"THE FORM DIVIDED": BRILLIANT LONG COMPLETE CLIFF HOUSE SCHOOL STORY INSIDE

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Incorporating "SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN"

"STOP! YOU MUSTN'T VOTE FOR ELEANOR!"

Read about this dramatic interruption of the Fourth Form Election in the long complete story of Cliff House School

Magnificent Long Complete Story of the Girls of the Fourth Form at Cliff House School

The Form Divided

Does Jemima Know?

CAPTAIN OF THE FORM! That is the proud title which Eleanor Storke means to claim for herself. By scheming and treachery she has disposed of the rivalry of Barbara Redfern. But she still has one girl to reckon with—the inscrutable Jemima Carstairs. And "Jimmy" gets to work in her own mysterious way.

"VOTE for Jemima!"

"Hurrah!"

"Rubbish! Eleanor Storke for Form captain!"

"Hear, jolly well hear!"

"Oh crumbs! I sus-say, you girls," Bessie Bunter bleatingly gasped above the general din.

But Bessie was not heard. For once, Bessie, in spite of her extremely ample proportions, was not even seen.

Which was rather unfortunate for Bessie, seeing that the fat one at that moment was wedged right in the very middle of the seething crowd which flowed about the sports pavilion on Little Side at Cliff House. Somebody in front of her was treading on her toe, and somebody behind her was treading on her heel, while somebody else had wedged an elbow into her side.

There must have been at least a hundred girls clustered round the pavilion, from which flew a banner announcing: "Be British. Back up the old firm!"

Characteristic of the girl who had convened the meeting was the wording of that notice—trust Jemima Carstairs of the Fourth Form to do things differently from anyone else!

And perhaps it was characteristic, too, that Jimmy, as she preferred to be called, was about the only girl in the Lower School who was not at that meeting.

But her supporters were. So were her rivals. Jimmy, to everybody's amazed astonishment had, at the very last moment, entered the lists in the election for a new Form captain against Eleanor Storke, who had seemed certain of a walk-over.

In the crowd Eleanor was. So were Eleanor's henchmen, prepared to hoot and heckle, flying flamboyant banners which urgently urged everybody to vote for their idol.

On the platform in front of the pavilion Jemima's election committee, composed of Barbara Redfern, Mabel Lynn, Leila Carroll, Marcelle Biquet and Jean Cartwright, sat.

"Where is Jemima?" Mabel Lynn asked, looking anxiously round.

But of the cheerful Jemima there was no sign. Barbara Redfern, the deposed captain, looking rather worried, shook her head. Clara Trevlyn, the tomboy games captain, frowned seriously at the crowd, and then looked at Babs as if expecting the ex-captain to produce the missing one from her sleeve like a conjurer's rabbit.

But Babs did not see. Babs, indeed, despite the clamour in front of her, seemed to be far, far away.

And Babs was. She was biting her lip. Perhaps she was thinking what a fickle thing popularity was. These girls now howling for Jemima and for Eleanor in turn—how, at the last election they had shouted for her! What an idol she had been then! And what an idol all through the term, until Eleanor Storke's treachery had got her disgraced and her captaincy torn from her.

In one short fortnight Eleanor, leaping from the shadows of obscurity, had by means of her wealth and her craftiness, bought herself the favours of the Lower School, and had aimed at her a vendetta which had ended in her complete downfall. Now she was a nobody. Not only nobody, but scorned, shunned, despised by half those girls who, in brighter days, she had numbered among her most ardent supporters and admirers.

Fickle indeed the favours of the crowd. But were they worth her worry? They were. They, like everyone else, had been deceived. Honest and open herself, Babs could not employ the subtle, crafty weapons against her enemy that Eleanor employed against her.

But Jemima, that enigma, that mystery, the girl who was always popular and of whom a great many of these others were afraid—Jemima believed in her!

Jemima, so that Eleanor should not greedily grasp the fruits of her treachery, had stepped in to oppose her at the last moment.

"Jemima! Jemima!" went up the cry. "Where is Jemima?"

"Oh crumbs! Phew! Look here, I'm sus-sus-suffocating," Bessie Bunter spluttered. "I sus-say, you cats—I mum-mean gig-girls, let me get out of this——"

"Somebody ought to open the meeting," Mabel Lynn said anxiously. "Babs, you get up."

By HILDA RICHARDS

Illustrations by T. Laidler

Barbara Redfern sighed. Still no Jemima. The meeting was due to begin. Obviously somebody had to open it. She rose to her feet.

"Immediately from Eleanor's supporters:

"Booh-hooh!"

"Get down!"

"Girls!" Babs cried. "I want to say——"

"We don't want to hear it!"

Clara's eyes gleamed. She jumped up.

"Look here, you chumps——"

"Rabbits!"

"What-ho! What-ho!" a voice chimed in. "Spot of heckling, what?" And everybody turned to stare at the trim, immaculately clad figure which, sporting a monocle and waving a letter in her hand, suddenly appeared. "Fair play, what?" Jemima Carstairs urged. "Be British and Spartan, and all that, you know. Go on, Babs, I'm listening."

Clara snorted.

"This is your meeting, you chump!"

"Oh, is it?" Jemima innocently inquired. "Well, go on, don't worry about me. I'm enjoying it."

And she beamed and clapped her hands.

But Clara threw a glance towards Jean Cartwright, the sturdy Scots girl. As one they rose; as one stepped down from the platform. Very determinedly they "chaired" Jemima, and in spite of the elegant one's faltering protests, carried her up on to the platform and stood her firmly upright as if she had been some waxwork. Clara waved to the crowd.

"There!" she cried. "Now get on with it. Let's hear your election address."

Jemima sighed. She fingered her monocle, took it out, wiped it and adjusted it again. Then she spoke.

"Friends, Spartans and jolly old Cliff Householders——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"In the first place," Jemima went on, "I must begin with the merry old apology. For being late—what? I'm sorry I'm late. I've been reading this—a letter from my guv'nor. You don't mind, I hope?"

"No. Get on with it, Jimmy."

"In the second," Jemima went on, "I must explain the purpose of this old election. The purpose," she added, "is to elect me captain. And why, you ask, do I want to be captain?"

"Well, why?" a derisive voice put in.

"Not," Jemima said, "to be a leader of men and girls—what? Too tough, that. But," Jemima went on dramatically, "a wrong has been done, comrades, and that wrong must be put right. I refer to our old friend, Babs."

There was a sniff from Lydia Crossendale. But all looked askance at Jemima.

"We have had," Jemima went on—and here for a moment her gaze rested upon Eleanor Storke, "a spectacle in the Fourth these last days, my old henchmen. Let me recall the details, in case you've forgotten your Cliff House history-books. First, Miss Primrose, our respected, revered, and jolly old headmistress, announces that at the end of the term we're going to have a pageant—a high-falutin' glorious old bust-up, such as has never been seen before! At the same time, Miss Primrose announced that in the pageant the captain of the Lower School, and the captain of the school—to wit, Stella Stone—shall do the honours."

"Well?" an impatient voice put in.

"Then what happens?" Jemima shook her head. "A girl who has previously hidden her merry old light under a bushel, received a sudden letter from her uncle in Africa. Which, incidentally," Jemima went on, "is where my jolly old guv'nor has his hang-out." Again her eyes dwelt upon the face of Eleanor Storke, which was beginning to betray traces of uneasiness. "Whereupon this girl, our one and only Storke bird, who has never before shown even the faintest interest in the school affairs, jumps into the merry old limelight like a hobgoblin through a trapdoor in a pantomime."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"One for you, Eleanor!"

"And from that moment," Jemima beamed, "Barbara Redfern, the idol of our eye, and the heroine of our hearts, begins to get it in the neck. Things are said and done by our Storkie bird. Merry old Babs is made to appear a whacking great sinner, full of hate, jealousy, and all sorts of naughty old naughtiness. Until—well, you know." Jemima shrugged. "Babs loses the captaincy, and a new election is ordered with our Eleanor as candidate-in-chief. Now, I ask you," Jemima went on severely, "why does our ornithological specimen, who always stood apart, want so suddenly to take the leading part in everything?"

"I protest," Eleanor spluttered furiously. "It's not true!"

"Beloved, I'm glad to hear you say it!" Jemima beamed. "You shall have your chance of explaining it later." She glanced significantly at the letter in her hand, frowned thoughtfully, and looked at Eleanor. "Ahem! As you're here, old Spartan, would you mind answering a few questions?"

Eleanor looked more uneasy than ever. However the Form regarded Babs, there was no doubt that Jemima had support, no doubt that her words carried weight.

A hot refusal rose to Eleanor's lips. But she saw everybody looking at her, realised that refusal at this very desperate moment might turn the tide of popular favour against her. She stiffened defiantly.

"I can answer any question you like to put," she retorted.

"Thank you!" Jemima nodded.

Again she looked at the letter. Her grey eyes gleamed a little.

A great impression had that letter from Colonel Carstairs made upon Jemima. It had set going a train of thought in that nimble brain of hers which was quite startling indeed.

For Colonel Carstairs, out in Nigeria, had some weeks ago met a gentleman named Benjamin Storke. This Benjamin Storke had told him he had a niece at Cliff House, and that that niece was captain of the Lower School. Knowing Babs—for Babs was a well-loved and very favoured friend of the Carstairs'—he naturally wanted to know from Jemima what had been happening.

"Have you?" she asked, "got an Uncle Benjamin in Africa?"

"What's that to do with it?"

"Answer!"

Eleanor paused. Inward panic filled her. What did Jemima know? What had she found out? But in a moment she was herself—cool, calm, calculating and cunning. She saw if she answered that question truthfully that

"EITHER you get Jemima to retire from the election," threatened Eleanor, "or else, Barbara Redfern, you know what will happen!" Babs shrank back, but Jemima, hiding unsuspected behind the screen, gave a grim smile. At last she knew the truth!

others, more startling, might be asked. She braced herself.

"No," she said.

"Pity," Jemima said—"great, great pity! For that prevents me, Eleanor, asking you if you've ever told your Uncle Ben a certain fib. You have an Uncle Ben somewhere, by the way?"

"That's my business!" Eleanor snapped.

"True, O queen! Well—well, too tough—what! Pity—pity," Jemima sighed. "Still one can't get blood out of a stone, methinks, and one can't get the truth out of a—ahem! Well, old Spartan, much as I'd like to enchant you further with the silvery music of my voice, we'll call it a day. I'm too modest to say that I'll make you the best captain you've ever had; but I do ask you, with might and main, and breath and lungs, and all the rest of the old urges, to vote for Jimmy when the great day comes."

"Hurrah!"

"Good old Jimmy!"

"Down with Jemima!"

"Vote for Eleanor!"

"Eleanor—Eleanor!"

Eleanor smiled sourly. She was looking rather hot, however. As Jemima, followed by her supporters, stepped down from the dais, she flung her a glance which was not devoid of uneasiness. For the first time since she had embarked upon this bid for the captaincy, she felt a tremor of uncertainty. What did Jemima know?

For if Jemima's questions meant nothing to the rest, they meant a great deal to Eleanor. They seemed to hint that Jemima had surprised that secret which, so far, she had jealously succeeded in keeping to herself.

For she had written weeks ago to her Uncle Ben in Africa. She had partly to please him, and partly to coax a good fat remittance, told him that she was Form captain.

But Uncle Benjamin was now on his way to England even now, and she had got to make that lie good by being captain, by taking the leading part in those celebrations when he arrived. If not—— And Eleanor shuddered.

Uncle Ben was her benefactor, the millionaire on whose money she lived and thrived. If he, soul of honesty, uprightness, and truthfulness that he was himself, found her out in her lies——

She paled as she thought of it. Inward fury shook her. Bother Jemima! Why should that girl stir this uneasiness within her when her game had been going all her own way?

She would be captain, in spite of Jimmy, in spite of anything? But caution told her that before she went much farther she must find out exactly how much Jemima knew!

In Hiding

"JIMMY, what did you mean?"

"Mean?" Jemima owlishly frowned. "Mean, old Spartan?"

"By those questions you asked Eleanor," Barbara Redfern returned.

She and Jemima were walking back to the schoolhouse then, Jemima slowly polishing her already spotless monocle, which showed that she was in a very thoughtful frame of mind indeed; Babs looking curiously perplexed.

"Oh, those?" Jemima said lightly. "Those questions? Well, I had reasons, of course. Never, Babs, my old sweetheart, do anything in this sad and serious old existence without a reason. There was once a man—a nasty little biped——"

"Jimmy, you're dodging the question. What did you mean?"

"Oh, things!" Jemima answered vaguely.

"But what has Eleanor's Uncle Ben—if she has one—to do with the election?"

Jemima eyed her oddly.

"I don't know," she said.

"What?"

"I don't know," Jemima repeated cheerfully. "At least, not all I'd like to know. But he's something to do with it, what? Oh, yes, he's certainly got something to do with it," she added thoughtfully. "Dear little Eleanor. How she changed colour at the mention of merry Uncle Benjamin."

Babs gazed at her hopelessly. What was one to do with Jemima? Enigmatic, always dodging the question, working in her own inscrutably mysterious way, never ready to divulge her secrets at all until she judged the time ripe. It was just hopeless to argue with her.

And then, suddenly, Jemima spoke again.

"Babs, have you heard from Dolly Drew?"

It was Babs' turn to be taken aback.

"Dolly? Jimmy, what do you know about her?"

"Just this, old Spartan. That because of Dolly Drew, the fair Eleanor has some sort of hold upon you. In my own woolly headed way, putting two and two together, reducing them to decimal fractions, and taking away the number first thought of, and all that, I've deduced the fact that Dolly Drew is likely to get into some sort of a mess if Eleanor tells something about her that she knows. A secret, forsooth," Jemima went on, "and the only other person who knows that secret is yourself. To save Dolly from getting expelled or something, you can't just show our twittering Storkie bird up for the naughty little thing she is. Babs," she added, "why don't you tell me the truth about that?"

Babs bit her lip.

"I'm sorry, Jimmy, I can't. I gave my word of honour to Dolly."

Jemima nodded understandingly.

"And sticking to it, what? The old bulldog spirit! Far be it from me, Barbara beloved, to wrest your precious secret from you, but if I knew—ah, then, if I knew, how much easier would my task be! And that task——" Jemima shook her head wearily. "Babs, you want to be captain, don't you?"

"Oh, Jimmy, what's the good of asking that question? You know it's impossible now."

"Oh no, not at all! You see," Jemima added shrewdly, "if I become captain, I can do what I like, can't I? I mean, for instance, I could resign, handing over the merry old honour to another girl."

"Oh, goodness, Jimmy! You don't mean you're trying to get the captaincy to hand it back to me?"

"Great brain," Jemima murmured.

"But it wouldn't be allowed. Primmy wouldn't let you. Primmy herself took the captaincy away from me."

"Ah, but then," Jemima said, "Primmy doesn't know, what? Primmy doesn't know that you're a victim of a great and cunning plot. If Primmy knew that, she'd not only go on her bended knees and give you back the captaincy, old Spartan, she'd probably throw in her headmistress-ship with it, just to make up. Which reminds me," Jemima said suddenly, "that I've got to see Primmy. Excuse me!"

"But, Jimmy——"

But Jimmy, to Babs' astonishment, had broken into a run! She vanished into the schoolhouse without looking round, leaving Babs frowning.

