-founded amazement.



Flowers of "Friendship"

"OH dear, it's all my fault!"

wailed Eleanor.

"Oh rubbish!"

"Don't worry, old thing!"

"But I do worry!" cried Eleanor,

at juncture, old Spartans. Perhaps," she added, "I might do something. I'm not promising, of course. Never count the old hatches before they're chicked, or whatever it is. Still, there's a chance. Shall I try?"

"Oh, please, Jimmy, if you possibly can do anything!" Eleanor pleaded.

Jemima nodded. Again she glanced rather queerly at the girl. She went out, leaving an uncomfortable silence behind her. Nobody had many hopes, even Jemima herself. But Eleanor suddenly jumped.

"I've got it!" she cried.

"Eh?"

"Listen! Mabs, you're Babs' friend."

Mabs looked at her.

"And Babs is awfully fond of flowers, isn't she?" Eleanor eagerly asked. "She just loves flowers. No, wait. Listen! I've got a scheme. We must get things put right, and get Babs out of this silly mood she is in. Now supposing I buy a lovely great bouquet of flowers?"

They all blinked.

"But wait!" Eleanor went on. "I'm not going to present them. You, as the committee, take them along to her. I'll hang in the background. Tell her that they're a peace offering. Yes, please, Rosa, for the sake of the Form. Please—please do help me in this—all of you! Babs will be pleased with those, won't she? It will make her happy to think that she still has you on her side, and she'll accept them. Then—then—and Eleanor gazed at them appealingly—"you can tell her if you like that I bought them. Once she's accepted them she can't very well throw them back, can she?"

She stopped, looking anxiously around. The girls exchanged glances. Really that was frightfully nice of the

girl who has been so badly treated by Babs.

Mabs looked rather hard at Eleanor. Puzzled and unhappy, she was ready to welcome any suggestion which would patch up the feud. Clara, for her part, was as anxious as Mabs. And flowers were one of Babs' real weaknesses.

"Will you help me?" Eleanor asked. "Right-ho!"

"Thank you! I'll phone to the Friardale florists at once," Eleanor said delightedly; and off she skipped.

But there was a smile on her face, a crafty gleam in her eyes, and she chuckled to herself as she went.

"BABS WON'T you tell me?"

"Jimmy, I can't!"

"But it's not like you," Jimema said seriously. "You must have a reason for not liking Eleanor."

"I have a reason," Babs said.

"H'm!" And Jimema shook her head.

She felt, and she looked, puzzled in that moment as she faced the unhappy leader of the Fourth Form in Study No. 4.

Obvious it was to Jimema that there was going to be no peace in the Form until this feud were settled. But obvious it also was to her that the cause could never be settled until its cause was disclosed.

She frowned as she stood by the window, then, twisting round, slowly went towards the wastepaper-basket. She glanced into it.

"These your lines?" she asked.

"Yes," Babs replied dully.

"Bit of a mess—what!" Jimema frowned at the ink-splashed paper which had been crammed into the wastepaper-basket. "H'm!" she said, and again after a second's reflection; "H'm!"

She lifted her gaze to the inkpot—one of the heavy glass varieties, incapable of being upset, except deliberately, and nodded again in that inscrutable way of hers.

"Eleanor have visitors," she remarked suddenly, as a knock came at the door; and a crowd, too, by the thundering sound of their fairy footsteps. Shall I open the door, Babs?"

"Please do!"

Jimema fixed her monocle. She tripped across the room. She flung the door open, and then staggered back at the perfume which filtered into the room.

For Mabs stood there, holding a lovely bunch of lilies and roses. Clustered behind her were Clara, Rosa, Lydia Crossendale, and Frances Frost. There was no sign of Eleanor Storke.

Babs started up.

"Mabs!" she cried; and her face flushed. "Oh, my goodness, what lovely flowers! Where ever did you get them?"

Mabs smiled.

"They're for you, Babs."

"For me?"

"A little presentation from the committee," Mabs added, "with the committee's love. Babs—there!" And she plumped them into the dazed and delighted Barbara's arms. "Just an expression of our loyalty and our admiration, and all that, you know, hoping you'll accept them and forget all past unpleasantnesses, and get to business on the committee. You like them?"

"Like them? I—I think they're lovely!"

"Then," Clara said, in hearty tones, "that clears the air, doesn't it? Now put them in water, Babs, old thing, and come off your giddy high horse.

We're holding up the meeting, and it will be call-over in twenty minutes."

Babs smiled. She smiled mistily and tenderly. Really the flowers were gorgeous—the most gorgeous she had ever seen.

What a sweet, kind thought it was of the committee's! What a lovely way of showing that they forgave her for that outburst in the music-room! And then a new figure came tripping in, a radiant figure, eyes sparkling.

Eleanor Storke. Pushing past Clara and Mabs, she launched herself into the study.

"Oh, Babs, I'm so pleased you've accepted the flowers. No, Clara, let me explain! Babs—"

Babs stiffened.

"Well!" she said.

"It was my little scheme," Eleanor laughed deliciously. "Don't be cross, Babs. You know that I did so want to be friends with you." Then she stopped—faltering at the sudden look on Babs' face.

"If," Barbara said between her teeth, "I'd any idea you'd anything to do with it Eleanor Storke, I'd never even have smelt them. If they're a gift from you, I don't want them. Take them back!" And, to everyone's consternation, she tossed them full in Eleanor's face.

There was a moment of utter, flabbergasted silence. Then, vibrantly and in horror from Mabs:

"Babs!"

"Babs!" Clara cried. "You idiot!"

"But, Barbara—" faltered Eleanor.

"Get out!" Babs blazed. "Get out, and take your flowers with you!"

And, in a sudden fury, she collected them again from the floor where they had fallen, and bundled them into the other's arms.

"Why, you jealous cat!" hissed Lydia.

"Sheer spite!"

"Resign! Resign!"

"You're not fit to be on the committee!"

Babs stood still, shaken, trembling.

Then she turned. She read hostility, condemnation in the faces in front of her—yes, even Clara looking uncertain, Mabs flushing with humiliation and shame. They believed this hypocrite! Her own chums were against her!

"Oh, please, please go!" she choked.

"Yes, for goodness' sake, let's!" cried Lydia Crossendale scornfully.

Together they filed out.

Only Clara, Mabs, and Jimema remained.

"Babs!" cried Mabs broken-heartedly.

Something like a sob escaped Babs' lips.

"Oh, please!"

"Babs, no!" It was Clara who spoke. "Wait a minute!" she said unsteadily. "I don't understand this. None of us understands it. We're your chums! We're trying to believe in you. But you must admit that you're making it rather hard for us!"

Babs hit her lips.

"I tell you—," she began, and then wearily shook her head. "Oh, I don't know! I'm sorry, I just can't, can't explain! But you're making a mistake. I'm not hateful—I'm not jealous—but I can't tell you. I can't! I've given my word of honour, and if I broke that word it might end in another girl's expulsion—" She broke off, facing them desperately. "Clara, Mabs, Jimema!" she cried. "Don't misjudge me! Please! I need your friendship! Please have faith in me!"

There was a pause. Mabs and Clara glanced at each other. Jimema took out her monocle, polished it, and put it back in her eye again. Then Clara spoke.

