

TOPPING TALES FOR HOLIDAY TIME

# THE SCHOOLGIRL

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Incorporating  
"SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN"



## CLARA THE FUGITIVE

A thrilling moment in  
this week's brilliant  
long complete Cliff  
House holiday story—

"IN HIDING ON HOLIDAY"

## STARRING CLARA TREVLIN: A Dramatic Long Complete Tale of the Cliff House Chums on Holiday



# IN HIDING ON HOLIDAY

**CLARA TREVLIN**—a fugitive from justice—in danger of arrest for a crime she did not commit! **Babs & Co.** spied upon and humiliated—the outcasts of Pellabay Castle. No wonder that the holiday they had hoped to enjoy has become a mockery; no wonder they are all determined to fight to the last to prove Clara's innocence, and to save the Castle Hotel from the schemers who wish to ruin it!

Following Footsteps:

"**W**ERE not going"  
"Rather not!"  
"We're stopping"—and here Barbara Redfern's blue eyes flashed with the light of battle,—"until we've got to the bottom of the mystery, and proved old Clara's innocence."  
"What-ho!"

And the group of girls clustered in Barbara Redfern's room in the Pellabay Castle Hotel looked determined almost to a point of fierceness.

Seven there were. Barbara Redfern, once again assuming the role of leader, Mabel Lynn, her golden-haired chum, Leila Carroll, the elegant girl from the United States, Marcella Biquet, pretty, petite, and excitable.

Jemima Carstairs of the imperturbable smile and the gleaming eyeglass; pale and gentle Marjorie Hazeldean, still looking a little wan after her recent illness, and Bessie Bunter, plump and ponderous.

There had been eight, the eighth being Tomboy Clara Trevlyn, the original leader of the party. But Clara was now in hiding. Clara was a fugitive.

Extraordinary the series of events which had led up to that crisis. A fortnight ago the chums had come from Cliff House School to Pellabay Castle

By

**HILDA RICHARDS**

Illustrations by T. Laidler

Hotel, in Cornwall, to enjoy a glorious vacation by the sea.

The hotel belonged to Clara's Aunt Grace, whose free and easy ways had endeared her to all the chums. She had converted the old castle ruins into a luxurious up-to-date hotel, and had appointed a manageress and her daughter to take charge.

The manageress' name was Mrs. Coates; her daughter's, Ida, and a more unscrupulous pair of rascals it would have been hard to find.

Not very long had it taken the Cliff House chums to discover that Mrs. Coates and her precious daughter were playing some shady game—that, so far from trying to make the hotel a flourishing success, they were deliberately seeking to ruin it. Naturally Clara, who had her Aunt Grace's interests very much at heart, had been up in arms. They had all been up in arms.

Bitter and unrelenting the battle they had waged. For a time it seemed that success was to crown their efforts. By a Herculean effort they had revived interest and life in the hotel. Prosperity

it seemed, was rapidly returning. But that, naturally, had not suited Mrs. Coates' book.

Determined at any cost to get Clara and her friends removed from the hotel before they further damaged her own cause, she had very artfully planted a first-class robbery upon Clara, and had called in the police.

To save Clara from the consequences of that plot, Babs & Co. had rescued her and hidden her.

That had happened two days ago. The police were still searching for Clara, not guessing that she was lying low in a secret chamber of the castle itself.

But in the meantime many and bitter were the humiliations which had been heaped upon the loyal little party's head. They had flatly refused to go when ordered by Mrs. Coates. The guests of the hotel—or the few that remained—disdainfully cold-shouldered them wherever they were met. But their determination was unshaken.

"The next move," Jemima Carstairs was saying, "is to get some grubbins to the old fugitive, what? And—hallo, hallo, methinks I hear a rumpus within the castle walls, old Spartans!"

A rumpus there was. It had suddenly broken out beneath the window of the room in which they were congregated. There was a shout, a cry, the stamping of feet, accompanied by a

derive "Boo-hoo-hoo!" As one, the chums sprang to the window.

And as suddenly faces became dark. For down there was Ida Coates. She was at the head of a party of boys and girls.

The boys and girls were new arrivals. They had only come that morning, and, obviously, from the effusive way in which Ida had greeted them, friends of hers. Ida was pointing up at the window now, quite plainly egging them on. A yell arose as the Cliff House faces were seen.

"Get out!"

"Thieves!"

"We don't want you at Pellabay!"

"Nice manners, what?" Jemima asked.

Bab's eyes gleamed. It was quite plain that Ida was the instigator of the scene. Ida, apparently having failed by every other means to get them out of the castle, was setting her own tribe of hooligans upon their tracks.

"Where's your burglar friend?"

Bab's lips curled scornfully. Very deliberately she turned away from the window. No sense, of course, in starting a shouting argument with that hostile crowd. That would just be playing Ida's game.

"Funks!"

"Show your faces!"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Mabs.

Leila clenched her hands.

"I guess—"

"Look here, you girls, sus-somebody ought to jolly well tell them off," Bessie Bunter glowered wrathfully.

"Towards! Thieves!"

"Come and face it out!"

Bessie Bunter's eyes gleamed behind her spectacles. Not as a rule was Bessie brave. But even the pride of the Bunters rebelled at the insulting epithets which were being hurled up at the windows now.

And Bessie, for once, really felt that somebody ought to take the lead. Not if she knew it was she going to be called a coward and a thief. Before any of her chums divined her intention, she had stepped towards the window.

Crash! Up went the window. Bessie's fat face, red and furious, glared down.

"Look here, you hooligans, go away!"

"Booh!"

"If you don't go at once I shall come down to you!" Bessie threatened.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And if I come down—" Bessie went on dramatically.

But what would have happened in that dire event was never known. For one of the boys who had stood with one hand behind his back suddenly released that hand. It flew upwards. Something white and small whizzed from his palm, describing an arc in the air. Bessie, shortsighted as she was, never saw it until—

Smash!

"Groo! Yooh! Phoo!"

And back staggered valiant Bessie into the arms of her chums, wrathfully and frantically gouging at a sticky yellow mass which suddenly obliterated her features. From outside came a yell of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, phoo!" gurgled Bessie. "Wow, I'm stu-stuffed! I'm suffocated! It's all over my glasses! Wow! Oh dear!"

Babs slammed the window down, narrowly missing another missile which crashed against the pane; her face was pale with anger.

"So that's the latest game!" she said between her teeth. "Having failed to put us out by any other means, Ida sets

this gang against us. My hat! It looks as if we're in for a merry time."

"Never say die—what?" Jemima asked.

"But, look here, you know, what about this egg?" Bessie hooted.

"Eat it," Leila advised.

"Oh, really, Leila. I have eaten half the beastly thing," Bessie choked, "and I've got all the rest over my face. I s-say, Babs, you might give me a towel, or something."

But there was no towel in the room. Amenities of that description had all been withdrawn in the drive towards pushing Cliff House out of the hotel.

The only available towel was in the bathroom. Babs threw one glance towards the window, and then stepped to the door; she pulled it open, almost cannoning into a woman who was at that moment thoughtfully strolling along the corridor.

The woman was Celia Keane, as Babs had learned from the visitors' book. Babs had seen her before, and for some reason felt a little afraid of her.

Mysterious somehow, with queer, penetrating blue eyes that seemed as if they were boring into one's very thoughts, Celia Keane was a compelling and arresting figure. Tall she was, dressed in stiff clothes, which, though severely cut, suited her mannish figure to perfection, and wearing always the flat-headed, rubber-soled shoes which gave no warning whatever of her approach.

Very quick, almost ferret-like, the glance she threw at Barbara now; she paused.

"You are Barbara Redfern?" she asked without preamble.

Babs stiffened.

"Yes."

"I have been hearing things in the hotel—rather disturbing things," Celia

Keane said; and Babs flushed under the uncomfortable scrutiny of the keen blue eyes. "You had a friend—Clara Trevlyn?"

"But what—"

"Clara Trevlyn is the niece of the woman who owns this place?"

"Yes," Babs said.

"Thank you!" And, with a satisfied nod of the head, the woman smiled. "Miss Trevlyn," she said, "is at present a fugitive from the police. You know, of course, that there is a warrant out for her arrest?"

Babs' face paled.

"But Clara," she defiantly returned, "did nothing of which she has any reason to be ashamed."

"That," Celia Keane said, "is a matter of opinion. The facts, as I understand them, are that Clara took advantage of the concentration of the guests upon the festival outside to rob their rooms. She was seen by Ida Coates; shut up. She escaped in some mysterious way, leaving the stolen things behind her. One article alone she took with her—a very, very valuable pearl necklace belonging to Miss Mardle. I am right?"

She said that not as if she were asking a question, but as if compelling Babs to agree with her. Babs felt a queer thrill of fear. What an amazing woman this was! And why on earth was she asking all these questions?

"Well, y-yes," she stammered.

"Thank you!" the woman said; and, as if she had secured information which completely satisfied her, passed on, leaving Babs staring a little and feeling strangely, most terribly, uneasy.

She went to the bathroom, she got the towel; her mind was troubled suddenly. Harmless those questions had been, but the way in which Celia Keane



A STIFLED squeal came from Bessie as the egg, thrown by one of the boys, broke all over her. Fury filled the Cliff House chums at this latest attempt on the part of Ida's friends to drive them out of Pellabay Castle.

had asked them seemed to invest them with some sinister significance.

In confusion she returned to her chums.

"Why, goodness, Babs," exclaimed Mabs at once, "what's the matter?" "Oh, nothing! But that woman"—and Babs cast a half-scared glance at the closed door—"Miss Keane—she's been asking me questions. She—she seemed as if she suspected—"

"We'll have to watch her," she added. "She's trying to nose something out. I don't trust her!"

The noise outside had ceased now; the shadows of dusk were lengthening; Ida & Co., having apparently got fed-up at the unresponsiveness to their baiting, had slunk off, and for a time all was peace and quietness.

But the chums had work to do. Clara, hidden in her secret room, was without friends, without food; and Clara must be fed. The tuck, packed in Jimima's picnic-box, was all ready. It remained now to draw the usual lots as to who should take it.

That task fell to Babs.

"Good!" she said. "I'll wait till the dinner-gong sounds; everybody will be in the dining-room then, and, with luck, I ought to get through. Poor old Clara! I'll bet she's eating her heart out down there."

Which was true.

For Tomboy Clara did not belong to the patient Marjorie Hazeldene class. Clara always chafed at inactivity. Clara at that moment was pacing the narrow confines of her self-appointed prison restlessly, her eyes gleaming, her hands behind her back.

Now and again she swung round to look at the wall, through which a secret panel gave access to the Minstrels' Gallery. Two days she had been a fugitive; two days had passed, and nothing had happened. Her secret remained safe and guarded. But that was not sufficient. At this rate she might be here for weeks!

"Blow!" she murmured suddenly. Impatiently again she looked towards the secret entrance. She consulted her watch.

Muffled and faint through the walls came the vibrations of the dinner-gong, reminding her all at once that she was hungry. Where was Babs—or whoever it was who was bringing her food to-night? She took half a step towards the panel.

But no; she must wait. Her watch told her that it must still be light outside. She'd give them just another half-hour; it would be dark then. If nobody had turned up by dark—

Yet, had Clara only known it, Babs at that moment was stealing out of her room with the picnic-box in her hand, the rest having gone down to dinner. Quickly she looked up and down the corridor and breathed relief.

Thank goodness nobody was about! Carefully she tiptoed along the corridor, pausing at the flight of stairs which led down into the huge banquetting hall and to the Minstrels' Gallery. The hall was deserted.

"Good!" breathed Babs. Then she stopped. What was that? Quickly she turned. The corridor was dimmed in dusk now, shadows stood out indistinctly along it. She could have vowed that she heard a movement. But nothing was to be seen, no sound to be heard.

Uncanny the sensation she suddenly had, however—as if ~~she~~ ~~she~~ close at hand eyes were watching her. She stood for a moment staring about her. Then she shrugged, angry with herself.

"Oh, get on!" she told herself impatiently.

She stepped on down the stairs. Then again she stopped, flinging round in quick alarm. What was that?

Faintly behind her came a rustling sound.

Babs gulped. She was sure now that she was being followed. Followed by whom? For what purpose? She thought of the mysterious Celia Keane. Had that woman, in her own stealthy way, discovered that Clara was on the premises?

Babs set her lips. Well, she wasn't going to fall into the trap. She went on, pausing now and again to listen.

But she did not turn when she came to the landing which led off to the Minstrels' Gallery and the secret entrance. She went straight down into the hall. Here quickly she crossed the floor, as quickly stepped behind a suit of armour, thus hiding herself completely from view. After a minute there was a step on the stairs. A figure, treading silently, came into view and halted on the Minstrels' landing.

Babs' face turned fiery red, and then deathly pale. For the figure was that of the mysterious Celia Keane. Celia Keane, then, suspected! Celia Keane was on Clara's track!



### Surprise Attack

FOR five, ten minutes Babs waited. She waited in agony, wondering what was going to happen. Then silently the stiff figure turned.

Not till she had vanished did Babs dare move. Then swiftly she slipped from her hiding-place. Hopeless now to think of going to Clara.