What exactly was Jimmy's game? But she knew the answer to that. Jimmy was out for the captaincy—not because she wanted it herself, but because she wanted to hand it back to her.

Babs flushed. She felt her heart racing suddenly. Good to have such a friend! But it was hopeless, she told herself. Not Primmy in her present mood to allow her to lead the Form again.

She sighed a little. How really she longed to lead the Form again! With what eagerness she had looked forward to sharing the honours of Jubilee Day with Stella Stone. How enthusiastically she had written home telling her parents about it!

Those parents would be present at Cliff House on the great day. They, proud of her, almost as wildly enthusiastic as herself at the honour accorded to their daughter, had already written telling her how eagerly, how excitedly they were looking forward to it.

Babs winced at that thought. They didn't know—yet—that she had lost her captaincy, that it was not she who would do the officiating.

She hadn't had the heart to write and tell them, trusting, however forlornly, that something would turn up in the meantime. She'd have to write now, of course. Impossible, in spite of Jimmy, that she should be restored to favour.

But Babs did not know Jimmy.

Jemima had something to go on. As she tripped thoughtfully into the school again she re-read the letter which she had received from her father that afternoon. The letter was dated four weeks ago—long, long before Eleanor Storke had ever dreamt of leaping into the limelight.

Eleanor Storke, then a nobody in the Form, had deliberately written to her Uncle Benjamin, telling him that she was captain.

Why?

Something must have happened—obviously! Jemima meant to know.

Straight into the school she went; up the stairs to Miss Primrose's study. The headmistress looked up as she entered.

"Yes, Jemima, what is it?"

"Er——" Jemima paused. "Miss Primrose, I've been thinking—about the jolly old celebrations, you know. Quite a lot of parents and relatives will be here, won't they?"

"Why, yes, Jemima," Miss Primrose smiled. "Several hundred, I should imagine."

"Good egg! I mean, of course, that's topping," Jemima beamed. "And it's a fact, isn't it, Miss Primrose, that several of them are coming from abroad."

"Quite a number," Miss Primrose agreed kindly.

"Thank you! Well, you know, I've got an idea," Jemima said enthusiastically. "An idea for welcoming the old overseas strangers within the golden gates. Don't ask me what it is, please, Miss Primrose. I haven't got it quite worked out yet, y'know. But I was wondering if you could tell me exactly how many relatives will be coming from Africa?"

Miss Primrose glanced at her curiously.

"Well, as to that, Jemima, I can tell you very easily," she said. "There are only three. Your own father, of course, will be an absentee. The others are Mr. Carson, Stella Stone's uncle, and Mr. Benjamin Storke, the uncle of

Eleanor of your Form. Can I tell you anything else?"

"No, thank you!" Jemima purred.

She left, a smile upon her face. Quite cheerful and happy Jemima appeared as she sauntered off down the corridor again.

Downstairs she tripped. Almost a jaunty stride had Jemima as she came at last into the Fourth Form corridor, and then suddenly paused, glancing up as she heard her name called.

The caller was Eleanor Storke herself, Eleanor looking a trifle anxious. She planted herself right in Jemima's path.

"Jimmy!" she exclaimed.

"What cheer!" Jemima murmured. "But not Jimmy to you, beloved. Jemima, please! Must insist upon drawing a line between jolly old friends and naughty old enemies—what? When is Uncle Ben arriving?"

Eleanor's face paled.

"What do you mean by Uncle Ben?"

"Well, haven't you got an Uncle Ben?"

"I've told you I haven't."

"Then," Jemima said cheerfully, "there's something wrong with Primmy's visiting-list. That's two fibs, Eleanor—one to Uncle Ben and one to me. Naughty!"

Eleanor slowly fell back. Her face seemed suddenly to have turned grey. Jemima knew! Jemima had ferreted out her secret. A wave of deadly fear seemed suddenly to possess her. While Jemima, with a bland smile, passed on and turned into her own study. The door closed behind her, and Eleanor blinked at the sound it made.

What should she do? If Jemima liked to make public the knowledge she had, she wouldn't only ruin her chances in the election, she would show her up for the fibber and schemer she was.

All at once Jemima Carstairs had become Eleanor Storke's greatest menace. Jemima must be got rid of. Somehow or another Jemima must be prevailed upon to renounce her claims to the captaincy. While she still remained in the lists Eleanor would know no peace of mind.

But how?

And then in her extremity she thought of Babs. Babs, Jemima's friend.

Jemima would do a lot for Babs, even as Babs would do a lot for Jemima. If Babs pleaded with Jemima to renounce her candidature——

Babs should!

Inspired by that thought, Eleanor turned on her heel. Down the stairs she vanished, just as the door of Study No. 8 opened and Jemima appeared in the corridor again. Jemima, still wearing an inscrutable frown. She looked anxiously up and down the corridor, and then strode off to Study No. 12.

That study Eleanor Storke shared with Matilda Tattersall and Frances Frost. Jemima knocked.

There was no reply.

She turned the handle. She went in, softly closing the door behind her.

Then on the threshold she adjusted her monocle, gazing thoughtfully round the room.

It was purely a "hunch," as she called it, which had brought her to that study. Having to her own satisfaction solved the problem of Eleanor's urgency to wrest the captaincy of the Lower School from Barbara Redfern, she was equally keen and desirous now of clearing up that other mystery—the mystery of Dolly Drew, by which Eleanor apparently exercised some sort of hold over Babs.

It occurred to Jemima that there might be some sort of clue to that in Study No. 12—a forlorn hope, it is true,

HALF way down the stairs Jemima halted, staring in startled dismay at the figure below. It was Sarah Harrigan—sharpest prefect in the school. Somehow she had learned of Jemima's intention to break bounds!

but Jemima never believed in leaving the tiniest pebble unturned when she was on the trail. And Jemima felt that under the circumstances she was quite justified in seeking a clue in Eleanor's study.

Her eyes turned on Eleanor's desk, placed under the window at the far end of the room. It was a tidy desk. Eleanor was frightfully neat. Patently there was no clue to be found there. From the desk her gaze wandered to the waste-paper basket full of odds and ends, which stood near the screen that hid a portion of the wall where the plaster had broken away. In the waste-paper basket Jemima was in the act of diving a hand, when——

"Aha, footsteps!" she breathed. "Jimmy, old Spartan, hide!"

Footsteps there were. They had halted outside the door. The handle of the door rattled. Quick as thought Jemima nipped behind the screen.

The door opened. Two sets of steps tramped into the room; the door swung back with a thud.

Then came a voice which made Jemima jump. It was Babs'.

"And why," that voice demanded, "have you brought me here, Eleanor Storke?"

"Ho, ho!" Jemima muttered.

"Because," Eleanor returned—and how different was the tone she used from when other girls were present!—"I want you to do something for me, Barbara Redfern. I want to talk to you—about Dolly Drew."

Jemima could not see, but she could sense Babs' change of attitude.

"Dolly Drew's gone away," Eleanor went on. "She's gone off with her father on a cruise. But I happen to know—never mind how—that they haven't left England yet. You remember, Barbara Redfern, you made a certain promise to that kid; you made it on your word of honour."

"To prevent you from giving her away."

"That's it!" Eleanor's voice was composed. "Well, I haven't given her away—not yet. But you remember what happened, Barbara Redfern. You remember that kid found my purse in the quad and returned it, minus the half-crown that was in it."

"I remember," Babs flashed back, "that that was what you said. But you've not given any proof that there was a half-crown in it when you lost it."

"No," Eleanor sneered. "Does it require proof?" she asked. "Last term your little Dolly Drew nearly got expelled, didn't she, for pinching Lydia Crossendale's bracelet and losing it?

"She was threatened then very definitely with expulsion if she were caught at the same little game again. If I've got no proof that there was a half-crown in that purse when I lost it, Dolly's got no proof that there wasn't. And who's going to believe the word of a little thief like that if I like to tell my story?"

From Babs came a little exclamation.

"So far," Eleanor went on, "it's suited my book not to give the kid away. But I've still got the power. Any day, any minute I can go to Primmy and tell her what I know. The kid's relying upon you, hoping you'll prevent me from going to the Head, which means that she'll be expelled. Well, I'm not going—if you'll be sensible. If you won't, then nothing on earth can save Dolly Drew from the sack."

A dead silence. Jemima's eyes glimmered.

"Well," Babs asked tensely, "what do you want me to do?"

"You're Jemima's friend. Jemima will

do anything you ask her. Get her to drop out of the election."

"A-a-a!" Jemima murmured to herself.

Back came Babs' answer.

"I refuse!"

"You want Dolly to get the sack?"

"No, but—oh, Eleanor—don't be such a beast——"

"I want what I want," Eleanor said relentlessly. "I want this. Either you make Jemima drop out, or I go to Primmy. The election's to be held the day after to-morrow. I'll leave it to you! But if," she added ominously, "Jemima opposes me in that election, I go straight to the headmistress."

There was a pause. Jemima, behind the screen, chuckled. Babs said something—in such a low, choked voice that even Jemima could not hear.

Footsteps across the carpet, the door closing.

Then—dead silence!

Jemima waited, tense.

So that was Babs' secret! That was why Babs had been afraid to denounce Eleanor! Babs had faith in the honesty of little Dolly Drew, but Babs could not prove her faith.

"So-ho!" Jemima muttered.

Quietly she slipped round the screen, quietly tiptoed across the room. Cautiously she opened the door, took one swift look up and down the corridor and then, with a gleam in her eyes, marched off.

Jemima Sets a Trap

"GIRLS!" cried Eleanor Storke.

"Hurrah!"

It was later that evening. The weather had turned miserable and rainy, keeping everybody indoors.

Eleanor Storke, in the Common-room, was addressing an election meeting.

It was quite a crowded meeting. Cliff House at the moment had election fever. One question only occupied the minds of everybody in junior school. Who would be captain? Eleanor or Jemima?

It was, in truth, difficult to tell. One half of the girls entitled to vote—and voting strength was mustered between the Fourth and Upper Third Forms only, the Lower Third and the Second being judged too young to shoulder such serious responsibilities—seemed to be in favour of Jemima—the other half in favour of Eleanor.

"Girls!" cried Eleanor again.

"Hear, hear!" Jemima applauded. "Good speech, what?"

"Idiot! I haven't begun yet," Eleanor cried. "Please, please listen to me. To-morrow, as you know, is election day."

"Hear, hear!" Jemima applauded again, fished something out of her pocket, spun it in the air and neatly caught it. "Truth will out, what? To-morrow is election day, you know."

Eleanor glared.

Jemima, will you please be quiet?"

"Oh, sorry. Was I making a row?" Jemima asked innocently. "Quiet, then. Quietness is the order of the day," she said severely. "All silent while the great girl speaks. You don't mind if I play with this while you're chattering, Eleanor? Mean to say, it won't distract you or anything?" Again she spun the thing she was playing with in the air, so that it gleamed bright and silver in her hand.

Eleanor paused.

"What is it?"

"Coin," Jemima explained. "Coin of the merry old realm, what? All genuine. It——" and Jemima blandly opened her palm. "It is, as you will observe, a half-crown," she said innocently. "Not yours by any chance?"

Eleanor glared.

"Why should it be mine?"

"Well, it was found, you know—found in the quadrangle," Jemima answered cautiously. "Obviously, as it was found, it doesn't belong to me. I brought it to the jolly old meeting in the hopes that someone might claim it, what? I suppose," she added thoughtfully, "it doesn't belong to you, by any mischance?"

Very lightly she asked that question, but there was something in the direct, almost challenging stare which accompanied it which made Eleanor pause. Perhaps there was also something in Jemima's attitude which made other girls turn, to curiously regard her.

"Is it yours?" Jemima asked.

"No," Eleanor said shortly.

"No?" Jemima looked surprised. "But I heard, Eleanor, that you'd lost half-a-crown! And in the quadrangle, too!"

Eleanor's eyes gleamed. She thought she saw now. Jemima was trying to trap her into an admission in front of the Form that she had never lost a half-crown. In which case, of course, her hold on Dolly Drew, and, through Dolly Drew, on Barbara Redfern, completely collapsed.

"I have lost half-a-crown," she answered angrily. "But that was some time ago. Over a fortnight ago, in fact."

"Well, this might be it, what?" Jemima asked seriously. "Might have lain about unnoticed, you know. I once," Jemima added, "lost a threepenny bit, and I lost it for six months."

Eleanor glared. Obvious it was to her now that Jemima was trying to trap her. Jemima wanted her to acknowledge this half-crown.

"Well, that's not it," she averred.

"But how do you know?"

"Well," Eleanor gasped, "it—it was marked," she blustered. "Is that marked?"

"No," Jemima stated owlishly. "Not a single blemish, old bean. How was yours marked?" she asked innocently. "I mean to say, if it's still about anyone of us might find it, and if it were marked it would save us such a fagging lot of old worry and bother, what, to know the owner at once. How was it marked, Eleanor, sweet Spartan?"

"It had a cross on it, on—on the face," Eleanor snapped. "Now will you be quiet?"

"Certainly," Jemima beamed.

And she shook her head and looked dashed, disappointed — as though, indeed, she had lost the point, while Eleanor paused to flash her a triumphant grin. That, she guessed, had made hay of the little trap Jemima had been so obviously weaving.

But had it? Not long did Jemima remain at the meeting. Taking advantage of a momentary opportunity she slipped out. She was smiling confidently, calmly now. She had, though Eleanor little guessed it, scored her point—she had forced Eleanor to admit, in front of the whole Form that she had lost half-a-crown in the quadrangle a fortnight ago, which was definitely marked.

Quitting the Common-room, Jemima went to her own study. For a few minutes she remained there, very busy and very absorbed indeed. Then carelessly she sauntered out into the quadrangle, strolling under the shadows of the old elms.

It had stopped raining now, though very few girls were about. A diminutive figure in the shape of little Dolores Essendon was walking thoughtfully up the drive from the quadrangle. Very carefully Jemima dropped something beneath the shadow of the elms, full in Dolores' path, and, swinging on her heel, marched slowly back to school.

Dolores, eyes on the ground, came on. Hardly could she have failed to spot the thing which Jemima had dropped. She started as she saw it, wonderingly looked round, wonderingly picked it up. It was a half-crown, a very wet and very mud-stained one, as if it had been lying on the ground for ages. A heavy cross indented the face.

She called to Jemima.

"Jemima—Jemima, please!" she piped.

Jemima, stopping, turned.

"What cheer, young Spartan. Anything I can do for you?"

"Yes," Dolores said. "Oh, look, Jemima, what I've found. It's half-a-crown."

Jemima inspected it through her monocle.

"True, true, what?" she said. "A good one, too, methinks! Lucky you, Dolores! Congratulations and all that. Change it into farthings and fill the old money-box, what?"

Dolores stared at her.

"Oh, but I can't do that, Jemima," she said seriously. "I must take it to Miss Primrose."

"True," Jemima frowned. "True, my honest one. Tut-tut, how these things will slip the old memory. Too tough, what? Still, Primmy will keep it, won't she? And if no one claims it, it will be yours."

And Dolores, perhaps wondering at that peculiar expression on Jemima's face, tripped off to carry out her advice.

Not until she had disappeared into the school did Jemima's eyes leave the hurrying little figure. Then, thoughtfully, she made her way to Study No. 4.

Babs was there, busily engaged upon a sketch of the cloisters she was making for the great exhibition which was to be held in conjunction with the Jubilee pageant. She looked round with a start as Jemima came in.