"O.K., Babs!"

"You believe in me?"

"Yes!"

"And you, Mabs?"

"Babs, of course!"

Babs gulped. She smiled mistily. Dear loyal friends! She turned to Jimema.

"And, Jimmy—you?" she faltered.

"I," Jimema said, "have never doubted, Babs, old Spartan! Here I am, and here I always will be, ready and willing to help you hold the old fort! So chin up, and look the world in the face like one of the true old bulldog breed. Shoulder to shoulder, Babs, old scout! Back to the jolly old wall. This," Jimema asserted, "is where we fight it out together!"

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

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BETTY BARTON & Co., of Morcove School, together with members of Grangemore, 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.

An airman, who makes a forced landing at the Morcove camp proves to be **MADAME DUPONT**—wife of the villainous Frenchman. She is about to take off again when Pam realizes she has stolen the vital Ankh necklace, without which the expedition is helpless!

(Now read on.)

Into the Blue!

BETTY Barton and her chums, as they rushed away from the camp in pursuit of Madame Dupont, were almost beside themselves with anxiety.

She had robbed them! And of all things vital to their safety out here in Wild Africa, she had stolen—the Ankh necklace!

No ordinary trinket, that, merely valuable as a curio wrought in precious metal. It was the mysterious relic worn three thousand years ago by a queen of Egypt, which to-day could achieve wonders for the Morcove expedition to Kwamba—amongst the Kwamba tribe.

Without the necklace—and they were without it now, for the cunning Frenchwoman had stolen it—they would find the Kwambas perhaps as hostile as other tribes had already proved to be.

And hostility there at Kwamba—Oh, it was going to be utterly fatal; must be, now!

Urged on by such thoughts as these, the girls floundered along over the rough grassland, desperate to frustrate the woman's obvious intention of getting away in her aeroplane with the stolen trinket.

Half a mile it was at least from the camp to where she, the wife of that

soundrel Dupont, had made her forced landing in the African bush.

Running at great speed, she was even now almost back at the waiting machine. For it really was waiting—to take her into the air. The girls knew Madame Dupont had overcome the engine trouble. And Jack and the other boys belonging to the expedition had even helped to clear and level the ground for a take-off.

"My goodness, if we'd known she would do a thing like this!" Polly gasped, tearing up with the others.

"But she shan't get away—she shan't!" Betty panted fiercely. "It'll take her a couple of minutes, surely, to start the engine? If we're there only at the last moment, hang on to the plane, that's what I say!"

"Yes; anything—anything to stop her!" Bunny Trevor agreed breathlessly. "Oh, look, there's one of the boys, upset; bit puzzled—"

"Then let him know!" Polly wildly cried. "It's Jack, and he's not so very far off from the plane. Hi!" she shouted to her brother. "Stop that woman—stop her!"

Jack had suddenly appeared at the top of a little hillock. It was not surprising that he was alone. He and his four Grangemore chums had gone in different directions when they set off to patrol the environs of the camp, in case of danger from natives.

"Stop her!" all the girls shouted on, pointing towards fleeing Madame Dupont and the plane as they ran. "She's got the Ankh necklace! The Ankh necklace—stolen!"

They saw Jack start an understanding rush to intercept the woman, with about as far to run as they themselves still had to go.

Then one of them, with a sharp little cry of exhaustion, stumbled and fell, failing to rise again. It was Pam, unequal to the severe strain after her recent experiences and the wear and tear they had entailed.

Madge stopped to give her attention,

as one or another of them was simply bound to do. At any rate, five still remained to continue the desperate race—with Jack likely to be of tremendous help, too.

"And we'll manage—we will!" Betty voiced, a few moments later. "She's at the plane! Never mind, we'll be up with it before it can rise!"

"She's started up the engines, though!"

Barely had Polly panted that comment than Bunny tripped over and fell. She tried to rise again, but cried out: "My ankle!" and fell back.

"Never mind!" Betty still inspired them cheerily. "Hard luck, Bunny! Tess, you stay with her. Come on, the rest!"

Only three of them now; Betty, Polly, and Judy—flogging on in the sweeter heat of the African afternoon. Almost at their last gasp—and still they ran!

A couple of hundred yards now, that was all. Would they do it, then—would they? The plane's engines were roaring; the propeller was a flashing blur in the sunlight.

A hundred yards! And now they could see Madame Dupont in the pilot's cabin, doing everything in a cool manner.

Then Jack was with the girls, within a few yards of the plane's wing-tips. He shouted what he intended doing, but the terrific noise of the engines drowned his voice.

Judy, nearest to him, caught only a part of his cry—something about shooting, and so they must all keep back.

But Betty and Polly heard nothing of that warning, nor did they see him bring his rifle to his shoulder and take aim.

They only knew that Madame Dupont was now actually taking-off. Sure enough, the whole plane, next instant, made a slight and quivering movement, the engines whining louder than ever.

And both girls, at the very risk of their lives though they knew it to be,

dashed closer in, to try to reach the woman there in her pilot's seat.

Bang!

Betty and Polly heard that loud report, but they thought it had something to do with the engines. They had no idea that Jack had fired, hoping that the bullet would perhaps pierce the petrol tank.

Betty was, at that instant, actually clambering up, expecting to have to drop down on to the woman pilot—and if she did, so much the better!

Polly also. She was clambering to get aboard. Both girls were struggling up, holding on by this or that part of the machine's body, feeling it rocking violently—perhaps because of their added weight?

It could have been only two moments later when Betty, lying as a sailor lies along a ship's spar, was almost knocking her head against Madame Dupont's. And even then the woman never looked round or up.

"Stop!" Betty yelled, almost in the woman's ear. "Stop!"

But, as self-possessed as ever, Madame Dupont moved a lever, and instantly the plane was off at a run.

For only a few yards it darted along the ground that had been levelled, rocking badly. Then it rose—it rose bravely into the air; it was off and away—into the blue.

And there were Betty and Polly, still on board!

The pair of them, meeting each other's excited eyes whilst clinging on, as best they could, to the machine's outer fuselage!

Peril Aloft

BETTY'S first thought was to make things better for Polly, whose position was by far the more critical.

The plane had taken to the air at a moment when Betty was at least half-inside the cabin. Polly was entirely outside, catching the full fury of the air current that came blasting back from behind the propeller-blades. She even looked to be in danger of being literally blown away.

So, after a frantic glance to see how one could best get down into the body of the machine without any blundering against Madame Dupont—for that might mean an immediate crash to earth—Betty began to writhe and haul herself onwards with extreme caution.

The hair-raising struggle to get properly inside lasted only a few moments, although it seemed an eternity of strenuous gymnastics to Betty.

Then she slid, flopped, and was all of a heap close behind the desperate woman who was piloting the machine.

As for Polly, she must have come on every bit as fast, as Betty had made way for her. Instantly looking up, Betty saw Polly, to the extent of head and shoulders, overhanging her!

There was space behind Betty to which she could hastily withdraw. She crawled to be out of the way again, and down came Polly, head-first, outstretched arms checking the violence of the fall.

"Whew! Oh, my goodness, Betty! Whew!"

Like Morcove's madcap, it was, to be loudly vocal about the deadly peril as soon as she had a moment for speech.

