

FOUR FINE STORIES and FOUR PAGES of ARTICLES

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Incorporating
"SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN"



CLARA LEADS THE WAY—

In the Cliff House campaign
to brighten up Pellabay Castle

(See this week's enthralling
long complete holiday story)

BABS & CO. ON HOLIDAY: An Enthralling Complete Tale of the Cliff House Chums at a Cornish Castle



CASTLE of CONFLICT

The Tables Turned

"MARJORIE, old thing—"
"How are you feeling now?"

Marjorie Hazeldene, from the white pillows of the bed against which she was propped, smiled faintly. "I—I'm all right," she returned bravely.

But Barbara Redfern & Co., her chums from Cliff House School, knew that wasn't true. Marjorie herself knew it wasn't true, for the doctor who had just visited her told her that on no account was she to think of getting up to-day, and even when she did get up, she must take things very gently for quite a considerable time.

She looked ill, if ever a girl did. Those soft lips of hers, so bravely trying to smile, were quivering a little.

For last term Marjorie had worked over-hard at Cliff House School. When, with the seven girls who now invaded her room, she had come to Pellabay Castle Hotel for the summer vacation, she had been in a rather forlorn state of health. A nasty fall, followed by a night of damp exposure on the bleak hillside on which the castle stood, had brought about a sudden collapse, together with a severe chill.

"Can't get up?" Tomboy Clara Trevlyn asked sympathetically, shaking her head.

"Well, the doctor says that—that I'm to stay in bed for the day," Marjorie replied hesitantly. "But oh, I'm so dreadfully sorry, you girls. Please don't let me interfere with your enjoyment."

The chums exchanged a glance at that. It was rather an ironical glance. Their enjoyment! When so far they had had to fight so hard for every bit of fun they had obtained at Pellabay Castle! When only an hour ago they

had all been given notice to leave, by the hard-faced manageress, Mrs. Coates.

A flash came into Tomboy Clara's eyes as she thought of that. Unconsciously her lips hardened. It was her fault, she told herself bitterly—her fault that Marjorie was ill; that her chums had come here at all.

For Pellabay Castle, the ancient ruin which her Aunt Grace had converted into a first-class modern hotel, perched high above the sea on its own headland on the rocky Cornish coast, was in

PELLABAY CASTLE, romantic holiday home of the chums of Cliff House School, is also proving the scene of a strange and dramatic mystery. How Babs & Co. meet this unexpected situation is told in these exciting chapters by

HILDA RICHARDS

charge of a manageress and her daughter now—that manageress, Mrs. Coates, and the daughter, the scheming and crafty Ida Coates.

Those two, Clara was convinced, were playing some funny game. It was a game directed at the ruin of the hotel. None of the advertised amenities which her Aunt Grace had spent her money on was working. The food was poor. Routine and discipline had taken the place of that go-as-you-please spirit, which Clara's aunt had been so anxious to foster.

Happily the guests arrived; disillusioned they left at the earliest possible moment.

From the first the chums, led by Clara, had been up in arms against the tyranny of Pellabay. Vehemently Clara declared that if her aunt knew what was going on, Mrs. Coates and her daughter would be dismissed without delay.

For her chums' sake and her aunt's sake, Clara had taken matters in hand. She had led the rebellion, fought tooth and nail at every step by Mrs. Coates and Ida, to establish a happier regime at Pellabay. The result was this:—

She and her chums had notice to quit!

"But we're jolly well not going," the Tomboy said fiercely, when they had left Marjorie and were back in the corridor outside. "We couldn't go now—not leaving old Marjorie behind!" "No, rather not, you know," Bessie Bunter bleated.

"But I guess we've got our marching orders," Leila Carroll reminded her.

"Yes, and I guess we're just jolly well going to ignore them," Mabel Lynn put in.

And they looked stubbornly determined at that. Even Jimena Carstairs, of the sleek Eton crop and the shining monocle, looked fierce. Little Marcelle Biquet, the diminutive French girl, pouted her lips, and Bessie, the fattest and hungriest girl in the party, pulled a scowling face which she fondly imagined expressed her iron determination.

They weren't going to knuckle under—rather not! They were standing by their tomboy chum. They were also standing by Marjorie.

"But I sus-say, we've had no breakfast," Bessie put in plaintively. "I dud-don't want to complain, you know,

but you don't want two invalids on your hands. And girls with such delicate constitutions as mine must eat."

"We've money," Clara announced suddenly.

"Well, yes, heaps of it! But what's the good of money if you can't spend it?"

"The village," Clara said, "is five miles away. That's just a nice walk. There's a shop there where they sell everything. As we can't get food in this place, I vote we go along to it and buy up all we can. Besides, I'd rather like to get old Marjorie some grapes and things like that. You know what sort of grub she's likely to get if it's left to Mrs. Coates."

Faces brightened. Even Bessie beamed, though to be sure she was not cheered by the mention of the five-mile walk. But the walk, they all felt, would do them good—and wasn't it a glorious walk along the cliff path, with the wild Atlantic wind blustering in one's face? Marcelle whooped.

"Ciel, I lof ze walk! And perhaps we take ze bathing costumes—yes? And have ze loffy swim in ze sea."

"And perhaps instead of coming back by road, we might get a boat," Mabel Lynn suggested.

"Ripping!"

"Come on, let's get our things." In eager haste now they tripped along the stone-walled corridor that led down into the huge banqueting hall. Thanks to Mrs. Coates, they had no quarters in the castle, having been put in a small bungalow in the castle grounds. A few guests were seated in the banqueting hall. In the absence of other amusements they were somewhat boredly reading, and they looked up apathetically as the revel streamed down.

Out into the bright sunlight they went, across the lawns. And then Clara, who was leading, pulled up with a sudden jerk.

"My hat! I say, what's happening?" They had come within sight of the bungalow. But what a centre of attraction that bungalow was now! Clustered around was a great crowd of guests, and outside the door was a stack of cases and boxes.

Even as they stood and stared, Mrs. Coates and Ida came out of the bungalow, staggering under two suitcases which they added to the pile. Clara jumped.

"Our luggage!"

"My hat, they're throwing us out!"

"Clara!"

But Clara was not heeding. Very grim was the expression that appeared on her face as with giant strides she tempestuously stamped towards the scene. The crowd saw her. A little murmur went up as she appeared.

As Mrs. Coates picked up another bag, Clara caught her arm.

"Thank you, but you can put that down," she said cuttingly. "Who gave you permission to interfere with our luggage?"

Mrs. Coates spun round. Her face paled a little as she found herself gazing into the blazing eyes of the Tomboy. There was something very fearsome, very compelling about Clara when she looked like that.

Her thin lips came together.

"I'm asking you a question," Clara said ominously.

"And what right have you—" Ida began.

"I'm talking to your mother, not you," Clara shortly silenced her. "Well, Mrs. Coates?"

Babs & Co. had arrived now. Rather grimly they lined up behind their

leader. From the crowd went up another murmur.

"I gave you notice," Mrs. Coates said icily. "You have chosen to ignore it. As," she added bitingly, "I am not in the habit of having my orders disregarded, and as I meant what I said, I am taking the liberty of sending your luggage on to the station."

"I see!" Something seemed to flash in Clara's eyes. "And we, Mrs. Coates, also meant what we said. You may be manageress of this hotel, but my aunt is the owner, and my aunt has given me some share of responsibility. We came here at her invitation, not yours, and I say again that we're not going. Come on, kids, let's move this luggage back!"

Mrs. Coates stiffened.

"Wait!" she cried. "Clara, don't you dare touch that!"

But Clara had already touched it. She had picked up one case, was handing it to Babs. She picked up another.

"Wait a minute!" Mrs. Coates said thickly. "Wait a minute!" She looked at the crowd of assembled guests as if for support; but the guests for once seemed in no wise disposed to interfere.

"Clara, I insist that you drop those cases at once!" she cried. "You must realise that in the circumstances I can do nothing else. In the interests of my guests, of the hotel—"

"In the what?" Clara swung round to ask scornfully. "Is it in the interests of your guests to half starve them? Is it in the interests of the hotel to make people fed-up as soon as they arrive here, and want to get out of it as soon as they can?"

"Is it in the interests of the hotel that one can't walk a yard without reading some piffing notice which tells them that they'll be committing an offence against your rules? And what about closing the bathhouse and the swimming-pool? What about allowing the lawns

and the gardens to run to seed, and shutting up the recreation-rooms? Is that in the interests of your guests?"

From the guests assembled came something more than a murmur this time. There were a few approving nods.

Mrs. Coates paled a little.

"I am only doing what I think is for the best," she said. "My duty—"

"Your duty!" Clara repeated scornfully. "Your duty apparently is to ruin this hotel. Well, I've a duty, too—to my aunt. My duty is to stop you—"

"Stop!" shrielled Mrs. Coates.

And her face went white suddenly. Very real the alarm that was in her eyes. Again she flashed a look round—a quick, almost hunted look. She saw the guests staring at her, wonderingly, curiously, some a little askance. One man stepped forward.

"Well, I must say," he said slowly, "for my part I haven't found things here to come up to my expectations."

"No, nor I!" chimed in somebody else.

"We were told in the brochure that advertised this place—"

"Please," Mrs. Coates said—"please!" She stood still, while Ida, her daughter, a scowl on her face, fell back. "Oh, please bear with me!" she cried. "It is false! It is wicked! Why should I want to ruin a place out of which I am making my living?"

"Well, there is certainly some truth in what this young lady says. Why aren't the amusements of the hotel going?"

"Yes, and why don't we get better food?"

"Why so many restrictions?"

"I'm sorry—really!" Mrs. Coates faltered. "I—I assure you I was only acting within my instructions. If you have any complaints, why, please, didn't you bring them to me? I want



IN reply to the woman's question, Clara shook her head vehemently. "Miss Coates does not come on the committee," she said flatly. There were murmurs of surprise, but Clara was adamant; she did not trust Ida Coates.

to see every one of you happy. I want you to enjoy yourselves. But these girls—"

"Those young ladies," said the man who had first spoken, "have only been sticking up for what they believed to be their rights."

Mrs. Coates gasped.

"Clara!"

"Clara!"

"I—I'm sorry! The words came with difficulty, however. They were accompanied by a vinegary expression which gave them the immediate lie. "I am sorry, I mean, that you should have been under a misapprehension as to my intentions. I do most sincerely assure you that I was only doing what I considered the best. But we all make mistakes, of course, and I hope," she added, with sweeping graciousness, "that when I make a mistake I can put it right."

Her words were greeted with approving murmurs.

"So—so if you care to remain," Mrs. Coates added, swallowing with an effort the gall of that offer.

Clara smiled grimly. Up from the guests went a little cheer. Babs & Co. delightedly nudged each other.

"We'll remain all right," Clara said.

"But while we're on the subject of complaints, what about doing the things your guests want you to do? What about opening the swimming-pool and the moat bathouse? Why not have the tennis courts cut and trimmed, and throw open the indoor recreation-rooms? And what about," Clara added boldly, "giving us more and better food to eat, and dispensing with all the silly restrictions you've made?"

Hate flashed from Mrs. Coates' eyes.

"I will think about it," she stiltedly promised.

"But it doesn't want thinking about, I guess," Leila Carroll put in. "Why not give us the low-down now?"

"Yes, rather!"

Again Mrs. Coates paused. Again she looked baffled. But the chums for once were carrying the crowd with them. Their grievances to a great extent were the grievances of the others. There was a cry.

"Yes, go on, Mrs. Coates! If you really feel you've made a mistake—"

"Very well," Mrs. Coates assented, but her face gave the impression that it was far from well. "I will do as you wish. I must warn you, though, that it will add considerably to the expense of running the establishment. As you assume so much on behalf of your aunt, I take it you will assume responsibility for that?"

"For anything and everything," Clara assured her cheerfully, "which will make Pellabay Castle the success it ought to be, and which, from this moment, it's going to be. Just one more request, Mrs. Coates—"

"Oh, my hat!" gurgled Babs.

"Yes?"—in a grim tone from Mrs. Coates.

"As you've so kindly removed our luggage out of the bungalow, and as we don't like the bungalow, and as there is plenty of room in the castle itself, give us rooms there."

"But—"

"We booked rooms in the castle," Clara sturdily reminded her.

Pause. Clearly Clara should have shrilled at the look she received. But Mrs. Coates agreed feebly. She couldn't do otherwise.

"Very well," she said, tight-lipped.

"I will make arrangements at once."

And, with that, she strode away. The guests, dispersed. The chums, in a laughing group, remained by their luggage.

But as Ida followed her mother she threw them a glance. It was a glance of hate, of malice, of all things uncharitable. Clara & Co. had at last forced her mother's hand. Clara & Co. were, most decidedly, victorious.

But not if Ida knew it should that happy state of affairs remain for very long!



Wake Up, Pellabay!

"TOPPING, what?"

"Spiffing!"

"Ciel, it sees what you call this in 'scumptious'! Ma r-celle shrilled, and clapped her hands as she gazed round in delight at the very snug and pretty room to which she and Jimima and Leila had been removed. It was ten minutes later.

The Cliff House chums were at last installed in the castle. They had two large, adjoining rooms on the first floor, which overlooked the long drive that led to the drawbridge, flanked by its two picturesque towers.

They were content. A happiness they had not known since they had entered these precincts was now theirs. In one blow, apparently, they had achieved all that they had fought for.

"But it's not enough," Clara said now. Clara was in her doourest mood. "It's not enough! Mrs. Coates didn't do this to please us. She just did it because she was frightened of us!"

"Obviously! Just whivering in her old elastic-sided boots—what?" Jimima genially asked. "Having overstepped the jolly old mark, she had to make the gracious gesture and get back to it. Still, good work, Clara, old Spartan! Oh, decidedly good work!" And Jimima grinned. "Wonder what she's feeling like now?"

"I'm not bothering," was Clara's characteristic retort. "We haven't started yet. For weeks and weeks Mrs. Coates has been sending this place to the dogs. If we hadn't arrived on the scene there wouldn't have been another guest in it at the end of the month. As it is, the place must have got a bad reputation, and it's up to us—or, at least, to me—to put it back on the map! I owe that to my Aunt Grace."

"And what," Barbara put in quietly but succinctly, "is up to you, is also up to us. But how does one put a place back on the map?"

"We've got to wake it up," Clara said.

"Agreed!"

"We've got to make things hum." "Hum's the word," Jimima heartily applauded. "Like a hive of bees and fifteen thousand spinning tops all working at the same time—what? But the method, Clara beloved?"

But Clara was not listening. It was obvious that something quite fierce was going on in the Tomboy's brain.

Pellabay Castle, obviously, had to win back its favour. At its dead loss of progress it would show a credit loss on the season's working, and Aunt Grace, as Clara knew, had practically sunk her last penny into the venture.

Its fame, once again, must be spread abroad. It must be known that its amusements were in full swing. It must be—

"My hat!"

"But you haven't got one on," Jimima observed innocently.