She hurried up the stairs, along to her room. There, with a gasp, she put the picnic-case on the bed and sank down. What now—oh, what now?

Clara, who she only knew it, was deciding the question at that moment. Clara was fed-up. The half-hour she had allowed her chums had come and gone. Had Clara stopped to think, she might have reflected that there must have been good cause for their lateness.

But Clara was not the thinking type. Clara always construed her feelings into actions and thought afterwards. If Babs & Co. wouldn't come to her, she was going to them!

Very unthinkingly she stepped towards the panel. She listened. Not a sound. Babs moved over the beading. A soft click, and the panel soundlessly slid open before her.

She stuck out her head, looking quickly along the gallery, down into banquetting-hall. Nobody about. Good!

In a trice Clara was along the gallery, had slipped up the stairs. The chums had just come in from dinner, then. They all wheeled with a jump as the door opened and the Tomboy sidled in. Babs started.

"Clara! Oh, my hat! How did you get here?"

"Up the stairs!" Clara grinned pleasantly. "But what's the matter with you dummies? Do you realise I haven't seen any of you since this morning?"

"Clara, you—you didn't meet anybody?" Babs breathed.

"No!"

"You didn't see anybody?" she pressed anxiously. "Nobody was following you?"

Clara blinked a little.

"Not that I know of. Why? What's

the matter with you ninnies? You look as if you'd seen a ghost!"

For answer Babs went to the door. She opened it, glancing quickly up and down the corridor. But no one was in sight.

"O.K.," she said. "You were lucky." She told the Tomboy of her own experience, and Clara frowned, looking at her sharply. "The woman followed me," Babs explained. "Before that she'd asked some questions about you. I believe," she added, "she's some sort of detective, probably in Mrs. Coates' employ. That's why I couldn't get to you."

"Well, anyway, she can't have spotted me," Clara said. "If she had, she'd have been here by now. But, I say, what about the grubbins? I'm as famished as a hunter!"

The picnic-box was opened. Clara's eyes lit up as she saw the contents—veal-and-ham pie; chicken; a flask full of steaming-hot coffee. She chuckled. Out of view of the window—though, to be sure, it was practically dark now—she sat down to consume her long-delayed meal. Just to guard against surprise, Babs posted herself at the door. She felt jumpy for some reason.

Perhaps that reason was intuitive.

For at the far end of the corridor was Ida Coates. There was a triumphant sneer on Ida's haughty face.

Accompanying her were a dozen of the rowdies who had created such a hullabaloo outside the chums' window during the afternoon. Ida was chuckling softly.

"Now, quiet!" she said in a whisper. "Wait till I give the word. I've taken the precaution of pinching the key of their room, so they can't very well lock themselves in. We're jolly well going to show them that we don't want them at Pollyday, and, just for a start, we'll pitch 'em, with their things out of the window! All ready?"

"What-ho!"

"Then follow! And no row, mind, until we get to the door!"

On tiptoe they crept along. The carpet was thick. Moreover, as they all wore bathing shoes, no sound of their approach was heard. Even Babs, standing on the other side of the door, was not aware that anything was amiss until from outside came a sudden shout.

"Then—crash!" As if hurled by a cyclone, the door crashed inward. Ida & Co., with a victorious yell, swept into the room.

"At 'em!"

As one, the chums swept round. Too late, they realised the trick which was being played upon them. Up jumped Clara, the picnic-box clattering from her knees. Desperately Mabs and Jimima threw themselves in the path of the invaders. But it was too late. From Ida went up a piercing scream.

"Look! Look who's there! Clara Trevlyn!"

"My hat! The girl who's wanted by the police!"

"Collar her!"

In a moment there was a surge forward.

Babs was sent spinning on to a bed; Jimima flung to one side. Mabs pluckily threw herself into the breach, caught her foot in the edge of the carpet, and went sprawling.

But Clara had seen. Clara had realised her danger. In a moment she had leapt for the window.

"Stop her!" shrielled Ida.

But no power on earth could have stopped Tomboy Clara at that moment.

Almost in the same leap, Clara was on the sill, catching at the creeper which grew round the frame.

She swung out, swarmed down and down, and dropped.

From her pursuers went up a howl.

"She's got away!"

"Follow her!"

"Quick—quick! Outside!"

The crowd turned then. In an excitedly seething swarm, Ida and her followers swept back into the corridor. By that time Clara was running as hard as she could go for the little spinney which, enclosed in the grounds, was about a hundred feet away.

She reached it, plunging into the dense, black shadows beneath the trees just as a howl from the entrance to the castle announced that the vanguard of her pursuers had arrived outside.

It took the Tomboy perhaps the hundredth part of a second to make up her mind then. In full hue and cry were Ida & Co. One of the party apparently had a torch. She caught it beam even as she paused.

Dunly above her Clara saw a branch swaying in the breeze. With one agile leap she caught it, hoisted herself up, and then, with an agility which a squirrel might have envied, went swarming up and up among the thick, concealing leaves.

"This way!"

"She must be hiding in the spinney!"

Clara smiled grimly. She was breathing heavily. She knew that she had cut her leg, but she felt safe. She saw the torch winking below her; heard her pursuers shouting excitedly. Minutes ticked away. She began to feel cold.

Half an hour—an hour! Still they could be heard shouting below there, banging at the undergrowth. Every inch of the spinney they searched, and by and by, when it was apparent that the quest was hopeless, Clara heard them forger again and stamp away. Not until then did she move.

What now?

There was another entrance to her secret hiding-place. It lay, however, on the other side of the castle. Across the lawn, eyes would still be watching, she told herself. No sense in making a move yet. She hung about watching the castle as the lights went out, one by one, signalling the retirement of its inmates for the night.

Time passed. Though the night was not cold, Clara, in her thin, summery dress, shivered. Must be getting on for midnight, she guessed, and, though most of the guests' lights were out, one on the ground floor beamed out bright and fiercely. It was the light belonging to the room which Ida Coates and her mother used as the hotel office.

"Well, blow!" Clara decided at last.

"I'm risking it!"

"All was quiet now. If only she could get past that window unspotted, all would be well.

She crept forward, hugging the shadows. She had reached the window, on the other side of which was her own secret entrance, and she drew back. The window was open at the top and she glimpsed, peering through the corner, that Ida and her mother were inside the room. Mrs. Coates was in the act of slipping something into a long, white envelope.

"Won't be safe," she said, "to leave this lying about."

"No. For goodness' sake, put it away." Ida said apprehensively.

"Mother, you—you don't think Clara Trevlyn knows anything about it?"

Clara's eyes gleamed.

"What should I know?"

"But what, Ida, countered, "is she hanging about for? And why won't those awful pals of hers pack up?" She shrugged irritably. "Oh, I know I'm windy, if you like, but—well, bluntly,

I don't like it! I got a shock, I can tell you, when I found Clara Trevlyn in that room to-night. I thought that girl was miles away. But I begin to see now why Barbara Redfern & Co. won't clear out. They're hiding Clara, of course!"

Mrs. Coates' thin lips compressed. "We'll soon," she replied confidently, "get hold of her!"

"But how? And supposing," Ida asked, "that she, in the meantime, gets hold of that document?"

Mrs. Coates laughed sourly. "Oh, you're all jumps! Calm yourself," she said contemptuously. "How

another cigarette. There was an impatient wait while the two of them examined some document on the desk, and then Mrs. Coates rose. Clara heaved a sigh. They were going out! They were.

The switch snicked as the place was plunged into darkness. She heard the door close. Still, for a long, long time she did not move. In the wood at the back of her an owl hooted with a sudden, discordant alarm that made her jump. Far away the shrilling notes of some night bird answered the call. Was all safe now?



**BABS** tensed as a figure came slowly into view. Celia Keane! So Celia, then, was on Clara's track—was trying to find the fugitive!

should Clara Trevlyn know of the existence of this document? Who can know, besides us and the man who signed it? And he," she added significantly, "is in New York. Don't be so squeamish, girl!"

Ida pouted. Clara, ears strained, leaned forward. What was this precious document, which was to be kept so safely? About which they were both so uneasy she should find? She risked another peep into the room.

Every detail within was quite clear. Against the opposite wall stood a safe. Clara knew the safe. She also knew, she reflected grimly, its combination, which meant that she could open and close it at will. In front of that safe Mrs. Coates was now kneeling, placing the envelope on the top shelf.

Clara caught in her breath. What was in that envelope? Why were they afraid that she should find it?

"Careful, mother!" Ada said. "Oh, goodness, don't put it on top! Ram it among the other papers!"

Tensely Clara waited. She saw Mrs. Coates fiddling with the combination of the safe. She smiled a little grimly. Ida, stepping to one side, had lit

Silence—silence as heavy as the darkness. Cautiously Clara crept towards the window.

Fortunately, Mrs. Coates and Ida had neglected to lock that. It opened upwards, on well-oiled hinges, without a sound. In a flash Clara was on the sill, had swung herself over, and stood, listening to the thudding beats of her own heart.

All was black—inky black. She muttered softly as in the darkness she grazed her hip against the edge of Mrs. Coates' desk.

Then she had reached the safe.

Now! With one ear strained towards the door, Clara set to work. How thankful she was that when she had been at Pellabay last year she had been so fascinated with the safe that she had studied the combination! One, two, three to the right, four to the left—that was it! Now! Another slight half-turn to the right—and she pulled.

The safe door swung open before her. Unerringly her hand strayed towards the shelf on which the mysterious document had been placed. She drew out the pile. Oh, goodness, she thought, if only she had a light.

But there was no light. She dared

not risk switching it on. She had nothing but her own sense of touch to tell her what she wanted to find.

But she had remembered the envelope clearly, and she did not feel that she would be at fault. Ah, this was it—it was long, heavy, bulky! This must be it!

Hastily she rained the rest into the safe. She shut the door and worked the combination. The blood was pounding in her ears now, her pulses were thrilling with elation.

She slipped over the sill once more and carefully closed the window behind her. Then she turned and swiftly skirted the castle, reaching the secret entrance in the wall.

The solid masonry seemed to slip away under her pressing fingers. Crouching, she stepped in, closing the entrance behind her. Gasping, she reached her room. Almost unable to contain her excitement, she turned up the lamp, which was her only illumination, and studied the envelope in her hand.

There was no clue on its face as to its contents. Clara hardly expected it. She put her thumb under the flap, tore it open, and emptied the contents into a heap on the table.

A shower of notes fell out.

Clara jumped. She stared at the notes in stupefied bewilderment. POUND notes they were. There must have been at least a hundred of them.

But where was the document? Where—where? And frantically, with the notes still fluttering about her feet, she examined the interior of the envelope.

A sheet of paper was in there. She took it out.

And read:

"Received from Miss Celia Keane. One hundred pounds in notes, to be handed back as asked for."

And then, Clara, realising the enormity of the offence she had committed, found every drop of blood ebbing from her face.

She had taken the wrong envelope! Not only had she failed to secure the proof which would have proved her innocence, but—

She had stolen a hundred pounds!

Babs turned wonderingly.

"Clara, old thing—"

"Oh, Babs, I had to come and see you. I'm in the very dickens of a hole. Last night—" And Clara, gulping, explained what had happened.

From Mabel Lynn came a sleepy grunt.

"I say, what's the matter?"

"Shush!"

"But—" and Mabs opened her eyes.

"Oh, my hat, Clara!"

"Mabs, quiet!" Babs bade feverishly. "Don't wake Bessie. Get up. Oh, my hat, Babs's mess! Clara, what are you going to do now?"

Clara frowned.

"What can I do? I've tried to put them back, but the window of Mrs. Coates' office is shut. The door's locked as well."

There was gloomy silence. Babs shook her head.

"You were a chump to risk taking them in the dark," she opined. She stood for a moment in silence. "Give me the envelope," she said suddenly.

"You—but what—"

"You might find an opportunity," Babs explained, "to put it back. There may be a chance during the day for me to nip into the office. In any case, you'd better not keep it. One never knows what might happen, and if you were caught with the notes on you, any hope you'd ever had of proving your innocence would go by the board."

Clara looked reluctant.

"Oh, bother it, Babs—no, it's my funeral! Besides which, I haven't got what I'm in after yet. That is, the other envelope. I had an idea—"

"Oh, please, Clara, don't argue! Do give it to me!" Babs said urgently. "Never mind anything else—yet! The good thing is that this shouldn't be missed. Somehow I'll get it back to Mrs. Coates' office!"

"But the risk—"

"There's no risk!" Babs said impatiently.

"But what about—the other?"

"We'll arrange to get hold of that," Babs said. "You ought to have seen me before you tried anything. If one of us had been on guard outside the door, and another at each end of the corridor while you were in the room, you could have turned the light on and made sure. But go now," she added, and this time settled the matter by plucking the envelope from Clara's hands and rapidly passing it to Mabs. "It's getting daylight. The kitchen staff—" And then she broke off, gazing alarmingly towards the door. "Clara, quick! Under the bed!" she hissed fiercely.

"There's someone outside!"

Someone outside there was. Quite distinctly there sounded a tap on the door at that moment. Clara flung one startled, guilty glance towards it, then flung herself full length beneath the valance of Barbara's bed.