"Yes—nice thing!" Betty was drawn into shouting. "But who cares!" she went on, after some heaving for breath. "Even this is better, Polly! Miles better than if she had gone off without us—and yet with the necklace!"

"I say so, too!" Polly shouted back above the deafening roar of the engines. "Wait till we land, that's all! We'll have her then—have the necklace, I mean."

"Have a good try, I know that!" was Betty's fierce rejoinder.

The machine was flying on—very steadily, unless the girls were too excited to notice any bad rocking. They could not see out except by standing up within touching distance of Madame Dupont, and they feared to move lest that might cause the plane to pitch dangerously.

It was a machine built for solo flights, and, apart from the pilot's tiny cabin, there was only a hold for luggage. Into that hold they had more or less tumbled, and it was amongst madame's belongings they now huddled together, seeing each other by a very poor light.

Suddenly Betty gave a queer little laugh.

"We've done something for ourselves, and no mistake!"

"Let's hope we've done something for everyone else as well!" Polly grimaced. "I'm just thinking. It mayn't be more than five or ten minutes before she makes a landing?"

Betty nodded.

"In the Kwamba country, you mean? It's only a few miles—we know. So this machine should be there in next to no time. Well, the moment we're down we—"

"Go for her, yes! And it's all right for us about that!" Polly exulted.

"We're behind her—splendid! She isn't even daring to look round now. She sharen't take her attention off the controls for a moment."

"And she'll be all the more engaged when there's all the landing to make. Rough ground again—bound to be!"

"Well, don't let's hope it will be too rough," Polly grimly smiled. "It's going to be the same for us as it is for her."

For a couple of minutes the machine rose steadily—on a straight course, or so Betty and Polly believed. Then came another tilting movement, causing a recurrence of that sinking feeling which had troubled them before.

But worse was to follow. Suddenly the machine dipped so that it seemed as if it might mean an unavoidable plunge downwards, ending in a nosedive.

Again there were moments of fearful suspense for Betty and Polly.

Falling!

With inheld breath, they dilated their eyes at each other.

The plane flattened out once more—just in the nick of time, perhaps? At any rate, they could give long sighs of relief.

There was, however, no resumption of a forward flight. Both in the behaviour of the plane and the woman pilot's livelier manipulation of controls there was clear warning to the girls that a landing-place was being sought.

Madame Dupont—she had done it once already, with a bit of luck, to-day. Would she do it again? If not, then the next few moments were likely to be the last for all on board the machine.

Suddenly the engines went silent.

Then a jarring bump!

"Oh!" Betty and Polly shrieked, clinging together.

Crash! And again—crash!

Down!

Their first need was to struggle clear of baggage which had pitched about, half burying them, when the plane came in for its violent, shattering crash.

They were still, in a half-dazed manner, writhing to extricate themselves, when there came the first sound since the bad landing which they themselves had not caused.

They heard a hacking and ripping noise just above their two heads, and at the same instant strong sunlight blazed in upon them.

Looking up, they saw two hands working furiously to tear a still bigger opening in the frail roofing of the luggage-hold.

Madame Dupont, herself unharmed and already doing her best for them? Who else, indeed, could it be?

Then a head hovered over the widened hole, and, most marvellously, they were not the eyes of Madame Dupont which peered down anxiously upon Betty and Polly.

"Jack!" gasped both girls. "Oh!"

"Yes," he spoke down to them, instantly jocular because he had instantly divined that they were both unharmed.

"All tickets, please! Kwamba—Kwamba!"

"What!"

"Come on, both of you!" And he reached down a helping hand. "We're there!"

"No need to tell us—we can't go any farther, anyhow," Polly now reacted to her own jesting nature as, with his aid, she came floundering out of the half-wrecked machine. "Whew! Betty, do come and see! But, Jack," she gaped on blankly, "you—you—I mean to say, how on earth! Have you been—clinging on somehow?"

"Getting a free lift, yes—like you two," he responded, whilst helping Betty now to get clear. His voice took on a more serious note: "We've got to see about Madame Dupont. I don't know, but—she mayn't be a pretty sight."

They could see nothing of the woman-pilot from their present position, and as he moved away, they both made some last extricating movements and then jumped clear of the wreck.

Almost a total wreck the plane was. It had landed on rough ground, amongst scrubby vegetation. Most of this consisted of stunted bushes forming a twiggy matting such as old heather often provides.

Now they found Madame Dupont all of a heap in the crumpled cabin, and they lost not a moment in drawing her out of the wreckage.

As a limp and lifeless-looking burden they carried her to where she could be set down. On the grass, in a rare patch of shade under a flat-topped tree, they placed her. She was still breathing. For all they could tell, during their first attentions to her, she might be no more than badly stunned.

Suddenly her eyes flickered open. With returning consciousness there came no moan of pain.

"Ah—merci!" she breathed faintly. That was all. Then her eyes closed again, and her head lolled heavily upon Betty's supporting hand.

"What do you think?" Jack muttered.

"Oh, it's nothing serious—can't be," Betty very earnestly exclaimed. "Somehow, her eyes, just then—the look she gave me. Got flung about more than we did, most likely, and so the shock for her was far worse."

"Yes," Jack muttered. "I guess I came off best, after all—sent flying into some bushes, I was. But look here;

Such a Surprise!

"POLLY, you all right?"

"What? Ye-yes, I'm all right—I think. What about you, Betty?"

"I—I think so, too."

any moment she may come to properly."

"Then what about the Ankh necklace?" Polly questioned.

"We've got to have it," Betty stated, with a frown that meant no enlousness.

"So—you find and take it, Polly."

"And when Polly did that, they could all three feel that their tenacity of purpose had been well rewarded after all.

Once again the expedition's "mascot" had been recovered. True, it was now only in the possession of Betty and Polly and Jack, separated as they were by miles of difficult country from their friends.

But, they knew themselves to be at Kwamba—at long last!—and it was here the Ankh necklace was to work such wonders for all!

The Land of the Kwambas

KWAMBA—at last! There had been Polly's thrilled outcry, just now: "Betty—do come and see!" But before that chum could take a first look round, after scrambling out of the wrecked plane, concern for Madame Dupont nad supervised.

The two girls made her as comfortable as possible, whilst Jack returned to the plane to see if anything immediately helpful were amongst the baggage.

He came running back at once, joyful over the finding of a small medicine-chest as well as a first-aid box.

"Here you are!" he cried. "Gee, and I tell you, girls, there's enough stuff aboard the plane to do us well in all sorts of ways. I shall go back and get hold of something that will serve for extra shelter from the sun, just here. How is she now?"

"Doesn't come round," Betty said, already busy with the medicine-chest. "I know what I'm looking for, if only it's here. Ah, got it!" as she picked upon one tiny bottle. "After I've given her some of this stuff, Polly; will you keep by her, whilst I—"

"Right-ho!"

So, a few moments later, Betty rose from her kneeling position, intending to run across to the wrecked plane. Jack was over there, doing such strenuous work as would make a helping hand very welcome.

Betty, who was no ignoramus in regard to first-aid work, had great faith in the restorative dose which she had administered; but she did not expect Madame Dupont to show more than the feeble signs of life, for a minute or two yet.