"Jimmy, don't fool—please!" Clara begged. Her eyes were blazing now.

"Listen to me! I've got the idea. What about a sports festival?"

"A what?"

"A sports festival. Cricket, tennis, boating, swimming, races—the giant marquee erected in the grounds. All sorts of water events, like—like an obstacle swimming race," Clara rushed on, the idea rushing out now in a torrent of words. "Oh, my hat, this is it, kids! It's it, I tell you! We'll organise it. We'll put posters up about it. We'll throw the castle open for one day to everyone who cares to come along and let them see what a ripping place it is. We'll hire motor-coaches and—"

"Wooa, wooa, wooa! Ease up and breathe, I guess," Leila Carroll put in. "Steady her, someone. She'll have a brainstorm at this rate. Now sit down, chump! Take your time about it, I guess. What's the big idea?"

And Clara, thus controlled, expounded. Naturally, as junior games captain of Cliff House School, her mind flew to sport.

The big idea was a sports festival, to be held in the grounds of the hotel ten days hence, the hotel being thrown open to the public for one day.

From the guests in the hotel they would make up teams. There should be a cricket match, a tennis tournament, open races on the coast, novel swimming competitions, track racing, a merry treasure hunt in the castle itself during the evening, a table-tennis tournament, perhaps, and a grand concert in the banquetting-hall to round off the proceedings.

It sounded good—overwhelmingly good! In a moment the whole seven of them were busy chattering, offering suggestions, discussing details.

Mabs at once was put in charge of the concert arrangements; Clara would organise the sports. Babs was to be responsible for the advertising; Leila and Bessie for the refreshments—Leila really being in charge of Bessie. Jimima and Marcelle were to act as hostesses.

With enthusiasm they got down to the details. Entry fees would have to be charged for the races, of course. That would pay for some prizes, at all events.

Apart from that they were all well supplied with cash. Clara had no doubt that Aunt Grace would put up as much as they required, but as they hadn't got Aunt Grace's address—she was somewhere in the South of France—she proposed writing home to her father and asking him to buy all that was necessary and forward it on.

The advertising they would pay for out of their own pockets. At St. Austell Clara knew a firm who would do the whole thing—printing, distribution, and everything—upon receipt of the necessary details.

Meantime, it was their job to stir up the interest of the guests.

"There are plenty of young people in the hotel," Mabs said. "They'll love all this. We'll make a special appeal to them. I vote we hold a meeting in the banquetting-hall after dinner tonight. Everyone will be in then."

That was voted a good suggestion. Enthusiastically the chums set to work. They had something to do now, something to work for. They were going to bring back to Pellabay the famous name it had always achieved. They were going to put it on the map.

While downstairs a furious Ida was facing her scowling mother.

"A fine mess you've made of things," she cried. "Letting that crowd of kids get the better of you! I thought

we were working to ruin this place." Mrs. Coates glanced at her impatiently.

"Well, aren't we?" "Looks like it," Ida retorted. "When you're going to turn it back into a sort of gala ground. Why the dickens didn't you chuck them out?"

Her mother shook her head patiently. "Ida, you're impetuous," she said, "also you're short-sighted. You know the stake I'm playing for. You know—but let me," she added, with a sneer, "refresh your mind. I took over the management of this place for twelve months, didn't I? I took it over with an eye to business."

Ida shrugged. "The place," Mrs. Coates went on, "is worth a hundred thousand pounds. A rich American is interested in it. He's offered two hundred thousand pounds for it. He thought, if you will remember," she went on in the same acidly grinding voice, "that I was the owner, not the manager. I let him think so. He wanted to buy the castle for two hundred thousand pounds. Quite a bit of money. If you will search your mind you will recollect

and the first of those ways is to turn everybody in the hotel against them, and that— Good gracious!"

They both jumped round with a start. From under the window had come suddenly a deafening roar of cheering. A trumpet blew, and a pair of cymbals clashed. Clara's voice, not at any time a whisper, was raised in triumphant volume.

"Oyez, oyez!" they could hear. "Hear ye, people of Pellabay! Ye great news!"

"Tara! from the trumpet and a loud: Bom - bom! from the drum."

The Coates stood and looked at each other in wide-eyed wonder.

"Those girls!" muttered Ida, only to pause as

competitions! Wonderful prizes. All guests at the hotel are requested to turn up at a mass meeting to be held in the banquetting hall immediately after dinner to-night, when Clara Trevlyn, organiser, will give further details.

"Put Pellabay on the map! Roll up! Roll up!"

Mrs. Coates' face turned white. Ida,



IN the nick of time Clara stepped back, as Ida was about to slip the watch into her pocket. But Ida's treachery was her undoing; she slipped, and with a terrific splash fell backwards into the pool.

that he paid me five thousand pounds as a deposit, on condition that he completed the purchase of the castle by the end of the year."

Ida moved irritably. "Well, I know all that." "But it's necessary to keep your memory green. Now," Mrs. Coates went on, "I accepted that money. I accepted it on false pretences if you like—which means, if it were found out, that I could be sent to prison. And you, too, as you are a witness to the preliminary agreement. But we're not going to be sent to prison, because when the time comes to complete the purchase of the castle, I shall be the owner of it myself. The idea, in the meantime, is to let the place run to seed, so that Miss Trevlyn, who is its real owner, will be glad to sell out at any price at the end of the season."

"I see that! But now—" "For a time all went well," Mrs. Coates went on, a steely glitter coming into her greenish eyes. "Then along comes this Clara and her friends."

"Well?" "Well, we just can't afford to run risks. I had, for appearance sake, to bow the knee, but only for a time. We've got to be a little cleverer than we have been—a little more subtle. You understand? We're going to get those girls out—but not by openly throwing them out. There are more ways than one of killing cats,

Clara's voice was heard again: "Roll up! Roll up! Bring back life and gaiety to Pellabay!"

At once Ida and Mrs. Coates were at the window.

In amazement they stared at the scene which met their gaze. For there was Clara, wearing a breastplate obviously filched from one of the suits of armour that were everywhere dotted about the castle.

And there was Babs, her merry face laughing through the vizor of a helmet, and between them they were carrying, strung between two old-time halberds, a great banner. Behind them were Lella & Co., laughing and cheering, Jemima waving her monocle in the air.

Around them, animatedly swarming was a crowd of girls and boys, sons and daughters of the guests of the hotel, all enthusiastically and excitedly talking. Mrs. Coates and Ida blinked.

"What is it?" Mrs. Coates asked.

"Read the notice," Ida said.

And Mrs. Coates' mean little eyes almost popped out of her head as she did so.

For that notice, printed in huge, bold black characters across a large strip of sailcloth, announced:

"The Pellabay Sports Festival!"

"Positively to be held in the hotel grounds."

"Swimming, boating, fun, and games. Public invited. Great Challenge

with a sidelong glance at her, grinned sardonically.

"And, this," she whispered mockingly, "is how to get the girls out. Are you sure you don't mean they'll get us out, mother?"

But Mrs. Coates for once was impervious to her daughter's sarcasm. Her eyes were glinting with fury.



The Trap!

NOT for a long while had there been such excitement at Pellabay Castle.

No doubt, the guests said, the place wanted waking up. And no doubt that Clara & Co. were in the process of waking it up. That day, for the first time during the season, the luxurious swimming pool was thrown open.

The tennis courts and the cricket pitches were mown, watered, and rolled. "Keep off the grass" notices disappeared as if by magic, and the big bathshed in the moathouse outside the castle was opened, and the boats, dinghies, skiffs, and punts once more added their note of jollity to the general surroundings.

Downstairs the recreation-rooms were

thrown open. Even the croquet lawns were opened up.

That was Clara's doing. Everybody realised it. But Clara was ferociously busy that day writing her agenda for the meeting, which was to be held that evening.

Lunch, for once, was a delicious meal. The tea which followed it was a banquet in comparison with the tea usually served, and when Clara held her meeting, there was hardly a guest in the place who did not attend.

Ida was there, too, but Ida's mother was not. Clara outlined her scheme; told them all about it. The first to speak, surprisingly enough, was Ida.

"Well, I think that's splendid, you know," she said approvingly. "Perfectly splendid, Clara. And, of course, mother will give some of the prizes. She'll be delighted."

Clara blinked. The guests smiled. If they wanted any further proof of the management's sincerity, they had it here.

"But what you ought to have, you know, is a committee," Ida went on. "You don't mind me making suggestions, Clara?"

"No," Clara said shortly. "But, as it happens, we've got a committee. We're the committee."

"Oh!" Ida shook her head. "But you're all rather young for such a big job."

Clara's eyes gleamed a little. Clara, like Jemima, was one of those who did not believe that the leopard could change its spots.

She did not believe now that Ida was acting in a purely disinterested spirit, nor was she willing to believe that Mrs. Coates had affected this amazing change because she had seen the error of her ways.

"Young or not, we've tackled bigger jobs than this at Cliff House," she said.

"But don't you think," Ida asked sweetly, "that you ought to have an older girl on the committee? I'd really like to help—awfully!"

Heads craned to look at Ida. Ida stood there, looking very sweet, very yearning, very, very much in earnest. When she chose, Ida could certainly act, and there was no doubt now that she caught the sympathy of the crowd. But Clara shut her lips.

"I'm sorry," she said, "but the committee's fixed up."

"But Miss Coates is right, you know," one lady put in. "It is a big job for children like you, and think of the money which will be involved."

"It's fixed up," Clara said inflexibly. There was a murmur. Ida looked hurt. The woman who had made that suggestion now questioned.

"You mean you don't like Ida?"

"No," Clara said bluntly. "But why not? Surely she hasn't done anything to you? On the contrary, I think she and her mother—"

There was a pause. Clara, impatient to be getting on with the business, ignored the interruption.

"Well, as I was saying—" she went on.

"But you haven't," persisted a voice, "cleared up this question. Does Miss Coates go on the committee?"

Clara glared.

"Miss Coates," she announced defiantly "does not come on the committee! If you all feel that an older girl should come on, then we'll consider the question. But not," she added inflexibly, "Miss Coates!"

That effectively silenced the interrupter, but it was noticeable that the meeting went on in a less enthusiastic

spirit. Rather resentful glances were cast at Clara, many the looks of sympathy directed towards Ida, who shook her head with a hurt, forbearing smile, and looked as though in truth she were the victim of spite.

Then while Clara was waxing eloquent again there came a fresh sensation. This time it was Mrs. Coates herself who caused it.

Into the room she came, pushing the curtains aside. So pale, so agitated was she, that even Clara for one moment felt sorry for her. She was wringing her hands.

"Oh!" she cried. "Clara, I—I'm sorry if I'm interrupting. But I must ask—while everybody's here! My

"Your what?" Clara asked.

"My gold ring—my wedding-ring!" Mrs. Coates gasped. "It's the first time since my husband died that I have left it off. I had to take it off because I cut my finger. It's not that it was worth a great sum in cash, but it was the one link with my dear husband that remained to me. Oh, please, if anybody has found it—"

She looked around her—appealingly, entreatingly. Certainly, if Mrs. Coates were acting then she was acting well.

"Is there no one?" she cried entreatingly.

A shaking of heads.

"Oh dear, what shall I do?"

"Cherish up, mother!" Ida said comfortingly, and very touchingly put her arm round the shoulders that were shaking with grief. "It's bound to turn up!" she cried. "Where did you lose it?"

"Well, I really thought that I had put it on the table under the inquiries window in my office," Mrs. Coates replied, almost on the verge of weeping.

"You left the window open?" Ida asked.

"Well, of course—it's always open!"

"So that anyone who came along could see it, and, by putting a hand through the window, take it?"

"Ida!" Mrs. Coates cried, in a shocked and trembling voice. "What are you saying, child? Of course it—it was there. But as if anyone—anyone would dream of stealing my poor wedding-ring! Oh, I don't know! Perhaps I dropped it in one of the bed-rooms. Clara, please do forgive me for interrupting the meeting, but I'm terribly worried. Ida, dear, please come with me and help!"

"Certainly, darling!" Ida said.

They quitted the room together. Clara frowned a little. There was a move among the company. Inspired by sympathy now for Mrs. Coates' loss, wishing to help her, two or three of the guests went out with her.

But Clara, had she only known it, was Mrs. Coates' victim. Very cunningly, very artfully, had Mrs. Coates laid this trap. With her little band of helpers, she suggested, looking in the bed-rooms she had just visited.

Bed-room after bed-room was investigated, with no luck, until they came to that shared by Clara, Babs, and Bessie. There again there was a fruitless search. Until, about to give up in despair, Ida turned with a sudden exclamation at the door.

"Mother, wait a moment!"

She crossed the room. Mrs. Coates and three or four helpers, who had volunteered to search with her, stopped. Across to the dressing-table Ida stepped. There, in full view of them all, she took something from a

box, the lid of which was thrown open. It was a gold ring.

"My goodness, it is my ring!" Mrs. Coates cried, in trembling accents. "But I wouldn't have put it there! If I dropped it at all, it should have been on the floor." And then, as the thought apparently occurred to her, she looked startled. "Ida, you don't think—"

Ida's lips compressed.

"The ring," she said, "was obviously put in that box by the person who stole it!"

"Stole—"

"Clara Trevlyn!" Ida said significantly, and looked to see the effect upon the others. "It is her box."



Whispers of Suspicion

"BUT I can't believe it! I can't believe it!" Mrs. Coates cried. "Oh no, it's silly! I know Clara's not a very law-abiding girl, but surely she wouldn't steal!"

"Well, if she didn't steal it, how did it come to be there?" Miss Mardle, an elderly spinster demanded.

"If she didn't steal it, then one of her friends did," said Sidney Porter, a pompous-looking monument of middle-aged corpulence. "You ought to tell the police!"

Mrs. Coates appeared to look dazed, however.

"Oh no, I couldn't do that!" she said. "The disgrace! It would be a blot upon the hotel—and she the niece of the proprietress! No, not that!" she begged. "If Clara took it, it was only the temptation of the moment. I am sure. Or, perhaps," Mrs. Coates added, "not liking me—you heard the wild, awful things she said to me at the bungalow this afternoon—she took it out of spite."

"Well, she ought to be punished for it!"

"Oh no! No, please," Mrs. Coates pleaded. "Let us forget it. It was just—just a mistake," she added falsely.

"You cannot hold up one tiny offence like this against a girl. It might worry her dreadfully if she thought that we all knew. Promise me—oh, please promise me that you won't say anything!"

Oh, very artfully was that done. Clara was a thief. Everybody, it was plain, believed that. But Clara would not know that they believed it; would not, until the poison which was now sown in the minds of the people began to work, never guess that anyone had anything against her.

On the other hand, how swiftly it restored Mrs. Coates' prestige! If the guests had been sorry for her before, how overwhelmingly admiring they were now.

Meantime, Clara, all unsuspecting of the currents which the crafty Mrs. Coates and her scheming daughter had set swirling about her feet, was finishing her meeting in a blaze of triumph.