Babs looked at Mabs, nodding her head. Mabs, with a rush, dived into her own bed, taking the envelope with her, while Babs crawled into hers. The tap sounded again.

"Hey—hey! Who's that?" Babs asked, as though roused from sleep.

"Come in!"

Click! The door-handle turned. Babs sat up, the blood momentarily freezing in her veins. For the newcomer was—Celia Keane!

And, early though it was—it could scarcely have been more than four o'clock—she was already dressed. Yes—and Babs noticed this with a thrill—she had obviously been out. Little beads of morning mist shone on the hairy tweed of her coat.

"Good morning!" she said pleasantly.

"Sorry to disturb you. But there is one question—a very urgent and important question, I assure you, which I feel compelled to ask without further delay."

Babs sat upright. Clara, beneath the bed, almost ceased breathing. Mabs, feigning sleep, clutched the envelope in her hand beneath the bedclothes, and wondered, in an agony of apprehension, if Clara's mistake had been discovered.

Babs heard herself replying, in a thin voice.

"Yes?"

"It is about your friend—Clara Trevlyn."

Babs' heart stood still.

"Yes?"

"Can you tell me," the woman asked, "if she wears rubber soles?"

So startling, so strange was that question that Babs blinked.

"But why?"

"Because," Celia Keane said, and her keen gaze was darting everywhere as she spoke, "I have discovered a footprint on the flower-bed beneath Mrs. Coates' office window. The footprint is that of a girl who wears rather square-shaped toes to her shoes, and who, furthermore, had on new rubber soles of a diamond-shaped pattern."

A breathless pause.

"Well, Barbara?"

"I am sorry," Babs' lips came together. "I cannot answer that question."

"You realise that you are impeding the course of justice?"

"I am sorry," Babs repeated, between set lips.

"Very well!" Celia Keane nodded. "I can't compel an answer, of course."

She stooped swiftly to pick up something, a slip of white cambric. "I perceive, however, that Clara has been in this room"—she crushed the handkerchief in her palm—"and that at no very distant hour. She has also," she added, exhibiting the slip, "been out of doors. This handkerchief is damp with mist. Barbara Redfern"—the question was suddenly fired like a pistol-shot—"where is she?"

Babs drew a deep breath.

"I don't know who you are; I don't know who gives you the right to ask me questions," she replied boldly.

"I don't know even why you are asking them—but as far as you, Miss Keane, or anyone else is concerned—I know nothing whatever of Clara Trevlyn!"

The woman gave her a hard, penetrating stare. Babs returned it fearlessly. Under the bed Clara muttered something softly beneath her breath. Mabs, bedewed with perspiration, clutched the packet of banknotes harder.

But not one more word did Celia Keane speak. She walked towards the door. There, with the knob in her hand, she paused for a moment. Deliberately her eyes travelled to the floor of the bed under which Clara was hiding. Then she went out.

"Phew!" gasped Mabs. "Do—do you think she knew, Babs?"

But Babs did not reply. Softly she leapt out of bed. In two bounds she was at the door. She opened it, gazing up the long corridor.

Celia Keane, her head bent in thought, was in the act of entering her room at the far end. Babs turned quickly back as she disappeared.

"Clara!"

"My hat! I say, who the dickens is she?" Clara whispered as she scrambled out from beneath the bed.

"I don't know. A detective, perhaps—on your track." Babs said breathlessly. "She's cute. But listen. You can't stop here another minute. Wait



## When Morning Came

TAP!

Barbara Redfern came out of slumber with a jerk.

The first faint streaks of dawn were filtering in at the window. Somewhere an early bird was already blithely caroling its gladness to the new-born day.

But it was not that sound which had awakened Barbara; nor was it the heavy breathing of Bessie Bunter, who slept at the far end of the room, or the muttering of Mabel Lynn, who talked as she slept.

Tap! There it was again. This time accompanied by a hoarse, throaty whisper:

"Babs! Mabs! Let me in!"

"Clara!" Babs muttered.

In a moment she had flung back the sheets and stepped out of bed. With a quick glance towards Bessie's bed, she stepped to the door, which she had locked before retiring, to guard against any surprise from Ida Coates and her unpleasant friends.

Clara stood on the threshold, her face grey in the early morning light, a bulky envelope in her hands. She brushed past Babs without a word.

a tick, though. Better make sure. She's got an uncanny gift for stepping on the scene at the wrong moment. I'll slip along and make sure she doesn't hop out of her room again. Count ten, and then, unless I give some sort of alarm, slip away. Get that?"

"Yes, but—"

"Get ready, then."

And Babs, without risking being involved in further argument, tiptoed out of the room. As silently as Celia Keane herself she glided up the corridor, halting outside that mysterious woman's door. She heard her moving about.

Now! The coast was clear!

She watched. In a second or two the door of her own room came open. She saw Clara's wary face peering up and down. She nodded vigorously, swinging her hand as a signal to the Tomboy to be off. Clara took the cue. She fled towards the head of the staircase.

Inside the room there was a movement, however. Celia Keane was coming to the door!

Barbara wanted to cry out then. At all costs she must prevent Celia Keane coming out. Desperately she grasped the handle, pulling it towards her, holding the door fast. Anything—anything to delay the silent one while Clara got away!

The footsteps paused. Clara, at the head of the stairs, vanished. Babs let go of the handle, gasping in her relief. At the same moment there was a step behind her.

And a voice—acidly sneering, faintly triumphant, exclaimed:

"You, Barbara Redfern! What are you doing spying outside Miss Keane's room?"

Babs swung round, with a half-strangled cry, to gaze into the coldly suspicious and condemning face of Ida Coates.



### Meeting in the Dark

FOR one ghastly second she fancied that Ida must have seen all.

And in the next realised that that was a mistake. The look of cold, concentrated venom, the triumphant satisfaction on Ida's face showed that she was concerned only with Barbara herself. Insultingly she repeated her question.

"Why are you spying here, thief? What—?" And she stopped as the door opened, and Miss Keane, the early sunlight etching her features into firm lines and deep shadows, silently pulled the door open and regarded them.

"Oh, Miss Keane—" Ida said.

"Thank you! Barbara, did you come to see me? Come in!"

"But Miss Keane—" Ida said.

But Miss Keane took no notice. Barbara, crimson, found herself hauled into the room. The woman, with a nod, bade her be seated.

"What did you come here for?" she asked.

Babs sat silent—feeling confused and self-conscious.

"Barbara, I want Clara—I want her urgently," the woman went on. "There is something—well, never mind. I will not ask you to tell me where you are hiding her, though I may find that out pretty quickly if she is always as careless as she has proved herself to be during these last few hours. If I give you a promise that no harm shall come to her, will you send her here to me?"

Babs looked at her. No, no, she

didn't trust this woman! She had an uncomfortable feeling that she was playing cat and mouse with her. She had made up her mind now.

There was no doubt that Celia Keane was some sort of detective, though whether she was acting in the interest of the police, Mrs. Coates, or of Miss Mardle, whose valuable pearl necklace

## A GOOD HOLIDAY HABIT

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Clara was supposed to have run off with she could not be sure.

"I have told you," Babs said, with a hint of defiance, "that I know nothing of Clara Trevlyn."

"You still stick to that?"

"Yes!"

"Even if"—the woman weighed her words, and she glanced towards the door—"even as I've told you that I mean no harm by Clara?"

"Yes," Babs was forced to say.

"Very well!" The woman shrugged. "I am sorry," she said. "Ida, you may come in," she added, though Babs certainly had heard no sound outside the door. And with the words, stepped across to the door and opened it. Ida, crimson and humiliated, stood on the threshold.

"Oh, crumbs, I—I—"

"Yes, Ida, I knew you were listening," Miss Keane said calmly. "I realised it. Barbara, you may go. If you change your mind, come to me at once. Do come in, please, Ida!" What acid mockery there was in the words, however! And then, as Babs went, she turned and faced the eavesdropper.

"You are very interested in my movements, Ida?"

Ida gulped.

"Well, not—not in yours, Miss Keane."

"But Barbara Redfern's?"

"Yes, I believe—"

"I know what you believe." The woman cut her short. "I gather you heard enough to tell you what my mission is here," she added, and most disconcertingly swung round to the window, turning her back upon Ida altogether. "Perhaps," she added, "you know who I am?"

Ida breathed deeply. Her face was working with excitement now.

"You are a detective?" she breathed.

"You have been sent here by the police?"

"Perhaps." Celia Keane returned, turning to face Ida once more.

"To track down Clara Trevlyn?"

"To get hold of Clara Trevlyn—exactly—the woman nodded. "But, Ida, I do not wish you to say anything about this."

Ida was thrilled. Her eyes were blazing now.

"No, of—of course not," she said. "But, great goodness, fancy! I—I never guessed. Of course, I don't wonder that the police thought of sending a private investigator along," she added. "Obviously, as Clara can't be found anywhere else, and her friends are still here, they should think she was hiding here. But you know all the details of—of the robbery?" she added.

"Yes!"

"Miss Keane," Ida added rapidly "you know that my mother and myself are as interested as you are in running Clara Trevlyn to earth. I'm sorry you caught me listening, but perhaps it was a lucky chance, after all. If I can help you in any way—"

"Thank you!" Celia Keane said suddenly. "You can. I will call upon you, Ida. I may," she added, with a strange twist of the lip, "call upon you this very night. Meantime, if you can glean any information as to Clara's whereabouts, I should be very grateful if you would report it to me right away. But one thing—"

"Yes!" Ida cried. She was quivering with excitement and jubilation now.

"Remember, not a word to anyone. And if you find where Clara Trevlyn is hidden, tell no one until you have come to me. Remember she escaped from the police once. It may happen again. You promise that?"

"I promise!" Ida laughed.

And she stretched out a hand to seal the compact. The detective took it and smiled.

NOT a happy day the one which followed for Babs & Co.

For it was obvious from the outset that Ida and her friends were making a dead set at them.

And since Babs & Co. had precious few friends in the hotel, these days. Ida & Co. were victorious and triumphant. At breakfast that morning the chums were confronted by an unusual menu, which stated:

"MENU FOR OUR COMING CON-VICTS—Bread and Water!"

When, after breakfast, they went to bathe in the swimming pool, they were followed by a mob of Ida's friends, who hurled their clothes into the water as a hint for them to get out.

Notices announcing, "We don't want gaol-birds at Pellabay! Why don't you go to prison?" were plastered freely on the walls.

Even when, in the afternoon, the chums decided to take a walk down to the sea, they were followed by Ida's friends. The very boat which they hired to get away from the crowd was vividly decorated with bright broad awnings.

When they returned, another gang of the precious crowd, attired in mock policemen's uniforms, made as if to arrest them. The chums were crimson with humiliation by the time evening came.

"This can't go on," Babs said, between her teeth. "It's obvious what the game is. They mean to taunt us out of the hotel. But are we going?"

"And leave old Clara to fight alone?" Leila Carroll said. "Guess not, sisters!"

"Through thick and thin, and flour and treacle we'll hang together—what?" Jemima said.

Those were the sentiments, more

fiercely and resolutely expressed than ever. They were one with Clara. Clara's battles were theirs!

But Babs felt anxious. She felt worried, and she also felt apprehensive. For Babs still had in her possession the envelope containing the hundred pounds in notes.

All day Babs had carried that envelope about with her. Safely and inconspicuously concealed under her blouse though it was, she was nervous and afraid.

Not once, but a dozen times had she essayed a trip in the direction of Mrs. Coates' office, only to be dogged by Ida's friends or to find the office in possession of Mrs. Coates herself.

Dinner was over now. Night was once again drawing nigh. It was obvious that if she were to rid herself of the burning burden of guilt which possession of that money inspired within her, that she had got to make the attempt that night.

She simply couldn't live through another day in the knowledge that she was hiding that dreadful secret.

So Babs made her plans. That night, when Pellabay Castle was silent and asleep, she would find her way to Mrs. Coates' office. She said nothing of that resolve to her chums—not even to Mabel Lynn. She felt it would be safer if she carried it through alone.

Unknown to Babs, however, Clara was also making resolutions. All day she had been thinking of the other envelope, the one which contained that secret which the Coates' were so afraid would reveal their little game, and enable her to prove her own innocence. Very, very keen indeed was Clara to get hold of that.

So at the same time that Babs palpitantly crept from her room, Clara grimly let herself from her secret hiding-place.

And at the same time as Babs silently pushed open the door of Mrs. Coates' office, Clara was climbing in at the window. It was pitch-dark outside. Babs closed the door behind her, and stood still.

Then she jumped.

What was that? She saw for a moment a dim figure move against the faintly grey light which gleamed in through the panes.

She moved forward. But Clara had seen her. Clara did not know that it was Babs. Clara, as scared as Babs herself, was none the less resolute. She stepped forward. As Babs turned to fly, Clara gripped her arm.

And in a panic Babs pushed. She had the envelope in her hand then. Clara staggered. She slipped, clutching in the darkness. In that same darkness Babs accidentally trod heavily upon her toe. Clara gave a snort.

"You beast!"

"Clara!" Babs almost cried out.

"Eh?"

"Clara, you—you dummy!" Babs almost swooned in her relief. "Oh, my hat! Is it you, chump? What are you doing here?"