"Oh, Jimmy!"

"Chin up," Jemima said. "Nifty work of art you've got there. Don't let me interrupt. I've just called in to give a waggish bit of advice. About Eleanor."

Babs frowned.

"Eleanor?"

"The little Storkie bird," Jemima nodded brightly. "About," she added carefully, "a certain conversation you had with her in Study No. 12 yesterday. Concerning, ahem, my honest self, old Spartan. The advice is," and Jemima prepared to depart, "don't fall for her bluff. Let her do her worstest, old Spartan! Let her, if she likes, go to old Primmy and spill all she doesn't know about Dolly Drew. That's all!"

And before the amazed and bewildered Babs could reply, Jemima, with a friendly grin and a waggish nod of the head, had disappeared.

Unexpected Visitor

WHAT did Jemima mean?

In perplexed anxiety Babs stared at the door. She had half risen to her feet. But the veriest moment's reflection told her that

it would be just worse than useless to follow Jemima and demand of her an explanation.

In any case, wasn't it perfectly clear now that Jemima, in that positively uncanny way she had of nosing out information, was in possession of the facts which Babs, bound by her word of honour to little Dolly Drew, had hesitated to tell her?

How Jemima had accomplished that, Babs did not know. Nor, now that she knew Jemima knew, was she greatly concerned.

Her first reaction was one of overwhelming, incredible relief. She wanted Jemima to know, but she couldn't have broken her word to little Dolly Drew.

But what had Jemima meant? "Let Eleanor go to Primmy," she had said. "Let her, if she likes, betray Dolly Drew!"

Babs frowned. Whether Jemima knew or not, the fact still remained that the cards were in Eleanor's hands. Lying or truthful, Eleanor had only to open her mouth to the headmistress, and little Dolly's doom was sealed.

Dolly was relying on Babs.

Babs sighed. She felt that she was in a quandary. Eleanor's was the whip-hand.

From outside there came suddenly a timid tap. It was a tap followed immediately by the hurried opening of the door.

And Babs almost jumped at sight of the little girl who entered. A big, wide-eyed little girl, with a face all wrung by tearful anxiety, who carried a little bag under her arm, and who looked scared out of her young wits.

She gulped relief as she saw Babs.

"Barbara!" she faltered.

"Why, Dolly!" Babs cried. "What ever brought you here?"

"Oh, Barbara, I—I had to come," Dolly said tremblingly. "I—I've heard things. Babs, I—I haven't gone on the cruise," she said—as though that needed explanation. "Daddy was called away to Scotland on urgent business before we sailed, and sent me to stop with my Aunt Penelope at Pegg."

"Poor kiddie!" Babs said pityingly. "Barbara, nun-nothing's come out?" Dolly said tremblingly. "Eleanor——"

Babs bit her lip.

"Everything's all right, Dolly."

"But—but, oh, Barbara, it's been worrying me," Dolly said, and her lips quivered pitifully. "You don't know, Barbara. Every night I've dreamed about it—every time the postman gave daddy his letters I—I had to look to see if there were one from Miss Primrose among them. It—it's been awful." She hid her face. "I was hoping—oh, so much, to get on the boat, Barbara, and be away from it all. Then—then, just as we were going to sail, daddy had this call."

Babs stroked her head. Poor, frightened little Dolly! What mental terror she must have suffered! What a cat, what a beast Eleanor was—she who had inspired these terrors, who was rapidly reducing this poor little one to a nervous wreck. She spoke soothingly.

"Dolly, please, please don't worry. Haven't you any faith in me?"

"Yes, Barbara, but——" and again Dolly gulped. "The very first day at Pegg I met Ida Jackson of the Third Form. She—she told me about you, Barbara. She said that you and Eleanor hated each other. She—she told me how you'd lost the captaincy because you were supposed to have done something to Eleanor."

Babs bit her lip.

"And so—so I felt I had to come and see you," little Dolly went on. She displayed something in her hand. "I didn't know how to get away, though. You see, aunty might have been suspicious if she'd known I wanted to go back to Cliff House School, so I—I daren't ask. But this afternoon she had a frightfully urgent message to send off, and as it's got to be delivered personally, she sent me to Courtfield with it. So I—I dropped off the bus and came here," Dolly went on. "I was awfully frightened I might meet Eleanor or Miss Primrose. But, Barbara, why have you lost your captaincy?" she asked.

"Oh, you wouldn't understand, kiddie," Babs told her.

"Barbara, is—is it because of me?" Babs tried to laugh.

"Right! Then there we are. Now you've got to go home," Babs decided. She walked to the door, flung it open, and gazed quickly up and down the corridor. "All right," she whispered, "there's nobody about. Come on, Dolly, I'll go along as far as Lane's Field with you."

Dolly nodded. There was admiration and worship in her eyes as she looked up at her heroine. Trustingly, confidingly she put one tiny hand in Babs' and Babs, hurrying along the corridor, took her down through the servants' entrance, across the cloisters to where the hedge separated the school grounds from Lane's field. She smiled.

"Good-bye, Dolly. And no more worrying, mind."

"No, Babs, and—and thank you!"

"GOT you!" hissed a menacing voice in Barbara's ear, and next moment she found herself clutched by Sarah Harrigan.

"Good gracious, what put that idea into your head?"

"But I know," Dolly replied, her eyes burning. "Eleanor's spiteful. She knew you were sticking up for me, didn't she? She knew that—that——" She gulped. "Oh, Babs," she added wretchedly, "what shall I do?"

"You'll do," Babs said firmly, "exactly what I say! And that——" She caught the little one's arm. "You're going home now, kiddie. You're not going to worry that little head of yours a moment, a second longer. Dolly, look at me," she cried sternly.

Dolly, lips quivering, obeyed.

"Dolly, I'm standing by you," Barbara said seriously. "I give you my solemn promise once again that nothing shall come out. But, Dolly, in return for that, you've got to give me a promise, too."

"Yes, Barbara?" Dolly asked.

"That you won't worry any more. Promise?"

Dolly nodded gulpingly.

Babs laughed. She kissed the little one, watched her as she hurried off into the damp gloom and retraced her steps thoughtfully into the school.

She passed the Common-room, where Eleanor's meeting was still in progress, paused a moment, and glanced through the glass-panelled door at the clock which hung above the mantelpiece. One minute to call-over!

It was, as a matter of fact, considerably less than a minute, for the clock in Common-room was just a little slow. Even as she turned, intent upon getting back to Study No. 4 and putting her work away, call-over bell rang.

No use then in thinking of anything else. She turned to go back into Big Hall.

Out from Common-rooms and studies girls came clamouring, speeding down the stairs as the bell sent its brazen summons ringing through the school.

Jemima, passing the prefects' room on her way from Stella Stone's study, where she had been to arrange details of the election which was to be held in

the Fourth Form Common-room to-morrow afternoon, heard it and quickened her steps. Then she paused.

For in the prefects' room another bell was ringing stridently, insistently, agitatedly. It was the telephone-bell.

"H'm!" said Jemima.

She looked round. But no one was in sight. Might be something urgent, Jemima decided, and stepping into the room, picked up the receiver. A plaintive, childishly agitated voice came through at once.

"Oh, please will you find Barbara Redfern?"

In spite of the metallic transmission Jemima recognised the voice.

"Hallo, hallo! Isn't that my cheery little Dolly Drew? This is Jemima speaking."

"Oh!" Dolly's voice sounded rather flat. "Can I speak to Barbara, Jemima, please?"

"Sorry, old topspinner. But Babs is at call-over. Can I give her a message?"

"Oh, would you mind, please?" Dolly's voice came again. "Will you tell her that—that I left a letter in her study, Jemima, please? It—it's awfully important, and I was to take it to a place in Courtfield, and I daren't tell aunty that I've forgotten to take it, because it was so dreadfully important that she sent me to Courtfield specially. She said it simply must arrive to-day, and—and I can't come back now because I haven't any money for bus fare."

"H'm!" Jemima said. "Sounds tough, what? Well, what do you want Babs to do?"

"Oh, please, Jemima, will you ask her if she would send it for me?" Dolly pleaded. "If she could get Piper, the porter, or one of the maids—the address is on the letter!"

Jemima smiled faintly. Dear little unsophisticated Dolly! She thought that Babs, being so much older, could perform miracles.

Certainly Piper could not be spared from his duties to take important letters to Courtfield. Equally out of the question was it for one of the maids. In fact, Jemima rapidly deduced, unless Babs took it herself—or she took it for her—there was no earthly way of getting the message delivered.

But Dolly obviously was agitated. Dolly obviously was in a panic of fear. The child's mind must be set at rest. She spoke into the receiver.

"Trust me, Dolly, little sweetheart. I'll see that it's sent."

"Oh, Jemima— thank you so much. You see, if—if it isn't sent I shall get into fearful trouble."

"Rest easy," Jemima advised. "Never, never shall it be said that a Carstairs let a youngster down. Bye-bye, Dolly, sleep well!"

And Jemima, decidedly late, but just in time not to miss her name being called, toddled away to Big Hall and call-over.

"Someone's Going to Break Bounds—"

MOST girls looked round at Jemima's late entry. Most girls lifted their eyebrows in surprise. Miss Charmant, fortunately, did not notice, and Jemima slipped into her place beside Eleanor Storke and Leila Carroll without that worthy being aware of her lateness. But Eleanor glanced at her curiously.

"Where have you been?" she whispered.

"Aha!" Jemima replied mysteriously. "Now wouldn't you be surprised if you knew? As a matter of fact," Jemima added, "I've been talking, Eleanor beloved, over that marvellous product of modern invention, the telephone. To someone you know, at that, forsooth! Someone you know quite well."

Eleanor's lips tightened a little.

"Who?"

"Did anyone mention Uncle Ben?" Jemima murmured, apropos of nothing.

Again Eleanor threw the inscrutable one a hard, penetrating glance. Her face sharpened a little.

Only one girl in the whole of Cliff House did Eleanor fear. That girl was Jemima.

At another time Eleanor would never have worried. But fear, her own guilty conscience invested all Jemima's actions to her with a significance that was overwhelmingly disturbing.

If only something could have happened to Jemima! If she were called away! If she were expelled!

The very blandness of Jemima's smile gave her an uneasy qualm. The significant, slightly mocking glance which Jemima turned upon her made her for a moment turn cold. What was Jemima planning? What was she doing? Eleanor felt that she would have given a whole year's pocket-money just then to see what was going on in the sleek one's mind.

Call-over was finished. Jemima immediately went over to Babs. She spoke a few words. Barbara started, looked quickly at her. And then the two hurried off together.

That was too much for Eleanor. Jemima had something on, then. Jemima was plotting with Babs—against her. She followed.

Up the stairs, along the Fourth Form corridor. She watched the two as they disappeared in Study No. 4. Then with mortification she saw the door close.

What did it mean?

Fear of Jemima urged her on. The most important thing in life to Eleanor at that moment was to find out exactly what those two were discussing. She crept towards the door.

In the study Babs had the letter which little Dolly Drew had left behind. Jemima was shaking her head.

"It's got to go, old Spartan. I promised that it should. A Carstairs always sticks by her word, what? And as," she added, "I've given that word, it's up to me to keep it."

"But, Jimmy, that means breaking bounds."

"Can't be helped, what?"

"But no." Babs shook her head. "Jimmy, no!" she cried. "The message was intended for me. It's my job."

"Your job," Jemima informed her, "is to be a good girl. Can't afford to run risks, old Bablets. Can't afford to destroy everything I'm working for. You're in the grim old bad books of Primmy as it is. If you are caught breaking bounds, Primmy might up and expel you. And then a lot of good it will be if I do get the captaincy," Jemima added. "No, Babs, I'll go—I insist!"

Eleanor, listening outside the door, clenched her hands.

"But Jimmy——" Babs objected.

"Here we are," Jemima decided. "An important letter is to arrive to-night. Right! It can't get there unless someone takes it. The servants can't take it. Piper can't take it. I must take it. At the moment the jolly old gates are closed, so I can't go yet. In five minutes it's bed-time, so I can't go for five minutes. In an hour, however, the jolly old lights throughout the slumbering school will be put out. I go then. No more! I have spoken!"

Eleanor breathed fiercely. Instinctively her hand closed over a scrap of paper in her pocket. That scrap was a handbill advertising a masked dance to be held at the Courtfield Dance Rooms to-night.

All at once a startling idea flashed into her mind. She thought she saw at last a way of accomplishing the ambition nearest to her heart—that of getting rid of Jemima.

For if Jemima were caught——

Then Jemima would most likely be expelled. At the very least, Miss Primrose would order her to stand down from the election!

Off at once Eleanor trotted, the handbill in her hand. Her eyes were gleaming as she strolled up the Sixth Form corridor, and tapped at the door of Sarah Harrigan's study.

Sarah was strict, sour, and severe. She believed that Cliff House would be a happier place if the Fourth Form were removed elsewhere, but there were one or two girls in that Form—principally girls who would lend Sarah money on demand—to whom she was rather partial and to whom she showed favours.

One such was Eleanor herself.

She looked up at Eleanor's entry. The scowl she was wearing changed to a smile. She said:

"Oh, hallo, Eleanor! What's the matter?"

"Well, I don't know," Eleanor replied, "that anything's the matter, but—but I thought it my duty, as the possible future captain of the Fourth, to consult you. I—I don't want to sneak, of course, but—but—well"—and she placed the handbill in front of Sarah—"one of—of the girls dropped this," she said.

"What girl?"

"Oh, Sarah, don't ask me!"

"You mean that girl is going to the dance?"

"I don't know." Eleanor shook her head. "But it looks like it, doesn't it?"

Sarah nodded grimly.

"It does," she said. "Still, never mind, Eleanor. Thank you for bringing this. I'll be on the look-out for her."

And Eleanor allowed herself a slight smile of triumph.

While Sarah Watches—

DONG!

The last reverberating chime quivered in the air from the clock in the tower in the grounds of Cliff House School, and Jemima sat up in bed with a jerk.

"What-ho, anyone awake?"

"Yes," answered a whispering voice—it was Babs. "Jimmy, I am. Jimmy, let me go!"

Jemima chuckled softly.

She did not reply, but rapidly she dressed. Under the pillow she fumbled for the letter, found it, and stepped towards the door.

A shadowy figure loomed up before her. It was Babs, her face grey in the gloom.

"Jimmy, please!" she begged. "I can't let you take the risk. Let me go!"

"And I," Jemima said, "can't let you

take the risk, Babs. Don't worry, I'm on my guard."

"But if you are found out——"

"I shan't be found out. Now, please," Jemima said. "Don't make a noise, old Spartan!"

Gently she pushed the ex-captain towards the bed. Obviously there was no gainsaying Jemima. Babs, biting her lip, watched as her dark shape flitted through the door, and with a sad shake of the head turned back again. She didn't like it—definitely she didn't like it. Some foretaste of disaster, some warning of impending evil, seemed to have thrown its shadow about her.

It was her job—hers! Little Dolly had intended her to execute this commission.

Supposing a prefect came in?

Babs sat in the bed Jemima had vacated. Not usual was it for Babs to feel such anxiety. That uncanny sixth sense which could sit upon her so strongly at times seemed to be breathing a warning that all was not well.