Everybody was alive with real enthusiasm. The only tiny shadow on the meeting was Clara's brusque refusal of Ida's offer.

But that did not prevent the younger element coming forward. After days and weeks of forced inactivity at Pellabaw Castle, Clara's scheme was as welcome as a gleam of sunshine in a fog.

Quite a hectic time Clara had of

taking down the names of all the girls who wished to do something in the festival. Girls who wanted to play cricket, who were good at tennis and swimming and rowing; who wanted to represent the hotel on the cinder track.

By that time the St. Austell printers, getting out posters and handbills post-haste, were already distributing them far and wide.

"It's going to be a wow!" Leila crowed, after the meeting. "Gee, I never knew so many young sportsmen could congregate in one spot. Ripping notion of yours, Clara."

"And it's going to be jolly hard work, too," Clara said delightedly, for if there were one thing the Tomboy loved it was hard work—especially in connection with sporting events. "We've got to have trials, of course—bags and bags of them. Got to find the best players and all that. We're going to use Cliff House methods for this, Babs. Early morning training before breakfast, trial matches—and so on!"

Excited indeed were the chums. Such loads of work to do all at once.

Late they stopped up that night, too enthusiastic even to notice the curious glances certain of the guests gave them as they passed, and too excited even to resent the fact that Miss Mardle, who passed them on the stairs, drew away with a little haughty and contemptuous shrug.

But by ten o'clock that night Clara had all her plans made and ready.

Ideas had flown swiftly and furiously. Babs had suggested an obstacle swimming race. Barrels to crawl through, bars to climb over, part of the distance to be covered while dragging a heavy weight, and so forth.

Then, of course, there must be a wheelbarrow race—that was always such fun. Egg-and-spoon and humpty-dumpty and—Oh, goodness knows what else! What with the excitement and the ideas, their brains were buzzing when they went to bed.

And in bed Clara smiled triumphantly to herself. It seemed at last that she had achieved her end.

Up early the next morning was the vigorous Tomboy. Once Clara had set her mind on a project she was indefatigable. Before breakfast she had her chums on the tennis courts. She herself walked round to inspect the cricket pitch, the tennis courts, the swimming-pool, and to see that the boathouse was open.

Teeming with ideas was Clara. She told her chums. Then in an eager group they made their way back through the castle grounds, very ready indeed for their breakfasts. A party of girls and boys came swinging down the steps of the castle as they tripped up them, and Clara stopped with a smile, recognising eager applicants of the night before.

"Cheer-ho!" she cried. "Don't forget the practices after breakfast."

But, to the chums' astonishment, the group simply glanced at her and passed on. There was not even a smile among them.

"Here, I say, what's the matter?" cried Mabel Lynn.

There was a general shaking of heads. The party, some of them flushing, hurried on. The chums stared after them puzzledly.

"Well, what the dickens has bitten them?" Leila Carroll asked.

They went on into the dining-room. There were perhaps two dozen people there, and they all looked up at the chums' entry. A little murmur went round. Babs, taking her seat, became aware of hostile, unfriendly glances.

But Clara, fortunately too preoccupied with her own thoughts, noticed nothing.

"What was the matter with everybody?" Babs thought.

Breakfast—a really good meal for once—was disposed of. Eagerly they gathered on the courts. Clara had given very strict instructions that everyone competing in the tennis trials should be on the courts by half-past nine, but when they reached the courts only one girl—Susie Parkes—had turned up.

Clara frowned.

"Where's the others?"

"I—I don't know," Susie said.

"Well, we can't jolly well start without them, that's a cert. Babs, you might go and round them up. Tell them we've got a heavy programme to get through."

Babs nodded. She hurried back into the castle. There she found one or two of the party. They looked hesitant when she told them that Clara was waiting.

Quite patently some of their enthusiasm had evaporated. Ella Griffiths, indeed, made a feeble excuse that she couldn't come. Babs had a feeling that the others only came with reluctance, and would have been glad to dodge it if they could. She frowned at them a little.

"I say, what's the matter with everybody? I thought you were keen?"

"Well, so we are," averred Jean Graham.

"Well, I must say it looks like it," Babs returned. "You knew the practice was going to be at half-past nine!"

"Yes!"

"Then why didn't you turn up?"

Again that strange glance between the girls, full of uncomfortable understanding, suggesting that they had some secret between themselves. Jean forced a smile.

"Well, shall we go?" she asked.

They went, Babs feeling ruffled, feeling indeed that she wanted to get to grips with something she couldn't see. Out on to the green lawns they tripped, but Babs noticed with a frown that they did not catch up with her. She noticed, too, when Clara gave the instructions at the tennis courts, that again that uncomfortable silence fell between them, again that significantly secret-sharing look was flashed between them. Mysterious it was, but the subsequent tennis at least, dispelled all shadows.

Clara, much too engrossed, much too enthusiastic to allow anything to interfere with the carrying out of the programme upon which she had set her mind, put them through their paces with a skill and a relentless vigour which would have done credit to a professional coach, critically standing by and making notes as they played. The trials were over. She nodded.

"O.K.," she said. "Looks as if we shall be able to put three teams in the field. I'll let you know the names of the selected girls as soon as I've fixed up the teams. Now then, everybody—the swimming-pool."

And readily enough they trooped off to the swimming-pool, that most modern and luxuriously appointed addition to the Pellabay Castle Hotel. A great many of the guests were there, revelling in the unusual luxury of the pool, which had only been re-opened yesterday. Some were bathing, some sunbathing on the lawns, some merely sitting watching with idle interest, the antics of the others. There, at least, Clara had no difficulty in getting together her team, though two of the girls who had put their names down were absent. Ida Coates, a falsely friendly smile upon her face, came forward.

"Oh, Clara," she said.



CLARA started forward, amazed at the sight which met her gaze. For on the floor of her room, was a sack, containing obviously valuable articles. How had it come there?

Clara glanced at her. "I'm sorry," Ida said, "but owing to the rush on the pool, most of the bathing cabins are occupied. But I've managed to save you eight at this end, which means, I'm afraid, that two of you will have to share a cabin each. You don't mind?"

"Of course they didn't mind. The great thing was to get on with the job. Most thoughtful of Ida, that was. Even Clara wondered for a moment if she had misjudged the girl. But Ida this morning was as helpful as could be.

"I've already put your bathing things in the huts," she said. "Clara, you share a cabin with Jean Graham. Barbara, you'll have one with Jessie Green. So nice, I think, to mix you all up a bit," she simpered. "Helps you to get to know each other so much better, you know."

"Well, thanks," Clara said. "She didn't care. She was impatient to get on with the job. But she might have paused if she had seen the queer look in Ida's eyes as that girl turned away.

Into the cabins they went. In record time they re-appeared, clad in their bathing-costumes.

Happy the two hours that followed. The pool was crowded. Marjorie Hazeldene, looking rather pale but much better, came down to join the sightseers, and watch Clara put her companions through their paces. Busy was the Tomboy, but she thrilled with every moment of it.

"Good material," she remarked to Babs. "Some fine swimmers among this crowd."

"Yes," Babs assented, with a happy laugh.

The festival was going well. No doubt that everybody, once in their stride, was keen. No doubt that Clara had fired them all with her own enthusiasm.

Twelve o'clock came at last. Happy, breathless and in need of a rest, the girls repaired to their huts. Clara was jubilant. She could think of nothing except the success of her festival—and what a success it seemed to be going to be. She grinned at Jean.

"Enjoy it, Jean?"

"Oh, I loved it," Jean said. "Clara, have you a comb?"

"Yes, rather—here we are. Give it to me later," Clara said, for in her usual careless way, she had dressed herself without reference to a mirror, and was anxious to be out discussing details of the morning's performance with Babs. "Any time will do."

She sauntered out, pushing the canvas flap back again, absently strapping on her wrist-watch as she went.

Across the pool, she saw Marjorie, a little colour in her cheeks at last, sitting in a deck chair. Hovering near to her, talking to each other, were Ida and her mother. Mrs. Coates was dressed in a bright summery frock, and looking most attractive, Clara went across to her chum.

"Hallo, Marjorie, old thing!" she greeted her. "Enjoying it?"

"Yes, thank you, but—" and Marjorie frowned. "Clara, what's the matter?" she asked, in a concerned whisper.

"Matter?" Clara looked surprised.

"I mean, what's this they're saying about you?"

"Who's saying what about me?"

"I don't know, but—" Marjorie bit her lip. "One can't sit among people without hearing things," she said. "It wasn't intended that I should hear, of course, but I just couldn't

help it. Something about a ring that was found in your box."

Clara shrugged.

"I don't know anything about a ring that was found in my box. That's silly. Nobody could find a ring in my box without my being aware of it, could they?" she asked. "You've got hold of the wrong end of the stick there, old girl. Here's old Babs and Leila," she added, as those two emerged from their bathing-hut. "Excuse me a moment, old thing. I must have a word with Babs."

She rushed off to greet her chums. She did not see in her excitement that Jean, who had also emerged from her dressing tent, was now talking to her mother on the other side of the pool.

Nor did she see the quick look that Jean's mother threw in her direction, the sudden agitated shaking of Jean's head, as though she had protested against something her mother had said.

By that time Clara had caught up with Babs and Leila, and was enthusiastically plunged into a discussion of the swimming events.

But all at once—

Clang!

Startling, alarming, the great brass bell at the other side of the pool chimed out.

Everybody stared in the direction of the gong. Silence for a moment descended upon the pool, as Mrs. Coates, mounting the lowest diving-board, took a megaphone and placed it to her lips.

"Please pay attention," she said.

Silence fell.

"I regret to announce," Mrs. Coates went on, "that one of our guests—Miss Jean Graham—has lost a silver wrist-watch. She believes that she dropped it in the bathing-tent she shared with Miss Trevlyn. If anyone has found such a watch, will you kindly return it to me at once."

Clara frowned. Jolly careless of Jean, she thought to be dropped her watch, not reflecting in her own careless way, that she had never even glanced at her own watch even though she had strapped it on her wrist—simply accepting it as her own because it was in the place where she had left it—on the ledge in the bathing-tent.

Then she became aware that heads were craning, people were staring.

She flushed hotly. Why the dickens were they staring at her?

There was silence, an electric silence. Mrs. Coates bit her lip.

"Miss Trevlyn," she said.

"Well?"

"I suppose, as the sharer of Miss Graham's hut, that you did not see the watch?"

"I did not!" Clara returned shortly.

"It is very strange," Mrs. Coates went on. "Ida, will you have another look round, please?"

Ida, as if with the intention of exploring the bathing-hut again, strolled across towards the chums.

She gave Babs a friendly smile, paused as if to speak to Clara, and then stopped.

"Clara!" she said.

"I'm here," Clara said gruffly.

"You have a watch on your wrist."

"Well, is that very strange?" the Tomboy wanted to know. "Of course I've a watch on my wrist!" and slowly, mechanically, she lifted her arm.

At the same moment there came a cry from Mrs. Graham.

"But, she's cried, stepping forward, 'that's not your watch, Miss Trevlyn! It's not! That belongs to Jean! It is Jean's!'"

She caught the suddenly stupefied Tomboy's wrist and turned it upwards.

"Jean, this is your watch, isn't it?"

"Yes," Jean muttered uncomfortably. And everybody turned to gasp their disgust.

While Clara, in startled wonder, stared at the watch on her wrist.

It was not hers!



Clara Condemned

IN stupefaction Clara stared from the watch to the severe face of Mrs. Coates.

She saw Jean eyeing her in horror, Jean's parents, grim-lipped, accusation in every line of their faces.

"I—I never saw—" Clara stammered, hardly realising what she was saying. "I never knew—"

"That is not your watch?" Mrs. Coates asked.

"But I didn't take it!" Clara broke out. "I didn't! My hat, you don't think I'm a thief, do you? This watch was on the ledge where I put mine. I never even gave it a glance when I took it down and fastened it on my wrist. I must have put it on in mistake."

A pause. Wildly the Tomboy eyed the accusing faces about her. There was no sympathy, no belief in those faces. Everybody in the hotel had by this time heard the rumour which had gone round—that the Tomboy had stolen Mrs. Coates' ring.—Everybody already mistrusted her.

"Wait a minute!" It was Babs who came forward. "There must be some mistake!" she cried. "Clara, you are positive; you placed your watch on that ledge?"

"Of course!"

"Jean, where did you put yours?"

"On the seat—among my clothing."

"In that case," Ida put in, strolling forward, "the matter's easily settled, I think. If Clara really meant to steal your watch she must have her own on, too. If it were a mistake, then her own still must be in the bathing-hut."

Clara looked up. Suspicion stabbed her all at once. Ida's back was turned to the crowd as she faced her now. There was no mistaking that cunning glitter in her eyes.

"Clara," she added. "I am sorry, but you must realise that this is a serious matter. You can only clear yourself by one means."

"And that?" Clara asked dangerously.

"By agreeing to allow yourself to be searched."

At that the blood ran up into Clara's cheeks. Searched—she!

Then she caught a look from Babs: Babs who was nodding her head appealingly. Babs, who was trying to say: "It's a beastly unpleasant business, but submit to it and get it over."

"All right," she said, between her teeth. "go on!"

There was a murmur. Ida smiled unpleasantly.

"Hold up your arms," she said. Clara, crimson with humiliation, held up her arms.

Silence—even the pool was deserted now.

Then—

Just for an instant Clara caught the gleam of something in Ida's closed hand. The hand was diving towards the pocket of her dress. It opened slightly. For one fraction of time she saw the watch which rested there—the watch which, in the next instant, would have been in her pocket, ready, of course, for Ida to "find!" This girl had the watch, was

deliberately intending to "plant" it on her.

"You beast!" she cried. "No, you don't!"

Quickly, as Ida's hand dived towards her pocket, she stepped forward. She snatched at the wrist. Ida took one pace backwards, the watch still in her hand. There was a cry:

"Look out!"

"Ida!"

"Oh, great goodness!"

Too late! Even as Babs ran forward, as Clara, just in the nick of time, threw herself back on her heels, it happened. Ida, unaware of her close proximity to the edge of the pool, caught her foot on the slippery edge. Her feet slithered, her hands clutched at empty air. There—splash!

She was in the pool.

What a shout went up then. Ida furiously spluttered.

Mrs. Coates, with a thin scream, flutered panic-stricken forward.

"You awful girl!" she cried at Clara.

"Why did you do that?"

"I didn't!"

"You did! It was deliberately done—I saw it! Ida, Ida, my poor, dear girl! Are you all right?"

Ida spluttered furiously. "I'm all right," she said, and she climbed up the steps. "But I've saved the watch!" she added loudly. "Look!" she shrielled, and held it up. "That is why she pushed me in the bath. I took this out of her pocket and she tried to grab it back!"

Clara stood still, seething with humiliation and anger.

Obviously it was Clara's intention—and a very fiery intention—to have the matter out with Ida there and then. Babs saw the light of battle gathering in her eyes, and plucked her arm.

"Come on, old thing!"

Clara's jaw set obstinately.