Clara started.

"Mum-my hat. Babs! Well, what are you—"

"Me—I came to put back that money," Babs explained. "What on earth made you risk coming, though?"

Clara sniffed.

"Come to get that paper," she returned. "Can't leave everything to you. But careful now," she added, as Babs helped her to rise. "You keep cave while I try the safe."

Babs nodded. Her mouth was dry. Quickly she moved towards the door, while Clara approached the safe.

She waited while Clara fumbled with the safe. All was quiet, and yet—what was it?—Babs felt terribly uneasy, as though she had a presentiment that something was going to happen. The room seemed to be occupied by unseen figures—figures that stood near her—watching—

Something touched her arm.

She gave a little scream.

"Clara—quick! Get away!"

"Why?"

"Got you!" cried a voice.

Ida's!

That was enough. In a moment Babs found herself struggling. Ida had grabbed her shoulder. Desperately she wrenched free. Then hands stretched out, gripping her by the arms. She yelled to Clara:

"Get away! Get away!"

"No, you don't!" muttered Ida.

In a flash she was across the room. But Clara by that time had thrown the window up.

One terrific push Ida received, and then Clara bolted. Then, without warning, the lights went on, and Babs stared, wriggling in the grip of her captor, into too hard face that looked into hers. It was the woman detective—Celia Keane.

"Ida!" the woman cried. "What are you doing?"

Ida was on the sill. She looked round.

"After her. I can see her."

"No, no; come back. Don't waste your time! Ida!" she cried, and, releasing Babs, made a dart forward, catching that surprised girl by the shoulder. "Come back!" she snapped. "Leave this to me!"

And, dragging the angry Ida from the window, she turned and faced Babs again, snatching the envelope from her hand, just as Babs was in the act of placing it on the desk near by.

"What is this?" she cried.

But Ida saw. Her eyes flashed.

"Why, you thief! You thief!" she shrieked. "Miss Keane, look! It's money—your money you gave us to keep for you. She's got it out of the safe."

Babs panted:

"I—I didn't!"

"Yes, you did! I remember mother putting it there. You awful thief!" she cried. "Oh, my hat! So that was the game, was it? You and Clara together—"

"I tell you—"

"Please," Miss Keane cried—"please! Barbara, how did you come by this?"

Babs shut her lips.

"You realise how black it looks against you?"

"Black!" Ida scoffed. "It's not just black," she said. "She is caught—caught red-handed, pinching money from the safe!" She chuckled grimly. "If this isn't enough to get you locked up, I don't know what is! Miss Keane, shall I phone for the police?"

The woman gazed at Babs. Her face was quite expressionless.

"I don't think so," she said slowly and dispassionately. "No, I don't think so. Barbara"—and here Babs blinched—"you may go! Yes, go," she added, while Ida's jaw dropped in utter stupefaction. "As this is my money, I suppose I can be left to decide whether she shall be charged or not," she added, meeting Ida's stupefied glare. "Please go, Barbara!"

Barbara's head seemed to be swimming. She could hardly believe her good luck.

But she needed no second bidding. She scooted

Ida glared.

"Well, my hat! Why the dickens didn't you let me have her arrested?"

"Because," the woman said, with a pitying smile "I have my own plans, Ida. Obviously, Clara and Barbara are in collusion. Obviously, they are helping each other. If you had pursued Clara just now, what do you think would have happened? She would have given you the slip. In the end, we both should have been no better off. Don't worry about Clara," she added softly. "Keep your eye upon Barbara. She's the girl who, sooner or later, will lead us to Clara."

And Ida, reflecting upon that, felt, despite her own ruffled feelings, that it held the essence of sound common sense.



## The Woman Who Snatched

"HEADS" up! Watch your pockets!"

There was a subdued chuckle.

It was after breakfast the next morning. Babs & Co.—Babs looking rather pale and careworn after her ordeal of the night—were stepping out of the castle, towels on arm, making for the bathing pool for the first dip of the day. It was as they passed the crowd laughing on the steps that that very audible whisper came to their ears:

"Look out for your watches!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Babs turned pink. But, in spite of their feelings, they affected to ignore the crowd. They passed on.

At a distance the crowd swarmed behind them.

They reached the swimming pool. Immediately there was a shriek. Girls and boys in exaggerated alarm, rushed to their bathing cabins, very ostensibly dragged out their clothes, piling them in heaps around the side of the pool as if to tell the Cliff House chums that they were keeping an eye upon them. One girl, in fact, grabbing up her wrist-watch and necklace, put them on and dived into the water.

The Cliff House chums stiffened. More than a flush of anger was on every face there. But they were not going to be beaten. They were not going to show the white feather.

As calmly as if nothing was happening, they had their bathe, went to their cabins and dressed. On the way back, however, another crowd followed them.

It was quite patent that Ida & Co. did not intend to leave them alone.

Obvious to them before the day was out that the crowd had constituted themselves the chums' trailers.

Wherever they went, a gang followed them. If they split up into pairs, or threes and fours, they were shadowed and dogged at every turn. They went for a walk along the cliff with a crowd of hangers-on following behind them.

Even when they went to their own rooms, the crowd lounged after them, standing stiffly at the doors until one or all of them came out again. By the time dinner came, the chums were exasperated.

"Look here, you know, I'm not jolly well going to stand this!" Bessie Bunter said.

"No, rather not!"

"It is getting rather thick!"

Only Babs did not join in the



general condemnation. And Babs' eyes were gleaming.

Trust Babs to turn disadvantage to her own advantage! The new tactics, so far from annoying her, had given her an idea. Plainly Ida's henchmen felt that sooner or later the chums would lead them to Clara. Plainly, acting under Ida's orders, they were going to continue to dog their footsteps wherever they went.

Clara, on the other hand, was lying low, fuming, impatient, yet fiercely resolved to get hold of that incriminating document which reposed in the Coates' safe. Babs had been thinking all morning—if it were possible to get Ida and her crowd out of the castle even for an hour.

The idea she had in her mind she communicated to her chums just before lunch.

"I'm going to get a message," she said. "No; wait a minute. While you're all at lunch I'm going to telephone it to the village post office, and ask them to send the boy along with it. Now, listen! We'll all be in the courtyard when it arrives. Ida's crowd will still be hanging around. I'll read the message to you, girls. You must all look dismayed and anxious. Then, just as if it were the most urgent and secret message on earth, I'll burn it in front of their eyes."

"Wow! Sounds like a plot," Jemima said. "Carry on, fair Babskins!"

"Then off you go," Babs said. "Make for the moor. Lead them on a wild-goose chase—anything! But be out of the castle for an hour or more. They'll follow—never fear! Once they're away I'll get old Clara, and we'll have one final stab at getting hold of that paper—see?"

They did see. They chuckled. As a wheeze it was an extraordinarily good one, and it fell out exactly as Babs had prophesied.

While the others were at lunch she took the opportunity of sending off her message. True to her words, the boy delivered it an hour later.

The chums were in the courtyard by then with Ida's sleuths, Ida among them, hanging around watching eagerly. Babs gave a jump as she read it.

"Oh, I say, Clara—"

"It's from her?" Mabs asked eagerly.

"Yes; she wants us to see her. Say it's important. But—"

And then Babs, as if realising, looked around, pretended to start, and crushed the message in her hand. She whispered to her chums, not missing the fact that Ida & Co. were looking excited. Then deliberately she took the message, applied a match to it, and burned it.

"Now all to your rooms," she whispered. "Put on hats and macs and things. Looks," she added, with a glance at the sky, which was becoming overcast, "as if you'll need them."

The bait had been swallowed. No doubt that Ida & Co. had been deceived. The concern of the chums, their mysteriousness, that sudden, urgent scampering as they made their way towards the castle, all confirmed that something mysterious was afoot.

Ida & Co. exchanged significant glances. They had overheard those remarks which Babs had intended them to hear, and they followed the chums excitedly as they swept into the castle. When they came out—

"Here they are!" Ida whispered. "Now don't lose 'em, whatever you do!"

"Rather not!"

They thrilled. The excitement of the hunt was upon them. Had they been less excited they might have seen that whereas seven girls had entered the castle, only six had emerged. Those six, as if in the most urgent haste, swung off down the path that led to the drawbridge, without even one glance round.

Chuckling, Ida and her cronies followed in their wake.

While Babs—

Babs, left alone, hurried round to Mrs. Coates' office. No one was there. She found Mrs. Coates in her private sitting-room—Mrs. Coates with her knees drawn up on the settee and snoring blissfully. She looked good for an hour at least, Babs thought. Only one snag remained. Celia Keane, the woman detective.

How to get rid of her?

Babs made up her mind. The situation called for bold experiments. With-out hesitation she went off to Celia Keane's room, to find that woman writing at a desk in the corner of the room.

Babs entered at her deep-voiced "Come in!" Standing at the door she paused swiftly, to slip the key from the inside to the outside of the lock. Celia looked at her steadily.

"Well, Barbara?"

"I—I just popped in—to thank you for—what you did last night, Miss Keane," Babs stammered.

"Oh!" The woman looked disappointed. "Nothing else?"

"No."

"You do not wish to tell me anything?"

"I'm sorry."

"Thank you; you may go!" Celia Keane said curtly, and turned to her letter again.



IN a whisper the words came from Clara's lips: "I've taken the wrong envelope!"

Babs bit her lip. She closed the door. But once on the outside of it again she slipped the key into it and locked it, thereby making Celia Keane a prisoner. The coast was clear now.

Babs chuckled. She thought she had managed it all rather well. She flew to Clara. That girl looked startled as she ducked through the secret entrance.

"It's our chance!" Babs cried. "You know the combination of the safe. We'll lock ourselves in the office, leaving afterwards by the window. Come on; but careful!"

"Oh, my goodness!" Clara faced Babs. "How on earth did you manage it?"

"Never mind; let's get to work," Babs replied tersely.

Quite unobserved, without meeting a soul, they threaded their way to Mrs. Coates' office. Mrs. Coates was evidently still asleep, for the office was deserted. They let themselves in, Babs locking the door. Clara got to work on the combination, and in three minutes the safe door swung open. She searched among the papers.

"I've got it!" she cried excitedly. "Here we are! Draft agreement between Mrs. Coates and Lincoln Elm, whoever he might be. This—!" And Clara paused. "Babs, is that someone coming?"

It was. Footsteps could be heard along the corridor. Babs nodded quickly towards the open window.

"Scoot!"

As one they both bolted towards it, forgetting in the excitement that the safe door was still swinging on its hinges. Outside it had begun to rain—driving rain that had turned day into twilight, and was curtaining the courtyard in a hissing downpour. They almost fell over the sill, breathlessly picked themselves up, and headed for the pinewood a hundred yards to the right.

"Buck up!" Babs called anxiously.

Clara was bucking up, though she was hampered because one of her shoes had come undone. The rain had made the ground sticky and wet, and several times she had to pause in imminent danger of losing the shoe altogether.

Babs reached the wood first, gazing apprehensively back. Clara plunged forward, the envelope still in her hand. Into the bushes she plunged, uttering an exclamation as, stepping in a pool of mud, her shoe became unstuck altogether. Furious she turned.

And then—

What happened? Even Babs hardly saw. So breathlessly surprising was the whole incident that for a moment she wondered if she were dreaming. Even as Clara turned, a figure stepped from the bushes. One white arm was thrust forward; one hasty snatch was made at the envelope.

Clara, with a yell, spun on her heel, her still bare foot splashing in mud.

"Here! What the— Oh, Great Scott! Babs—Babs, stop her!" she shrieked.

But that was hopeless. Babs realised that even as she started in pursuit. The woman, vague and shadowy in the mist, was flying at an incredible speed towards the castle. For a minute or two, Babs ran gaspingly on, dismay at her heart. But she was not a match for her opponent. Into the castle the woman disappeared.

And there Babs paused, looking back at Clara, who, having retrieved her shoe, was now furiously charging across to join her. She panted up.

"Babs, who was it? Did you see it?"

Babs shook her head. She was utterly mystified.

"It wasn't Mrs. Coates?"

Babs smiled. Mrs. Coates, even in such an urgent situation as that, she thought, would have been incapable of such an exceptional burst of speed. She glanced queerly at her chum.

"No, it wasn't her," she said, "and it wasn't Ida, because Ida's gone off after Mabs & Co. That means—" She paused. "It must have been—"

"Celia Keane!" Clara breathed. And Babs nodded.



The Police Car

MOST certainly it was not Mrs. Coates. For Mrs. Coates at that moment was standing in front of the open safe in her office. And Mrs. Coates' thin face was white with the terror that was imprinted upon it, her thin lips were twitching.

The envelope—the precious envelope containing the agreement between her and Lincoln—had gone!

Mrs. Coates' eyes were wide with fear. Who had taken it? Who could have taken it? And then, like a flash, came the answer—only one of two people—Clara or Babs!

Ida—where was Ida? Feverishly she rang the bell, only to be told by the servant who answered it that Ida, with her chums, had gone out twenty minutes ago. Mrs. Coates fumed. At all costs she must get those papers back—at all costs.

But where to start?

But wait—wait!