If Jemima were caught, then Jemima might be expelled. At the very least she would be deposed from the election, which meant that Eleanor Storke would get a walk-over. Jimmy had done so many things for her sake—was doing this for her—that Babs just felt that she couldn't let her take the risk.

But Jemima had gone. What then?

But Babs had an idea. If anyone were to suffer, that one should not be Jemima. If any prowling mistress or prefect took it into her head to look in at the Fourth Form dormitory, then it should not be Jemima's bed which was found unoccupied.

Easy enough for her to slip into Jemima's bed, leaving her own vacant.

Without a second's further thought Babs did so, drawing the sheets about her face. Well, whatever happened now, Jimmy would be safe! Nobody had seen.

But hadn't they? Babs did not guess that one pair of watchful eyes had watched everything. Those eyes belonged to a wondering and infuriated Eleanor Storke.

Meantime, Jemima was padding softly down the stairs which led to the lobby in Big Hall.

Quieter than a mouse was Jemima. When Jemima had ticklish work to carry out she could betray a stealth that was surprising.

She was not concerned particularly about her own safety, but she was concerned about the letter—not, at any cost, was little Dolly Drew going to be let down.

Taking advantage of every patch of shadow, eyes and ears always alert, she crept on inch by inch. And then suddenly she stiffened.

"Oho!" she breathed.

She stopped, peering over the banister-rail. From where she stood now she had a view of the lobby window, by which she had intended to make her exit from the school.

A faint movement by the window had caught her quick eye. It was a movement accompanied by a rustling sound, the faint shuffle of a footstep. Jemima craned forward, peering intently.

"Sarah!" she muttered.

Sarah Harrigan it was, for at that moment Sarah moved. And at the same moment the moon, emerging from a cloud wrack, shone straight in at the window, pouring a bright, silvery radiance on to the floor. Unconsciously Sarah had stepped into a patch, so that her angular and unmistakable frame showed up as a black silhouette.

Sarah was watching.

"Smells a mouse—what?" Jemima murmured. "On the merry old look-out. Too tough, Sarah, my old watch dog. Too utterly tough!"

And Jemima, with a quiet chuckle, slipped back up the stairs, making her way along the Fourth Form corridor to Study No. 12, where it was easy enough, if a little dangerous, to climb down the ivy and drop into the cloisters.

All that was accomplished without a hitch, however, Jemima thoughtfully leaving the window of the study open to facilitate a return journey.

Once out in the open air, she ran like the wind for the shelter of the hedge that divided Lane's Field from the school ground. In five minutes she was on the Courtfield Road, and half an hour later was at the address printed on the envelope she held, handing the important missive to a night porter.

Meanwhile Sarah, growing more and more impatient, was beginning to get restive. She looked at her watch.

A quarter to twelve!

Sarah paused. It dawned upon her then that the dance at Courtfield would be over at midnight. If the suspected girl had broken bounds at all, she must have gone long ago by another route.

Sarah's lips compressed. Well, who ever that girl was, she was not going to get away with it. She turned quickly on her heel and made her way to the Fourth Form dormitory.

Quietly she pushed open the door.

Like the quadrangle outside, the Fourth Form dormitory was flooded with brilliant moonlight. Its rays poured through every window, showing up the hummocked forms beneath the sheets almost as clearly as if it had been daylight.

Babs, lying in Jemima's bed, saw the prefect standing there, and held her breath.

Eleanor Storke, one eye open, saw her also, longed to cry out what she knew, but realising that she could not very well sneak before the whole Form, held her tongue.

Like a ferret's, Sarah's little eyes roved the dormitory. They fastened sharply upon Babs' empty bed. She came forward, threw back the sheets, and her lips compressed. Then, without a word, she went out again.

Babs' heart sank. She was caught. But Jemima was saved.

Thank goodness—oh, thank goodness she had been seized with the brainwave of occupying Jemima's bed!

But wait—and her heart leapt again. She was not out of the wood yet. She knew that Sarah, suspecting her of breaking bounds, would go back to the lobby window to await her homecoming.

Sarah liked to catch her victims in the act. But the victim Sarah would catch on this occasion, would be Jemima!

Babs lay rigid.

What now? Was her sacrifice to prove in vain, after all?

But it wasn't! It shouldn't! Desperately Babs groped in her mind for a solution. She saw what would happen.

Sarah, expecting her, would seize upon Jemima—for Babs, of course, knew nothing of Jemima's ruse.

Jemima would be caught—herself called in to explain why she had occupied Jemima's bed, thus landing them both in the mire.

Willingly she had made herself the victim. At all costs she must prevent Jemima being involved, now that she had done so much. Babs rose.

Eleanor, watching from her bed, frowned.

"Now what's the little game?" she muttered.

Truth to tell, Eleanor was feeling both puzzled and furious. She had not intended her little scheme to work out like this.

Jemima was her objective, not Babs. Babs, she felt, she had already secretly bottled up by her threat to expose Dolly Drew. But she was helpless. Without arousing the Form, without deliberately sneaking, and so bringing the scorn of the Form upon her, she could only lie and furiously watch events.

What was Babs doing now?

For Babs was putting on her hat, her coat. Babs was going out! Out she went, making her way to the fire-escape at the back of the building.

Down that she climbed, her heart thudding, making her way through the cloisters and towards Lane's Field, just as if she were returning from a bounds-breaking expedition.

Cautiously she reached the lobby window, cautiously climbed over it. And then a hand fell upon her shoulder.

"Barbara Redfern! Got you! Where have you been?"

Babs let out a gasp of pretended fright.

"Oh, Sarah, how did you know?"

"Never mind how I knew!" Sarah said grimly. "I think I'm up to your little game, Barbara Redfern. Think we prefects are blind, do you? Think we don't know what's going on? Well, you've kept me hanging about half the night, and you'll sit up for that. Report to Miss Primrose's study before breakfast to-morrow."

"Yes, Sarah!" Babs mumbled.

And she watched as Sarah disappeared towards her own quarters. Then, very sad and heavy at heart, she climbed the stairs to her own dormitory.

She had saved Jemima—but at what a price to herself!

WHILE JEMIMA, all unconscious of what had happened, leisurely climbed the stairs to her own dormitory, let herself in, and tiptoed back towards the Fourth Form dormitory.

Babs, by that time, was back in her own bed again. She started up.

"Jimmy, that you?"

"As large as life, and cheerful as an advert for a patent medicine," Jemima answered.

"You—you delivered the letter?"

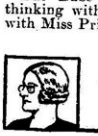
"What-ho!"

"And—and nothing happened?"

"Nothing, beloved."

And Jemima, with a cheerful grin, undressed and got into bed, there immediately to fall asleep.

But Babs didn't. Babs was still thinking with dismay of that interview with Miss Primrose on the morrow.



Eve of Election

JIMMY mustn't know. If Jimmy guessed what had happened—that she—Barbara—had connived at taking the blame for her own escapade of the previous night—the fat would be in the fire with a vengeance.

Jimmy might have a strange way of reasoning out things and doing things, but she was normal enough not to let a friend down. She would just go to Miss Primrose and own up.

So Barbara said nothing. In the morning—the morning of the day on which the election was to be held in the afternoon, she got up quietly, dressed, and went at once to Miss Primrose's study.

Miss Primrose was there. Sarah was sent for, and Babs, with whitening cheeks, listened to the indictment against her. Miss Primrose looked up.

"Barbara, have you anything to say?"

"No," Babs replied faintly.

"Very well." Miss Primrose's face set like flint. "Haven't I already warned you, Barbara, that the next offence of yours which came to my knowledge would be dealt with severely? I am sorry to see you behaving like this. Remembering the sort of girl you used to be, and what you are now, I am amazed. You can consider yourself confined to school bounds for the rest of the term. When your parents arrive here for the celebrations, I shall certainly have a word with them. You may go!"

With white, tense face Babs went. She looked and felt as if she had been whipped. Gated for the rest of the term! To be reported to her father and her mother! Oh, what an awful mess everything was! She who had so happily and excitedly looked forward to the Jubilee celebrations in which she was to have figured as one of the stars of the day, was now to be disgraced.

In the bitterness of her spirit she groaned. And all this had come about because, in the first place, she had protected and sheltered little Dolly Drew from the bullying hate of Eleanor Storke.

Still, Jemima's name had not been mentioned. Jemima was safe. That was something to be thankful for.

Joylessly Babs trailed into the sunlit quadrangle. The whole school was astir, it seemed. Everybody looked excited. To-day was the day of the election. In the afternoon, in the Common-room, the Lower School would know who was to be its future captain—Jemima Carstairs or Eleanor Storke.

Everybody was talking about it. Everybody was discussing it. Who would win?

"'Lo, Babs!" a voice greeted her cheerily.

She looked up, saw Jemima. Jemima had a note-pad in her hand, and was thoughtfully frowning at the mass of figures which were scrawled upon it.

"Hallo, Jimmy!"

"Just trying to get a forecast of the old voting," Jemima said seriously. "Not too bright, what? As far as I can judge, it's fifty-fifty at the moment. I can rely upon you, of course?"

"Of course!" Babs said.

"Oh!" another voice sneered, and Babs turned, tensing as she saw the sneering face of Eleanor Storke. "I say, I want to speak to you!" she snapped.

"Indeed?"

"Yes, indeed!"

"Pleasant, what?" Jemima drawled. "Our little fluttering bird in her most delightful humour. Had a bad night, my ruffle-feathers, or is this the usual way you feel on election day?"

Eleanor glared.

"Will you leave us alone?"

"Pleasure!" Jemima shrugged. "Call, beloved, if you want any help," she added to Babs, and sauntered away, still poring over her figures. Babs turned to face her enemy.

"You're not voting for Jemima?" Eleanor snarled.

"Supposing," Babs asked levelly, "I tell you I am?"

"And supposing," Eleanor said, with a scowl, "you recollect what I told you in my study the day before yesterday? Oh, don't try to bluff me!" she added savagely. "You know jolly well that this election hangs by a thread. One vote, indeed, might make all the difference. Well, I mean now what I said then. I leave you to work it out. You've got influence with Jemima Carstairs—use it! But I'll tell you this," she added furiously, "if Jemima wins the election, I hold you responsible!"

And with one lowering glare she hurried away.

Babs stood still. Her cheeks were a little pale. Not by any means did she underestimate that threat. Eleanor meant what she said. But she couldn't influence Jemima. How could she go to Jemima and say—"Jimmy, I want you to drop out of this, leaving the field clear for Eleanor!" She couldn't! She couldn't!

The election must take its course.

But the election, if Eleanor knew, was not going to take its course. Eleanor, like Jemima, had been canvassing for votes. And Eleanor, like Jemima, had come to the same conclusion.

The election might depend upon one girl's vote. She meant to have Babs' vote at any cost.

Babs obviously hadn't tackled Jemima about standing down. Babs obviously wouldn't. In any case, Eleanor had only brief hope in that direction. Jemima had shown very plainly that she had her own way of doing things, and very, very plainly Jemima meant to stand for the election whatever anybody might or might not say.

In the meantime, however, she'd got to force Babs' hand.

How?

In a flash came the answer. Eleanor's eyes glittered as she thought of it.

Off she sailed at once to the Third Form Common room. There she button-holed Ida Jackson. She took a shilling from her purse and held it between finger and thumb.

"Here, Ida, this is yours," she said, "if you'll give me some information. You met Dolly Drew the other day, in Pegg?"

"Yes," Ida said, eyes greedily fastened upon the shilling.

"Where does she live?"

"Please, Eleanor, she's living with her aunt, at a place called the Maples."

"Thanks," Eleanor said briefly. "That's yours," and ramming the shilling into Ida's astonished and delighted hand, she flounced off again. This time her steps took her in the direction of the gates. There she stood, fumingly waiting for the bus to Pegg.

The Maples was well known. Eleanor had no hard job to find it. Boldly she went to the front door, asked to see Miss Penelope Drew, and presently found herself in the presence of that middle-aged lady.

"Oh, Miss Drew," she simpered, "I wonder if you'd mind if Dolly came back to the school just for this afternoon? You see," Eleanor explained, "there's an election to be held and we want the whole school represented. Do you mind?"

This, of course, was all pure invention on the part of Eleanor. Dolly, belonging as she did to the Second Form, was not entitled to vote in the election at all. But it served Eleanor as an excuse.

"You don't mind?" she repeated.

"Why no," that good lady said, "of course not. Shall she go back with you?"

"Oh, please," Eleanor said.

"Very well, you will find her in the grounds I think—on the other side of the lawn. You will make yourself responsible for her safety?"

"Yes, Miss Drew!"

And Eleanor, with a grim smile, walked off to find the absent Dolly.

The Last Vote

"ELECTION two o'clock," Jemima Carstairs announced, "in the Common-room. Every girl this day is expected to vote for the jolly old cause, so don't forget to bring your vote with you. See you later."

Babs smiled—a little faintly, a little worriedly. She was in Study No. 4, but she was not looking happy. She was thinking—of the election, of Jemima, of Eleanor, but most of all of little Dolly Drew.

Loyalty and friendship urged her to vote for Jimmy. Fear for Dolly impelled her to vote for Eleanor. One vote might make all the difference. What should she do? What could she do?

A step in the passage, a hurried rap on the door. Then, without any invitation, the door swung open. Eleanor Storke, breathing heavily, her eyes flaming, stood there. By her side was the cowering figure of Dolly Drew!

"Eleanor!" Babs gasped.

"I've brought her," Eleanor said vindictively, "just to help you to make up your mind! Here you are, Dolly, here's your champion—the girl who can save you or put paid to your account for good and all! Get in, you little booh!" and roughly she sent the little girl staggering into the study. "And Barbara, remember—if the election goes against me, what will happen to her!"

And slam! the door closed upon her. Her footsteps, hurried and tempestuous, could be heard receding along the corridor.

"Barbara," gasped Dolly. "Oh, Barbara, what does she mean? Barbara, is—is she going to give me away?"

Babs bit her lip.

"Barbara, don't—don't let her——" Dolly pleaded frantically.

But Babs did not reply. She could not reply. Jimmy—or this trembling child! What—oh, what could she do? She stroked her head.

"There, Dolly, don't worry."

"But Barbara——"

"Shush! Now sit here like a good little girl. Look, Dolly, here's a picture-book, and you'll find some tarts in the cupboard, if Bessie Bunter hasn't been at them. I must go now. I must——"

And she must, for the bell was ringing—summoning the members of the Fourth and the Upper Third into the Common-room.

White-faced, lips twitching, Dolly sat down, her big wide eyes following Babs as that girl went to the door. Appealing the pleading look upon her little face, tremulous the quivering of those soft lips. She choked.

"Barbara, what—what has Eleanor brought me here for? What did she mean by saying that if the election went against her, something would happen to me. Barbara——"

But Babs, feeling choked herself, unable to answer those questions, closed the door. She felt that her brain was on fire.

What could she do?

She went into the Common-room. The room was full of clamouring, excited girls. On the dais stood Stella Stone, captain of the school. On one side of her stood Eleanor, looking a little anxious; and on the other side Jemima, a bright smile upon her serene face, beaming at the eager crowd through her monocle.

Stella Stone banged on the desk with a hammer.

"Now, please, silence!" she said. "Listen while I call the roll! Every girl has one vote—one vote only. You will vote by a show of hands. You all know the candidates—Jemima Carstairs and Eleanor Storke—and I must request you to get through the business with as much order and as little noise as possible. Now, silence, please!"