"Wait till I've spoken to her!" "Oh, my hat! Clara!" Babs whispered urgently. "Please don't be a chump, old thing. You won't do yourself—us—any good by having another row. You don't want to mess up the festival, do you?"

"Eh? Of course not!"

"Then come on, chump! You can speak to Ida later."

And Clara allowed herself unwillingly to be led away.



Drama at the Fete

BUT for the rest of that day and all the next, Clara saw nothing of Ida. That girl, like Brer Rabbit, was lying low.

But the mischief was done.

From then on there was a noticeable coldness in the attitude of the guests of the hotel towards Barbara Redfern & Co., and especially towards Clara Trevlyn. Quite a few of the girls who had enthusiastically joined the festival now came along and asked for their names to be erased.

But if the attendance at the meetings was lower in those next few days, enthusiasm for the festival certainly was not. The news had spread abroad by now.

Clara was deluged by requests for invitations, by offers of assistance. When Clara had a job to do she spared neither herself nor her helpers, and in the bustle of those next few days she had no time for thoughts of revenge upon Ida.

But things were being said. Rumours



IN a trice the chums had the ladder against the wall; but Clara did not bother to climb down all the way—she jumped, and a moment later was with her chums again—safe, thanks to Babs' brainwave.

passed swiftly from lip to lip. Half the hotel was already convinced that Clara was a thief. There were sly glances when the chums entered the public rooms, a ceasing of chatter.

More and more girls, obviously influenced by their parents and their relatives, failed to turn up at meetings and practices. One of these was Ivy Smith.

Ivy was Clara Trevlyn's tennis champion. She was, in fact, a girl who had already won distinction at the game. She was Clara's trump card for the tennis event.

On Wednesday night Clara had arranged a singles match between herself and Ivy, and Clara was already on the ground when the time for the match came round. But of Ivy there was no sign.

"Oh, my hat, where is she?" she groaned. "Marjorie, go and find her, will you?"

"Certainly," said Marjorie.

Off she went. She remembered having seen Ivy with her mother and father in the lounge. Into the hotel she went. But the lounge, for once, was untenanted except for Ida Coates, who threw Marjorie a swift look as she entered.

Marjorie, stopping, flushed a little. It was the first time she had seen Ida since the swimming-pool incident. Ida, however, came forward in a friendly fashion.

"Do you want anything? Can I help?" she asked.

Marjorie paused. Marjorie, like Clara, had no use for Ida Coates. But Marjorie could never bring herself to be curt. She said—

"No, I'm just looking for Ivy Smith, that's all."

"Oh, Ivy!" Ida dimpled. "She's up in her room. I think—I heard her say something about having a nap."

"Thanks," said Marjorie hastily. "I'll go up."

She hurried off. Ida smiled a crafty smile. She waited only for Marjorie to disappear, then swiftly vanishing in the direction of the reading-room, popped her head in at the door. Ivy Smith, looking very mutinous, and her father and mother, were there.

"Ahem! Excuse me," Ida said. "I thought I'd tell you, Mrs. Smith. Have you given Marjorie Hazeldene permission to go into Ivy's room?"

"Why, goodness gracious, no! Why?" "I thought not. Well, she's in there. I saw her as I came down."

Up in a moment jumped Mrs. Smith. Ida, with a smirk, retired.

Marjorie, meantime, mounting the stairs, was shaking her head a little. What a waste of time, she was thinking, for Ivy to be sleeping on a gorgeous evening like this.

She reached the room, knocked at the door.

No reply. Knock again. Marjorie listened. Everything was very still.

She turned the handle of the door and went in.

Ivy's bed lay behind a concealing screen. Impossible, without stepping behind the screen, to find out whether she were in bed or not. Round the screen Marjorie stepped, and then blinked and frowned. For obviously the bed had not been disturbed at all. At the same moment there was a step in the passage.

The door opened. Mrs. Smith, accompanied by her husband, came in. Her eyes were full of suspicion as they darted at Marjorie.

"You! What are you doing here?" she cried.

Marjorie jumped. "I—I came to look for Ivy," she stammered.

"Indeed?" Mrs. Smith's face was flinty. "It did not occur to you to look in the public rooms first?" she asked. "Why should Ivy be in her bed-room at this time of day?"

Marjorie turned pink. "Well, I was told by Ida Coates—" "Oh, I say!" said Ida, entering at that moment. "Is anyone calling me? Excuse me, Mrs. Smith, I had to come in." Marjorie, did you say something about me?"

Marjorie looked puzzled. "Ida, tell them. You remember I asked you where Ivy was?"

Ida looked blank. "When?"

"Five minutes ago—downstairs." "I'm sorry, but I've certainly no recollection of it," Ida said. "As a matter of fact, I was up here five minutes ago. I saw you in this room, and naturally I thought you were talking to Ivy. But when I went into the writing-room and saw Ivy there—"

Marjorie's face turned pale with horror.

"But, Ida, you know—you must remember—"

"Thanks, I think that's enough!" Mrs. Smith said tartly. "Please don't tell fibs, Miss Hazeldene." She gazed quickly round. "What have you taken?"

Marjorie's eyes widened. "Taken? You mean—?"

"I mean," Mrs. Smith said shortly, "it is obvious why you came here. I must ask you to show the contents of your pockets!"

Marjorie turned pale. She looked at Ida. She saw it all then. Ida, making the most of her every opportunity, was seeking to tar her with the same brush as the one with which she was endeavouring to paint Clara.

Bitterly she resented that implication of her own honesty, but more bitterly did she resent it for her friend's sake. Her head went up proudly.

"I refuse," she said, "to be searched!"

Mrs. Smith's lips came together. "Then," she said, "you will not leave this room until I have satisfied myself that you have not taken anything. Shut the door, please, Miss Coates!"

And while Ida, with a slow smile, shut the door, standing there with her back towards it, the search began.

Marjorie, pale as a ghost, looking as if she might at any moment collapse, stood swaying on her feet while the search progressed.

"**MARJORIE!** My hat! What's the matter with you? You look as white as a sheet."

Thus spoke Clara Trevlyn ten minutes later, as Marjorie, trembling and shaken, came back to the tennis courts. In the absence of Ivy, Clara had just commenced a brisk singles with Babs. She came over to Marjorie now as that girl, with a rather broken little cry, sank into a deck-chair.

"Marjorie—" "Oh, it—it's nothing!" Marjorie said. "But what's up, old thing? You look ill."

"I—I'm all right," Marjorie faltered. But she wasn't. Easy as anything was it to see that. The ordeal of the last ten minutes had shaken the gentle one of Cliff House's Fourth Form. She could never forget the horror, the trepidation in which she had waited in Mrs. Smith's room while that room had been ransacked. Nothing, of course, had been missed, not that that prevented suspicion, she felt, being attached to her name. Ida, by her lies, her treachery, had scored up another black mark

against the names of the Cliff House chums.

Not, however, that Marjorie intended to say anything of that episode. Marjorie knew very well what tempestuous reactions Clara's would be. With no thought for consequences, she would go and have it out with Ida. That could only create further unpleasantness, further acrimony.

"Please don't—don't worry me," she said.

"Oh, all right!" And Clara shook her head puzzledly. "Did you find Ivy?"

"N—no!"

"Well, what's the matter with her?"

"I—I don't know!"

Clara snorted.

"Strikes me that everybody in this place is going crazy," she said. "Well, bother it! Come on, Leila, I'll take you on. Let's see you give me a whacking."

That, however, was beyond the powers of Leila. Clara was easily the best tennis player in the Lower School at Cliff House.

The set was finished. Just before dinner Marcelle suggested a swim. The tide was out, so they made it a sea bathe. Hungry, they came in to dinner, excitedly chatting about the festival, bubbling with enthusiasm.

To-night they were to hold the first rehearsal of the concert. But when the time for the rehearsal came, only three of the twelve who had volunteered to do turns were there.

"Well, where are all the rest?" Mabs asked.

"They're not coming," said Pansy Finch.

"Not coming? But they promised."

"Well—" Pansy shrugged her shoulders. She was a candid, outspoken girl; moreover, like the other two, she was at Pellabay Castle without parents or relatives. "Well, you know what parents are. There's some funny idea going about in the hotel about you lot, and—"

She shrugged again. "But why worry?" she asked. "It's their look-out, not ours. I guess we can run the thing without them if they don't want to come. Anyway, we're backing you up."

That was some comfort, but it was small comfort. Mabs, who liked her rehearsals to go like clockwork, was not satisfied.

She went off to round up the others. Now Jean Graham, for instance. Jean was a jolly good little actress, and it would be a feather in the Cliff House chums' cap to get her back. About this time she and her parents usually retired to their own private sitting-room for coffee.

The door was open. Mabs was about to knock when she heard Jean's voice inside.

"But, daddy, let me—do, please! It's all so silly, really."

"My dear," her father said kindly but inflexibly, "I have said enough. I refuse to allow my daughter to associate with thieves!"

Mabs flinched. For a moment a burning flush came to her cheeks. But it was enough. The very tone of the voice, if not the words, showed that the Cliff House cause was hopelessly lost as far as Jean was concerned, at all events. She turned rather heavily.

Hopeless, hopeless, she told herself, and in rather distracted frame of mind walked back to the hall. The rehearsal that night was not a success. The trials on the morrow were not a success. The attitude of the guests towards Cliff House became more openly hostile, more aloof.

It looked as if the pageant were going to be a wash-out.

"Well, we won't give them the laugh," the Tomboy vowed. "We jolly well won't! We'll go through with it. If we only stand together, we're bound to come out top dogs. After all, it doesn't matter as long as we get the outside crowd here." The whole thing is being staged for the benefit of the hotel. If these ninnyes won't take part, we can't make them. We'll just revise the programme so that we can carry it off our own bats."

And that they set out to do. The cricket match, of course, was out of the question, so was the tennis tournament. Mabs had the brilliant idea of turning the concert into a supper cabaret, which meant that they were free to give individual performances instead of acting as a concert team.

Clara's tomboyish spirit inspired another thrill—that of a climbing race, the venue of the climb to be one of the castle towers, the methods of climbing to be ladders erected against the walls.

They wouldn't be beaten—they jolly well wouldn't! They'd show these mistrusting people that they could get on without them.

In great determination they started on the revised programme. Pansy and her chums stood loyal next day—the day before the tournament. There was no rest in the energies of the festival makers.

Boating, swimming, running, were in full swing. Many of the girls and boys who had been forbidden by parents to take part in the festival came down to watch with envious eyes, and from their own window Ida and Mrs. Coates watched with eyes that spitefully glittered.

In Mrs. Coates' hand was a letter. It was a letter from Clara's Aunt Grace, which she had just received. With it had also been a letter for Clara; but that was burning in the flames of the fire which, even in the hottest weather, Mrs. Coates kept going in her room.

"There's no putting that girl down," she said, between her teeth. "Anyone else would have cleared out by now of their own accord. We worked to put the guests against her. We've put them against her. But does that make any difference?"

Ida frowned gloomily. "They seem to be getting on with it."

"Yes; they're getting on with it." Mrs. Coates' frown was bitter. "They'll hold their festival. It will be a success. And then—what? In this letter here Grace Trevlyn is asking questions. She wants to know why Clara hasn't written to her. She hints that something must be going on. If she takes it into her head to come here, what am I to say?"

Ida's frown was gloomier than ever. Then she started to get up.

"Wait a minute!" she said.

"Well?"

"Wait a minute!" She looked excited. "I've got the idea. My gracious, it's THE idea! Now, listen!" she said feverishly. "We've sown the seeds. Everybody in the hotel, practically, is up against Clara. Everybody, if you ask me, is staggered that she's still carrying on after what happened. But supposing it became whispered round that she was organising the festival for a purpose."

"What purpose?"

"Well, we've given her the name of thief. What other purpose? Everybody will be out of doors to-morrow when the festival takes place. That means their rooms are left unlocked and unguarded. Now wait a moment. To-morrow—be artful about it, if

course—but let it be known that you've heard something. Tell everybody who is going to the festival to lock their rooms, and hand in the keys at the desk."

Mrs. Coates looked startled.

"You don't mean—"

"I mean that, Ida grined. 'It's a cinch,' she cried. 'What happens? Leave the rest to me. When I give you the word, let it be known that someone has stolen the keys off the hotel board. That will send everybody stampeding at once to their rooms. And what then will they find?' Ida added, with a chuckle. 'That the rooms they left locked are now open; that most of their valuables have disappeared. Those valuables,' she added, with a nod, 'will turn up afterwards, along with the hotel keys, in Clara's room.'

Mrs. Coates stared at her daughter. Even she looked a little appalled at the sheer audacious treachery of that scheme.

"And—then?" she breathed.

"Then," Ida stated with satisfaction, "we send for the police. If Clara won't get out of her own chums, we'll make her, that's all."

While the Cliff House crowds, all unmindful of the plot being hatched, went on with their preparations.

Great the excitement next morning, when at ten o'clock the great drawbridge was lowered. The coaches and cars streamed in, bearing with them visitors from miles and miles around.

Jemima and Marcelle acted their part of hostesses to perfection. The hotel, alive with merry, good-humoured crowds, all in holiday mood, and with holiday money to spend, were shown round, to comment, admire, and envy.

In the refreshment booths Bessie and Leila did a roaring trade. Babs and Mabs, helping Clara with the amusements and the sports, were nearly run off their feet.

But the festival was going to be a success—no doubt about that. In the general spirit of cordiality introduced into the castle, even the guests thawed out. To be sure there were rumours; to be sure there were many anxious backward glances at windows of rooms already left locked up.

Amazingly Mrs. Coates was there, greeting and beaming at all and sundry, making herself indeed, as affable as she possibly could, and hoping that everyone would enjoy themselves.

The chums scarcely had time for lunch. So many things to do, and everything was going off so swimmingly. Merry the fun then in the pool during the obstacle swimming race, the high-diving and the stay-under-water contests—Clara, in her endeavour to win that, did everything but drown herself!

Then came the climbing race—what a thrill—won not by Clara but surprisingly enough by Marcelle Biquet, who could be as active as a cat when she chose. Then the track racing events.

Clara was starting off towards that when she met Jemima.

"Going well, what?" Jemima beamed.

"I see Mrs. Turncoat is making herself conspicuous. But what about the old waistcoat, what?"

"The what?"

"The waistcoat—the Ida cat. Haven't seen that merry child, Jemima remarked. 'You haven't imprisoned her in the castle dungeons or anything, to keep her out of the way?'"

Clara laughed. No, she hadn't done anything like that. Truth to tell, she had been too busy even to think of Ida

Coates. Quite accidentally she looked towards the castle.

Unconsciously, or instinctively, it was to her own window that her eyes travelled. And then, looking, she jumped.

For there she saw a movement—a movement in her room. Immediately afterwards a face looked swiftly through the glass, then as quickly turned back. The face was that of Ida.

Ida—in her room!