Twenty minutes Ida had been gone. That meant that the robbery had taken place within that time. If that were the case, and Babs had got the papers, Babs must still be in the castle with them in her possession. That was enough! She troubled no further to probe in her mind. Publication of that secret document meant prison for her—and the throwing away of a fortune into the bargain.

She quitted the office, intent at all costs upon seeing Barbara. If she were anywhere, she would be in her room, she guessed. Thither she made her way. She reached the corner of the long corridor, and then paused as quite audibly along its length came the sound of muttering voices. One she recognised as Babs.

"Careful, old thing, don't want to be seen!"

Mrs. Coates stopped. It occurred to her at once that an open sally into Babs' apartment might not meet with the success she desired. That cunning and stealth, so inseparable a part of her make-up, rose up to aid her. Very cautiously she peered round the corner, just in time to see Babs opening the door. With Babs was another figure. The manageress' heart leapt as she recognised it.

Clara!

The thin lips of Mrs. Coates came together. The beady eyes glittered. In an instant she had her plan mapped out. As the two disappeared she scurried stealthily down the corridor, turned the key in the stout oak door, and, hurrying back to her office, summoned Briggs, the gardener. He came in.

"Briggs, I want you to go outside. Keep a watch under Miss Redfern's window. I have reason to believe," Mrs. Coates added, "that Barbara Redfern is shielding the girl who is wanted by the

police—Clara Trevelyn! Whatever happens, you are not to let them escape. Understand?"

"Yes, ma'am!" agreed the goggle-eyed Briggs.

He shuffled off. Mrs. Coates smiled grimly. Hurrying to her desk, she picked up the telephone. In a few minutes she was connected with the police at St. Austell, fifteen miles away. She smiled sourly as she heard the sergeant's voice.

"Will you send your men over to Pellabay at once?" she asked. "I have the girl Clara Trevelyn locked up in one of the rooms here. Eh? What is that? Yes, she has been hiding in the castle all the time. You will be how long—half an hour? Thank you very much!"

She put the receiver down. Very grim and gaunt was her smile as she looked at herself in the mirror opposite. She felt that she had the game in her hands now.

Clara and Babs had those papers! Clara and Babs, under threat of being handed over to the police, should be forced to give them up.

With a flinty glint in her eyes, she stamped off to Barbara Redfern's room to make terms with her prisoners.

"ALL SERENE?"

"Keep moving."

"Yes, but this rain—"

"Bother the rain! Are they following?"

And Mabel Lynn, at the head of the group, paused to look back.

Raining it was a fine, misty rain which soaked through clothes in a matter of minutes.

Three or four miles the party was from the castle now—out on the wide moorland. In the rain their macintoshes glittered, the water dripped from the brims of hats. Visibility was restricted to about twenty yards.

But if they were chilled, they were comparatively dry. That could not be said for Ida & Co., who, too eager to get on the trail, had neglected to bring macintoshes. On the trail Ida & Co. were, but very, very cold under their soaked coats and dresses were they, and very, very bad-tempered. For what a chase they had been led!

Daggled they had followed the chums, hanging back, trying to make themselves inconspicuous, but without success.

Over hill and dale, through swamp and marsh, the merry hunt had gone. Once Mabs had neatly contrived to get through a barbed-wire fence 'made almost invisible by the flying curtain of rain, and Ida & Co., unaware of its existence till they reached it, had suffered badly.

Now Mabs paused, staring back through the mist. She could see nothing, but she fancied she caught the mutter of voices.

Once they turned, paused to listen occasionally for the sound of the faithful footsteps which followed. It was raining harder now, a real mist was rising to mingle with the rain. Then suddenly Mabs stopped.

"Wait a minute! What's that?"

She stopped. The steps behind her stopped, too. They stared up at the bulky mass which had suddenly loomed up in front of them. Something moved slowly with a hoarse, whirring sound. In the gloom they saw two arms revolving. Mabs chuckled.

"Oh, my hat! I say, wait a minute!" she whispered. "Leila, keep cave. See that nobody gets too near. This is old Pellabay Mill. It's marked on the Ordnance maps. Hasn't been occupied for ages. Wait here a minute."

And Mabs, her head full of a mischievous scheme, stepped forward. In a few moments she had reached the old mill. One heavy door perched on top of a flight of worn steps gave access to it. Of other entrances, however, there was no sign.

Mabs eyed the door. It was in a good state of preservation despite the ruins of the rest of the place.

Mabs turned the knob. She opened it, noting with satisfaction that a large and rusty key was in the lock on the other side. She chuckled as she extracted it and flew back to her chums. "Nothing happened?" she asked.

"Ciel, it is zat Ida is behind ze hedge," Marcelle whispered.

"Good!" Mabs laughed. "Well, here's the wheeze," she said. "Bessie, you're in this. Your ventriloquism will come in useful. We'll go up to the mill. I'll hide myself by the door. Then I want you, Jimmy, to call to Clara in a low voice. 'Clara, are you there?' Call it twice. Then you, Bessie, throw your voice as if it comes from inside the mill. Say: 'Hello, girls! Wait a minute, I'll let you in!'"

"Oh, gee!" gurgled Leila.

"And then, Mabs said, 'get round to the other side of the mill. Hide there. Wait until I join you. Is everything clear?'"

"What-ho!" Jemima grinned.

"Away, arch-plotter!"

Mabs chuckled. She sped off once again. Under the steps which led to the door, she crouched, hiding herself.

Presently she heard her chums tramping forward. She heard Jemima call, once, twice. Then, as realistically as though she had been in the mill itself, Clara's voice floated back.

"O.K.!" Mabs breathed.

There was a movement. Chucking, the chums flew to their places. Two, three minutes passed by. Then a cautious figure appeared in the misty curtain—Ida, her face working with excitement. Mabs heard her whisper:

"It's all right. They've all gone in. Not a sound now, mind!"

Again she chuckled. She crouched lower. Now through the mist came Ida, peering this way and that, accompanied by a dozen or more of her cronies. They paused at the foot of the steps.

"Now," Ida breathed, "stand together with me. Rush!"

"What-ho!"

And, on the signal, up the stairs they rushed, a full thirteen or fourteen of them. Bang! Bang! went the door. As the last vanished, Mabs silently rose. Inside she heard them clattering up the rotten stairs. Swiftly she pulled the door to and, slipping the key in the lock, turned it. With a laugh she pocketed the key.

"Now scoot!" she cried, as she rejoined her chums.

They scooted, laughing among themselves.

A half mile they went, the rain beating in their faces, and then suddenly emerged upon the main road. Bessie was panting then, most of them were tired and fed-up. A car was coming, a long, low, roomy car. Mabs hailed it.

The car came to a standstill.

"Oh, please," Mabs gasped, "can you give us a lift—?" and then she stopped. The uniformed police sergeant looked through the window. "Oh, I'm sorry, I—I didn't know it was the police," she stammered.

The sergeant grinned.

"That's all right, miss, can we help?" "Well, we're going to Pellabay"



"COME back!" shrieked Celia Keane. But Clara was already in the corridor. "Quick!" she panted to Babs. "I've got the envelops. Run!"

Castle. I thought perhaps you might give us a lift."

"Why sure," the sergeant said, and stared at them. "Cliff House girls, eh?" he asked keenly.

"Yes," Babs said wonderingly. "Jump in, jump in!" the sergeant said cordially. "We're rather interested in you." And then when they were all comfortably seated—"because," he added, a rather grim look overspreading his face, "we too are going to Pellabay. To arrest a girl who, I believe, is a friend of yours. I refer to Clara Trevlyn!"

remains that you are under suspicion. The fact also remains that you were clever enough to break into my office just now, and steal from the safe a packet of papers."

Clara stared. She glanced quickly at Babs.

"But I," Mrs. Coates went on, "was rather more clever. Having trapped you in the room, and made sure that you would not escape, I immediately telephoned for the police. They are on their way here now."

Clara winced a little. Babs' face whitened.

"But—" "Please hear me out," Mrs. Coates raised a hand. "Within the next half an hour," she said deliberately, "you, Clara Trevlyn, will be arrested. So far you have managed to avoid that fate. You can still, if you so desire it, continue to evade it. While—" and her eyes glittered, "you were in my office, you took out of the safe an envelope which contained certain private papers which I value rather highly."

Clara caught a warning look from Babs.

"Well—yes!" Babs said quickly. "I want those papers. I want them at once. If you are sensible, you will hand them over."

"And if," Babs asked before Clara could interpose, "we don't?"

"I shall hand you over to the police immediately they arrive!"

"And if we do?" Babs asked.

"Then," Mrs. Coates said, "I will give you a chance. As far as I am concerned, you shall be free to escape."

"I see!" Babs frowned fiercely at Clara, who, sensing that something was going on in her leader's brain now, fell silent. "Well," she considered, "that's a bargain, of course. Naturally Clara doesn't want to be arrested, and naturally I'm not keen to be mixed up in this business. But you don't think, Mrs. Coates, that we were fools enough to bring those papers here?"

The woman glanced at her penetratingly.

"You mean you have hidden them?"

"What else?" Babs asked boldly.

"Where?"

"Well—" Babs paused. She appeared to be debating a question.

"If we show you, of course, you really give us your word of honour that you will let us go?"

"Of course!"

"Then," Babs said, and gave a quick glance at her chum, "let's go!"

"And no tricks, mind," Mrs. Coates said.

Babs conjured a smile. She went to the door. Mrs. Coates laid one hand upon her, another upon Clara.

Along the corridor they went, down the stairs leading to the servants' quarters. And then suddenly Babs gave a shout.

"Now!" she cried.

Not very illuminating, but Clara understood. Clara had been waiting for some such signal, indeed. As one they wrenched free from the grip upon their arms. Mrs. Coates, unprepared, went staggering back against the wall. Breathlessly Babs flew.

"Come back!" shrieked the manageress.

But Babs and Clara heeded not. Like the wind, they skimmed down the stairs, along the corridor. There was a door on the right.

Breathlessly Babs hurried into it. Then she stared.

The room was evidently shared by three or four of the maids. Clothes and uniforms hung about, and the dressing-table was littered with lipsticks and powder. Babs' eyes gleamed.

"Oh crumbs! An idea," she cried.

"Quick, Clara, get hold of those maids' dresses. Make up your face."

"Oh, my hat! You mean disguise?"

"Why not?"

Clara chuckled. In a trice she had reached down two of the uniforms. In breathless haste she and Babs donned them. In front of the mirror they disguised themselves with lip-stick and powder and dressed their hair in a different way.



Babs Makes a "Bargain"

"WE'RE trapped!"

There was dismay in Barbara Redfern's voice.

The door was locked. Outside, beneath the window, Briggs, like a sentinel, stood.

"But who—" breathed Clara.

"Hush, wait a minute," Babs whispered.

She listened, her ear at the keyhole of the door. Outside came footsteps, nearer, nearer. They were stopping outside.

Then suddenly a key grated in the lock. Swiftly the door opened, and Mrs. Coates, her expression grim, stepped into the room, locking the door behind her. She stared at the two girls.

"Clara Trevlyn!" she cried.

Clara eyed her witheringly.

"Well?"

"So it is—you!" Mrs. Coates' lips curled in a satisfied sneer. "You are aware that a warrant is out for your arrest?"

"On a charge," Clara returned bitterly, "that you and your precious Ida faked against me."

"Whatever the charge is," Mrs. Coates returned, thin-lipped, "the fact

And then somewhere near by a bell rang. A bright light shone on the direction board that was placed above the entrance to the servants' main quarters.

"Somebody calling," said Babs. "Room eleven. My hat, Clara, that's Miss Keane's room."

"And nobody here to take the call," Clara said.

"Nobody," laughed Babs, and then paused. "But wait a minute," she said softly. "Oh wait a minute!" She chuckled, clutching at the Tomboy's arm. "Clara, I've got another idea. We both believe that Celia Keane has got those papers—"

Clara blinked.

"You mean—"

"I mean," Babs said grimly, "you answer the call, and when you go into her room—there may be a chance—"

No further words were needed. Up the stairs, with Babs on her heels, Clara went two at a time. She knocked on Celia Keane's door, and somewhere an impatient voice bade her enter.

Celia Keane was sitting at her desk near the window. She favoured Clara with the most curious glance.

"Will you, please," she ordered, "tell Mrs. Coates to get another room ready? I am expecting a visitor."

"Yes, miss."

But Clara lingered. Her eyes were darting round the room. Where was that envelope? Was it here? And then suddenly the colour rushed into her face. Her hands clenched by her sides. For she saw it—yes, she saw it! On the table by the side of Miss Keane's desk.

Just for a moment Clara hesitated. It was only a moment. Miss Keane, as if surprised that she did not go, looked up.

At the same moment Clara made a dart forward. No word she said. She simply grabbed. Up in a flash was Celia Keane. In outraged surprise she made a snatch. But the envelope was in Clara's hands then. She bolted for the door.

"Girl, come back!" shrieked Celia Keane.

But Clara did not heed. Like a flash she went through the door into the corridor. Crash! went a chair as Celia Keane jumped to her feet.

"Quick! Clara gasped to Babs. "Run! I've got it!"

"Run! marvellous—come on!"