Then, on her way to the wrecked plane, Betty gave her first roving glance to the surroundings. These were of such an awe-inspiring character, she simply had to stop dead to remain agaze—spellbound.

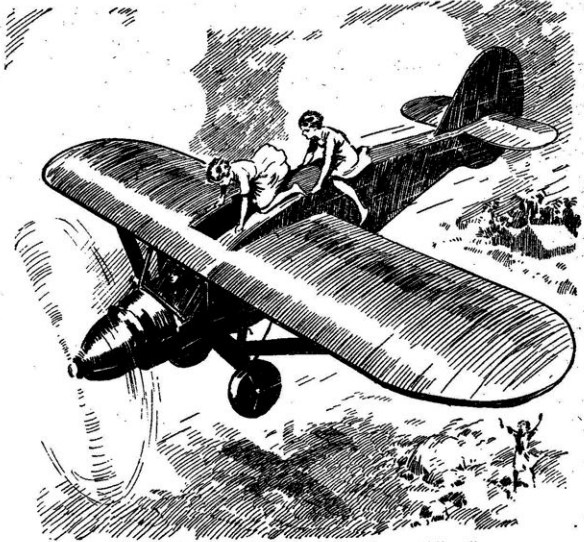
At the very foot of one of the towering mountains forming part of the Kwamba range, had the aeroplane come to ground.

Even if there had been only the natural grandeur of this mountain-side in all its ruggedness, to claim Betty's attention, she would have known a big enough thrill.

But, instantly, she had seen—like a huge sign chiselled upon the face of a sheer wall of rock—the device of the Double Hawk.

The Ankh emblem!

The same figure which had been wrought, thousands of years ago, upon the Ankh necklace that was now



HIGHER and higher droned the plane, while all unknown to the scheming pilot, Betty and Polly were clinging on—being carried they knew not where!

Moreover's "mascot." The same figure which had been tattooed upon an arm of their own Kwamba guide and interpreter. And, according to him, that same device was tattooed upon the arm of every member of the Kwamba tribe.

The Sign of the Double Hawk—here it was again; this time, graven upon the face of the mountain!

Betty shook off the spell that had held her mute and still. She ran on again, crying out to Jack as she got to him at the plane:

"You've seen, Jack—up there, on the mountain?"

"Eh? Oh yes! Didn't I say, Betty; this is Kwamba all right? But I wonder where all the Kwamba folk have gone?"

"I don't know that we want them to find us—for a bit," Betty half-uneasily laughed. "We've got the necklace, so we are all right there! But—the fact is—"

"Feel a bit shaky still—I know!" he chummily nodded. "Bit that way myself, don't mind saying. Great thing to remember, Betty; the others are not really far off."

"Oh no! And we'll manage! Do you want to get that torn-off wing across to where—"

"That's the idea, Betty. This," he said, dragging and wrenching at the useful bit of fabric, "will make a fine bit of shelter. Big as the roof of a bus, it is—and reminds me of one! Oh, hang—"

"Wait! There are one or two wires to tackle, Jack."

"You're right, and we'll do things your way," he grinned, stepping to where he hoped to find a toolbox. "Got any other suggestions, Betty?"

She laughed.

"Oh, if you don't like my—"

"But I do! Hurrah, boys—I mean, captain—"

"Now then!"

"But as you are a captain, at school, Betty, and as I'm going to remember, I work under you! Say, though, I got a revolver and cartridges. I'm going to have that," Jack jovially announced. "I lost my gun. And here's the toolbag—fine!"

He brought it across to where some stout, twisted wires still kept that wing of the machine hanging on precariously to the rest of the wreck. Betty took a file and fell to work very usefully, whilst he used pliers.

"Jack—"

"Yes, mum—cap'n—here, what do I have to call you, Betty?"

"I shall be calling you something, if there are any more of your nasty snacks," she joked back. "But I'm thinking, Jack; we can perhaps manage to let the others know that we're here, quite safe at present? They can see this mountain from where they are? Shine some bright object in the sun—"

"Gee, Betty! Quick, you leave me to do the rest here, and see if you can find a mirror amongst madame's things. There must be one! We can't exactly heliograph a message, but we can keep on flashing to mean—O.K.!"

"Almost bound to see it, Jack?"

"Bound to! They saw the way the plane went. They must know we're down somewhere here. The helio will let 'em know, anyway, that we're still alive."

"Jack, three flashes mean S O S, don't they—always, everywhere? And three gun-shots—the same? Look here, then, Betty rushed on, "the thing will be for us not to give three flashes. They'd expect us to make it three flashes, if we were in desperate danger—and we're not."

"Then find that mirror, Betty!"

She turned away smiling. Whilst she was rummaging about amongst Madame Dupont's tumbled belongings, Jack

made short work of the last hindering wires. When she came scrambling back to him he was dragging the dis severed wing clear.

"Here's a mirror, Jack."

"Well, don't drop it, or seven years bad luck. I'll have it presently. One thing at a time, and that well done, as they say at Morcove! Now, Betty, I don't want you here. Get back to Polly, and it might be as well to make sure madame hasn't any concealed weapon. That woman," he added, "has got to be treated as a prisoner."

"On parole?"

"Oh, and not too much of that, perhaps!"

Betty, going off again, was not feeling that Jack had spoken with undue sternness. It was only right to be very sorry for the wife of Pierre Dupont, as a sufferer from the bad landing. But solicitude must give place to renewed mistrust as soon as she was recovered.

"That stuff you gave her must have done her a lot of good," Polly was ready to exclaim, as her chum rejoined her. "Once or twice I've thought she was coming round all right, and now I think she really is!"

Betty knelt again beside that still inert form.

"Can't believe there's any pain, Polly—thank goodness."

"Oh, no. A terrible shaking—and so, if we can only keep her lying here, sheltered—"

Polly broke off, for Madame Dupont had opened her eyes again at last. This time they remained open, staring recognisingly at Betty first, then at Polly.

"Ah!" came from faintly smiling lips. "And so, I suppose, you have—the Ankh?"

"Sorry, Madame Dupont," Betty answered, "but it's what we were after, you know."

"Ah, oui! And I must admit that you deserved the luck!"

"We didn't have all the luck!" Polly frowned. "After all, this is the second time to-day you have come off mighty well—considering?"

"Oui!" the fast-strengthening voice agreed. "Not quite so good, that second time, perhaps? But one is still alive!"

"But I wouldn't try sitting up for a bit," Betty counselled. "We shall soon be making more shade for you, and—"

"Oh, merci! But I just wish to feel—for something—"

"It won't be there," Betty said, guessing why the crafty foreigner, having lifted herself upon an elbow, was fumbling a hand to a pocket of her pilot's suit. "You're thinking of this, aren't you?"

And a small, bluish-steel automatic revolver came on offer, for madame's eyes to see. Betty had taken it away from the woman only a few moments ago.

"So," madame nodded, after a long pause, "that, as well as the Ankh! And I am to consider myself, then—in custody, *n'est ce pas?*"

"I'm afraid—something like that, Madame Dupont."

"*Tres bien—very well!*" she assented quite prettily; and she was going to let herself sink back, looking not at all sullen over her helpless, defeated state, when she became aware of Jack dragging that aeroplane wing to the spot.

"What!" she gasped. "You also!"