Clara instinctively withdrew behind the hedgerow which hid her from the window's view. What was Ida doing there? Suspicion, sharp and fierce, took possession of her mind at once. The quick, furtive, guilty glance which Ida had thrown through the window hinted at once to the Tomboy's mind that treachery was afoot.

Her lips came together. Right! Well, one little scheme, whatever it was, should not succeed. She'd surprise Ida in the act!

Carefully keeping the hedge between her and the window, she stole towards the castle.

Miss Mardle, who had been watching her, turned to Mr. Smith.

"Why, there goes that girl Clara," she said. "See her creeping along the hedge there?"

"What's she doing—playing games?" Mr. Smith frowned.

"Looks almost as if she doesn't want to be seen," Miss Mardle said. "Extraordinary!"

Extraordinary it was! Extraordinary was Clara's conduct to anyone who did not understand. For to prevent herself from being spotted from the window again she had to walk at a half-crouch, and ducked and waited when she came to the gaps in the hedge.

She went on, unaware of the watching eyes that followed her, unaware that despite her caution Ida, from her own room, had carefully watched her

was a bulky sack. Its neck gaped open, and out of it had fallen several things. A watch, a pair of exquisite bed-room slippers, a necklace that seemed to be of some value. How had that come here? How—

And then—

Slam! That was the door shutting behind her. Click! That was the key turning in the lock. With a jump Clara spun round.

At the same moment she heard Ida's voice yelling into the courtyard.

"Help! Help! Thieves!" Clara Trevlyn is burgling the castle!"



Clara, the Fugitive

BBARBARA REDFERN and Mabel Lynn, standing there, looked in the direction of the cry and saw Ida leaning out of an upper window, excitedly waving a key in her hand.

Mabs looked at Babs.

"Trouble!" she said. "Looks like it. But come on, Babs said. 'Where's the rest of the gang? Jimmy! Leila!' she called urgently.

"My hat, what's happened?"

"Something about Clara," Babs said tersely.

They joined the crowd which was now thronging into the castle. Mrs. Coates, with Miss Mardle and Mr. Smith in tow, swept past them as they rushed up the stairs. At the top Marcelle, looking extremely bewildered and flustered, joined them.

Up the stairs they all flew. At the top Ida, red-faced, brandishing a key in her hand, faced them.

"I—I caught her!" she cried. "She was going into her room dragging a sack. She came out of the room along the corridor. It was full of stolen articles, because several of them dropped out. I waited till she got to her room and then I locked the door on her."

From Clara's room came a furious pounding of panels, and Clara's voice raised furiously.

"It's lies—lies! Let me out!" "No, no," cried Mrs. Coates. "Oh, my goodness, this is dreadful! Ida, you say she's in there—with the things she stole?"

"Yes!" panted Ida. "Oh, rubbish!" Babs cried angrily, pushing her way forward. "What's this—a joke?"

"I am afraid," Mrs. Coates said, her eyes glittering, "it is too serious to be taken as a joke."

"She must have stolen the keys from the board," Ida said. "I noticed when I came up that they weren't there. Naturally, mother, I thought you had them!"

"Indeed I had not!" There was a mutter from the crowd.

"Then—then I thought it was just as well to have a look round, as you left me in charge of the castle," Ida went on. "I came up here—from the back way. I tried the doors as I passed, and imagine my consternation when I found them all unlocked! Then I—I heard a sound in the room. I dodged into Miss Smith's room and watched. And I saw Clara—come out dragging this sack with her."

"It's not true!" Babs panted. "It's all a pack of lies!"

"Is it?" Miss Mardle came forward.

"I hope," she said with a frown of

A DAY EARLY

Owing to the August Bank Holiday, the next issue of *THE SCHOOLGIRL* will be on sale on

**FRIDAY
JULY 31st**

shadow as it crawled nearer. Now—she had reached the castle.

Into the deserted lounge she went, tiptoed up the stairs. She reached the door of her own room, paused with her hand on the knob and then, with sudden purpose, flung it open. She went in.

"Now, you—" she began.

And stopped. The room was empty.

Except for—

And then Clara's eyes bulged. What was this? For on the floor at the foot of her dressing-table was a sack. It

severity at Babs, "that you are not mixed up in this. But as it happens, both Mr. Smith and I saw Clara acting in a very, very peculiar way a little while ago—sinking along by the side of the bushes as if she did not wish to be seen. We watched her disappear into the castle."

Mrs. Coates' eyes flamed.
"And you would be willing to tell the police that, Miss Mardle?"

"Most certainly I should!"
"Then," Mrs. Coates said, "go and telephone for the police, Ida. Give me the key of that room. It must not be touched, must not be opened. The girl shall be arrested as she stands, with the fruits of her guilt in her possession!"

"Why, you great—" gasped Leila.
"I had a warning of this," Mrs. Coates went on. "It was whispered to me that this festival was only a cloak to enable Clara to make this coup. She and that girl Marjorie Hazeldene are responsible. They are plotting it together. I overheard them. Please, please do not come near me," she said, as Babs almost beside herself with fury, took an angry step forward. "Ida, please will you go. Phone up the police immediately."

"Yes; but it will take them an hour to get here," Ida pointed out.

"No matter, phone them."
There was a cry. Faces were looking grim now.

From Clara's room no sounds came. Babs felt dismayed—distracted. She saw now that the whole thing was prearranged. These rumours which had gone before had prepared the ground for this—the greatest of all the Coates' schemes against her chum.

Something had to be done. Somebody had got to act swiftly. Even at this moment Ida was phoning up the police. In an hour they would be here.

Babs felt a pluck at her sleeve. Marjorie, white-faced, was at her elbow.

"Babs, Leila," she muttered, "and Mabs—all of you. Clara wants to speak to you."

"Clara?"

"Outside."
Babs wonderingly followed; for a moment her heart was bounding with hope. Had Clara in some way contrived to escape? But remembering the unclimbable wall, the height above the ground, she hardly thought that possible.

In a body she and her chums went outside. Clara had not escaped, but the window was open, and she leaned out.

For the moment at least the grounds were deserted.

"Hallo, Babs!" the Tomboy cried. Her face was red with wrath. "I say, what exactly is the little game?"

"It's not a game—or if it is it's a jolly serious one!" Babs told her. "Ida's phoning for the police."

"What for?"

"They're going to have you arrested."
"But that's rot—"

"It's not rot. They're in deadly earnest," Babs said. "Whether they find you innocent or guilty, it means you'll be detained by the police for a week, or perhaps even longer. You've got to get out of this!"

Clara glared.
"What do you mean?"

"You've got to escape."

"What—dodge the police?" The Tomboy sniffed. "No, thanks! I've got nothing on my conscience, so why should I be afraid to face the police? Let them send for the police!"

"But listen, you chump—"

"Well?"

"Clara, for goodness' sake," Babs pleaded, "listen to reason! I tell you

they've got the whole thing framed against you. You don't realise it, but you're right in the soup. If they take you away, goodness knows what will happen. And are you going to sit in gaol while Mrs. Coates stays on here calmly ruining the place? You know jolly well that's her game!"

Clara's face changed. Obviously, she had not thought of the thing from that angle.

"Well, what do you suggest?"
"Is anyone coming?" Babs asked.

Clara looked to right and left. From her high position she commanded a wide view.

"No."
"We've got to hide you," Babs said, "somewhere in the castle. Now listen! Leave everything in my hands. Do you know a place where you could lie low?"

Clara smiled grimly.
"I know one all right. Only my aunt

THE TOMBOY'S ORDEAL

● **A FUGITIVE on holiday!**
That is what Tomboy Clara Trevlyn has become—thanks to the crafty schemes of those who are resolved to ruin Pellabay Castle.

But neither Clara nor her chums are going to give in without a fight, and in next week's brilliant long complete holiday story you will read of their valiant efforts to save Pellabay.

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By HILDA RICHARDS

and I do know it. There's a secret passage leading off the minstrels' gallery in the banquet-hall."

"Is that the only entrance?"

"No; there's another one not five yards from where you are standing," Clara said.

"Then that's fine!" Babs whispered.

"Now go back, Clara. Leave the rest to me. Wait till you hear a whistle." And, as Clara obediently ducked back, she turned to Bessie. "Bessie, you can do it," she said. "Go to the other side of the castle. Raise some sort of diversion—anything to get people away from here. Understand?"

There were surprising moments when Bessie could grasp a suggestion without question. She nodded.

"Right-ho, Babs! Leave it to me!" She made off.

"Now wait," Babs said to her chums; but her eyes were resting on the ladder

which had been used for Clara's thrilling climbing race. "Soon as the commotion starts, grab that," she said tersely. "Put it up against the window. Then as soon as we've got Clara out of the way rush back into the castle and join the guests. Marjorie—and you, Marcella! You'd better do that now—just in case anybody thinks to look for us. Whatever you do, keep them from closing this way!"

Without a word Marjorie and Marcella nodded. One look they gave at each other and skipped off.

There was a three minutes' heart-wracking wait.

Then suddenly—
"Help, help, help!" A voice in the castle was raised in stentorian panic.

"Help! I'm being killed! I'm fainting! Thieves! Fire! Quick—everybody!"

No one would have guessed the voice was Bessie's. It sounded like that of a shrill, reedy old woman. Bessie's ventriloquism had once more found a useful outlet.

Followed startled shouts, the thudding of feet. "Now!" Babs cried, and whistled.

In a trice they had the heavy ladder planted against the wall. Out popped Clara. She did not bother to climb down all the way. When she was about ten feet from the ground she jumped.

Breathlessly she landed among them.

"O.K.," Babs said tersely. "Nobody coming. Now get the ladder back, Mabs—and you, Leila. Clara, where's this secret entrance?"

But Clara was already leading the way. The way was considerably more than five yards, however. She stopped in front of the solid outer wall of the castle.

She got her hands against a solid block of masonry almost as tall as herself. Once, twice, three times she pushed. The block swung over silently, like a see-saw. A dark cavern yawned within.

"My hat, I feel like a fugitive from justice!" she groaned, as she disappeared.

And that, from that moment, was exactly what Clara was. For when the police came and had attended to Mrs. Coates and her daughter, backed up by Mr. Smith and Miss Mardle, a warrant was issued immediately for her arrest.

For Clara, of course, was discovered to have flown by that time. How she had gone, however, nobody knew. The sensation of Clara's escape was almost as great as her alleged theft.

But some things from among the stolen property were still missed. They were a pearl necklace, a bangle, and several hundred pounds belonging to Miss Mardle. Ida smiled craftily as she displayed them to her mother later in the evening.

"For while these are missing, they'll still be after her," she said. "While these are missing, the memory of the robbery will be green in the minds of the other guests in the hotel. The question is, how did she get away?"

Mrs. Coates smiled sourly.

"Does it matter?" she asked. "She got away. Wherever she is, she's got to keep quiet. The only thing that remains now is to get her friends out of it. But after this," she added slyly, "I don't think they will want to stay."

Which was just where Mrs. Coates was completely wrong.

Whatever happened, Babs & Co. would not leave Pellabay Castle until Clara's innocence was proved, and until the rascally manageress and her equally rascally daughter were brought to book!

Dramatic Chapters of This Vivid Thrill-and-Mystery 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. Kai Tal, and has little sympathy for Kwanyin.

Kwanyin believes that her father is a prisoner in Pagoda Place. Catherine and her cousins promise to help her find him. One day Catherine sees Kwanyin being forced into a car. She rushes to her rescue.

(Now read on.)

In Pursuit

"WARE, Kai Tal! It was Catherine Sterndale's Cousin Mollie who called that warning as Catherine ran forward in the hope of stopping her uncle's car.

In the car was the little Chinese girl, Kwanyin, and Miss Smith, Uncle Gerald's secretary. But Kwanyin did not look back, although Catherine could see her head through the rear window.

Catherine gave up the hopeless chase and looked warily at Kai Tal.

She took good care to hide the rolled-up message she had for Kwanyin, for she did not mean the evil Kai Tal to get possession of it.

Kai Tal walked towards her, his face expressionless. Catherine could not tell if he were angry, pleased, friendly, or filled with hatred.

Catherine spoke first. "I didn't have a chance to say goodbye to Kwanyin," she said. "Has she gone to the station?"

Kai Tal folded his hands humbly. "Very miserable Kai Tal not any more the servant of the illustrious uncle of Miss Catherine," he said. "No longer considered a trustworthy person to receive master's secrets. Kai Tal is now no more than the mat beneath the feet."

He spoke in dejected tones, but that did not deceive Catherine, who knew

him for a rascal and a humbug. His smooth speech nauseated her; it certainly did not bring any sympathy.

"Then it's no good my asking you for information," she said, turning away.

Kai Tal gave her a momentary look of bitterness.

"Please," he murmured—"if you please—"

Catherine hesitated, although Charles and Mollie, her cousins, were making frantic signs to her from the veranda of Pagoda Place not to talk to him.

"Well!" she said.

Kai Tal bowed.

"Despicable and miserable, much despised, this person is, and with all reason, yet he will be honoured to perform a simple service for the noble and courageous young lady who now has the great kindness to address him. If it is that young lady's gracious wish to send a message to the departed Kwanyin, this person will delight in honour of taking it."

Catherine felt a stab of alarm.

Kai Tal knew that she had a message for Kwanyin. His words made that clear. Did he know that the message was supposed to be from Kwanyin's father? The question sprang to her mind, but she could not decide the answer.

"I will find my uncle," said Catherine coldly.

And then she bowed mockingly as Kai Tal bowed to her.

By

ELIZABETH CHESTER

Illustrations by E. Baker

Charles and Mollie called her eagerly, and she went to them.

Mollie spoke in a whisper.

"Cath, Charles says his motor-bike's here in the garage," she said. "He didn't tell us before, because he didn't want to have us on the pillion. But now he can race the car to the station, and—"

"As a special business," said Charles.

"Just this once," said Mollie, with a sly wink at Catherine.

"My word! How marvellous!" said Catherine eagerly. "We can race the car!"

Charles hurried forward, and Catherine turned to Mollie.

"Go into the house, Mollie, will you? And make Kai Tal think we're following—to give us a chance to get away."

Mollie hurried to the house, and changed in in her usual blundering way. She did not realise that Kai Tal was just inside, listening and waiting. But she discovered it when she crashed the door into him.

The Chinaman reeled back, lost his balance, and Mollie toppled and fell, too. But she fell more for effect than of necessity, and she did not hurt herself.

It was easy enough to prevent Kai Tal's chasing her cousins, for she carelessly, but deliberately, trod on his garment. The simple trick effectively prevented his springing up.

By the time he was on his feet, and had managed to get past Mollie, Charles and Catherine had reached the garage.

Charles' motor-cycle was there, just as it had been deposited by the van from the station. It took only a moment to fill it up with petrol. Then, with the engine roaring, Charles drove off, with Catherine astride the pillion.

"Go carefully!" warned Catherine anxiously. "No need to be reckless, you know."

"I am never reckless!" said Charles huffily. "But hold tight!"