In a few seconds Babs and Clara had raced the length of the corridor at imminent risk of breaking their necks; they hurtled down the stairs into the banquetting hall.

A crowd of girls were just coming up the steps into the hall—from a door on the right Mrs. Coates, wild and distraught, issued. She gave one shriek as she saw the envelope in the Tomboy's hand.

"Stop her! Stop her!"

She put on a spurt. Clara spurted, too. The crowd in the doorway halted in stupefied surprise. A yell went up.

"Clara, you goose!"

"Mabs!" yelled Clara.

And then someone stepped forward. Not a girl, not a woman, a man this time. The grim-faced figure of the police sergeant. He caught the Tomboy by the shoulder.

"Miss Trevlyn" he exclaimed.

Clara gasped.

"Let me go!"

He smiled grimly.

"It is my duty," he cried, to arrest you. I must warn you that—"

But Clara, with a tremendous tug, tore herself free. As Mrs. Coates came up, snatching at the envelope in her hand, she pushed her aside. Chest heaving, eyes flaming, she rammed the

envelope into the sergeant's hand and pointed at the woman dramatically.

"Don't worry," she cried, "to arrest me! Read that, and then arrest her! And, yes, arrest her, too," she added, as Celia Keane arrived on the scene. "The whole lot of them are impostors, thieves, and robbers!"

"Clara!"

"What on earth are you saying?"

"She is saying," a voice put in, "what is perfectly true." And to everybody's astonishment, Celia Keane came forward. "I think you will find in that envelope, sergeant, sufficient proof of Mrs. Coates' guilt. Not only has Mrs. Coates represented this hotel as belonging to her, she has also entered into an agreement with one Lincoln Elm, an American millionaire, to sell it to him. I think," she added, "you will find full details in the draft

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## "THE PRISONER of RED TOWER"

agreement which is contained in that envelope."

Clara blinked. Mrs. Coates gasped faintly, her face suddenly ashen grey. The chums stared in amazement.

"Then—then you are not on her side?" Babs asked.

The detective smiled.

"Did I ever give you reason to suppose that I was?" she asked. "No, I am employed by another. The visitor who I am expecting to turn up here at any moment now. I think, sergeant, you will find everything in order. Mrs. Coates, having let Mr. Lincoln Elm think that this was her property, agreed to sell it to him at the end of the season.

"She accepted a large sum of money as deposit, and that sum, I believe I am right in saying, she has spent. Her intentions, as far as I can gather, were to ruin the hotel and so force Miss Grace Trevlyn, the real owner, to sell

out to her at her own figure, after which, of course, she would have made a handsome profit in disposing of it to the American."

"These girls attempted to interfere with that project. Afraid that they might expose her plot, she and her daughter deliberately foisted a charge of burglary upon Clara, hoping that Clara would be arrested and, in consequence of the heavy disgrace, the rest would leave."

"Well, mum-my hat!" stuttered Clara faintly.

The sergeant looked amazed.

"Who are you, madam?"

"My name," the woman said, "is Celia Keane."

The sergeant showed new respect.

"Keane?" he muttered. "The woman detective. Of course, we have heard of you!" He glanced at Mrs. Coates, who, moaning faintly, had sunk into a chair, seeming to be on the verge of collapse. "Of course," he added, "you have proof?"

"I have proof, yes," the woman stated calmly. "I think I can satisfy you as to every fact. The burglary which was planned to get rid of Clara Trevlyn was planned by Mrs. Coates and her daughter, Ida. To make it appear that she really had got away with something, Ida stole Miss Mardell's necklace. The woman smiled a little grimly. "This afternoon," she added, "while Ida has been out, I have given myself the privilege of having a look round her room. I found this!"

And she held up a string of pearls.

There was a stupefied silence, broken only by the cry of Miss Mardell, who had just come into the hall. Every eye was upon the calm, assured face of the masculine-looking woman now, every expression one of dazed, stupefied bewilderment.

"And here," Miss Keane exclaimed suddenly, "is my visitor."

They all turned as a car pulled up outside. From it stepped a woman, at sight of whom Clara gave one joyful shout.

"Aunt! Aunt Grace!"

"Clara, my dear!"

In a moment they were in each other's arms.

"Miss Trevlyn," the woman detective said grimly, "sought me out in the South of France. She was not satisfied at the reports she received from this hotel. She asked me to go along to investigate. I came, of course, as a guest, to find her niece under this dreadful shadow, the whole hotel in uproar; Mrs. Coates and her daughter most amazingly making a dead-set at these girls here who were simply standing by their friend.

"That, if nothing else, was sufficient to set me on the track." She smiled faintly at Babs. "In spite of the obstacles set up in my path, I flatter myself I have succeeded. Sergeant, I give Mrs. Coates into your custody on a charge of unlawfully uttering a document she knew to be false; of obtaining money by false pretences from one Lincoln Elm, and of conspiring to rob Miss Trevlyn. The daughter also should be arrested. But where she is I do not know."

"But," interposed Mabel Lynn, with a happy laugh, "I do! I think, sergeant, you will find her and her friends in the old Pellabay Mill. Perhaps," she added slyly, "you will look in there as you go back. Here is the key."

And with a quiet chuckle she fished in her pocket and handed the key over.

Peril at the Golden Grotto! Dramatic Chapters of this Enthralling  
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# MORCOVE M 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, and at last reach the Golden Grotto. Suddenly, however, they hear voices. The villainous Frenchman, Dupont, and his wife are on the trail!

(Now read on.)

## No Way Out

**T**HEIR enemies—again! Unmistakably, they were the whispering voices of Pierre Dupont and his wife that had been heard just then.

Nor did the words—so excitedly uttered in French—leave any room for doubt in the minds of those who, down here in the black depths of the Golden Grotto, had overheard them.

That one urgent whisper of the woman to her husband, imploring him to “be quick!” That, in itself, was sufficient warning.

Betty and Polly, like Jack and Mr. Willoughby, knew instantly that the ruthless pair were even now working frantically to cover the one exit from this vast cavern with slabs and lumps of rock.

Mr. Willoughby, during that brief standing still with his companions, to listen, had thumbed off the pocket torch. The current had to be saved whenever possible. Now he flashed on the light again, and simply dashed for the flight of stone steps leading up to the mouth of the shaft.

The girls and Jack kept with their leader. Knowledge of the appalling danger had come to the four of them when they were still a dozen paces from the bottom of the shaft. Along these last few yards of rocky floor they swarmed together, whilst sounds came down to them which meant that even such great haste might yet fail in its purpose.

The Duponts were swiftly handling some of the very lumps of stone that Mr. Willoughby and his three juniors had themselves dealt with, when just now they uncovered the opening into the shaft.

The torchlight greatly helped these four, who knew themselves to be in imminent danger of being trapped alive. There was that brilliant ray, in the pitch darkness, to light the way up the stone steps, as Mr. Willoughby went first, with all possible speed, shouting his infuriated protest:

“Pierre Dupont—you scoundrel! Stop, there—stop, I tell you!”

Mr. Willoughby was going first up the steep steps so as to be the first at the top, where he might have to make use of his revolver. He had it gripped in his right hand, his left holding the torch.

Betty was at his heels, and behind her was Polly; but suddenly Jack overtook and writhed past both girls. Sturdy, fearless lad that he was, he meant to be to the fore, where the danger lay.

In vain had the Leader called upon the Duponts to desist, if only for the sake of his three youthful companions. The only answer had been another thud-

ding blob of stone being lumped over the mouth of the shaft.

And now the beam of the torch shone upwards to where it should have met the dull light of the day's end in the Valley of the Giant. But no daylight was entering the shaft.

By the casting on of one more great stone, the exit had been finally covered over.

Betty and Polly were compelled to stop half-way up the steps, for Jack and Mr. Willoughby were held up in front of the girls. The torch wavered its light upon a rocky ceiling—the stones that had been placed over the shaft-mouth.

“Fiends!” Mr. Willoughby panted. “But I know what their game is, and—eh?” He broke off questioning, for Betty had suddenly shouted to him.

He shone the torch towards her, on the steps, and she was ready to hand him a snatched-up scrap of paper, folded like a note.

“What is it?” she wondered aloud.

“I saw it lying upon this step!”

“Something scribbled by that black-guard!” Jack fiercely inferred. “He and his wife—”

“They were reckoning upon our taking longer exploring the grotto,” Mr. Willoughby nodded, whilst his stern eyes scanned the pencilled message.

“So we were to find this on the steps—after they had done their foul deed up there!”

“And the message says—what?” clamoured Polly.

“He very kindly tells us that we can rely upon our friends to—ransom us.”

Mr. Willoughby's tone was one of bitter scorn.

“I see!” said Jack furiously. “A price to be paid!”

“That's it, my boy.”

“And the price will be—oh, one can guess!” Betty exclaimed. “The value of all that's here, in the Golden Grotto!”

By  
**MARJORIE  
STANTON**

Those Duponts mean to have it all—for just themselves."

"Then it's a shame!" Polly raged. "We found the grotto! It belongs to us, as the discoverers. And besides, how about the Kwamba people? We always intended that they should—should share any luck we had! But what will those Duponts care about the tribe? A swindling, selfish pair!"

"It's what they are, right enough!" Jack grimly agreed. "All the same"—and he drew a deep breath—"there was that witch-doctor! He did himself no good in the end by not playing the game! It isn't cricket—this! But the Duponts will only have beaten us—when they've got the whole Team out!"

There followed a silence on the part of all four prisoners in the cavern. Each had thoughts that were best left unvoiced; sudden, appalling thoughts arising from the desperate plight that it was—the certainty that escape was cut off.

"I must be sparing with the light," Mr. Willoughby said quietly, after a few moments. "Sorry, girls, but we may have to be in the dark—for a bit."

He switched off the torch, and the darkness was all about them again. That pitch-blackness which had lasted here, unrelieved, for a single instant through thousands of years—until they came, as they had come, less than an hour ago! The first to tread these rocky steps, ever since the days of Egypt!

### Who Comes?

"THE new moon, Dave!"  
"Yes," Judy. Looks fine, doesn't it?"  
"Beautiful! And this might be such a jolly evening for us all, here in camp. Only—those others are not back yet, Dave!"

"I'm watching for them now, Judy."  
"Yes, so I could tell."

It was just after sunset. At the Morcove camp, at the foot of one of the great Kwamba mountains, Judy Cardew had come away from a fire whose lively flames illuminated the sudden darkness to speak to her vigilant brother.

He had stationed himself, sentinelle-like, at a spot best suited for watching that part of the level "bush" across which Mr. Willoughby and his three young companions were expected to make their way back to camp.

It was the same tract of rough ground—all loose rocks and tussocky grass—across which the four had gone a few hours since, with the witch-doctor for their ill-favoured guide.

"You can't see anything now, Dave!"  
"I can," he assured his adoring sister. "That moon helps quite a lot. But I don't see them yet."  
"There's not a sound, either!"

"No. We're very quiet just at present. What's everybody doing?" He smiled the inquiry, as if feeling that a touch of "Morcove" boisterousness would be welcome. "But I suppose most of them are still very tired?"

"Pam's with her mother, and Jimmy is talking with Madge and her father. But most of the others are asleep, I think," Judy said, with a smile like Dave's for its seriousness. "Paula and Naomer—they went off like kittens."  
"Do 'em good, Judy. You ought to be resting, too, know. After all those forced marches—"

"Hark! Oh, what an awful roar!" Judy shuddered at the noise which had come from a great distance away in the darkness.

"Another lion. He's a mile off, at least. When all this business about the Golden Grotto is over, Judy, and we're all on our way back to M'Goya—"

"When?" she laughed faintly. "But what were you going to say, Dave?"

"Only that I would like to pot one lion—for you, Judy."

"For me!"

"Wouldn't a nice skin go well in your study at school?"

"I don't know, I'm sure! Why not make it a snapshot—not too close up!"

"The lions round here really need keeping down. Terrible things happen to the natives at times—to the children. Old Kwamba has been telling me."

Dave surprised his sister by quietly remarking, with absolute certainty:

"Here's someone coming now, Judy."  
"What! I can't see or hear anyone." She was peering eagerly as she said it.

Dave, who had his rifle, handled it significantly whilst looking fixedly away into the nightbound bush.

"It's no one belonging to our party," he muttered. "And it isn't a native, either. It's a woman," he next moment declared.

"A woman? Oh, Dave, not Madame Dupont?"

"That's just who it is—must be! I'm going to challenge her, anyhow. Stop, there!" he called loudly towards an advancing figure, which at this very moment Judy herself discerned. "What do you want? Madame Dupont, aren't you?"

"Qui!"  
The assenting response came with mocking pleasantness.

"Important," the woman spoke on, giving the word a very French pronunciation. "It must be that I have the little interview, s'il vous plait."

Dave lowered his gun. He was going to speak aside to his sister, but found her already fitting away to the heart of the camp, to let others know.

"I'll tell Mr. Minden, and mother, and Mrs. Willoughby!" she said rapidly. "Oh, Dave, I wonder what it means? This woman—and those others not yet back!"

Dave's challenging cry just then had caused a stir of alarm in the camp. But only a couple of his chums came to his side as he stood waiting for Madame Dupont to reach him.