"Yes," Jack affably nodded and smiled.

For a space she still stared at him as if he were a daylight apparition. Then, muttering to herself in French, she at

last fell back into a restful position, and, sighing catchily, closed her eyes again.

"*Malheur—bad luck!*" was what she had said under her breath. Over and over again, perhaps not realising that they would know the meaning of the word:

"*Malheur—malheur—*"

IN a little while Polly and Jack set off to climb to a height of a couple of hundred feet or so on to the mountain-side.

Betty they were leaving, by her own wish, to keep an eye upon the "prisoner," who had asked to be given a certain bottle from the medicine-chest so that she might dose herself.

The phial must have contained a strong sedative, for directly after taking some of the stuff, Madame Dupont had sunk into a heavy sleep.

Burning hot were the jagged brown rocks to which, again and again, brother and sister laid their hands to haul themselves up.

The crags were difficult to climb, but these two youngsters had done much scrambling about the beetling cliffs of Morcove in term-time. Only the extreme heat of the afternoon sun tried them; and yet without the sun there could have been no hope of "heliographing."

"Here, this must be high enough, Polly-wolly," Jack panted at last, taking his stand upon a narrow rock-ledge. "Gee, yes! You can see back for miles and miles over country across which we flew."

"And we've got—these!" Polly exulted, unslinging a pair of field-glasses taken from Madame Dupont's outfit. "Jack, I'll spy out the land whilst you work the jolly old vanity-glass."

"You know, there's another thing we can do to keep in touch," he chuckled, starting to flick the little mirror so that it caught the fierce sunlight. "After dark, Polly-wolly, I'm for making a flare with some petrol from the plane. There's a whole lot still in her tank. We could work a sort of regular half-hourly flash."

"But that would be just splendid!" Polly cried, whilst she held the field-glasses to her eyes. "Not only tell them that we're here, but help to guide them on in the dark!" My word, though, Jack, there is some rough country for them to come across!"

"As I can talk without glasses," he mumbled. "We're going to hear the lions, right enough, after sunset. But we—"

"Jack! Oh," his sister jollyly shouted, "our helio has been seen—it has, I tell you! There's a return flash—flash going on now; I can just pick it up with these glasses. One of the others, miles away over there, must be using a pocket mirror—Paula's, perhaps! Keep yours going, Jack!"

"How do you spool Morcove by helio?" he mock-furiously demanded. "Gee, but now I can see their signal myself, Polly—hurrah! That's no broken lemonade bottle, lying about in the sun. That's Dave, that is!"

For once even the excitable Polly was silent for a few moments. The marvel of it! Here they were—two of them—perched high up a craggy mountainside, with a vast tract of unexplored wilderness lying spread out in a map-like form below.

And there, away on the horizon, a tiny flash of light told them of their school-fellows and friends—comrades and parents—thrusting ever onward through unknown dangers.

Polly shaded her glasses with her hand and peered once again across that rolling, bush-covered plain. Here and there the shapes of moving creatures—herds of antelope and buffalo.

No intent was she, indeed, that she did not hear a faint, ominous sound which pulsed on the air.

"They're still a long way off," Jack remarked.

"Ten or twelve miles away?" Polly hazarded. "And yet we are already in touch! Oh, Betty must know about this straight away. It's great; it's everything! I'll go down to her. You stay here—"

"No, Polly. Don't you go without me, I'm coming now," Jack said—in such a suddenly changed tone that she gave him a quick, consulting look.

"Danger, Jack? Where?"

"There are some native blokes about now—must be. Listen. Don't you hear a sort of drum-beat—slow, like a funeral march?"

"Yes, and there's some strange singing, too," Polly whispered, after he and she had listened intently for several moments. "It's getting a wee bit louder."

"This is the mountain that has the Sign of the Double Hawk," Jack muttered. "It may be that they only come here at certain times, for a kind of ceremony?"

"We have got to face them, Jack; take our chance—"

"Oh, rather. Either the Ankh necklace is going to save us, or we're for it. Come on, then; quick as we can, down to Betty. We'll hope it's going to be all right for us, but— Eh, what?"

She was suddenly gripping him by the arm. Her other hand pointed down to a tree-dotted part of the low ground only a short distance from the derelict aeroplane.

"Look, there they are," Polly panted. "The Kwambas!"

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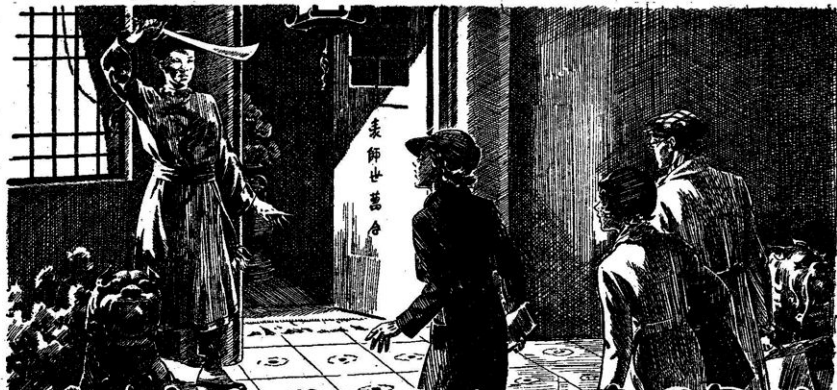


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THE PAGODA OF PERIL

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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.

He puts Kwanyin on trial to answer several charges. To the cousins' amazement, she confesses to them. Suddenly, however, Catherine realises why!

(Now read on.)

Strange Happenings

"STOP! The trial's a fake! Kwanyin's being forced to tell lies!"

Catherine Sterndale's startling accusation broke the silence in the pagoda.

Kwanyin, the pretty little Chinese girl, stood with her back to thick velvet curtains, against which her brilliant red and gold costume contrasted most vividly.

She seemed to be swaying; she seemed now and then to writhe. But there was no one near her. There was apparently no one who could justify Catherine's angry accusation.

Nevertheless, Catherine sprang forward to the curtains.

Through those curtains stretched out two yellow hands. They were gripping Kwanyin's wrists. Catherine, watching carefully, had caught a glimpse of them. But neither of her cousins, Molly nor Charles, had noticed anything amiss.

In a moment Catherine would have pulled back the curtains. She would have revealed a Chinaman standing there with Kwanyin's wrists in his grasp.

But before Catherine could reach the curtains, her uncle intervened. He stepped forward, and grabbed her arm.

"Catherine—how dare you?" he exclaimed. "Don't you know that this is a serious inquiry—a Chinese trial? How dare you interrupt?"

There was a flash of anger in his eyes, and Catherine was momentarily taken aback. But she had courage, and she knew that she was in the right.

"Uncle, let me go, please!" she begged. "I tell you that Kwanyin is being made to answer. There is someone behind those curtains. Pull them back and you will see."

"Nonsense!" said her uncle. Catherine saw the curtains rustle slightly, and she tugged to get herself free from her uncle. For if she did not act now she would be too late. The rascal behind the curtain would escape.

But Uncle Gerald, in grim mood, tightened his grip. Catherine could not escape.

"Molly!" she exclaimed. Her high-spirited, reckless cousin heard that appeal and did not hesitate. She, too, had seen that rustle of the curtain, and she was just as sympathetic towards Kwanyin as Catherine was.