There was silence while Stella called the register. Sixty-three names she called, including those of Jemima and Eleanor Storke. That made the voting strength sixty-one.

There was dead silence as she finished. Babs felt tense and overwrought. Who to vote for—her friend or her enemy?

"We will take Jemima first, as she is the elder scholar," Stella Stone announced. "Now, all those who vote for Jemima step to the other side of the room and raise their hands."

There was a murmur, a quick scuffle. Fully half of the girls stepped over to the right-hand side of the Common-room and stood there, hands raised; but Babs, in the centre, did not move.

Stella counted them.

"Thirty," she announced, and a quick thrill went through everyone. "Now Eleanor. Will Eleanor's supporters step to the other side of the room and show hands?"

Another shuffle, an excited whispering. Eleanor, on the platform, looked significantly at Babs.

But again Babs stood as though rooted to the floor.

And again Stella counted.

"Thirty!"

A low muttering went round.

"Thirty—thirty!" Stella announced. "That doesn't make a decision. There is one girl who has not voted."

"Barbara Redfern!" cried Eleanor.

"Eleanor, please remember that as a candidate you are not supposed to say anything. Barbara——"

Babs stiffened.

"Yes, Stella?"

"You have a vote, Barbara," Stella Stone said. "I am afraid I must insist that you use it. At the moment the situation is a deadlock. On the first count Eleanor and Jemima have tied. Your vote will make all the difference one way or the other."

Babs stood still—dreadfully, uncannily still. Everybody was looking at her. She saw Eleanor's eyes—threatening, boring at her. She saw Jemima frowning, a reproachful, hurt look upon her face.

But how could she vote when it meant so much to that poor little girl in Study No. 4?

Through white, tight lips she repeated:

"I—I can't vote!"

And then—— Crash! went the Common-room door. Into the room darted a wild-eyed, distraught little figure. Everyone wheeled round; everyone stared as little Dolly Drew, trembling and shivering, flung herself upon Babs. Her sobs sounded like the cry of some tiny wounded animal.

"Barbara!"

Babs jumped.

"Dolly!"

"Babs, I—I've just heard!" Dolly gasped. "Oh, Barbara, why didn't you tell me that you lost your captaincy through—through me? Why didn't you tell me that you were punished for breaking bounds last night to take my letter for me, Barbara?"

Babs looked distraught.

"Dolly, be quiet!"

"But I won't be quiet!" little Dolly sobbed. "It's not fair—it's not fair! When I was in your study, Barbara, Miss Primrose came in. She was looking for you. She said she wanted to see you about your bounds-breaking last night, and—and then I guessed, Barbara. And Miss Primrose told me that you'd lost your captaincy because you'd been hateful to Eleanor, and I knew that couldn't be true. But you never told me."

"Look here," Eleanor hooted suddenly, red in the face, "is this an election, or isn't it? I protest, Stella! I protest, everybody! That kid has got no right in here! If she wants to talk to Barbara, she can do so after the election!"

"Hear, hear!"

Bang!

Stella Stone rapped upon the desk.

"Silence, please! Dolly," she added severely, "you have no right to crash in like that! You are interrupting. Barbara, for the last time, will you use your vote?"

Babs straightened up. She couldn't—she couldn't! Then softly, gently into her hand she felt a trembling, hot little palm—felt it squeeze around hers. She heard Dolly's voice.

"Babs, vote for Jemima!"

"But, Dolly, if I do——"

"Vote for Jemima!" Dolly said fiercely.

"Well, Barbara?"

There was a hush. Babs gulped. She looked at Eleanor. With a bold, fearless challenge she answered the hostility in her face; then slowly she walked over to Jemima's supporters. She raised her hand.

Immediately a wild yell broke out.

"Jemima! Jemima wins!"

"Hurrah!"

"Jemima is captain!"

"Please, silence!" Stella shouted. "Girls!" And bang, bang! went her hammer, restoring order. "Girls, by one vote Jemima is elected captain!"

"Hurrah!"

Frenzied the cheering then; even some of Eleanor's supporters looked glad.

Jemima put in her monocle, beamed round, shook hands with herself, and then smiled at Eleanor.

Eleanor was on her feet. Eleanor, all dignity gone to the winds. Eleanor, remembering all those hopes which had rested in the election, remembering what she stood to lose, was beside herself. For the first time the Form saw the real Eleanor—the sly, crafty, spiteful, hypocritical Eleanor.

"Wait a minute! Wait a minute!" she cried. "Jemima's not captain! I've got something to say—yes, and I'll say it now in front of the Form. Jemima's not fit to be captain."

"What?"

"I say she's not fit to be captain!" Eleanor shrieked. "I know! It wasn't Barbara Redfern who broke bounds last night. It was Jemima Carstairs. Barbara wanted to shield her, that's why Barbara gave herself up."

ELEANOR, white with sudden rage, flung round to point at Jemima. "That girl," she cried fiercely, "she's not fit to be captain! It was she who broke bounds last night!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Babs, you ninny!" Jemima cried.

"But wait a minute," Stella shouted. "Eleanor, sit down! My goodness, are you all losing your heads? Now, quiet! Eleanor," and she turned with frigid face to the girl who made that announcement, "I might remind you that this is an election—not an exhibition of sneaking," she added tartly.

"Hurrah!"

"Bravo, Stella!"

"She asked for it! Sneak!"

"I might also remind you that if you have any denouncement to make, this is not the place to make it. If you must sneak," Stella went on witheringly, "go to Miss Primrose. In any case, what Jemima did last night doesn't affect the present question one way or the other. It is what Jemima does henceforth as captain of the Form which really matters."

"Good old Stella!"

"Sneak! Sneak!"

Eleanor fell back, a little pale.

She hated Babs, she hated Stella, she loathed and detested Jemima, but paramount to all those emotions was her fright, her panic at the thing she had lost.

Her eyes flashed through the crowd. Jemima had the better of her! Somebody was going to pay for this. Oh, yes, somebody——

That somebody was Babs. Babs had let her down, Babs had given the casting vote which had decided the election against her.

"You!" she burst out.

And in a moment she was down from the dais. She had started towards Babs. Dolly, seeing her, shrank back against her protector. Eyes flashing, Eleanor stood there.

"You," she almost snarled, "you! I told you what would happen, didn't I? You lost me this election, Barbara Redfern! Well, you're going to pay for it! Come on, you!"

And, darting forward, she snatched little Dolly's arm. Dolly's face went as white as chalk. She screamed.

"Oh, no—no, don't!"

"Eleanor!" cried Babs.

But Eleanor, swept on by the tempest of fury which raged within her, was storming away towards the door. Babs, with a cry, started forward. Jemima as quickly nipped down from the dais and followed her. Passionately Eleanor flung open the door, the gasping Dolly in her grip, and then stopped.

Everybody stopped. For in the act of coming into the room was Miss Primrose.

"Why, what—good gracious, what is all this? Dolly," she cried, "are you aware——"

Eleanor fought to compose herself.

"I was bringing Dolly to you, Miss Primrose!"

"Good gracious, what ever for?"

"Because," Eleanor said spitefully, "I consider it my duty. It is every girl's duty to report a thief——"

Dead silence. From Dolly's ashen lips came a low moan.

"Eleanor, what are you saying, girl?"

"Just this, Miss Primrose! Dolly stole half-a-crown from me. She stole it three weeks ago. I didn't come to you before, because I didn't want to give her away. But I see now that it is my duty to tell you, in view of the fact that she was convicted for one theft last term."

"Eleanor, you beast!" Babs got out.

"Barbara, be quiet, please!" Miss Primrose looked stern. "Eleanor, you should certainly have told me about this before," she said. "Most certainly you should. But first I must hear details. How did Dolly steal this half-crown?"

"I lost my purse," Eleanor said vindictively. "I made inquiries. Not until twenty-four hours after I had missed it did Dolly Drew decide to give it back to me, and then she gave it back empty. There was half-a-crown in it when she found it."

"Oh, there wasn't—there wasn't!" Dolly sobbed.

Then Jemima strolled forward.

"She can prove it, of course, Miss Primrose?"

"I have only my word," Eleanor said. "I am not likely to be able to prove it, am I?"

Again Jemima stepped into the breach.

"But," she said, and turned, "there is some proof, Miss Primrose. Now I come to think of it, Eleanor mentioned the other night in front of the whole Form that she had lost half-a-crown. She described the coin, too, didn't she, girls? A half-crown which had a cross scored across the face of it."

Miss Primrose's eyes glinted.

"Then," she said, "the coin was never stolen. That coin is in my possession now. It was brought in the day before yesterday by little Dolores Essendon, who found it in the quadrangle.

"I think—yes, I have." And Miss Primrose searched in her pocket. "I have it in my possession now," she said. "I was waiting for someone to claim it. Eleanor, you have made an exceedingly unwarranted and unaccountable accusation, trying to condemn a girl upon the strength of having made one mistake in the past. I must warn you in future about jumping to conclusions. There," she added bitingly, "is your half-crown!"

While Jemima, turning slowly towards Babs, met that girl's wondering stare with a beaming smile, and deliberately winked.

ELEANOR WAS beaten

Eleanor was the scorn of the Form.

Nobody wanted anything to do with her now. Girls who would sneak as Eleanor had sneaked, a girl who would try to take such a vindictive vengeance upon a little girl in the Second Form—no, that was too much for the fair play spirit which prevailed in the Fourth.

But when five minutes later Jemima made her end of the election speech——

When Jemima explained how Babs, to save Dolly, had put up with Eleanor; how she had been the object of her abuse; how hypocritically she had treated her——

The Form listened with faces that crimsoned with shame.

But when Jemima concluded:

"And now, Spartans, you've made me captain—a noble old honour—what? But it's an honour, if you don't mind, that I want to decline, a crown which another far worthier than I should wear. As captain, it is my privilege to resign whenever I want in favour of another girl. Friends of the Fourth Form, I resign here, now, at once, and immediately in favour of Barbara Redfern!"

A storm of cheering arose.

"Babs, Babs, Babs!"

"Good old Babs!"

"Babs for captain!"

And the cheers were still echoing, when a minute later Miss Primrose again appeared on the scene—this time to give her blessing to the new captain. For outside Miss Primrose had heard every word of Jemima's explanation to the Form. She knew at last—as they all knew—the truth!

AND SO, thanks to Jemima, it was Babs who officiated with Stella Stone at the jubilee celebrations a few days later.

Eleanor, on that occasion, however, was hardly seen. For Uncle Ben called in the morning, to be immediately summoned to Miss Primrose's study. She saw nothing of the pageant, neither did Uncle Ben. Uncle Ben took her to Courtfield. Uncle Ben, shamed and hurt, made it quite clear and plain that if ever she resorted to lies and treachery again, he would cut her completely out of his will.

Only Jemima, indeed, had a word to say to her. That was when, after the fireworks which closed the celebrations on that memorable Jubilee day, she strolled along to Study No. 12.

"What cheer!" she said. "All alone? Nice day it's been, hasn't it?"

"Oh, get out!" Eleanor snapped.

"Certainly, certainly! Just popped along on a little matter of business—what!" Jemima purred. "A little matter concerning half-a-crown. A half-crown," Jemima carefully explained, "with a cross marked on its face. Some time, old Spartan, when you're feeling rich, you might let me have that back."

CLARA TAKES CHARGE

That is the title of next week's grand Long Complete Holiday story of the chums of Cliff House School by Hilda Richards.

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BETTY BARTON & CO., of Morcove School, together with members of Grangemoor, 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.

MADAME DUPONT, wife of the villainous Frenchman, lands near the Morcove camp on her way to Kwamba by aeroplane. Betty, Polly Linton, and her brother Jack hide on the plane, and are carried on to Kwamba where the plane crashes. They are unhurt, although Madame Dupont falls ill. The Kwamba natives welcome the chums to their territory, but afterwards turn threatening!

(Now read on.)

"White Man's Magic!"

ONCE again the light of a camp-fire in the heart of Unknown Africa was revealing to Betty Barton, Polly Linton and her brother Jack a scene as strange as it was fraught with danger.

Facing the juniors were these six men of the mysterious Kwamba tribe, five of them in no fierce mood—at present.

But the sixth man—this old and wizened creature who was obviously the tribe's witch-doctor—he was even now denouncing the girls and Jack as utter impostors.

They knew this, although it was the gibberish of the Kwamba dialect which the man was uttering, whilst he made threatening play with his long-bladed spear.

Not a word could they understand—and yet how well they understood the critical position!

All had gone so well in the last few hours. But now—there was a change, a challenge!

"Strange beings who have come amongst us to-day—we have given you welcome, given you friendship," was certainly the English equivalent of what this witch-doctor was jabbering. "Yea, ye have even had our gifts, because ye claimed to be living agents for the Ankh, from whom great things have been promised us. Now, therefore, prove your claim to be true! Prove it; let there be a sign, even now, or else——"

Or else—— What?

The witch-doctor's deep-set eyes flashed cruelly. He went on pointing the spear at each of the three youngsters. So, in his mischief-making capacity of a witch-doctor, he had been accustomed for many a year, no doubt, to "smell out" traitors to the tribe. And against the verdict of such a man, however baseless the charge might be—no appeal, ever!

By MARJORIE STANTON

Illustrated by L. Shields.

Betty and Polly could only rely upon Jack in this terrible emergency. They were remembering that the Kwambas, like other savages the world over, held women and girls to be of no account. It was he, Jack, to whom the witch-doctor had addressed every threatening word.

And now Jack spoke—in English. He looked steadily at the man with the spear, as if the words were meant for him. There were accompanying gestures—highly dramatic—intended to impress the witch-doctor and his companions. But really Jack was calmly imparting heartening remarks to the two girls.

"Steady, and I may be able to settle these awkward doubts of theirs," he said calmly. "Anyway, I'll make 'em go on thinking we must be pretty wonderful people, after all."

Then, the six Kwambas having become impressed listeners to a language they understood not at all, Jack made a grand sign, commanding them to squat down.

They did so. No batch of kiddies at a party could have settled themselves more eagerly, being promised a surprise entertainment by a conjurer.

Quick-wittedly grasping Jack's intention, Betty and Polly stood away from him. An artful movement it was, enabling them to retire to a slightly safer distance from the Kwambas, who were evidently all the more impressed.

The men had eyes only for Jack, now that he was standing more by himself—Jack, who wore the Ankh necklace!

Slowly he backed to where, in a safe place away from the camp-fire, he had put by a supply of petrol taken from the plane's undamaged tank.

The girls saw him splash a little of the petrol into a tin—one that was so small it hardly showed in his right hand as he returned towards the squatting Kwambas.

"Now, blokes!" he said. The words were for the benefit of Betty and Polly, but the impressive voice and all attendant gestures were calculated to spellbind the men. "No deception whatever, ladies and gents! Nothing up the sleeve. I make a few passes in the air—so! And—hey, presto!"

Into the camp-fire went the petrol—about as much as would have filled an eggcup.

Flash!

Dazzling white flame shot upwards in one great, blinding flare.

Lightning-like, the flash was gone as soon as it had come, and there were the

Kwambas, rolling over in a startled blinded way.

Betty and Polly had shut their eyes for a moment, so as not to have their sight temporarily affected by the sudden glare. But the six natives, staring their very hardest just then, had been dazzled.