Others would have hastened this way, but they had met Judy, and were turning back to go with her to one tent and another.

Pam Willoughby and Jimmy Cherrol were the two who had so promptly come across to Dave. It was like him to smile—and say nothing.

"Yes, well!" was Pam's characteristic utterance. "Only a minute ago mother and I were talking about Madame Dupont; and here she is!"

And Jimmy, who generally watched Pam's face as a spaniel keeps a worshipping look for his young mistress, could see her smiling as serenely as usual.

Then Madame Dupont, with a last little run, was up with them all.

"Bon soir!" she greeted them, with that heartless smile of hers. "You will please to conduct me to—Oh, but I see the two ladies coming, and the gentleman!—your Mr. Minden, oui?"

The light of the camp fire was behind them as they came quickly this way. Judy was returning with them, and Bunny and Tom and other juniors were with her.

"Ah, bon soir!" Madame Dupont exclaimed again, in the same tone of mocking politeness. "It is only that I have a message from my husband, who is—otherwise engaged! He and I—we have

had the good luck to find each other, oui!"

"And you wish us to do something for you, both?" Mr. Minden inferred. "Well, what? You wish us to supply you with a few things—"

"Oh, no!" the Frenchwoman pertly dissented. "At least, only the one thing! The Ankh necklace— Ah, you have it, I see!" she laughed, as Pam's mother put up a feeling hand to her neck. "Bon!"

"Yes, I have charge of the trinket at present," Mrs. Willoughby calmly answered. "And I may tell you that, as before, it will not be parted with."

"But one moment," Madame Dupont said blandly. "As before, it must be that we receive the necklace, or—you may not see your husband again."

There was just enough light coming from the flaring camp fire for her to see the violent start which some of her listeners gave.

"Also," she smiled on, "this time there are two, three of the young people in a similar difficulty. You understand? Anything that happens to Mr. Willoughby, it will also happen to them."

"Confound you!" Mr. Minden suddenly stormed. "You and your husband! When we all get back to your own country—"

"I would not be too sure, my friend, that you will all get back!" Madame Dupont retorted. "At any rate, my husband and I are not going to trouble about what you may do then. For the reason that, to be able to stand some chance of getting back safely, you will have been glad to come to an arrangement!"

"That is a plain enough threat!" Madge's father said fiercely. "Now listen to one from us—just as plain! If within an hour from now Mr. Willoughby and that lad and the two girls are not back in camp, we shall let the Kwamba chief, at the native village, know that you and your husband have caused them to come to harm. And remember, Madame Dupont, the Kwambas are not like those native bands of the forest. They are entirely friendly to us; will do anything for us—"

"At present—oui! But, even if they remain friendly, it is just possible that even their friendship could do nothing for Mr. Willoughby, and that lad, and those two girls! They are, you see, in a place where it would be quite, quite impossible for anyone to find them."

Pam's mother and Mrs. Cardew turned to the boys and girls who stood around to make signs that it would be better for them to withdraw. But no one moved, and in a moment Madame Dupont was speaking again.

"Also, it is not so certain that the Kwambas will remain friendly to you—even though you keep the Ankh necklace, that is such a wonder-working charm! Much depends upon what I report to my husband 'within an hour from now'!" She smiled as she used those words that had formed part of Mr. Minden's threat.

He looked her straight in the eyes very sternly.

"You are not going back to report anything to your husband, wherever he may be! Madame Dupont, you will have to remain here—as a prisoner, yes. And if that doesn't force him to come here himself, so that he and I can—"

"It will not do that," she interrupted coolly. "It is all arranged what he will do if you detain me. You talk of saying things to the Kwamba chief.

That, my friend, is a game my husband can play at also. He speaks the Bantu language very well, as I think you know."

"And what can he tell the chief that will count for more than anything we may say through our interpreter?"

Madame Dupont shrugged. "For example," she said, "that the witch-doctor is dead. Oh, yes, the Kwambas will not like it, you may be sure when they hear that Mr. Willoughby has been responsible for the witch-doctor's death! And there are other things also."

A pause to let those last words sink in, and then the audacious woman triumphantly suggested:

"So I think it will be better for you to come to terms. You will give me the Ankh necklace—that so-useful charm. You will also give your word of honour that you will not do the least little thing to—"

Mr. Minden interrupted. "The tent over there—you see the one I mean," he exclaimed, pointing towards it. "Madame Dupont, you will at once go to that tent, and remain there—in custody. No, not another word! Just do as you are ordered, please."

"Oh, très bien—very well!" she again shrugged and smiled. "And so, I understand, you are even ready to leave those dear ones of yours—to die!"

### Night in the Valley

UNTIL this moment the girls and boys who were hearing all that passed had kept quite silent.

Madame Dupont's sauntering across to the tent ended the juniors' spellbound state. They were now being left to themselves, for Mr. Minden was striding after the Frenchwoman, who had Pam's mother and Mrs. Cardew on either side of her.

Impudence, defiance, and, above all, callousness, had worked upon the feelings of the youngsters, and there would have been a burst of angry comment, but Dave said at once:

"I know what we must do."

"What then—what?" his sister and the rest clamoured.

"Have a shot at finding where the Duponts have got hold of Mr. Willoughby and those two girls and Jack," the lad with such a steady nerve answered crisply. "It can be done, too."

"Oh, Dave, if only—," his sister broke out in great anguish, and again he spoke with quiet confidence:

"They set off for the Valley of the Giant. Whether they got there or not isn't certain now. But, anyhow, the way they went some of us must go at once. I shall get Mr. Minden to head a search party. First of all, though, where's old Kwamba, because I want to ask him something."

Dave meant, of course, the expedition's own native guide and interpreter; their "Kwamba of the Circus," as they sometimes called him, as he had thrown up a job with a travelling circus at home to come out with them all to Africa.

The simple, honest fellow had a way of keeping to himself when in camp. He liked to rig up his own bit of shelter, from which any cry of "Hi, Kwamba!" would bring him running at any time, eager to serve the pleasure of Morcové & Co. "You folks alius knows how to git me," was his frequently chuckled reminder. "Jess you holler."

But no one had "hollered" for him during the last few minutes, and so, although he had become uneasy, knowing that Madame Dupont had turned up, he had not come forward.

The juniors found him outside his rough tent, his ebony face catching a faint glow from the camp-fire. His forehead was wrinkled on account of anxiety, and his eyes goggled excitedly.

"Say, Kwamba," Dave began genially, "if some of us want to set off at once for the Valley of the Giant, can you show us the quickest way?"

"De Valley ob de Giant, folks?" gaped the negro. "And in de dark, too? I nebbber been dere myself, no, sabs! In de old days, before I leave de tribe to take on for de white folks as were catching animals for a show, I nebbber go to de valley—"

"We know," Dave nodded. "It's a place that has always been avoided by your people—except the witch-doctor." "Jess so, folks! An, y'know, jess akas de old witch-doctor, dis yere Kwamba 's fond ob being dere, dis yere Kwamba —meaning himself—'don't like de idea ob going dere any de better!'"

"It's like this, Kwamba. We fear that Mr. Willoughby and those others have come to some harm. They have been prevented from getting back to camp—"

"Dere now! Does you mean, young sabs, de Frenchy and his wife—"

"That's about it. I'm sure Mr. Minden will be for taking some of us to scout round the valley. If you were to come with us, it might save a lot of valuable time. But if you feel windy—"

"No, folks, not now you tell me dat!" cried old Kwamba, dealing himself a rallying smack on his broad chest.

"What, sabs, me afraid? As I says to myself when I had to get in de airy-plane at Croydon dat time, 'tain't no use, Kwamba, being afraid! Jess you think of all dese girls and boys—not a bit afraid!"

"You're the one, Kwamba!" sparkled Bunny. Like Dave and the rest, she knew that the honest old fellow was very creditably conquering a strong superstitious dread of the valley. "And if you don't go back with us to Croydon, at the end of all our adventures, then they ought to make you chief of the tribe."

"But Kwamba will go back with us," Pam ardently remarked. "He is going to have a job on the estate, at Swan-lake. Mother and dad have—"

And there "the little lady of Swan-lake" broke off. For once her equable nature had been suddenly shaken, and so her voice had faltered into silence—at the thought of "dad" missing again! For the second time, victim of mischief originating with the Duponts!

He, the very leader of the expedition, again the victim of ruthless treachery; and, as fellow-sufferers this time, there were Betty and Polly and Jack—

But to Pam, doing her best to bear up bravely, there was to be at least the relief of being chosen to go with that search party which, before another ten minutes had sped, was setting out.

Mr. Minden had picked Dave and Jimmy as a reliable pair of lads to go with him, and there were Pam, Madge, and Bunny to complete the party which, it was felt, should number six whites at least.

It had to be remembered that, during the anxious search, urgent need might



IN the bright torchlight Betty and Polly saw a score of baboons crouched among the rocks—as if, indeed, they were guardians of the Golden Grotto!

arise for two or three of them to bring some message back to camp.

The moon had gone down when the searchers, having made their way across the first half-mile of night-mantled "bush," came to far more difficult ground. This was where fallen masses of rock marked the very foot of a mountain.

Much clambering about had to be done, and writhing between one mammoth boulder and another. Narrow gullies there were, along which they had to go in single file.

Half a mile after the searchers toiled on during the first hour or so. And then at their very guide, suddenly checking, whispered round:

"De valley, folks!"

He said it huskily, under his breath, as if a great awe were upon him. And no wonder! There was awe upon all his companions, now that they felt rather than saw what was before them in the night.

Peering eyes could discern only the beginning of the valley's rocky floor. A hundred yards or so, and after that—a black void!

Not a sound! And yet this was the place to which those dear ones of theirs had been guided, by the witch-doctor, only a few hours since.

"Give a shout, sir?" Dave suggested. "Yes, certainly," Madge's father agreed. "And if we don't get an answer, it will be a puzzle to know what to do next. All together"—and they shouted instantly:

"Morcove! Hi, Mor-cove, where are you? Mor-cove!"

That, the recognised hailing-cry of the expedition, awoke eerie echoes amongst cliff places on the steep sides of the great valley. But they were only echoes that came back to the anxious listeners.

No familiar girlish voices answering, or the lusty shout of Jack.

"Morcove!" they shouted again and again. "Where are you?"

And more than once a fragmentary echo seemed to be the voice of the valley's own evil spirit, sending back only a hollow, mocking:

"Where!"

### The Cave of Baboons

IN black darkness—for he had at this moment switched off the torch once more—Mr. Willoughby spoke to those who were shut away with him in the Golden Crotto.

"We're stopped, I'm afraid. This is where the underground stream slips away between a mere fissure—you saw it?"

"Yes!"

For an hour and more they had been following the course of the icy-cold water, in desperate hope of finding some exit of its own into the open air, which would enable them to escape.

"Go back to the steps, then!" Jack voiced in the darkness.

Desperately cheerful was his tone. Usually, he and Polly were inclined to rage and against any bit of bad luck. But neither he nor she had emitted an infuriated "Rotten!" in the face of this tragic disappointment. Because it was so tragic—their only hope gone!—they were bravely resolved not to complain.

"And when we get back to the shaft-steps," Polly's voice came, hollowly, "have another go at trying to tackle the blocks of stone those wretches piled over the opening? I know we did no good at all, just now, but—"

"Yes, we'll try again," Mr. Willoughby called out in a heartening manner. "In any case, you youngsters

must not begin to feel that we shall have to stay here until—"

"Oh, it's not that!" Polly struck in spiritedly. "But I just hate the idea of those Duponts getting their own price for setting us free!"

"A feeling I share, my dear, you may be sure," Mr. Willoughby was murmuring calmly when Betty asked:

"For just another moment or two, before we turn back, may we have the light on again?"

And then, as it was instantly switched on once more, giving only a very weakened ray, she said excitedly:

"Mr. Willoughby! Oh, this fissure that takes the water on from here—surely Polly and I could squeeze along it? You and Jack never could, but we're smaller!"

"Why, yes!" Polly joyfully shouted. "And—you never know! After a bit, we may be able to go on quite easily—"

"Through another cavern," Betty panted.

"And so work our way out into the open after all!" Polly rushed on.

"Then—easy to get you two rescued, Jack!" she cried to her brother, who was already seeing if he could squeeze into the V-shaped cleft. "It's no use, you can't!"

"No, I just can't," he had to acknowledge. "So there it is."

"But we girls can!" Betty laughed.

"So, Mr. Willoughby—"

"Go on then, my dears—and best of luck! Here, have the torch, one of you. Don't get stuck!"

"Thanks!" Betty said as she took the torch. "Come on then, Polly, and see what we can do!"

Another moment and there was black darkness again. Betty had switched off the light after shining it for the mere second into the underground rift that was so extremely narrow.

With Polly coming after her, Betty wriggled and writhed on the cleft, going sideways.

"Still managing it, Betty?"

"Rather!"

"Going fine!" Polly promptly shouted back to those fellow prisoners who had been compelled to leave "Morcove" to make this desperate venture. "Hurrah! But if only we

can keep on the way the water goes—dash it, then we simply must reach the open air!"

Betty was not going to say anything to spoil her chum's sanguine theory. She could not feel quite so sure about it all herself, for she was remembering that even the Homeland has a famous underground river whose exit into the open air has never been traced.