Molly jumped forward, dodged a Chinese servant, and tugged at the curtains.

They drew back, but no one was revealed.

"There!" said Uncle Gerald, in ringing triumph.

He released Catherine's arm, for he thought that she would be satisfied, and would admit that she was wrong. He did not know Catherine well enough, however.

The moment her arm was released, she darted to the curtains.

There was a wall six inches behind them, and Catherine pushed her way along for a yard or two. She heard her uncle call angrily, but did not heed.

If she were right, then the cruel Chinaman was somewhere between the curtains and the wall.

A moment later she saw a felt-soled shoe just showing from under a fold in the curtain. Creeping forward, Catherine gave the curtain a tug.

The man was taken by surprise, and before he could snatch back at his covering, Catherine saw his face.

With a gasp of surprise, she staggered back.

"Kai Tal!" she cried.

By
ELIZABETH CHESTER

Illustrations by E. Baker

She was almost stupefied with surprise. For she believed that Kai Tal was the Chinaman wearing the hideous head of the idol, Ts' Tsiang, who was even now in the room in front of Kwanyin.

As Catherine hesitated, her uncle pushed through the curtain and shook her shoulder.

"Really, Catherine," he began. "Uncle," she exclaimed, "I was right! Kai Tal is there—I saw him! Look—his shoe!"

The shoe moved from sight. "A shoe? I see no shoe!" said her uncle crossly. "And, anyway, it could not be Kai Tal; for he is in front of Kwanyin—he is wearing the idol's head. Come, see for yourself!"

Catherine thought quickly. She knew that her uncle was prejudiced in favour of Kai Tal. He regarded him as a loyal servant and friend.

But Catherine and her cousins had every good reason to believe that the evil Chinaman was their uncle's enemy.

So Catherine went eagerly back into the room where the trial was taking place.

She saw the figure with the hideous head of the idol standing where it was before.

As she stepped forward to snatch off the idol's head, the figure sank down into a kneeling attitude, spreading the black cloak in a wide circle.

"Catherine, stop!" warned Uncle Gerald.

Catherine stopped. She did not want to interrupt anything to do with the ceremonial rites.

Kwanyin was on trial—charged with telling lies—with telling the cousins that Kai Tal was evil, and working against them and their uncle. It was a Chinese trial, bound up with all sorts of ritual.

Catherine stopped short, and faced the idol grimly.

What a shock for her uncle when she

took off that head and revealed that the man was not, as he supposed, Kai Tal!

"Have courage, Kwanyin," whispered Catherine, and pressed the little Chinese girl's hand.

"So nice, Miss Catleen," said Kwanyin softly.

The man in the idol's head rose again. The head, although three times human size, was, as Catherine knew from experience, light, and she did not expect any difficulty in lifting it.

Reaching out with a sudden movement, she snatched at the head.

It was lifted easily.

"Catherine—my dear girl——" protested her uncle, in horror.

The head was lifted clear. A Chinaman's face was revealed.

But Catherine Sterndale could have cried with chagrin.

The man was Kai Tal himself!

"Considerable regret to remark," said Kai Tal smoothly, "very bad to touch head of idol. Even distinguished and lovely hands of niece of great master should not do so."

Catherine, pale-faced, put the head back on Kai Tal, and turned to her uncle.

But he seemed more amused than angry.

"Well?" he said. "You know now?" Catherine's cheeks crimsoned; she felt that she had made a fool of herself. For it seemed quite impossible that Kai Tal could have moved from the curtains into the centre of the room and donned the idol's head without being seen.

Yet she was perfectly sure that she had seen Kai Tal behind the curtains.

"I can't understand it," she said in dismay. "I'm sure I saw Kai Tal. I've seen him often enough. Is there someone just like him?"

"My dear Catherine, to the uninitiated one Chinaman looks very much like another, and you had but a hurried glimpse of the man. Moreover, you were prejudiced—you were prepared to see Kai Tal, and your imagination played you tricks. Apart from which, perhaps——"

He looked at Kwanyin, as though about to blame her.

But as he looked he saw the Chinese girl suddenly collapse in a faint.

Catherine hurried to her and lifted the little Chinese girl's head and shoulders.

"Water—quick!" she said urgently. She huddled Kwanyin close to her, and her heart ached with pity.

"Poor Kwanyin," she said. Kwanyin stirred slightly.

"Tlapdoor," she whispered. "Door in floor!"

Catherine heard, and she turned to look at the idol. But Kai Tal had moved away, and where he had stood was a red, richly worked rug.

A trapdoor? Was that, then, the explanation? He had moved from behind the curtains and reappeared by the trapdoor!

It sounded strange, almost unbelievable, and yet in this Chinese house, even though it was in the heart of England, many peculiar things had already happened.

But Catherine said nothing of her suspicions to her uncle, who now knelt beside her and looked at Kwanyin anxiously. He had not heard what she said.

"I think she's still in a faint," said Catherine, as she shook Kwanyin's hand gently, without bringing any response.

Kwanyin did not speak again.

"Uncle, let me take her to my room," begged Catherine. "She seems so distressed. I won't let her upset me by anything she says——"

"No, Catherine. I will call Miss Smith."

He spoke to an attendant, rose, and for a moment had his back to Catherine and Kwanyin.

"Puttee me down, please," whispered Kwanyin. "Go away, please——"

Catherine, startled by the request, let the Chinese girl sink to the floor. And then, rather hurt by the request, she stood up and walked towards her cousins.

No one was looking at Kwanyin now. Uncle Gerald was talking to the grouped Chinese servants, Catherine was talking to Molly and Charles.

No one looked towards the Chinese girl until Miss Smith entered, and then Kwanyin was not there to be seen.

Uncle Gerald rushed to the curtains and looked behind them. Kai Tal uttered an exclamation of anger and, removing the idol's head, hurried from the room.

"She has gone," said Uncle Gerald in fury. "Catherine, Molly—I think you had better run along. Don't worry about Kwanyin, please. She is only shamming, to be out of the trial. Go into the gardens—try the tennis courts, if you like. Lunch at one o'clock."

Charles, Molly, and Catherine took that as an order to go, and they went.

"Either we're completely wrong about that Chinese girl, or uncle is somewhat hard-hearted, I fear."

"He's deceived," said Catherine, "and I'm glad she escaped."

"Yes, but where did she get to, if she wasn't behind the curtain?" said Molly.

Catherine could answer that; Kwanyin had given her the clue.

"She went where Kai Tal went after I saw him skulking behind the curtains," she said grimly. "Down below the room, and up through a trapdoor. Some of the time there was no one inside the cloak, or the idol's head. It was just propped up."

"Oh!" said Molly. "What an artful trick!"

Kwanyin Speaks

IT was a fierce hour's tennis the three cousins had in the hot sunshine, and they enjoyed every minute of it.

Now they were resting on the grass beyond the courts. There were gaily coloured flowers in profusion all round; the sky was blue, and all was peaceful and calm.

It was hard to believe that they were guests in their Uncle Gerald's Chinese house, and not an ordinary English residence. There were no Chinamen in sight, and the tennis courts themselves were no different from any others they had seen.