"See?" Jack said to them dramatically. "Gee, I don't believe they can see, girls, even now! Anyway—up, the lot of you!" he shouted, in a most commanding tone and with a suitable gesture. "And now—beat it, pronto! Anything you may have to say—the morning's the time!"

Up from the rough grass floundered the Kwambas, their eyes goggling with fright.

Betty and Polly were secretly delighted to observe that the witch-doctor had been most affected by the bit of "magic." He was shaking visibly, and it was he who instantly vanished into the night, jabbering fiercely to himself.

His companions scurried a short distance away; but before they were quite beyond the range of the firelight they halted—still bunched together in fright. Unlike the witch-doctor, however, they felt a good deal of childish pleasure mingling with that fright.

The witch-doctor was probably jealous of the "power" that Jack had wielded. These other men only regarded it as satisfactory proof that confidence had not been misplaced, after all!

The two girls and Jack even saw the five black warriors starting to chuckle and nod. So Betty and Polly were as quick as Jack to respond with friendly gestures.

Another moment, and those men were running off into the surrounding darkness—back to their village, there to tell of this wonderful thing!

"So that's that!" chuckled Polly, but in a rather highly strung manner. "Whew! I really thought we were for it that time!"

"Best of it is," Jack grinned, "it really wasn't a waste of petrol. You know I've talked of sending up a flare at regular intervals all night—for all our friends to see, as they are bound to do."

"Not much doubt about their having seen that flare!" Betty smiled. "But now—I suppose we are going to be left in peace for a bit? So I can go back to Madame Dupont; and Polly darling—you must get that bit of sleep!"

"Suppose I must," grimaced Jack's sister. "But there'll be a row if you let me have more than a couple of hours. I shall probably sleep like a log as soon as I do get down to it, so I warn you—I am to be routed up to the very minute."

"Right-ho," Betty smiled, and went across to where she was to keep watch beside the woman who was now so seriously ill.

With the quietness of a night nurse tiptoeing into a sick-room did Betty return to the makeshift shelter which had been rigged up for Madame Dupont, mostly out of fabric from the wrecked plane.

Just a little of the camp-fire's fitful light found its way into the shelter, enabling Betty to see the woman, restless in a feverish doze.

Some of Madame Dupont's own mosquito netting, found amongst the very complete equipment which had been on board her plane had covered her. Betty herself had draped the flimsy material over the unhappy sufferer as soon as night fell. But in the last few minutes some uneasy movements had caused the netting to slip aside.

Gently Betty covered her patient again. She peered about, to make quite sure again that she had put everything ready to hand that had been available. The medicine-chest, a couple of the capsuled bottles of sparkling mineral water, an aluminium cup—all here! Yes.

And so, seating herself on a tiny folding camp-stool, Betty began her vigil, the darkness and the silence inducing earnest thoughts.

There was time for going back, in one's mind, over all the strange happenings of the last week or two; time to think of dear friends who, at this very moment, might be struggling on over the night-bound "bush," desperate to effect a reunion.

The big party which they had comprised—the "Morcove expedition," as they had jokingly called themselves, when they first set forth upon their adventurous quest of the Kwamba country! And now, to-night—how scattered!

First, their own faithful Kwamba, their guide and interpreter, had been carried off. Then the leaders of the expedition—Pam's father, and Madge's—fearlessly setting off to rescue old Kwamba, had been treacherously set upon by blacks in overwhelming numbers. And since then Betty herself, along with Polly and Jack, had become separated from the main party.

Would they ever be together again? If not, then how few of them were ever likely to win back to civilisation—to that homeland from which they had all set off, weeks ago, so high-spiritedly?

No mistake, they had ended by being "up against it" badly. And simply because of one man's villainy, and that man the husband of this very woman for whom Betty was doing her best to-night.

Yet Betty, with her great nature, could feel no hardening of the heart towards Madame Dupont. Her crafty husband's clever ally she had been, or she would never have turned up as she had, piloting her own plane to Kwamba, there to await him. If she had not been taken ill like this she must have been treated as a prisoner—an enemy disarmed.

Instead, she was upon their hands as a fever-stricken woman, who might even die during the night.

Suddenly the Frenchwoman babbled incoherently, gave a violent, restless movement, again pushing off the mosquito netting, and clamouring, in a husky voice:

"Water! Give me to drink! Oh, *vite, vite!* Quick—quick! Water!"

The Woman They Nursed!

BETTY uncapsuled one of the bottles and tilted a little of the pure, sparkling spring-water into the cup.

She herself was thirsty—always thirsty—in this climate! But she knew there must be none of this special reserve of water for her. She, and Polly and Jack—they were going to make do with water from a water-hole, found, just before dark, at the base of the mountain.

Greedily the feverish woman drank to the last drop, and then, as Betty took the empty cup away:

"Ah, *merci, merci!*" came in a whimpering tone. "How is it that you are so kind to me, I being—his wife?"

"Don't worry about that," Betty soothed. "Your job's to get better as soon as you can. You must try to lie still——"

"It is so hot!" the querulous woman almost wept. "I think it is that I am to die. I have done wrong. It was wrong of Pierre and I to work against you—— Ah, if only he were here, my husband, I would say to him—— But he cannot arrive yet. It is that I shall never see him again!"

"Hush! You're not as ill as all that," Betty returned rallyingly. "Only fever. It will be gone by morning."

"Ah, but this—this is not fever of the kind you mean. No, no! I shall die. Why is it"—her voice took on a peevish tone—"that I am so unlucky? Why I am picked out to suffer like this? *Malheur, malheur*——"

Poor Betty! Yet she had not one pitying thought for herself—a girl of school age, merely, yet undergoing such a strain! By dark night, and in such a place as this—pretty awful to find that no well-meant, tender word could comfort and soothe. Madame Dupont, when she was well, could be as vivacious as she was daring. But, laid low, like this, she was a most trying patient, in cowardly dread of death!

Like a frightened child in the dark, she cried herself to sleep at last. There was a merciful respite then, for Betty, from the woman's self-pitying whimperings. Complete silence—except that once a wild beast howled somewhere in the surrounding wilderness over which the stars were flashing in their thousands.

Presently, Jack, keeping guard about the camp, came across to have a word with Betty. He was realising how trying it must be for her to be doing what she was.

He did not come into the shelter, but called softly, to let Betty know that he was just outside, and she very quietly stole out to him.

"How is she now, Betty?"

"Sleeping again; but she has been quite light-headed. Has complained a lot, too."

"Well, I dunno," he muttered. "But sometimes sick people who do that are not so bad as they think they are. They get the wind up. So I wouldn't go too much by that, Betty."

"Oh, no. As a matter of fact," she whispered, "it has seemed to me, since she fell asleep, some of the fever has left her. She may have taken a turn for the better. She's not nearly so restless now—nor so hot."

"Pulse?"

"Yes, I felt for that, and it seemed less violent. I'm banking on the quinine I gave her."

"You're pretty marvellous, Betty," he smiled, "to stick it like this. But look here, can't she be left for a bit? You get some sleep——"

"No, Jack. My relief will come presently."

So he went away, and Betty did not see him again until she was being relieved by Polly. Then, crossing the camp-ground to lie down where that chum had just ended a most refreshing sleep, Betty discerned Jack doing a kind of sentry-go.

"All quiet on the Morcove front," he voiced softly, but cheerily. "So get a good rest whilst you can, Betty."

"I mean to! And then you must turn in for a bit. I'm sure you're having to walk about to keep awake."

"Not a bit of it! I go to the brew of tea every now and then, and have a swig at it, and that does me fine!"

They had made themselves enough tea to be able to resort to it during the night. It was contained in an aluminium "dixie," belonging to the Dupont outfit.

An hour later, Jack, before putting more fuel on the fire, heated up the remainder of the tea. The night was inclined to turn chilly, the cold striking

down from the perfectly cloudless sky. A few sips at the hot tea greatly cheered him, and so he took some across to Polly, his whispered "Here, Polly-wolly!" getting her to come out to him.

"As Naomer would say—gorjus!" was Polly's appreciative comment, after a few sips. "And now, Jack, do go and lie down!"

"Not on your life, Polly!"

"I can very well keep an eye out for danger, and yet be at hand if this Dupont woman wakes up and wants anything."

"No, Polly. I'm not going to spoil a bare chance by slacking off."

Even as he said this, they both heard—or thought they heard—a faint rustling sound such as man or beast might have caused, being on the prowl close to the camp.

Brother and sister looked at each other, then peered uneasily in the direction from which the suspicious noise had come.

"Just a sec," Polly whispered, "and I'll go with you, Jack—to the other side of the fire. You can't tell from here."

"But I'd rather you stayed——"

"I'd be doing nothing. The woman is soundly off."

At that very instant, however, Madame Dupont opened her eyes again.

MADAME DUPONT had awakened once more—this time, without emitting any peevish moan. She was instantly aware of feeling better—much better!

All the dull achings had left her. Her brain was clear.

The sense of blissful relief caused her to lie mute and still, closing her eyes again because she did not want to be pestered by one or another of the girls who might be night-nursing her. Madame's brain, in fact, back to normal, was already thinking: "Best not to let them know that I am better——"

Lying there, shamming sleep, she could tell that one of the girls was now stooping in, softly, having been away for a minute or two, perhaps. The woman heard a metal vessel set down on an upturned box that served as a tiny table.

Then the girl went away again, quickly.

Madame Dupont opened her eyes, lifted herself upon an elbow, and peered about. Ah, some hot tea! She nodded and smiled to herself, understanding. This was some tea that the girl had fetched for herself, to serve as a "refresher" during her spell of night-watching.

Eagerly the woman took up the metal bowl and sipped some of the tea. Delicious! Now indeed one was beginning to feel—oh, marvellously fresh and steady.

She replaced the bowl, then let herself sink back, sighing with a relief that was all the greater because she was such a bad one at bearing the slightest indisposition. She really had been ill, and the symptoms had certainly resembled those of an illness that often proves fatal. But she could not have been as ill as she had feared, perhaps? At any rate, the stuff she had taken from her own medicine-chest must have worked like magic.

Suddenly she sat up again, listening intently. That girl had not come back. Faintly one could hear a girl's voice and the lad's. Some scare in the night, had there been, that the girl had gone out to companion the one lad who, quite likely, was keeping guard in the open?

Madame Dupont frowned to herself in the darkness as she thought of Jack Linton. For in one of her wakeful moments just before nightfall, she had seen that he was wearing the Ankh necklace. If only—now that she felt so much better—if only she could regain that trinket! Wonder-working charm as it certainly was, in the eyes of the Kwamba tribe. Get possession of the necklace once more; get away with it again, and then—after all, how far need one go? This was the Kwamba country. The Kwamba village itself could be only a little way off.

"O.K., Polly-wolly, so don't stay about out here any longer," the woman heard Jack saying. "It was a leopard, right enough, prowling about. Nasty bit of work! But he seems to have sheered off."

"All right then, Jack. But let me know, won't you, if——?"

"I will, Polly."

Madame Dupont knew that in a few moments the girl would be back, to go on watching over her. The clear brain had suddenly evolved a crafty plan, and now the woman's unbandaged hand reached, swiftly, for one of the many phials in the medicine chest.

Next second she had that midget bottle uncorked and was pouring some of the contents into the waiting bowl of tea. The stuff was a harmless opiate, for administering in an emergency to anyone unable to sleep on account of pain.

There was no time for Madame Dupont to return the half-emptied phial to the medicine box. She let it fall to the ground, whilst she herself dropped back to sham sleep again.

As soon as Polly came into the shelter, she took up the bowl to drink some more of the tea. Her thirst had not been satisfied by the few previous sippings.

Jack's voice spoke in to her again, from just outside.

"I'd better know how she is now, Polly? Still sleeping?"

His sister, glad that he had come across like this once more, went out to him.

"Sleeping splendidly, Jack. Surely she is going to be ever so much better in the morning—and what a good job! Have some of this tea?"

"I'll finish what's here, and bring a refill across to you, presently. Happy days, Polly-wolly," he laughed, raising the bowl to his lips.

Madame Dupont, overhearing all this, smiled exultantly to herself.

Better than ever! Now he was drinking some of the doctored tea.

She had reckoned that she would have to tackle him by a resort to violence in a little while—when Polly had dropped off to sleep, as she was simply bound to do. But Jack, too, would be heavily asleep almost before he was aware of a stupor overcoming him.

Nothing easier, if one waited, shamming sleep like this, than to take the Ankh from its wearer! And then—away to the Kwamba village, there to take full advantage of the privileges which the wearing of the Ankh was bound to confer.

"A woman, I! And these two girls and the lad—bah, what will they be in the eyes of the Kwambas, when they no longer have the Ankh! Besides, there is some of the Kwamba language which Pierre taught me. That will be a help——"

So Madame Dupont was thinking to herself, even though she was that very woman for whom "Morcove," in its pity for her as a fallen and stricken enemy, had done the very best to-night, true to the Morcove ideal of returning good for evil!

But then Madame Dupont was now no longer ill. She was fit again—ready for scheming—and conflict!

BETTY tore aside the canvas to stand as if stunned at the scene within. Both her chums were sprawled helplessly on the ground—quite motionless.

The Night is Past

"WHAT! Daylight?"

And Betty, having started out of deep sleep, sat up sharply, rubbing her eyes.

There was the rosy light of dawn to light the scene for her.

"Oh," she cried out again, distressfully, "but they shouldn't have let me sleep on, right through the night! Why—why, I was to be called at midnight!"

There had been a part of the wrecked plane's fabric for her to shelter under. Starting to her feet, she quickly stepped clear of everything impeding her view of the camp and its desolate surroundings. And then came shock upon shock for her, so that she stood aghast, her eyes wide and staring.

The camp fire black—out! And no sign of either Polly or Jack! Where were they? Why had they let the camp fire go out? Something must be seriously wrong. Never under any circumstances was the fire—relied on to keep prowling beasts at bay—allowed even to die down, much less go out completely.

Betty, her heart beating faster than ever, started forward, glancing anxiously across to the rough bit of shelter which had been devised for Madame Dupont. Not a sound came from there.

"Polly! Polly darling!" Betty called softly, whilst running across to what had been the camp's makeshift sick-bay. "You in there, Polly?"

No answer.

"Polly! Where are you, Polly! Hi!"

Betty reached the shelter entrance. Clawing aside the strip of canvas that curtained the way in, she saw her chum—lying inert on the ground. Jack, too, collapsed across a box, was so heavily asleep that even shouting had not awakened him. And Madame Dupont had——

Gone!

The woman was gone! The place where she had lain as one who complained of being so seriously ill, was an empty couch now.

For a moment Betty could only stand dumbfounded. Jack and Polly in this state, and Madame Dupont—gone! And the Ankh—the Ankh! No longer did it adorn Jack's neck. It was gone with the woman; stolen by her, again!

"Hi, Polly, wake up, dear! Oh, you must wake up!" Betty suddenly yelled, stooping to administer rousing shakes. "Polly! Wake up, wake up!"

"Eh— wha'——"

"Oh, Polly darling, I know it's not your fault or Jack's, but—but——"

"Hallo?" the other girl half-stupidly mumbled, as she stared bewilderedly into the familiar face that was set so close to her own. "Goodness, Betty! Daylight? Here, what's happened then?"

"You're not ill, are you, Polly? You and Jack——"

"Ill? No! Only—sort of muzzy; heavy! What about Jack, then?"