They went like the wind. He raced through the gateway of Pagoda Place, and sent the motor-cycle rocketing along the lane to the station.

It was not long before they saw the car. As it was a large limousine, it could easily be seen over the hedges, and Charles put on a spurt to catch it up.

"Easy!" warned Catherine. "We can't stop the car before the station. Mustn't let Miss Smith know we're giving Kwanyin a message."

Charles caught up the car and stayed behind it.

The station was only a mile away, and the car was ahead and going at a smooth, steady speed. There were cross-roads ahead, and the car slowed. Its pace eased to a crawl. Presently, some distance in advance of the cross-roads, it stopped.

So suddenly did it stop that Charles had to pull out to avoid it.

"What on earth—?" exclaimed Catherine, and then saw that the side door was being opened, and that Miss Smith was getting out.

The secretary walked back, and looked down the road as though expecting to see someone. She did not see the motor-bike, as it was hidden from her by the car.

"Now's our chance!" said Charles. "Open the door of the car for me, as you're nearer!" breathed Catherine, with her eye on Miss Smith.

But Charles, inside the car, had seen them, and managed to pull the door open.

Catherine did not speak a word, but pushed the roll of paper—the message from Kwanyin's father—into the little Chinese girl's hand.

"Station!" said Catherine to Charles. He opened the throttle of the motorcycle, swerved in front of the stationary car, and sent the machine speeding down the road.

Miss Smith glanced round for a moment, and then looked back down the road, the way they had come. She was obviously expecting to see someone else arrive. The car had been stopped at some meeting point.

Catherine looked back, and wondered what Kwanyin thought of her message—whether she were very excited or pleased, or if it were bad news.

She was quite unprepared for what she saw next.

Kwanyin's head appeared in the doorway of the car; she seemed to speak to the driver. Then the car moved forward rapidly.

Miss Smith was left behind in the roadway.

The last glimpse Catherine had of her, the secretary was waving her arms and shouting. But the driver of the car could not hear.

"My goodness! Kwanyin's collared the car!" said Catherine excitedly.

"Done what?" yelled back Charles.

"I think she wants to speak to us; pull up."

Charles took the next bend, and then slowed.

Catherine, looking back at the car, expected to see it stop; but it drove on past them, with Kwanyin at the window, making signs.

There was a dangerous bend ahead, which had to be taken carefully, and the Chinese driver slowed for it. Catherine urged Charles on, for now was their chance to catch up with the car. It had been going at a far greater speed with Kwanyin alone in it, and Catherine feared it might get too big a lead and lose them.

But Charles, bending low, set his machine going hard.

The car accelerated away from the bend, and Charles followed. He caught it up in a hundred yards, and then, in triumph, overtook it.

Catherine peered inside. She had expected to see Kwanyin's face at the window; but the little Chinese girl was not to be seen.

"Stop—stop!" she called to Charles.

He applied the brakes, and Catherine looked back down the road. She was convinced that Kwanyin was not in the car. The little Chinese girl would not have hidden, after trying to attract their attention.

Then where was she? There seemed

only one answer! She had jumped from the car.

Catherine, even though she was prepared to see Kwanyin when she looked back, had a shock when she actually did see her.

The little Chinese girl, limping slightly, was waving her hands in great excitement and pointing to the hedgerow. Near signals, before Catherine could make signs in reply, she had vanished. Meantime, the car had gone on.

Charles turned his machine as soon as Catherine had explained. In a moment they had reached the spot where Kwanyin had disappeared.

It was a short path leading into a wood; but of Kwanyin there was no trace.

"Must be there, though," said Charles.

Catherine looked anxiously about her. She was thinking that at any moment Miss Smith might come into sight, or that the car might return.

Charles' motor-cycle might be recognised, or if Miss Smith or the chauffeur had recognised them, the motor-cycle might provide a clue.

"Bring the machine on to the path—quick!" said Catherine.

She had acted wisely, for no sooner were they hidden from the road, with the machine behind the hedge, than a car came along at high speed. They only just managed to see the occupants, for it was a hired station car, and they did not at first think it important.

But in it was Miss Smith, and beside her was—Uncle Gerald!

Instantly Catherine guessed that it was for Uncle Gerald she had waited. Both were looking out of the car anxiously, staring ahead, obviously hoping to see their own car and Kwanyin.

But Catherine and Charles remained hidden. The car went on, in vain pursuit.

What Does It Mean?

CATHERINE and Charles felt rather uncomfortable when they realised that they were taking part in the deception of their own uncle. After all, as Charles argued, they were his guests. They ought to consider him.

Catherine saw that point clearly, and she did not make her decision to stand by Kwanyin without any kind of qualms.

But she had a surer instinct than Charles.

"Even if they come back, say nothing," she said.

"But Kwanyin will have to be found," protested Charles.

A soft voice came from just behind them. Kwanyin had crept from hiding. Her face was pathetic in its anxiety as she looked from one to the other; for she was obviously not quite sure whether they would help or betray her.

"Me here," said Kwanyin. "Me no run way. Not ruce. Lookce, lookce!"

She lifted the hem of her long frock, and Catherine, with surprise and anger, saw that the little Chinese girl wore a heavy bracelet round each ankle, and between the bracelets was a chain.

It was not to be wondered at that Kwanyin hobbled.

Catherine's eyes flashed.

"That settles it," she said. "Whoever did that is just mean and horrible!"

Miss Smith must have known it—Kwanyin gave an eager nod. She saw the anger in Catherine's eyes, and that Charles' hands were clenched.

"Miss Smith—velly bad!" she said,

nodding. "Kwanyin no likee. Kwanyin stay!"

"Stay where?" asked Catherine.

"Me stayee near Pagoda Place," said Kwanyin.

"While uncle's away?" asked Catherine. "But he'll search for you. He'll be hunting high and low."

"P'laps huntce, p'laps not," said Kwanyin. "Guessce me go findee illustrious father. Waitce catchce."

"Except that uncle's gone away," said Charles, frowning and adjusting his glasses. "This will mean a great inconvenience to him, you know. It will upset his plans."

"Yes. My goodness, he can't go away and leave you at large!" said Catherine.

Kwanyin gave a fleeting smile.

"Uncle Gerald p'laps go way. P'laps no tell you Kwanyin is missing. You see. Goce back. Me sendce message."

Then she asked them to help remove the anklets, which Charles managed to do quite easily.

They were some distance now from Pagoda Place, but there were only an open field and some stretches of woodland between.

In fact, Catherine presently saw the pagoda itself when she moved amongst the trees to see just what kind of country Kwanyin would have to walk across.

"You think you can manage it?" she asked.

"Yes, yes. No w'oly. Kwanyin she findee wayce, much t'anks!" said the little Chinese girl, and took Catherine's hands and kissed them in sincere gratitude.

Catherine wanted to know what the message was from Kwanyin's father, but she could not let her inquisitiveness master her to the extent of asking. For if Kwanyin wanted to tell, she could do so in her own time.

Charles walked to the road and looked up and down.

"Let's go back," he said. "Mollie's all alone in that place."

Kwanyin understood, and gave another of her rare smiles. For the first time since they had met her, the cousins saw a look of happiness in her eyes. The thought of the return journey and of the difficulties that must follow, clouded them almost instantly; but it was enough to tell Catherine and Charles that there had been no really bad news.

"Where now?" asked Catherine, when they had watched Kwanyin until she was out of sight.

"Home, of course," said Charles.

"Or the station?"

"The station? Why?" Charles asked, in surprise.

"We've got to explain why we rushed off—where we went."

It took a moment or two of argument, but finally Charles agreed that Catherine was right.

It did not take them long to reach the station, and when they did so they found their uncle's car already there, and the hired car beside it.

The hired car drove off as Charles ran his machine up to the kerb.

Miss Smith, who had been in the booking-hall, hurried out, saw them, returned, and then came back with Uncle Gerald.

"Hallo, hallo! Come to see us off?" he said. "Where were you? I looked for you, to say good-bye. You've just missed Kwanyin."

Catherine stared at him blankly. She had supposed that he would be very worried and anxious; that he might ask questions. But he seemed quite unconcerned by Kwanyin's disappearance.

"She went on the train," said Miss

Smith. "A Chinese lady came by arrangement to meet her. They have gone together."

Catherine tried to look as though that item of news was not a great shock.

She looked startled, however, and so did Charles. For Miss Smith seemed to be lying with great fluency, and Uncle Gerald was making no attempt to correct the statement.

"Oh, well, as long as she is all right!" said Catherine. "I wanted to see her when she went."

"Too bad!" said Uncle Gerald. "But never mind. You will probably see her again some time. I'm afraid I have one or two things to see to, and I must catch the next train."

Then he assured them again that they were welcome to stay, and that Miss Smith would look after them and do all she could.

"And don't be afraid," he ended.

They wished him a safe journey and good luck, and then, when he and Miss Smith had stepped into the car, Charles turned his machine.

"Fooling us—eh?" said Charles grimly.

"Or trying to keep it from us so that we don't worry," decided Catherine. "After all, we should worry if we thought she were lost. They're probably going to search for her now. They've probably telephoned the house. Chinamen may be searching—waiting for Kwan-yin."

Charles gave a nod, and settled down to take the motor-cycle home at top speed, for all this while Mollie had been alone in the house, and although she was not a nervous girl, she must be feeling lonely and a little on edge, they decided.

But Mollie, in their absence, was doing some exploring on her own account.

Mollie is Mystified

MOLLIE STERNDALÉ, left alone in the strange Chinese house, had walked about, filled with idle curiosity, examined pictures, embroideries, ornaments, idols, with great care and interest.

Kai Tal had hurried away when he had discovered that Catherine and Charles had seen him since, and Mollie had not seen him since.

At first a Chinaman had followed her, not speaking, not even looking. She had gone from room to room, and everywhere she went he followed.

But he always found something to do as an excuse for following her. He would pick up an ornament, or finger a piece of tapestry, or adjust the set of a rug.

Mollie, however, realised that she was not to be let out of his sight, and that idea had not pleased her.

"Speakee English?" she had asked him.

He had turned with a start, as though not previously aware that she was there.

"No spikkee—English," he said.

"Oh," said Mollie, "what a pity! I was going to ask you if you would like a pound note."

"Spikkee little English," said the Chinaman impassively.

"I'd like a pound note, too," said Mollie, her eyes glimmering.

The Chinaman's face did not show his feelings. He bowed his head, and altered a rug slightly from one position to another he liked better.

Mollie walked to the rug and changed it back to its former position.

The Chinaman said nothing—did not even seem to notice.

Next Mollie had up-ended a chair very carefully.

The Chinaman had to put it straight again, and Mollie very softly tiptoed to the door and dodged into the next room, hiding behind a screen.

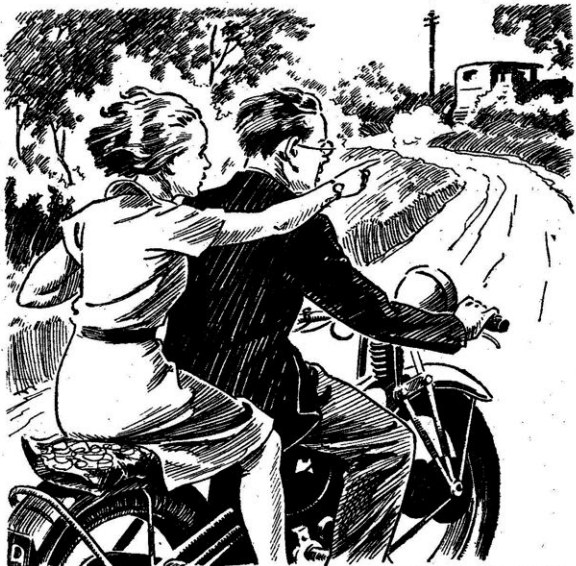
She did not see him again. She waited ten minutes or more, and crept out to find the whole place seemingly deserted.

Even in the hall, where there was usually a servant standing, there was no one. A large wooden idol stood to

crossed to the wall and swung aside the bracket on which a small bronze idol rested.

The action was deliberate and purposeful, and Mollie watched. But when she saw a dark, gaping hole where a panel had been, she nearly gasped aloud.

The Chinaman who had moved the idol walked through the hole into the darkness. But his companion hesitated.



"THERE'S the car—look!" Catherine exclaimed, and sure enough it was to be seen vanishing round a distant corner. Charles put on speed. They must not lose sight of their quarry.

one side of the hall, and Mollie looked at it very carefully.

To her surprise and delight it was hollow. There was room for her to stand behind it and be completely hidden. There were even slits in the eyes through which she could see.

"Artful dodgers," she chuckled. "I bet one of them stands here hardly breathing, and spying on everything."

Mollie stood quite still, and peered through the eye slits. Everything in the house was still; there was nothing to suggest that she was not quite alone. Moments passed, and then suddenly Mollie grew alarmed. The stillness began to get on her nerves.

A creaking sound broke the silence suddenly. She brought herself to earth. Holding her breath, she listened. There came a soft tread. Then followed the rustle of a bead curtain.

A Chinaman stepped into view, holding to the curtain, waiting for another to follow. They stood together, whispering, and Mollie watched them carefully.

"What a shock for them if I suddenly jumped out," was her thought. "Or if I made a deep groaning sound."

She was known as a joker at school, and she would have fallen to the temptation to give the Chinamen a little of their own medicine, if something altogether surprising had not happened to take her interest.

One of the Chinamen suddenly

He seemed suspicious, and stared about him.

Mollie scarcely breathed. She realised that if he looked at the idol he might see her eyes gleaming; but she dared not move.

"If they see me they'll say I spied," she told herself in alarm.

Mollie felt that, above everything, she must scream. She was strung up with excitement.

But the Chinaman turned quite suddenly and went to the gap in the wall. He ducked low to enter, and then, just as Mollie was relaxing, he turned.

Click!

His next movement was almost a spring through the hole in the wall, and the panel went home behind him.

Mollie was staring at the blank wall again.

"Now, am I dreaming?" she asked herself.

Then silence reigned again. Not a sound. No movement. She was alone in this quaint hall, with its gong, its dragons, the idols and tapestries.

Thousands of years ago these very things had adorned Chinese temples. Men who had lived thousands of years ago had carved them, before England was dreamed of.

Mollie shivered. She stepped out from behind the hollow idol and looked about her.

"I was dreaming," she told herself. And she almost believed that she had

just dreamed the incident of the Chinaman and the little idol. But she went across to it and very carefully moved the bracket.

It was just an experiment. It was something that she had to do to make quite sure that she was really awake now.

Suddenly she felt a draught. She looked to the left, and there was a black gap where the panel had been.

Mollie did not move; she stared at that gap in fascination and dread, expecting a Chinaman's head to peer through, or a clutching hand to come groping out.

But nothing happened, and, gaining courage, she stooped and peered through.

For a yard or two the daylight penetrated sufficiently for her to see a red carpet. The panel gave on to a secret corridor, and of a sudden she realised that this must be the place where Catherine had explored.

Only Catherine and Mollie shared that secret.