"Wolly, admirable tennis courts," said Molly, talking Kai Tal's sort of English. "Well suited to utterly incompetent self. But a highly delicious lemonade would be appreciated——"

"Wouldn't it just?" agreed Catherine. "If this were really China, we need only to rub a magic lamp and a glass of lemonade would appear in mid—— Oh!"

Catherine sat up with a jerk. Through a bush to her left appeared something that looked exceedingly like a glass of lemonade.

Her eyes widened, and she blinked. But the glass was not floating in mid-air; she was not dreaming. It was held in a dainty, well-cared-for little hand.

"Oh, look! The lemonade!" said Molly, as she suddenly turned her head and saw it.

"Kwanyin!" Catherine cried.

"S-s-sh!" came a warning.

The foliage of the bush parted; a small, smiling face appeared. It was Kwanyin. Framed in the lovely flowers of the bush, she looked more beautiful than ever, Catherine thought.

"Oh, good! They haven't got you!" whispered Catherine.

"No, no; I keep away. But soon they get me," whispered Kwanyin sadly.

"Oh, please, you are my friends. I know you v'ly nice, v'ly kind. Me not so good; me tly to please——"

There was something so pathetic in her tone and expression that Catherine reached out her hand and took Kwanyin's.

"Don't be afraid," she whispered. "We mean to see that uncle is made to understand. Is there anything we can do for you?"

"Kwanyin shook her head.

"Kai Tal hatee me," she said miserably. "He tly to send me away, I tink. You no lettee?"

"Of course not," said Catherine, and took the lemonade which Kwanyin handed to her.

"Let you be sent away? No fear!" said Molly. "I can't think what uncle's doing to let Kai Tal bully you."

"He seems so decent himself," agreed Charles.

"Me v'ly sad," said Kwanyin. "My father—noble father—great man. Not here. Me seekee."

"Seek here? Your father is here—hidden somewhere?" Catherine asked.

Kwanyin gave a nod of agreement.

"But in the house?" asked Catherine eagerly.

This was something new to the three cousins. Their sympathy for the little Kwanyin increased. Catherine felt that she wanted to take the little Chinese girl in her arms and comfort her.

Tears shone in Kwanyin's eyes, and her lip quivered.

"Please help," she said simply. "Kwanyin, we will help—we will," promised Catherine. "I'll make uncle understand."

"No—no!" the little Chinese girl cut in. "No t'el'ee him. Him v'ly c'oss, then. Him sayee you no speak me again. No—no. I lovee Uncle Gerald. But he no understand."

Catherine pressed Kwanyin's hand in sympathy. She could feel for this girl, alone in a foreign land, not knowing to whom to turn. The one person who could have helped her was Uncle Gerald. But he, through the wicked machinations of Kai Tal, was against her.

And it seemed that there was not one Chinaman in the whole house in sympathy with her. There was no one, therefore, she could talk to, no one to understand her suffering.

"Tell me! Is there anything we can do now for you?" Catherine asked.

Kwanyin gave a hasty look behind her.

"Think they come," she whispered, her eyes showing fear. "But looker over lake—much see. P'laps understande all."

"You mean you want us to go across the lake?" asked Catherine.

Kwanyin looked her straight in the eyes, but hesitated before replying. It seemed as though she wanted to be quite sure that she was saying the right thing.

"Much care. Great danger," she whispered. "Goee softly——"

Charles made a sharp exclamation. He had just seen a Chinaman—the old gardener, walking along in suspicious mood.

"Talk about the tennis, girls. Bob down, Kwanyin!" he said sharply.

Kwanyin bobbed down, and Molly made a loud comment.

"I don't think the balls seemed very round this morning," she remarked.

"The gardener walked out of sight."
"O.K., Kwan!" said Charles. "Forgive the familiarity of the abbreviation, please, but I did not want that fellow to guess you were here."

"So that's why you're shouting it out now for him to hear," said Catherine. "Anyway, she's gone."

She looked cautiously into the bush and parted it where Kwanyin had been. But there was no sign of the girl. There was only a lemonade bottle to mark that she had been there at all.

Kwanyin had seen there a playing tennis, and had thoughtfully brought the bottle and a glass with her. It was a simple demonstration of her friendly nature.

"May as well finish off the bottle," said Mollie eagerly. "She brought it for us, I say! She is a good sort, you know!"

"She is," said Charles darkly. "And if that rotter Kai Tal tries any more tricks, I'll give him a thrashing."

Catherine gave him a thump on the back, and a smile. Charles had the spirit to do what he said; but although she sympathized with the motive, Catherine did not think it wise to take so stern action. They had their uncle to consider.

"Uncle Gerald would boot you out," said Mollie. "Kai Tal's the apple of his eye."

"Let him," said Charles grimly. "And wouldn't Kai Tal scree!" said Catherine. "Remember our promise. We're not going out of the house to leave Kai Tal in charge, and leave Kwanyin without a friend."

"Rather not. We're standing by her," nodded Mollie. "But she's jolly mysterious. I wonder what she meant about the lake, you know. And I wonder why uncle has such a down on her if she's so devoted to him."

It was all very puzzling. But at least there was certainty on one point. Kwanyin was unhappy, and needed aid. The little Chinese girl was alone and miserable. And if she had not made some strange mistake, her father was Kai Tal's prisoner in the house.

Catherine looked at the bush.

"I wonder if she got away all right," she mused. "I don't trust that gardener. It was he told uncle that we were going to bathe in the lake."

The bush at Catherine's side rustled slightly, and she peered through it, hoping to see Kwanyin.

But it was another face she saw—a yellow face, old and bearded—the gardener. He was spying. He had crept up to Kwanyin's old hiding-place, and was listening.

Catherine shivered slightly. A thrill of dread ran through her. To be spied upon; to be shadowed in their uncle's own grounds. It was not a pleasant experience.

But she did not warn her cousins. She gave no sign that she had seen the man.

"I tell you what we'll do," Catherine suggested, raising her voice slightly to make sure the spying gardener would be able to hear. "Let's go back into the house secretly, and examine that room in the pagoda, for any sign of a trapdoor, shall we?"

Mollie agreed instantly. She was very keen to learn the truth about that room.

Charles, however, demurred. "Do we want to upset uncle. Is it the right way to behave?" he asked. "No," said Catherine; "but never

mind. You can go and put that bomb under uncle's bed."

Charles stared blankly, and saw Catherine wink.

"Bomb?" he said.

"Yes," said Catherine; "bomb. We'll pretend that Kai Tal did it."

Catherine jumped up.

"Come on, Mollie," she said, and then hesitated. "Bother my shoe lace

—"

She stooped, and Mollie, who was almost as puzzled as Charles, stooped, too.

"What ever are you babbling about, Catherine!" she asked.

"Gardener spying in bush. He'll rush to uncle and warn him about the bomb!"

"Oh! But—why—I mean—is it just a joke?"

Catherine shook her head and then indicated some rustling leaves through the undergrowth. The gardener was creeping away to give warning.

"Not merely a joke," said Catherine, an eager light in her eyes. "But just a way of keeping Kai Tal busy. If he thinks we're going into the house, he'll go there while we—"

"Yes," said Mollie. "While we—"

"Go to the lake, of course," whispered Catherine.

Charles shook his head.