"He's the same as you, dear. There he is—asleep——"

Betty got no further. Her chum, during some first glancing about, had now noticed that Madame Dupont was no longer here; and it was a circumstance which had banished instantly all Polly's dullness of mind. She was exclaiming intelligently as she struggled to stand up:

"That woman, Betty——"

"Gone, yes!" Betty nodded. "And that's the woman we were nursing. She's served us like this—oh, abominably!"

"But how—how did she manage it all?" Polly fiercely demanded. "Jack asleep as well? I—I suppose I'm in disgrace; fell asleep again, although I'd had my fair ration of sleep! But Jack—he would never—— Oh, he is not like that, Betty!"

There would have been Betty's repeated assurance, that in any case she could hold neither of her chums to blame; but at this instant she was pouncing to snatch up something lying upon the ground. She recognised it as a tiny phial from the medicine chest.

She read the label, then turned to staring Polly.

"Did you—did you—— Oh, I see! This bowl here—tea, was that it, Polly?"

"Yes, Betty. Jack brought me some hot tea. We had it together. Why?"

"Only that you needn't feel the least bit to blame, either of you. You wouldn't notice that something had been added to the tea."

"What!"

"Out of this phial," Betty said, throwing it away—for it was empty now. "So that's that! And now——"

"Oh, Betty, Betty!" gasped Polly. "The Ankh necklace! Is that—gone again?"

"Let's wake Jack up. Then we must see about getting after the woman. But she has six hours' start."

Polly drew a hissing, suffering breath. She could guess, from the way Betty had pityingly evaded the question about the necklace that it was gone. Both girls were realising how easily Madame Dupont had been able to do everything in the night. They were now to find that she had taken Jack's revolver and ammunition. There had even been opportunity for her to help herself to a supply of food and such necessities as she would be able to take with her.

"Yes, the revolver's gone!" Polly commented grimly, the moment she and Betty were kneeling on either side of Jack, who still lay sleeping like a log. "Hateful woman—utter rotter!"

"Polly—quiet! Listen!" was Betty's sudden interrupting entreaty. "Hark!"

Then, although they both held themselves quite still, not a sound could be heard.

"I don't like it," Betty muttered, at last. "I'm sure I did pick up a noise just then—from over there!"

She pointed, and so her chum knew which bit of the surrounding bush to continue watching anxiously. They were remembering that any enemy, having made a self-betraying noise by some clumsy movement, would be very likely to lie quite still for a bit.

Suddenly Jack writhed about as if he were going to wake up. He yawned loudly and growled complainingly.

"Geraway, chaps! I'll get up, but—heigh-ho!"—came another great yawn—"they must be doing it on us with first bell! Can't be time yet. Wha' sor' of a morning, chaps?"

Betty and Polly looked at each other emotionally. Poor Jack, he must have been dreaming, in his sleep, that he was back at Grangemoor School.

"You watch that bit of ground out there whilst I speak to him," Polly whispered to Betty. "Jack——"

"Eh? My hat!" he gasped, sitting up, wild-eyed. "Polly! And I—I've been to sleep! It—it wasn't my turn; I ought to have kept awake! What's happened, then?"

Before she could voice a word in answer, there came a thrilled outcry from Betty.

"Oh, look—look! See who it is coming? It's Dave!" Betty shrieked joyfully. "It's Dave!"

She added, with an immediate change to acute anxiety:

"But he is—alone!"

ALONE!

The next moment or two might have been charged with agonising dismay for Betty and Polly and Jack. This staunch chum of theirs, when they had last seen him, had been with the others; and so his turning-up all by himself like this could easily mean that disaster had happened to them.

But they saw him give reassuring waves of the left arm as he came running towards them, carrying his rifle in his right hand. More, he called out to them, breathlessly but calmly:

"It's all right!"

Then they all three rushed to meet him, saving him from having to pant over the last fifty yards of ground.

"Dave!" gasped Betty. "But what do you mean—all right?"

"The Ankh necklace!" he said. "That woman had got hold of it again, hadn't she?"

"Well?"

"Well, I've got it back from her, that's all!"

And, as calmly as he had spoken and smiled, he let them see the ancient trinket, ashine in the light of the rising sun.

Dave—of all people! And with the Ankh necklace, too! What does it all mean? Where are the rest of the Morcove chums? How did Dave manage to save the Ankh? You'll be longing to hear the answers to these questions and once more to join the expedition on its adventurous exploit. On no account, therefore, must you miss next week's issue of THE SCHOOLGIRL.

LITTLE LETTERS

From The Editor to a few of his reader-chums.

Jess Rosling (West End, Swanland).—I was very interested to read all about the rules and code of your Society. You are indeed lucky to have such lovely surroundings to meet in.

"Madge's Fan" (Cardiff).—I well remember the series you mentioned. The stories were very good, weren't they? I hope you are enjoying the new programme in SCHOOLGIRL every bit as much as the old one.

"Nancy of the Farm" (Totley, Sheffield).—My best thanks for introducing our paper to your friends, Nancy. Tell them I shall always be very pleased to hear from them.

"Madge" (Wanganui, New Zealand).—I will certainly consider your suggestion and may be able to do as you ask one day. Many thanks for your good wishes which are heartily reciprocated.

Betty Astbury (Birkenhead).—Yes, I agree, there are many points of resemblance between Dave and Pam. You will find just the type of articles you like in SCHOOLGIRL and that, I know, will greatly please you.

"A Canadian Reader" (Lethbridge, Alberta).—Your friends should write concerning the gifts. I am sorry they were disappointed. Did you receive the lovely photo-postcards of the Film Stars safely? Let me know when next you write.

Dramatic Chapters of a Popular and Unusual Serial

THE PAGODA OF PERIL

FOR NEW READERS.

CATHERINE STERNDALE and her cousins, MOLLY and CHARLES, are staying at a queer Chinese house owned by their UNCLE GERALD. Catherine makes a friend of a little Chinese girl, KWANYIN, whom Uncle Gerald seems to suspect. The cousins defend Kwanyin against a crafty Chinaman—KAI TAL, whom they strongly mistrust. Uncle Gerald, however, appears to have the greatest faith in Kai Tal, and has little sympathy for Kwanyin.

Kwanyin is searching for her father, who is missing. She thinks he is hidden in a Chinese hut on an island in the lake which is in the grounds of Pagoda Place. The three cousins, with Kwanyin, cross to the island. Catherine is about to enter the hut.

(Now read on.)

House of Strange Secrets

"STOP, Catherine! Don't go in! There's a Chinaman behind the door. It's dangerous!"

Catherine Sterndale heard her Cousin Charles' warning, but she did not heed.

She knew the risk she was taking. She knew that there must surely be a Chinaman lurking in this strange Chinese hut. But she and her cousins, Mollie and Charles, had come to the island to explore the hut, and she did not mean to go away without at least walking in.

But Charles took her by the arm and pulled her back.

"Look—the junk!" he exclaimed. "Don't you understand? Kai Tal is coming."

"And two other Chinamen," added Mollie.

Catherine tried to shake her arm free. She looked towards little Kwanyin. The Chinese girl had given the first warning that Kai Tal and the others were approaching the island in the junk, and she looked even more alarmed than Charles.

"But listen!" protested Catherine. "The door's open. If Kwanyin's father is really a prisoner in there——"

"Me tinkee yes," said Kwanyin. "Wicked Kai Tal make illusthious father of Kwanyin plisoner. Bad man, but him velly closs. You go way; me stay."

Catherine frowned. She was worried, and she did not know what to do.

If she entered the hut, then Kai Tal would report them to their uncle. That was the very least he would do. Anyway, they would all suffer.

Mollie and Charles would be punished, too, if she went into the hut.

"The junk can't arrive for a minute or two," said Catherine. "I can just walk into the hut. The door's open."

They all stared at the Chinese hut, and little Kwanyin walked towards the door.

It was for her sake that the three cousins had come to the island, for although their Uncle Gerald had full faith in the loyalty of his servant, Kai Tal, they had not.

They had had plenty of proof that he was a rogue. Only half an hour ago he had tied Charles up and taken him to the island.

"Listen!" said Catherine, and paused. "Uncle is bound to take our side. We can prove that Kai Tal kidnapped Charles. All right, then; we've a good reason to be here, and a good reason to explore the hut. I'm going to explore it."

Catherine turned back to the hut and then gave a gasp.

Kwanyin was already in the hut. The little Chinese girl had dodged past.

"Kwanyin!" Catherine called. "Wait for me!"

Kwanyin turned.

"Please, Kwanyin seek," she said. "Catleen not seek. Danger. Catleen velly gleat fliend; do nuff. No more. Kwanyin seek—alone."

But Catherine dashed forward and followed the little Chinese girl into the hut.

She looked down the short corridor at the great wooden idol, and then made for some bead curtains on the left.

She pushed her way through, and found herself in a small room furnished in the Chinese manner. There was not much furniture. One rug in the centre of the floor, a low divan in the corner, and an ornament or two could be seen.

No other doorway led from this room.

"Not here," said Catherine, turning.

But she heard Kwanyin give a sharp cry.

The little Chinese girl had pulled back the rug from the floor.

"Lookee!" she cried.

But Catherine had already seen what she pointed out.

There was a trapdoor in the floor.

In great excitement, Catherine dropped to her knees. She pushed and groped round that trapdoor, but it could not be pushed down; it could not be lifted.

But from below Catherine fancied she heard movements. She pressed her ear to the ground and listened. The movements became more distinct. There was a shuffling sound, then something metallic.

"Listen, Kwanyin!" she said huskily.

Kwanyin's eyes shone. She listened eagerly, almost hungrily, like a child who hears a voice by telephone for the first time.

"It is someone," she said.

Catherine's eyes sparkled with delight.

"Oh, Kwanyin. I hope it's your father!" she said exultantly. "If it is, then I'll see that he is set free."

Tears shone in Kwanyin's eyes. She clasped her hands earnestly.

"Oh, please—please open the door!" she begged "Oh, if it is illustlious father!"

Her joy went to Catherine's heart. She felt that she would do anything, however risky, to find Kwanyin's father.

"Charles!" Catherine called.

She turned to the door, but Kwanyin, listening, called to her.

"Hear—hear——" she said.

By
ELIZABETH
CHESTER

Illustrations by Baker

Catherine paused to listen again, and now she heard a voice calling.

"Kwanyin!"

Kwanyin babbled back excitedly in Chinese, a sob in her voice.

Catherine hurried out of the room. If Charles and Mollie would help they might be able to open the door. Charles would think of some ingenious way. A boy usually could

"Oh, quick!" cried Catherine, in thrilled excitement.

Her cousins, who were watching the junk, turned to her.

"What, not found him?" asked Mollie.

"Yes. He's spoken to Kwanyin. He's below the floorboards. There's a trapdoor we have to open."

The junk was only a few hundred yards away

"Come on!" said Charles, through his teeth. "Let's shut ourselves in the place—bar them out until we've opened the trapdoor."

He looked round for an implement, and picked up a stout stick. With his penknife he could sharpen the end and use it as a lever.

The three cousins rushed into the corridor. Charles slammed the door. Catherine and Mollie pushed through the bead curtains.

But there they paused.

Catherine stared about her blankly. There was no sign of Kwanyin anywhere.

"Well, where is she?" asked Mollie.

Charles had bolted the door. Now he came into the room and had the situation explained. He at once did his best to open the trapdoor. He rapped and listened, and rapped again, but no sound came

Then Mollie, looking out of the window through the thick net curtains, gave a gasp of alarm.

"The junk's landed! They're here! Oh crumbs!"

"Keep them at bay!" said Catherine fiercely. "We've got to find Kwanyin. What could have happened to her?"

The three cousins searched the room. The divan was fixed to the floor, and there was no room beneath it. There seemed no movable panels in the wall. There was just the trapdoor that suggested a means of escape.

Charles had gone into the hall, and now stood looking up and down in bewilderment, for he knew that there was more than one room in the hut. Yet there were no doorways.

But as he stared at the idol, he saw a suspicious line on the wall. It was like a thin crack running from top to bottom.

His eyes glistening, he examined it closely, and found a similar crack on the other side.

It was a secret doorway behind the idol!

"Here—quick—I say, girls!" he called.

Catherine and Molly ran into the corridor, and then, greatly excited by his discovery, they tried to move the huge idol aside.

But it was beyond their powers.

"Phew! It couldn't have whisked open," said Catherine. "I only looked out of the doorway and called out. I was only a moment. Kwanyin simply must have pulled open the trapdoor. Come on—it's the only way. I know someone was down there—I heard his voice."

She pushed through the bead curtains, and then a sharp cry escaped her.

Molly and Charles rushed to her aid. But they stood amazed. For in the room was Kai Tal!

He stood there, arms folded, a terrible glint of anger in his eyes.

Not a trace of a door or window open—nothing at all showed to tell them how he had entered.

But there he was, master of the situation.

They were trapped.

Kai Tal Takes His Leave

"WHAT do you want here?" Catherine asked sharply.

Kai Tal bowed his head. As usual, his words were softly spoken, and sarcastic.

"Very humble and despicable Kai Tal enters his own abode to find the inquiring and prying, but otherwise admirable, elegant, and worthy——"

"Oh, cut all that," said Charles in contempt. "Say what you mean. The wonderful and faultless Kai Tal has found us looking for Kwanyin's father in——"

Kai Tal stiffened. His face showed for once his emotion.

He was obviously amazed. And Catherine realised with dismay that Charles had blundered. He had given too much away.

"It is to seek the father of Kwanyin you come here?" asked Kai Tal softly. "And then it is possible that the evil-minded and trouble-making Kwanyin also has come here?"

The three cousins were silent. Charles could have bitten his tongue off for being so unguarded.

"We're not discussing anything with you," said Catherine, tossing her head in defiance. "Any questions can be asked by Uncle Gerald."

Kai Tal bowed, walked past them smiling, turned into the corridor, and walked through the doorway.

"Where's he going?" asked Charles anxiously.

"Charles, you goop!" said Molly in wrath. "You've given the show away. He's up against Kwanyin. He'll try to hide us here——"

"My goodness, yes. Come on quickly. We may be locked in," said Catherine. "He'll keep us from uncle——"

But even as Catherine stepped into the corridor her uncle came into view outside.

He paused at the entrance to the hut and drew up, startled, Catherine guessed, to find them there.

"Catherine," he said in reproach, "what are you doing here in Kai Tal's house?"

Catherine was silent. It had not occurred to her that this was Kai Tal's house.

"Spying—seeking someone. Father of Kwanyin," said Kai Tal, standing behind Uncle Gerald.

The three cousins exchanged looks. They were in a predicament now.

But Catherine made up her mind quickly what line to take.

"We came here, uncle, in the first place to find Charles. At least, that's why we came to the island. Kai Tal had him brought here—roped up——"

"Yes, he set about me," said Charles.

Uncle Gerald turned to Kai Tal.

"Is this true?" he asked sharply.

Kai Tal hunched his shoulders.

"The young noble gentleman has such an imagination that not to write illustrious stories is a waste of Heaven-sent gift."

Catherine snorted.

"We are telling the truth, you scheming rogue!" she snapped.

"Catherine!" her uncle exclaimed.

"I mean it," said Catherine fiercely. "That man is a rogue, uncle Charles found him torturing Kwanyin. Charles hit him. Then he struck Charles down, tied him up, and had him brought here. We followed and cut Charles loose. And if you still think we are all telling lies, then you must believe that Kai Tal is the only truthful person here. It seems very funny."