Catherine, so Mollie remembered, had seen men busy in a kind of tunnel, digging, and working with pickaxes.

Putting her head just inside the hole, Mollie listened. Voices came faintly, high-pitched, sing-song Chinese voices. She heard, too, the clink of pickaxes.

Mollie was excited. She wanted to

explore, just to have a peep at what was going on. She wanted to know why they were digging, what they could possibly be doing, and whether it had any connection with Kwanyin's father.

Was Kai Tal there, supervising? What was happening?

So intent was she that she did not hear a soft step behind her. She could only hear what was going on inside.

Unseen, a Chinaman crept closer to her.

Without a sound he sprang. But he did not pull her back. He gave her a violent push that sent her stumbling into the darkness.

"Much regret," said the smooth, mocking voice of Kai Tal.

A wild scream of terror came from Mollie. Then the door closed. She was locked in.

Kai Tal, his eyes glinting, turned back into the hall and tiptoed to the front door.

He peered through a small glass panel and saw a motor-cycle advancing up the drive.

Catherine and Charles were returning.

"Phew! Thank goodness that's over," Catherine was saying. "I should think Mollie must have heard that fearful din from the village."

She turned the great brass knob of the door, and pushed.

Kai Tal moved silently aside and

stepped behind the large, hollow idol, where Mollie had been.

"Hallo! No one at home," said Catherine.

"The chap who usually stands here's gone, too," said Charles. "I bet they're all looking for Kwanyin—"

"Yes, poor kid, they'll be waiting for her," said Catherine. She did not guess that Kai Tal was standing only a few yards from her.

"Let's tell Mollie," said Charles. "Only be careful, Catherine. No giving anything away. The Chinks, I mean, may be listening, and they would pretty soon guess that—"

"Shush! No sense in telling them, then," warned Catherine.

"Who's telling them?" said Charles.

"You were just going to, duffer."

"Don't call me a duffer! There's no one here to tell."

"Well, don't we know that walls have ears here?" asked Catherine, and then she cupped her hands, and called:

"Mollie!"

They listened. No reply.

"Hope she hasn't gone to the lake for a swim," said Charles. "Once I'm out of the way, you girls do such senseless things. If Mollie's gone to the lake I shall be most frightfully annoyed, you know."

"Shame!" said Catherine, with heavy sarcasm. "But, I say, I don't feel at all afraid, do you? I mean, these idols don't seem so sinister in this sunlight. Hey, Mollie!" she called.

"You go that way, I'll go this," said Charles, pointing out the way he expected Catherine to take in obedience to his command.

He passed through a bead curtain, and the sound of his footsteps disappeared.

Catherine turned to obey him, but paused. A soft, strange sound had come to her. It was the sound of an indrawn breath.

All at once her lightness of heart went. She stiffened. She hardly breathed.

Someone was watching, spying.

She glanced round the small hall, and then nearly screamed. For, looking in the direction of the small idol that operated the entrance to the secret panel, she saw something that filled her with horror.

At one side of the panel, to the left of the idol, was a piece of bright material. It protruded from the beading of the panel.

At a glance Catherine recognised it. It was a piece of Mollie's frock.

She stepped forward, and then hesitated, looking about her warily. But now she could see that the material had been trapped, as in a door. The panel was slightly ajar where the material had caught.

"A secret panel," she told herself, and then remembered the occasion when she had been wearing the idol's head. Then she called softly:

"Mollie, Mollie!"

It seemed to her that a soft reply came, and she went to the panel, to open it.

But that sound she had heard had come from behind her. Kai Tal had moved from behind the idol. As he stepped forward Catherine moved the bracket on which the little idol stood—the secret catch that opened the panel.

Will Catherine be trapped by the cunning Kai Tal? Next Friday's exciting chapters reveal the sequel to this dramatic incident, so make quite certain of your SCHOOLGIRL by ordering it right away.

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MY DEAR READERS.—Y et another move! Yes, I came back from my holidays to learn that I was to be installed in a new office. So for the past few days, Gusty—my office-boy—has been having a high old time, clearing everything up in readiness for the move.

I think Gusty would like a move every week. He simply revels in the general upheaval and excitement. Unfortunately, he has an unhappy knack of either losing or breaking everything which he touches.

For instance, he started taking down my few pictures. You would think it was a simple matter to take down three pictures—but no. Gusty, perched precariously on a high chair, turned the affair into a sort of acrobatic feat.

In fear and trembling, I watched as he wrestled with the hooks. And what I dreaded only too soon came to pass. The chair suddenly wobbled, Gusty staggered wildly, and then, with a crash that must have been audible half-way down Fleet Street, collapsed into the fireplace.

Unfortunately, he did not crash alone. The picture came down with him, and when the dust had somewhat cleared, I saw Gusty squatting in the fireplace, entangled in picture wire and surrounded by broken glass.

However, the move was safely accomplished at last, and now you may imagine your Editor safely ensconced in a newly decorated room, the pictures (what remains of them) safely rehung, and everything more or less tranquil once again.

Oh, I almost forgot to mention my new curtains. When my niece, Claudine, heard about my move, she said: "Oh, you simply must have some new curtains. I'll make you some."

Knowing Claudine, I didn't pay too much attention. Judge of my surprise, therefore, when the other day she appeared with an enormous parcel containing—curtains. And such curtains!

Duly hung, they presented a truly wonderful appearance (for Claudine's ideas of decoration are rather startlingly modern). I'm afraid some of my contributors, entering my room, must have something of a shock.

Now, in a very few words, I must tell you something about

NEXT WEEK'S STORIES

The third of the present series of complete Cliff House holiday stories appears next Friday, under the title of "IN HIDING ON HOLIDAY." Written by popular Hilda Richards, this magnificent tale stars your great favourite, Tomboy Clara Trevlin, and is a stirring narrative of exciting events at Pellabay Castle.

Marjorie Stanton's "MORCOVE IN UNKNOWN AFRICA," and Elizabeth Chester's "PAGODA OF PERIL," will tell you again next week, and there will of course be another sparkling complete story featuring Her Harumscarum Highness.

Pat's four pages of delightful articles complete a really splendid number—one you simply mustn't miss!

And don't forget that your SCHOOLGIRL will be on sale on Friday next week.

With best wishes, YOUR EDITOR.

In Quest of the Golden Grotto . . . Thrilling Adventures with the Morcove Chums in This Exciting Jungle Serial

MORCOVE

By MARJORIE STANTON

IN UNKNOWN AFRICA



FOR NEW READERS.

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.

Arriving in the Kwamba country the expedition makes friends with the natives. They promise to find the Golden Grotto and share the expected treasure with the Kwambas. Betty, POLLY LINTON, and her brother, Jack, are chosen to accompany MR. WILLOUGHBY on the last stage of the perilous expedition. Their guide is to be an old witch-doctor who, however, has already proved himself their deadly enemy!

(Now read on.)

The Valley of the Giant

"ARE you two girls getting tired?"
"No, Mr. Willoughby; not a bit!"

"An hour since we set out—um! Well, from what the Kwamba chief said, we shouldn't have to go much farther."

"So long as our guide is taking us the right way, sir."

This was Jack Linton, with a private wink for his sister Polly and her chum Betty.

That pair of Morcovians, very happy at having to go with Mr. Willoughby and Jack upon what promised to be such a thrilling bit of sightseeing, quite understood the meaning of the wink.

They and Jack had agreed not to say anything too disturbing to Mr. Willoughby about the native guide. At the same time, there was no harm in implying mistrust of the man. So Jack's wink had simply meant: "Because I've said that, don't you girls say the rest."

But now Mr. Willoughby, walking slightly ahead of the three juniors, with the Kwamba guide still more in

front, smiled round in a very knowing manner.

"You youngsters don't like this black fellow? Neither do I. He's the very last man I would have wished to pick from the whole Kwamba tribe—their witch-doctor. But you know how I was placed. The chief would have him take us to this strange place—declared, in fact, that not another soul in the tribe could ever be persuaded to go there!"

"All I'm saying is, sir," Jack grinned, "the old bloke looks his part."

"Doesn't he?" Polly grimaced. "Horrid, skinny wretch!"

Mr. Willoughby gave an agreeing nod, and faced to the front again. So, like the two girls and Jack, he could keep an eye upon the guide, who at the best had been openly sulky from the start, and yet, strangely enough, he was leading the way quite eagerly.

"I can just imagine what he's thinking," Betty shrewdly muttered to Polly and Jack. "Sort of nasty, spiteful idea; since the Kwamba chief would have us go to see the Valley of the Giant, then we must be taken there. But—"

"If only we can come to harm, so much the better for old Cross-Eye!" Jack said, with a grin at the nickname, suddenly thought of for the odious creature. "Say, though!"

This added exclamation was due to a sudden increase in the impressive nature of their surroundings.

In the last few moments they had followed the witch-doctor round a sharp bend in a rough track—one that was like the dry bed of a watercourse, walled in by brown rocks.

Beyond the bend the view ahead became a wide one, and it was what could be seen of a sudden by looking beyond the plodding guide that so excited Jack.

As for Polly and Betty, they instantly wondered aloud:

"But is this it, then—the Valley of the Giant?"

Again Mr. Willoughby smiled round upon his trio of youthful companions; but as the witch-doctor still padded on, his bony feet untroubled by the pebbly nature of the track, there was no halting for an exchange of comments.

The leader of the Morcove Expedition to Kwamba, and his three juniors, would certainly have come to a standstill just here if the guide had consulted their wishes. For the "surprise view" was more than impressive in its rugged grandeur. It was sensational.

A more enormous valley than this that had suddenly opened out to them, between two of the vast mountains of the great Kwamba range, Betty and Polly could not have imagined.

Sunless was the bottom of the great valley at this time, for the burning African sun was but two hours from his setting. Accustomed in the last few weeks of holiday travel in equatorial Africa, to the most dazzling, grilling sunlight, the juniors at once marked the cool gloom which this valley had to offer. Yet it was a change from trying heat that did not seem to give relief.

Instead, the mysterious place was all the more oppressive, because of its being in deep shade. The very spirit of the valley seemed to be whispering: "All who enter here—beware!"

Suddenly the witch-doctor stopped, and, facing round, let them see that cunning face of his for the first time since he set off to conduct them, by tortuous ways, to this spot.

No proud or pleased smile was his, such as any ordinary guide is likely to indulge in, having provided eager sightseers with a thrill. He could, of course, only speak the native language, of which none of his companions knew

a word. So he had to resort to looks and gestures, and they were all of a sudden "There-you-are-then" kind.

"Well, then," Polly impatiently clamoured, "where is the Giant—the man turned to stone," as the Kwambas call him? This must be the valley, right enough."

"We'll take a look round—after a few minutes' rest, perhaps?"

"Oh no! No hanging about," Betty laughingly pleaded. "Why?"

"All right, then. Come along with me. Our guide, I take it, prefers not to go any farther."

The witch-doctor had suddenly squatted down, knees to chin. His bony black arms were clasped about his doubled legs, the posture being altogether one of sulky determination—not to go another step.

"Hanged if I tip him when we get back!" Jack grinned. "Now, if old Kwamba could have come with us, what a difference!"

"Like some bald-headed old vulture," Polly said, as she looked back over a shoulder. "What a shame it is, though, that these tribes must always have some awful witch-doctor Johnny, only living to make trouble for others."

"We'll watch it that he doesn't make any trouble for us," Betty murmured.

"Naturally, a man like that is bound to be jealous of our standing so well with the tribe, and its chief. Then there's the reason for our having come to Kwamba to find the Golden Grotto. The tribe wants us to find it for them, but I very much doubt if he does."

"That's just about it," Jack heartily agreed. "He only wants things to stay as they are, so that he can go on 'smelling out' as many victims as ever, and have a high old time in his own rotten way. Nasty bit of work!"

"Strange," said Betty to the brother and sister, Mr. Willoughby keeping slightly in advance, "the witch-doctor is the only Kwamba who is not afraid of coming here. I wonder! If the truth were known, perhaps the cunning wretch has caused the valley to be haunted?"

"So that he could have the place all to himself," Polly rejoined. "In which case he may have found out something about it that he hasn't wanted the tribe to discover."

"I wonder!" Betty whispered. "Hallo," as she glanced back, "he's gone!"

"Good riddance, then!" Polly grimaced. "We can easily find our way back. But he hasn't gone far—not he!"

"Skulking amongst the rocks—spying upon us," Jack was carrying on the shrewd talk, when Mr. Willoughby called out as he stopped dead, pointing. "Over there. See it?"

"Oh!" jerked Betty and Polly, whilst Jack fairly shouted.

"By Jove, so it is! Hurrah! The 'man turned to stone.'"

But the recess was a perfectly natural one—simply the freakish shape a gully had taken at the foot of one of the mountains which formed a whole side of the valley.

As for the "man turned to stone," the giant after whom the valley was called by the Kwamba people—it was obviously the work of ancient Egypt.

Even the three juniors could recognise, just as quickly as did Mr. Willoughby, how exactly the image resembled one of those impressive stone figures which still survive to-day amongst the tombs of the Pharaohs.

But the size of it! That was what held Mr. Willoughby and his young companions spellbound.

Twenty feet high, at least, was the figure, and this although it was that of a seated man. The weather of thousands of years had erased much of the original sculpturing in all its faithfulness to proportion and other rules of art.

The face itself was worn smooth by time, so that it now presented a strangely bleared effect as to the expression. Yet the eyes, deeply carved, still kept their staring, sphinx-like look, and the firm set of the mouth was traceable above the square, bearded chin.

There he sat, the giant of the valley, alert, kingly as a monarch upon his throne, the upper part of his arms coming straight down to his hips, and his thighs, so that either hand clasped over a knee.

"King Ankh?" Betty wondered aloud, ending a full minute of silence due to awe. "Is that who he is supposed to be?"

"I expect so," Mr. Willoughby nodded. "He was never here, of course; but those who found their way to Kwamba as an expedition from his kingdom—they set up the figure in honour of him."

"What it must have cost them to do it!" Polly gasped. "I mean the labour, to say nothing of the actual sculpture work."

"How on earth did they ever set about it all?" Jack marvelled. "See the size of him! Did they simply carve him out of one whacking great mass of rock?"

"But I don't believe it is done all in one block," Mr. Willoughby muttered, going closer still to start a very keen inspection. "Anyhow, the Egyptians did some wonderful things in the way of setting up huge stones on end."

The juniors also went nearer, and then he remarked:

"No, this image is not all of one piece. It seems to have been made in three-four-five sections at least. Still, pretty good effort!"

"I should think it was!" Betty admiringly exclaimed. "And that makes you wonder why—they went to such trouble. The Ankh sign on the mountain above our camp—that you can easily account for. It was done merely to show their claim, as it were, to the Kwamba country. It can be seen from miles away. But this statue hidden away in this valley!"

"Has it something to do with the Golden Grotto itself?" was Polly's thrilling suggestion. "It was their finding gold at Kwamba which made them want to come back again, some day, and get more of it. I wonder if they ever did!"