"No. I don't agree at all. I think we ought to face uncle with it. Have the whole thing out about the trapdoor—"

"Do you? Well—you go and do that," said Catherine, smiling. "Only—word of honour—nothing about our going to the lake. You can leave us on the courts, playing singles."

They discussed it for a minute or two, and then Charles went towards the house, leaving Catherine and Mollie knocking a ball backwards and forwards over the net.

"Hide the bomb well," called Mollie. Charles gave a shrug and walked

solemnly on, glad he was doing what he considered best, and not acting on the advice of the girls.

He walked quietly, and his approach was not heard by two struggling men.

One of those men was Kai Tal; the other one whom Charles did not know by name. At first glance he thought they were fighting. Then he saw that between them was Kwanyin.

Charles to the Rescue

KWANYIN had been captured. "Stop!" jerked out Charles, and rushed forward.

Kai Tal saw him, and released his hold of Kwanyin.

"Impetuous young gentleman not interfere," he said, spitting out the words.

Charles interfered. He slashed out his left fist hard and straight.

The punch took the Chinaman between the eyes and sent him staggering back, crash into the other man who was struggling with Kwanyin.

He lost his balance and knocked them both down as he fell himself.

Kwanyin, striking out to free herself, fled without looking back.

"Get up, and I'll knock you down again," said Charles.

Kai Tal got up and whispered to his companion, and draw an ugly looking knife from his clothing.

At sight of that knife, Charles paled. He was game for a fight with fists, but not with knives.

"Put that away!" he said in alarm.

"You can't use a knife! If my uncle knew this—"

The Chinaman with the knife swung round to Charles' side. Charles fell into the trap. He turned to confront that armed Chinaman—who had no intention of using the knife.

But Charles' back was now to Kai Tal, and that was what the rascals wanted.



CATHERINE tore aside the curtain, surprising a familiar figure. "Kai Tal!" she gasped.

Kai Tal leaped on to Charles' back, and brought him crashing to the ground, a hand over his mouth.

All the wind was knocked from Charles' body. Before he could recover a chunk of turf was thrust into his mouth, and Kai Tal's waistband was tied about his head.

Held in a jiu-jitsu grip that made movement impossible, Charles, perforce, lay still. Whenever he did try to move the pain was intense.

But through the scarf he heard a voice—Catherine's.

"Charles, did you shout?" she called. "Charles!"

Charles was rolled over and over, and then dragged out of sight behind a bush, still held by the Chinaman.

But Kai Tal remained.
When Catherine rushed round the corner, Kai Tal was plucking a flower and sniffing it.

"Kai Tal—have you seen my cousin?" asked Catherine, giving him a penetrating look.

She had heard a shout, although what Charles had called out she did not know.

"Cousin of highly esteemed young lady?" asked Kai Tal, smiling. He raised his hand and pointed towards Pagoda Place. "Throwing the tennis-ball with commendable skill and a boyish cry to arrest the flight of the greatly whirling ball."

"Oh, thank you, Kai Tal!" said Catherine shortly.

Not three yards away, but concealed by the bushes, Charles lay still, able to hear all that passed, yet unable to make a reply.

"Cousin not like Kai Tal," said that rasical in a sad tone. "Kai inferior person, possibly; yet Kai Tal is pleased that when he makes pleasant speech, even to great superior, he is answered. It makes for sadness to be thus treated."

"You mean you spoke to Charles, and he didn't answer?" said Mollie.

"Yes, it is so."

"I thought that's what you meant," said Mollie. "But it doesn't sound like Charles." But I say," she added. "Have you bumped your face against something? There's a bruise coming between your eyes."

Kai Tal touched the spot.
"The door," he said. "It was unfortunate. But no matter. On inferior people, wounds heal with great rapidity."

"I hope so, for your sake," said Catherine, and walked on.

She disliked the mock-humble Kai Tal intensely. The more she saw of the man the more she distrusted and disliked him.

Kai Tal watched her go and chuckled softly.

"Take away despised youth," he said in Chinese to his companion. "Tie securely. Place in boat. Row across lake."

He walked after the girls towards the house, pausing now and again to admire the perfume of the flowers.

Catherine and Mollie walked past the flowers, unheeding them, even though they admired floral beauty. They were uneasy about Charles. Kai Tal had not quite satisfied them.

It was unlike the dignified Charles to throw a ball and run after it.

"Very odd," said Catherine. "Although what—"
"Please!" said a voice. "Pluck flower."

Catherine turned towards the thick bush beside her. But she was no longer

(Continued in col. 3.)

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surprised to hear Kwanyin's voice from the bushes. The little Chinese girl could always choose a hiding-place that concealed her in the bushes.

But Catherine, knowing that Kai Tal was not far behind, paused to smell a flower.

"Kai Tal is near," said Catherine. She could not see Kwanyin, who remained near.

"Your *muches* blave cousin—he is safe?" asked Kwanyin.

"Safe—what do you mean?" asked Catherine anxiously, her heart giving a sudden leap of fright.

"He hit Kai Tal in face—hard, oh, so hard!" said Kwanyin, with a tremor of mingled fear and satisfaction.

Catherine went cold. She recalled the bruise on Kai Tal's face. Charles was responsible for that. But Kai Tal had not mentioned that he had been fighting with Charles. Why?

At that moment Kai Tal suddenly appeared in view, and Catherine shivered slightly.

"This is a lovely flower," she said to Mollie. "Ask Kai Tal its name. Here he comes."

It was a warning to Kwanyin to make herself scarce.

With a faint rustling of leaves the little Chinese girl stole away. Catherine and Mollie could detect no sign of suspicion about Kai Tal when he reached them.

"Lovely nieces of gleat master much admire mean and ill-nourished blossoms nurtured by despicable Wang Fu," he remarked smoothly, pausing to smile at the cousins.

"I think they're marvellous!" Catherine gushed. "Do tell us the name of these lovely red things!"

"Highly special blossom gloved by Wang Fu. Secret of his ancestors. Take many hundred years to reach great size and colour."

Catherine tried to simulate intense interest, hoping the whole time that Kai Tal would hurry on his way. But the Chinaman seemed in no anxiety to go. "Won't it soon be lunch-time?" she asked casually.

"Kai Tal even now goes to superintend preparation of humble and inadequate repast for so gracious ladies."

And, almost as if he had taken the hint, Kai Tal gave a little bow and moved on down a side path.

Catherine took Mollie's arm. "Mollie," she whispered urgently, "you go on to the house, talking. Understand? Lead Kai Tal on. I'll go back. Something's happened to Charles. I can feel it has."

Mollie gave a quick nod. "Come on, Cath," she said. "Never mind the old flowers."

She went on alone, as if expecting her cousin to follow. But Catherine bobbed down, as if keeping out of sight by the bushes. A moment later, she saw Kai Tal stealthily in pursuit of Mollie, who was talking and laughing realistically, as though she had a companion.

Catherine watched no more. She ran back to the spot where she had first met Kai Tal—where the fight had taken place.

Now to find out what had happened to Charles!

You will be anxious to know how Catherine fares in her quest for her cousin, so do not miss next Saturday's enthralling chapters of this popular serial. Make sure of your SCHOOLGIRL by asking your newsgate to reserve you a copy each week.