"Hear, hear!" put in Mollie rebelliously.

For a moment anger showed in Uncle Gerald's face. Then he frowned heavily.

"This must be seen into," he said. "I want to be fair. I admittedly cannot believe that you three would tell such a stupid lie. But you must see how difficult it is for me to believe such a thing about an old and trusted servant——"

Catherine's heart gave a jump of hope.

She suddenly saw that the case was not hopeless, that even now she might unmask Kai Tal to her uncle. And if she could do that she could make him see, too, that Kwanyin was in the right.

It was only Kai Tal who had turned her uncle against the little Chinese girl.

"Uncle, let's talk it over alone," she said.

"In front of Kai Tal, please," said her uncle.

"Very well," said Catherine. "Then please ask him who he has prisoner here, and where Kwanyin is."

Her uncle turned to Kai Tal and spoke in Chinese. Kai Tal seemed to answer sharply. His lip seemed to curl in a sneer.

The cousins could not understand a word, but from the tone of voices and expression, they judged that their uncle and Kai Tal were quarrelling.

Finally, Uncle Gerald, to their surprise, pointed to the junk.

Kai Tal bowed, and, without a word, turned away.

"Uncle, you—you've ordered him off?" asked Catherine.

Uncle Gerald spoke heavily.

"Yes," he said. "He admitted that he did attack Charles. For a Chinaman to be struck is an offence he cannot forgive. He said you all three are against him."

Catherine heaved a mighty sigh of relief.

"Oh, thank goodness we have opened your eyes to him, uncle!" he said. "And—and he is really going?"

Uncle Gerald shrugged his shoulders.

"Yes, he has said that he will no longer stay here if he is not trusted. He is going to pack his things and leave. He says, 'Let Kwanyin deceive me—let her work her evil magic and schemes.' I shall suffer, and he will not be here to protect me."

Molly gave a chirp of joy.

"Lucky you, uncle! Good riddance to bad rubbish!" she said. "If that's the last of Kai Tal, whoopee, says me."

Charles adjusted his glasses.

"It's certainly a load from my mind," he said. "I have a wonderful gift for judging character, I've been told. I can always pick out a rogue or an impostor."

Uncle Gerald spoke coldly.

"We cannot all have your wonderful gift, Charles. However, let's not argue about it. In the circumstances, I will overlook your defiance. Let's get back to the house. I have arranged a party for you this afternoon. I want you to forget Kai Tal and Kwanyin and the rest of it, and just be happy."

He turned away as though the whole matter were settled. But one point remained.

"Uncle, where is Kwanyin?" said Catherine. "And there is really someone hidden under that room—there——"

Her uncle turned back a little wearily.

"Oh, didn't I explain? Kai Tal

admitted that his brother captured Kwanyin. He was under the floor, and called her. He opened the trapdoor——"

"And now?" asked Catherine, wide-eyed. "She's there! Oh, we can't leave her there, and——"

"No, no. She was taken from there by a secret passage. They have left her in the junk now. If we are quick——"

He gave an exclamation of annoyance, for, looking towards the water, he saw the junk moving off.

"I say," exclaimed Charles, "he's stranded us, the awful cad!"

"There is another boat," said Uncle Gerald. "Come along. Let's put all this out of our minds. There's nothing more for you to worry about. And as to Kwanyin's father, I shall have to tell you the truth——"

The cousins waited eagerly, wondering what the truth was.

"Kwanyin's father," said Uncle Gerald, "was arrested by the English police here. We did not want to worry her or upset her. I allowed him to drive my car, which he often did in China. Unfortunately, he drove dangerously, it was claimed, and now he is in prison——"

"Oh!" said Catherine, in deep dismay. "Poor Kwanyin! And she doesn't know! She only guesses that he's a prisoner somewhere! Oh dear, poor Kwanyin!"

And Catherine's mind was more concerned for Kwanyin's unhappiness, loneliness, and fear, than with the promised party that their uncle had arranged.

If she had known that Kwanyin, far from being on the junk that was making straight for the shore, was actually still in Kai Tal's house, her concern would have been a good deal greater.

For Kwanyin, in pitch darkness, was crouched on a damp stone floor, her arms tied behind her back, her ankles bound, and a scarf wound round her mouth.

Once again Kai Tal had lied!

The Cunning of Kwanyin

KWANYIN crouched in the corner of her little prison. She had been there for more than an hour, and she had abandoned hope of her rescue.

Her heart was filled with sadness. For now she knew that she had been fooled and tricked. For a moment ago she really believed that her father was hidden below the room in Kai Tal's house. But she could believe it no longer.

And now she could not believe that Catherine would rescue her. She had heard them go.

Catherine, Charles, and Molly, she regarded as her only true and reliable friends. Every other hand seemed against her, and the little Chinese girl was now in the depths of despair.

If Catherine really failed her, she would feel that there was no hope. She would be utterly at the mercy of Kai Tal.

She had not heard of his dismissal.

But Kwanyin even now could not really bring herself to believe that Catherine would not try to find her when hours elapsed and she did not appear.

Kwanyin wriggled again, and now, by working her face against the wall, she moved the bandage slightly. The hard wall grazed her face, but she persevered.

Diligently though she worked, however, she coud not move the scarf to free her mouth. Breathing hard from exertion, she paused. As she did so a faint sound came to her.

She listened again, and her eyes widened.

"Kwanyin!" called a voice softly.

It was her father!

Kwanyin tried to speak; she wriggled, struggled, but the scarf was too tightly bound for her to be able to reply.

"Kwanyin——"

The voice grew fainter. Kwanyin grew frantic, for she guessed that her father was moving away, searching in another direction.

But a moment later she ceased struggling, for she could hear movements close at hand.

There was a sharp click. Light flooded the darkness. But its suddenness blinded her. She blinked, unable to see anything but a vague shape.

It took only a moment, however, for her to become accustomed to the light, and she saw clearly.

She stared. She stared again, her eyes rounding.

For in front of her stood Kai Tal. Two other Chinamen were with him.

Kwanyin stared at Kai Tal in horror. She feared this man.

She knew that he hated her. She knew that he was her father's bitter enemy.

His silence was more awful than if he had spoken. Motioning to his followers, he stooped over Kwanyin and lifted her.

With a quick movement he covered her eyes with a scarf.

It was five minutes later that Kwanyin's eyes were uncovered. She was in a bright red room, which she had never seen before. On one wall was a golden, scaly dragon, surrounded by small, glitterings suns. A red carpet covered the floor, and an idol with a nodding head stood in one corner.

Kwanyin stared at the idol in fascination. There was something unusual about it, even to Chinese eyes. It was queerly carved. The arms seemed to move, as well as the nodding head.

From the arms her attention wandered to the hands.

Then Kwanyin noticed that they were real—they were human hands. She did not move; she hardly breathed. She saw the hands move and twitch.

On one finger was a large ring. At a glance she recognised it was her father's.

"Father!" she gasped.

The scarf was torn from her face, but her arms were pinioned behind her.

"The highly untrustworthy Kwanyin," said Kai Tal, with a sneer, "will perhaps consider the feelings of her aged but unhonoured father, and not try to hold converse with him when he is not able to talk."

Kwanyin stared in fascination at the hands. But the more she stared the less certain she was that those hands were indeed her father's. The ring was his. But were they his hands? They were a little too broad. They were different.

Her heart was pumping with fear; and she dared not voice her suspicion.

"What am I to do?" she asked, in Chinese.

"To write a letter to the girl Catherine and her cousins, who so ingeniously push their noses into matters which can be no concern of theirs," said Kai Tal.

"What am I to write to them?" whispered Kwanyin.

Kai Tal indicated a lacquer writing-table in one corner, and the man holding Kwanyin's arms pushed her to it.

Trembling, afraid to struggle, she sat in the chair.

Kai Tal pushed a pen into her hand.

"Write!" he said.

Kwanyin poised the pen over the paper. Her hand trembled so that she could hardly write at all:

"'Kind Catherine.'" dictated Kai Tal, "for in such absurd manner you

WITH eager fingers Catherine strove desperately to lift the trap-door while Kwanyin waited with agonised impatience. Somewhere below the little Chinese girl's father was a helpless prisoner.

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MY DEAR READERS,—You have, of course, met Chum before. You all know what a lovable old fellow he is. I secretly think him quite the friendliest black cocker spaniel who ever existed, although, for the sake of those readers who also own black cocker spaniels, I am willing to admit that there may be others as nice!

But Chum, for all his niceness, almost earned several thick black marks against his name last week. The gardener, in fact, hasn't forgiven him yet! I'll tell you all about it, shall I?

Know, then, that Chum, owing to his doggy habit of burying favourite bones in various parts of the garden, has been allotted one small portion of flower-bed to himself. This territory is a nicely hidden spot in the middle of the shrubbery, bordering on the neighbouring garden. Here he can rake about and bury as much as he likes.

And Chum, wisely enough, thoroughly behaves himself. He keeps strictly to his own patch of "garden," and leaves alone the carefully nurtured beds which old Stubbins, the aged odd-job man, so carefully looks after.

Judge, then, our horror when, one fine July morning, we discovered a vast, gaping hole in the middle of old Stubbins' pet pansy-bed!

Oh, yes, Chum was to blame.

The things Stubbins said about Chum would have made even that perky old rascal put his tail between his legs and hang his head for shame.

And then we discovered the reason for Chum's unaccountable lapse. We found why he had deserted his own allotted patch. On the other side of the garden fence, opposite Chum's "garden," sat a large black cat licking its paws, and staring with wickedly glinting eyes.

And on Chum's nose there was a long scratch!

And so, of course, we found a fresh patch for Chum on the opposite side of the garden, and forgave him. But I still catch Stubbins glaring at Chum now and then!

NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE.

of THE SCHOOLGIRL" contains a particularly fine programme of stories. First, there is a magnificent long complete tale of Cliff House School, entitled "CLARA TAKES CHARGE." It is the first of a new series in which you will join Babs & Co. on holiday at a castle on the Cornish coast. Clara Trevlyn, the inimitable tomboy, plays a leading role.

In addition to a further sparkling complete story of Her Harum-scarum Highness, by Ida Melbourne, there will be two fine instalments of our two serials: "MORCOVE IN UNKNOWN AFRICA," by Marjorie Stanton, and "THE PAGODA OF PERIL," by Elizabeth Chester. And—last, but not least—"Out of School Hours."

With best wishes,

YOUR EDITOR.

would address the young lady—'kind Catherine,' forgive me that I have made much trouble in bad way. I tell truth about Kai Tal——'"

Kwanyin looked at him in wonder.

"To say that I speak truth in saying you are bad——"

Kai Tal's eyes glittered. He rapped her knuckles sharply so that she uttered a gasp of pain.

"Write; not speak!" he said.

Kwanyin's hand wrote shakily. She put down the words he dictated:

"'But I have learn truth of my illustrious father. He is in police prison. I go now to see him. For kindness I thank. My sorrow for wrong I do people.

"Your humble and devoted admirer,

"KWANYIN.'"

Kwanyin signed the note, and Kai Tal read it.

"Again write it, and again, and then once again so that there shall be no trace of uncertainty in the bad writing of the incompetent Kwanyin," he said. "So that it shall not appear that some industrious spider has crawled upon the paper, but that a highly educated Chinese girl has written a letter to a friend."

Six times Kwanyin wrote the letter before Kai Tal would pass it. She addressed an envelope, and placed the letter inside it, watched all the time by the suspicious Kai Tal.

"And now?" she asked.

Kai Tal snapped his fingers, and made a gesture of dismissal. Instantly Kwanyin was seized; the scarf was bound about her mouth, and she was carried off.

Kai Tal, smiling, turned the envelope over in his hand, and then went silently away.

"All most admirably conceived and executed, O worthy and ingenious Kai Tal!" he told himself.

So far as he could see all was indeed well; but then he did not know that for once the little Chinese girl had been too clever for him.

CATHERINE AND her cousins were laughing merrily. Uncle Gerald was in cheery mood; Miss Smith, the secretary, was very friendly, and the "party" that had been arranged was a great success.

It was what Uncle Gerald called a Chinese party.

There were singers, and there were strange dancers. The singing was sometimes solemn, sometimes amusing, and funniest of all was a little man who was a Chinese clown.

He had a solemn face, and did the most stupid and ludicrous things in a very serious manner. He could fall over nothing; he could somersault, sit down where there wasn't a chair, and do it very slowly and laboriously. He also ate an old tennis ball with evident enjoyment, under the impression that it was an orange.

Actually the party was a sort of cabaret entertainment to amuse them while they sat about on cushions, drank tea, and ate wonderful cakes and sweetmeats.

Only one cloud marred Catherine's happiness, and that was the absence of Kwanyin.

Miss Smith sent a Chinese servant to find her, and he returned to say that she was putting on a special frock, and would come down to do an exhibition dance.

"Good!" said Mollie. "I was getting worried about her. Funny we haven't seen her since she landed."

But twenty minutes passed, and Kwanyin did not appear. This time Uncle Gerald dispatched another servant.

"If she doesn't buck up, all these lovely cakes will be gone," said Mollie. "Gosh, they are good! Wish I had the recipe."

At that moment the door opened; the servant who had been sent to find Kwanyin, entered. He was bearing an envelope in his hand.

"Kwanyin send," he said to Catherine.

Catherine, in surprise, slit the envelope, and pulled out the letter.

It was the note dictated by Kai Tal, and as she read it Catherine's eyes widened.

"My goodness; she's gone! Uncle, Kwanyin's gone!" she cried.

"Gone! Gone where——"

Catherine handed him the note, and he read it through, frowning.

"My goodness! How did she find out? And where can she have gone to look? This wants seeing into!"

He crossed to the door, and Catherine hurried after him.

"I'll come, too, uncle," she said.

"No, no; please stay! I'll get the car out, and bring her back in no time. She'll be at the station by now. You go on with the party."

He closed the door in Catherine's face.

Meanwhile, Mollie was studying Kwanyin's note, with Charles looking over her shoulder.

Catherine, approaching them, looked at the note from behind.

"What's the word underlined?" she asked.

"No word is underlined," said Charles.

But Catherine took the note, turned it over, and studied it.

"My goodness, the word prison is underlined with her finger-nail, or something fairly sharp. And other letters are——"

In growing excitement she took the note to the window and studied it. She soon saw that various letters had been underlined by pressure from a finger-nail. Slowly she made them into words:

"H—e—l—p prison—l—a—k——"

"Help—prison—lak—lake!" gasped Mollie.

"She's a prisoner. Someone was watching her write that note," said Charles excitedly.

"Someone made her write it," said Catherine sharply.

She glanced warily at the Chinese dancers, the clown, and the others. They were all intently listening.

Catherine lowered her voice.

"They'll try to stop us if we go by the door; but there's the window part open. You two go to the door; I'll go out by the window, and just run and hide. You get out somehow."

Mollie turned to the door. Charles hesitated, then followed. As one, the Chinese servants moved towards them.

Then, quick as a flash, Catherine made for the window, pushed it wide, jumped out, and ran like a hare into the bushes.

Will the cousins' desperate plan succeed? Will they be able to evade the clutches of the Chinese servants and rescue the helpless Kwanyin from the clutches of Kai Tal? The answers to these questions and a most thrilling sequel will be contained in next week's enthralling instalment. Order your SCHOOLGIRL now!