"Very likely not," Mr. Willoughby responded, whilst he still prowled round and round the stone figure, sometimes with his eyes only six inches from the graven surface. "One thing is certain. All knowledge of this place died with the King Ankh dynasty."

"Whew!" Jack whistled. "When you think, chaps"—as if his sister and Polly were schoolboy pals of his—"we really are the first white people to tread here! If any explorer had come this way at any time he would have been bound to shout about it when he got back home. 'As we shall do!' chuckled Polly. "And have samples of the gold to show as well, perhaps. How perfectly splendid! Oh, what a holiday trip this has been! First, getting to Kwamba, and now—this!"

"Yes," Betty laughed, in great excitement. "Here in this Valley of the Giant—somewhere here, surely, the Golden Grotto!"

"Better open your haversacks and get a bite and a drink," Mr. Willoughby affably suggested, as he himself lighted another cigarette. "We mustn't hang about for long, this first visit. If we are to be back in camp before dark—"

"But we shall come out here again tomorrow!" was Polly's glad, taken-for-granted cry. "With some of the others—a whole day here!"

"How about shifting camp to this valley, sir?" Jack suggested, as he unstoppered a water-bottle that held cold coffee. "Have some of this, girls. What I'm thinking, Mr. Willoughby, we are more on the spot here. This valley was more important to the Egyptians than that mountainside where they carved the Ankh sign, wasn't it?"

"Not the least doubt, going by this," Mr. Willoughby said, nodding towards the colossal image. "In fact, I'm wondering whether—"

And there he broke off abruptly, no less startled than were the two girls and Jack, by a sudden noise of alarming significance.

The brooding silence of the great valley had been put to flight by a dull rumbling as of falling rocks on one of the steep slopes.

"Oh, look—look!" Polly yelled. "Up there!" she went on to a louder yell of "Look out!" at the same time darting to be out of danger.

With her ran Betty and Jack and Mr. Willoughby. It was a general stampede to get more away towards the dead level floor of the valley, whilst down the steep slope behind the stone giant came tons of falling rock.

To the rumble and crash of bounding boulders, as they came skipping downhill, was added the harsh roar of loosened pebbles drawn after them.

For a few moments there was such a deafening noise in the ears of the two girls and their companions as reminded them of the roar of breakers along Morocco's rugged shores.

Then, as they stopped and looked round—feeling sure they had run far enough to be out of harm's way—they were just in time to see one of the foremost rocks, of all that were hurtling down, hit the stone image.

A loud, jarring smash sounded sharply above the general avalanching roar. That lump of rock, in full career, had dealt the statue a shaking blow.

Crash! Again—smash! The ancient stone image was standing right in the path of rocks that still hurtled down. It was doomed to sudden destruction—at long last!

Those who were near to see this fateful thing happening became aghast. For thousands of years, that wonderful work of art had survived, and now it was being suddenly shattered—smashed to atoms.

Betty and the others saw it falling to bits under such a terrific assault. The head was off—lying about in all the dust and smother, somewhere. After

The "Man Turned to Stone"

THE two girls and Jack had Mr. Willoughby keeping up with them as they made their own eager dash to get a closer look at the colossal stone image.

It had come into sight suddenly upon their left, being set up in a recessed position amongst great boulders.

As the four of them reached the half-enclosed space in front of the figure, they could almost believe they were treading the boulder-strewn floor of what had once been a vast rectangular building, its wall fashioned from blocks of hewn stone.

thousands of years—no more would that stone face stare out, with its sphinx-like expression, into the valley!

"Awful!" Betty gasped, when at last the rumble of cascading stones was dying down. "Oh, and it seems such a shame!"

"Smashed—wiped out!" Polly panted. "And so now our chums will never know what a wonderful thing it was. We shall try to describe it—"

A wild shout interrupted her. It came from Jack.

"But that's why it happened!" he was angrily roaring. "See him—up there, where the rocks came from! The witch-doctor!"

"What! Oh—"

For now Betty and Polly, like Mr. Willoughby, were gazing up the steep mountainside. Jack's outflung hand was pointing directionally.

A tiny figure to them all, seen as he was from so far below—there was the guide who had conducted them to the valley.

The witch-doctor—he was up there, in view to them only because he had not been quick enough to scramble out of sight. Now he was doing his best to clamber to some hiding-place amongst the crags.

For a few seconds longer they could see him, as he wriggled and stooped about; and then—he slipped!

He slipped and fell, because of guilty over-haste. And, even though only a few moments ago the man's ill-will towards them had been shown again, they all cried out in great concern, knowing the fate that must now be his!

The Secret of the Valley

IN the returning silence, after all the appalling commotion of the last few moments, Betty and Polly and Jack turned their eyes upon Mr. Willoughby.

He was looking very grave, still staring up to that part of the craggy slope where the witch-doctor had last been seen.

"Yes, well! Now I shall have to go up—to see," came the calmly-voiced decision. "I must know if he is lying about up there, only injured. If he is, then we'll do our best for him."

"Shall we all go, sir?"

"No, Jack; your sister and Betty will stay about, down here, and you must keep with them. I shan't be long, and we shall be within easy shouting distance. There's no risk, I imagine, of any more rocks coming down," added Mr. Willoughby.

He hurried away, to start his awkward climb, and for a little while the two girls and Jack watched him.

"Geo, though," Jack muttered. "Just fancy the witch-doctor trying that game on us! Talk about being 'put on the spot!' We were on the spot just then!"

"Near enough, anyway," Betty agreed, a little shakily. "I believe now that we might have been hurt after all, if the stone giant had not been in the way."

Polly nodded.

"Yep! Some of those lumps of rock were fairly round. They might have some bowling at us, even though we had run to be out of the way."

"Let's have a look at what remains of poor old King Ankh," Jack said with returning joviality. "Find his head, chaps; take it home as a souvenir!"

"How?" Polly jested back. "Don't expect me to help you carry it, anyway. Just look at the state the place is in now!"

"As if there'd been an earthquake," Betty put it. "We'll be able to take back tiny bits of the statue, anyhow, for the Morocco museum! There are parts of it simply smashed to atoms."

They were almost back at the very spot where, five minutes since, they had stood grouped in front of the image. It was a case of having to step warily now, for the debris was heaped in many a loose mound. Big fragments of smashed boulders, by suddenly turning over, could easily crush a foot.

Jack suddenly whistled his renewed awe.

"I'm bothered, girls! Even the sort of foundation stone of the statue was upset! King Ankh was fetched down good and well, that time. It made a clean sweep of him."

He had no sooner voiced that comment than he saw Betty make a pouncing movement—as if to snatch up some interesting fragment. But her hand did not go to ground; she merely stooped low, appearing to use her ears rather than her eyes.

"Here—listen, you two!"

Then Polly and Jack, putting themselves close to Betty, felt sure that there was a faint sound coming, as it were, out of the ground!

"There must be a crevice just here, letting up the trickling noise of running water," Jack broke out in great excitement. "Geo, but that's odd! Is there, then, an underground waterway, where the statue stood?"

"Or a dug well?" Polly hazarded. "Did they put up the statue to cover a well?"

"Dashed big lid for a well-top, if they did," her brother derided the suggestion. "No! But look here, supposing the statue was set up, to cover a kind of mine-shaft?"

"The way in to the Golden Grotto!" Betty cried, bringing her hands together with a clap. "Oh, quick! Let's see if we can find out something, by shifting away some of the broken rock!"

"It's the very thing to do," Jack shouted.

Instantly they fell to work, and for the next five minutes there was an incessant rattling and crashing as the fractured rock was removed.

Often it took a couple of them to shife aside one extra large lump. They had begun work upon what was a mound, and as this was slowly reduced it seemed to them that the unmistakable noise of water, gurgling along an underground channel, grew slightly louder.

Then Mr. Willoughby came back, to raise his brows in astonishment at what the juniors were doing.

"Fact is, sir, we're on to something good, we reckon!" Jack puffed. "You can hear running water."

"Water! Ah, then!" was Mr. Willoughby's understanding murmur. "But about that witch-doctor, I found him, and—nothing I could do. Don't know how the chief and his tribe will take the news, but that man broke his neck when he fell."



IT was a wonderful sight that Mr. Willoughby's torch revealed—the Golden Grotto. "Found, at last!" Betty breathed.

The tragic news was given in a subdued tone which was not without its note of pity. And the listeners showed how they, too, were being affected by the witch-doctor's death when they paused for a few seconds and looked most solemn.

"Let me give you a hand," Mr. Willoughby quietly offered at last. "We ought to be going, but it would be fine if we could take back the news that we have actually found the grotto's very entrance. It may well be that."

"If it is—oh!" Polly panted, working on again as fast as ever. "And need we be in such a hurry to go back, Mr. Willoughby? After all, you did bring a torch, so if it does come on dark before we—"

"Hi!" Jack's excited shout overwhelmed Polly's breathless voice. "How's that, all! Just look!"

He stared and nodded down to the spot from which he had just lifted a large lump of broken stone, to cast it aside with the rest. And his companions saw—a hole in the ground just there, roughly D-shaped.

There was no need for Mr. Willoughby to tell them that it looked as the very shape of the hole meant that it could easily be enlarged. Jack and the girls were realising; the straight side was part of the edge of a square opening. They had only to heave away some more slab-like pieces of stone, and then the top of the shaft would be uncovered.

"But we can't get down," Polly bitterly deplored. "Oh, rotten! We'll have to wait until—"

"No!" Jack suddenly shouted again, in greater excitement than ever. "It's O.K., boys! I can see now—steps leading down!"

The Golden Grotto

IN a moment they were all four on hands and knees round the uncovered shaft-head, peering down.

But it was black darkness only a yard or so below the square mouth of the pit.

Mr. Willoughby produced a torch from a pocket of his white drill jacket, thumbed on the current, and shone the brilliant ray into the black void.

It had been possible to see the top-most stone steps. Now the eager gazers saw how other steps went steeply down in a direct way. And every step was one well cut in the rock.

Mr. Willoughby switched off the torch, and then looked at his watch.

"A few minutes make no odds," he significantly smiled. "I shall go down. You two girls had better come after me," added the leader, "and Jack will follow last of all. That'll make you helpful, Jack, if there's any awkwardness about scrambling out again. First of all, though—"

And the juniors—fuming with impatience—had to watch him as he took out his notebook and tore from it several blank leaves.

Crumpling these together, he set light to them. Not until the handful of paper was a flaming ball, did he drop it into the dark shaft, in such a way that it missed the first few steps.

Peering down again, they all saw the paper still burning, after it had lodged upon a step fully fifteen feet from the surface.

"Air's all right as far down as that, anyhow," Mr. Willoughby commented in delight. "So here goes!"

Betty followed him down, and after her came Polly, then Jack. As soon as the daylight from above failed, Mr. Willoughby switched on the pocket torch again. The girls and Jack were on the alert, ready to act instantly on any warning or checking word.

But the descent was perfectly easy. To their joy, Mr. Willoughby was soon remarking that the air must be quite good everywhere. He had lighted and thrown down another ball of paper to a greater depth, and it not only remained aflame, but gave signs of a draught.

"Fact is the running water down there means a whole lot to us," he voiced in the gloom. "There is probably an underground stream. Where it enters the ground the air passes in as well, and it finds its way out where the water reaches the open again, through some fissure or gully. Are you youngsters all right?"

"Yes!" the girls gladly shouted, whilst Jack droned a hearty:

"O.K., chief!"

Except that the stone steps became of irregular size, some being so deep that it was a case of having to jump, the exploring descent remained as simple as it was thrilling.

Then the juniors knew that Mr. Willoughby had come off the last step on to level ground. He was at a standstill, shining the torch this way and that.

Betty got down to him, and instantly there were her sight-seeing cries to make Polly and Jack come on down all the faster.

"Oh, wonderful!" was Betty's entranced cry. "The sight of a lifetime!"

THE GOLDEN GROTT—at last!

They had found their way into it. They were the first feet to tread the rocky floor of this cavernous place, since the Egyptians were here, thousands of years ago!

By the electric ray, these discoverers were viewing now what must have been first revealed to those ancients only by the smoky flame of primitive torches.

A single advancing step, then a pause before going on just one more step; thus they were still proceeding after their first ten minutes below ground.

No sense of doing a risky thing accounted for the slowness of their advance. They had a smooth, level rock-floor to walk, in places coated with

a reddish grit. It was like following a winding road beside which ran a stream.

The water, flashing in the light from the electric torch, seemed to Betty and Polly such a delicious sight.

Their weeks in equatorial Africa had often meant a half-serious moaning for water in abundance—and here it was, ice-cold, pure as any spring water of the Homeland!

And to look away from that crystal clear stream was to be thrilled by the mysterious grandeur of the whole place. A golden-grotto, indeed!

Already Mr. Willoughby, whilst Betty held the torch, had cupped his hands to fetch up some of the silt over which the water flowed, and there had been his word for it, as an expert, that they were tiny grains of gold which speckled the handful of slop. Gold, too, was in all the rocks forming walls, roof, and strangely shaped columns in this great cavern.

Gold in such rich veins that, whichever way the explorers glanced, they saw the colour of it in shimmering streaks!

"But we must get back," Mr. Willoughby sighed, so that his companions could tell how reluctant he was to take returning steps. "We mustn't have our friends getting anxious about us. Besides—"

He paused, like one forgetting what he had been going to say, and for a moment he kept the torch shining steadily upon one part of the solid rock which was all little ledges.

See where those Ankh fellows worked the place as an actual gold-mining, he keenly commented. "They got the ore away, right enough. As a rule, the Egyptians only obtained their gold from river-beds."

Then, taking the girls and Jack with him upon the way back to the sloping entrance-shaft, he resumed:

"I was going to say, I think we ought to spare a few minutes, above ground, covering that shaft-entrance. You and I, Jack, can—"

"Oh, easy, sir! But just supposing that stone giant had never been smashed to bits like that! What on earth chance would the expedition have stood off—"

"Don't talk about it!" Polly was exclaiming, when she had reason for suddenly rearing her head in a listening manner.

"Voices!" she whispered incredulously. "Hark!"

"I heard—yes, and there they are again!" Betty said, under her breath. "Is someone speaking down the shaft to us? That's what it sounds like!"

They all four stepped quickly, to get back to the foot of the stone steps.

"Somebody come after us from the camp?" Mr. Willoughby conjectured. "I think it must be. That was not native lingo we picked up just then."

"Sounded to me more like—'St!' Jack broke off, for a hollow murmur of voices could be heard again. "There! Someone said 'Vite, vite!' That's French for 'quick,' isn't it?"

"French!" jerked Polly.

"Madame Dupont!" gasped Betty.

"And she has her husband with her!"

In the very moment of the Morcove party's triumph, it seems that their rivals, the scheming Duponts, have turned up. You will be longing to know what happens next, so make sure of reading next Friday's thrilling instalment by ordering your copy of THE SCHOOLGIRL at once.

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