Suddenly she was less pent-in by the rock-walls. She could move freely, but had still to go an inch at a time lest a hasty step in the darkness should mean disaster.

It was a relief to her to hear no sound of falling water, such as must have come had the underground stream cascaded over a dangerous ledge.

A few yards farther, with Polly all the time keeping close after her, and then Betty thought she had better use the torch for just a moment once more. She had a sense of being about to emerge upon another cavern, and so it was a time for taking one swift look.

She switched on.

Somehow she felt that the light, although so weakened, would reveal a way on—to safety! She and Polly together were going to win through, saving others as well as themselves. She seemed all at once to be breathing a different air.

And then a shock came to her, so unnerving that she very nearly dropped the torch. She drew back in a repelled, shuddering manner.

"Polly, keep back!" she gasped.

"Stay—stay where you are!"

That eager chum, however, was even then at Betty's elbow, her eyes wide as she beheld what Betty had already seen.

Baboons!

Dozens of them were—here, startled out of their sleep.

Some in the full glare of the torch, and others in the gloom—they were sitting up and staring at Betty and Polly. There was angry resentment in each pair of bright, frowning eyes, and there was the special hideousness of the large face and jaws—repeated fifty times over!

"I—I shall switch off, Polly," Betty quavered. "I had better. You go back, and I'll follow."

Then, as she put out the torch, she actually saw some stars flashing in a patch of sky rendered visible by a distant exit from the cavern.

Freedom there! A way out! But it was one cut off to her and Polly by these big, dangerous creatures—the whole host of them!

"Polly, have you gone?" Betty whispered after a pause.

"No! Why?"

"But go on then—quickly! Work back to Mr. Willoughby and get him to lend you his revolver. Tell him I must have it. Oh, and tell them both—there's a way out, Polly."

"Keep the light going then!"

"All right, I will. It may scare them away."

Polly was already writing and squeezing along the rock passage to get back to her brother and Mr. Willoughby.

Betty, keeping close to the exit at this end, worked the switch of the torch once more. And this time—the light did not come.

Are the intrepid chums to meet with disaster? Is their dramatic quest to fail after all? You will know when you read next week's vivid chapters of this epic adventure serial. Make sure of your SCHOOLGIRL during the holidays by ordering it regularly every week.

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## Thrilling Mystery in a House of a Hundred Secrets



# THE PAGODA OF PERIL

FOR NEW READERS.

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

Molly discovers a secret passage, only to be trapped therein by Kai Tal. Catherine, however, sees a fragment of her frock, which has been caught in a sliding panel. As she is about to go to the rescue, Kai Tal creeps up behind her.

(Now read on.)

## The Idol Falls

"A SECRET panel!" Catherine Sterndale gave that startled exclamation as realization dawned. A piece of frock material was caught in the panelling. A secret panel was the only possible explanation.

"A piece of Mollie's frock," muttered Catherine.

Alarm filled Catherine. She knew how adventurous her Cousin Mollie was. She remembered, too that there was a secret corridor behind this wall. Mollie must have gone exploring. The panel had closed upon her and caught her frock.

The Chinese house was silent. Not a movement of any kind could be heard. But the silence was more sinister than any sound, and Catherine gave a slight shiver of dread.

"Mollie!" she called. "Mollie—" There was no reply. Catherine pushed the panel, hoping that it was not fully fastened. But it would not move.

She gave all her attention to the panel. But if she had glanced round, she would have seen that she was not alone in the entrance hall of Pagoda Place.

Kai Tal was behind her. The man she dreaded—the evil genius of this house—stood not a yard from her. He was crouching like some jungle animal

about to spring. In his eyes was a wicked glint; his hands were like claws.

But Catherine, all unconscious of his presence, pushed anxiously at the panel.

In a moment Kai Tal would pounce. A quick movement of his right hand could open the secret catch, and the panel would slide aside.

Then, with a lunge, he could send Catherine into the darkness beyond. It was a plan that had worked well with Mollie. And Catherine, unwarned, would be an easy victim.

But as Kai Tal crept forward, the hall suddenly became filled with sunshine. A cloud had passed the face of the sun, and a sudden, brilliant shaft

lit the hall. And, like a black mantle, Kai Tal's shadow fell before him.

Catherine saw the shadow of his hands. It seemed to leap on to the wall, startling and black.

Fear paralysed her. Her mind worked at crazed speed. She knew that she would be seized; she knew that she was trapped, and she guessed, all at once, that Mollie, too, had been a victim.

But she could not move. Her legs seemed numbed. Her throat was parched as she saw that hideous shadow thrown by the sudden sunshine.

Cousin Charles was in another room, twenty yards away, ignorant of her danger.

Yet someone was near—a friend. Someone whose presence meant salvation to Catherine.

The main door of the hall was open—just as she and Charles had left it—and through it now came a slinking figure.

It was Kwanyin, the little Chinese girl.

She saw her English friend in peril; the evil Kai Tal's hands raised to strike.

"Not dare to touch!" she cried in Chinese.

Kai Tal turned his head. He knew that voice.

"Kwanyin!" he hissed. His men had been searching the grounds for Kwanyin. Now she had walked right into the trap. She had announced herself.

Kai Tal could hardly believe his luck.

But Kwanyin, although she had spoken, did not intend to be caught. She had saved Catherine. And that was what she meant to do. Having done that, it was best to escape.

She darted like a terrified rabbit to the first place of cover. There was no time to think. Her instincts said: "Hide, hide—"

In her terror to escape Kai Tal, she did what came to mind first. She ran to the hollow idol of the god, Siang.

It was in that idol that Kai Tal himself had hidden before he sprang upon Catherine.

He guessed her hiding-place, even as she dodged.

But now Catherine had recovered from her shock. The sudden dread had gone. She could move again, and her mind was clear.

As Kai Tal turned from her to Kwanyin she acted.

She thrust out her arms, and pushed him with all her strength.

Kai Tal staggered. He was off his balance. The jump he had meant to make for Kwanyin failed.

"Charles, Charles!" called Catherine desperately.

Charles's running steps could be heard. In a moment they would be three against one. But in the meantime help might be summoned—other Chinamen might come to the scene.

Kai Tal recovered, and drew up, casting upon Catherine a look of anger. But it was at Kwanyin he rushed.

In alarm, Kwanyin took cover in the idol.

"Oh, have mercy, great Siang!" she

By  
**ELIZABETH CHESTER**

Illustrations by E. Baker

cried, in Chinese. "Protect me; for I help great friend—"

Catherine could not understand the Chinese speech; but the note of piteous appeal was unmistakable, and went to her heart.

She would gladly have attacked Kai Tal herself. She would have done anything to save this brave little Chinese girl.

But a strange thing happened. Kai Tal, rushing towards the idol, suddenly drew back, and threw up his arms. He ducked as though defending himself.

From Kwanyin came a shrill scream. "The idol!" cried Catherine, her eyes rounded with horror.

She saw what caused Kai Tal to crouch, and Kwanyin to cry out in alarm. The idol was tottering. The great wooden carving was rocking on its base.

Kwanyin's sudden rush had unbalanced it.

Now it crashed down with startling suddenness.

Catherine jumped aside, Charles, arriving, collided with Kai Tal, who spun round.

Crash!  
None of them saw quite how it happened, but Kai Tal and the idol seemed to fall together.

They fell, and lay still as though both were carved statues.

Kwanyin, her eyes wide, stared down. She clasped her hands and muttered softly.

"My goodness!" Catherine gasped. "He—he's—"

Charles dropped to his knees beside Kai Tal.

"Dead? No," he said. "Stunned, though."

Kwanyin made a wailing sound of great distress.

"This muchee bad girl, she askee gleat idol savee—gleat idol stlike Kai Tal."

Catherine shook her head.

"You must have pushed the idol, Kwanyin. You were just behind it."

Kwanyin's eyes flashed.

"Me tinkee idol stlike. Other Chinese also tinkee. Kai Tal bad. Idol stlike Kai Tal. Kai Tal bad—"

She rushed across the hall before they could stop her, or even guess what she was going to do. But they saw her snatch up the stick of the huge gong.

"Kwanyin!" warned Charles, in alarm.

"You'll bring the whole crowd here!" said Catherine sharply. "They'll say we knocked Kai Tal down! We shall be blamed!"

"No blamee—no blamee! Idol stlike Kai Tal!" said Kwanyin exultantly.

Charles and Catherine exchanged a puzzled and anxious look. They had not Kwanyin's superstitions. They certainly did not believe that the carved wooden idol had taken any action, except accidentally, in striking Kai Tal.

But what would other Chinese people think?

"I don't like it!" said Charles fretfully, as the hollow, deep, booming notes of the gong sounded in the hall and through the house. "They'll all come, an—"

"And capture Kwanyin!" said Catherine. "Kwanyin, for goodness' sake, hide!" she urged. "Anywhere—but go! Don't you see they're hunting for you now? This won't make any difference at all! You must go!"

Kwanyin, breathless from the exertion of having beaten the gong, rested the stick.

"Alle knowee Kai Tal evil!" she said,

in shrill delight. "Siang no likee Kai Tal! Kai Tal bad!"

Voices could be heard at the end of the corridor. There came, too, the sound of a car in the drive.

"Miss Smith coming back," said Charles.

Kwanyin's glee vanished. She was once again a girl hunted, on the run. And Miss Smith, the secretary, was not Chinese. She would not think Siang had settled the whole business.

"Hidee—hidee!" wailed Kwanyin, in great distress.

Catherine swung round to the secret panel even as the car came to a halt in the drive. She pushed at the panel with all her strength, and it flew back. The piece of material had prevented the catch from fastening.

"In there!" said Catherine.

Kwanyin entered, and Catherine made to follow.

But her Cousin Charles took her arm. "Wait—wait!" he said. "We can't do that!"

"Let me go!" said Catherine, almost fiercely. "Mollie's in here!"

"But—"

Catherine snatched her arm from her cousin, stepped into the secret entrance to the corridor behind the wall, then snapped the panel to.

It was done only just in time. For only a second after the panel snapped shut, Miss Smith, the secretary, entered the house. And from the corridor on the left came a Chinaman, with another just behind him.

Cousin Charles was left to face them—to face them and explain how it came that Kai Tal was on the floor unconscious.

### Charles in Charge

C OUSIN CHARLES had a very high opinion of his own tact and diplomacy and ability to handle delicate situations, so he felt himself quite able to satisfy Miss Smith's curiosity, and yet not reveal that Kwanyin had returned to Pagoda Place.

"Why, Charles," said Miss Smith, as she entered the hall and saw Kai Tal, "what's happened?"

Charles had dropped to his knees beside the fallen Chinaman, and now looked up. He adjusted his glasses, and his expression was solemn. His heartbeats were a little quicker than usual, and he felt as he did on the eve of a stiff examination for which he had not "swotted."

"Er—Kai Tal unconscious," he said.

"How did it happen?" asked Miss Smith, kneeling beside the fallen Chinaman.

"Idol fall—hittee Chinese!" said Charles, forgetting in his nervous anxiety to be convincing that Miss Smith was not Chinese.

"You can speak English to me!" said Miss Smith. "Did you see it fall?"

"Yes," said Charles. "It fell. It just fell. It seemed to strike Kai Tal."

He looked cunningly at the two Chinamen present.

"Idol seemee stlikee bad Kai Tal," he said. "Idol Siang no likee."

"How do you know it is Siang?" asked Miss Smith sharply.

"Oh—er—I heard Kai Tal addressing it!" said Charles, with a hollow feeling inside.

"Kai Tal does not call it Siang. It is one of his quarrels with Kwanyin that this is not Siang at all," said Miss Smith. "It's much more likely that you heard Kwanyin call it Siang!"

Charles bit his lip. He could see that he had blundered.

"I—er—"

"Is Kwanyin here?" Miss Smith asked.

Charles felt a sudden wave of relief. Miss Smith had herself blundered in asking that question, for she had already told them that Kwanyin had left by train.

"Kwanyin? Isn't she on the train?" he asked.

Miss Smith did not answer. She went up to the two Chinamen and spoke to them sharply.

They stood still, awed by what had happened. They paid no heed to Miss Smith. Another Chinaman came, looked down on Kai Tal, and shuddered.

"The fools think it is an act of the idol's!" said Miss Smith, in fury.

"Naturally," said Charles quickly. "The idol has an evil face."

"Don't talk rubbish! How could an idol, made of wood, do such a thing?" snapped the secretary.

"It is an ancient Chinese idol," said Charles, in a hollow impressive tone. "Who knows what evil it can do? Nothing would make me touch it!"

Charles rose to his feet, and a feeling of elation now filled him. His nervous excitement had gone. He felt master of this situation.

Just as Kwanyin had prophesied, the Chinamen were awed and impressed by this unnatural happening. If they were so superstitious, then Charles realised that he could use their fears as a weapon against them.

"Where are your cousins?" asked Miss Smith, as Charles made to move away.

Charles managed to bluff.

"That's what I would like to know," he said. "Where is Mollie? She was here when we left."

He wanted to take Miss Smith's attention from the secret panel, and yet, if possible, go there and investigate himself.

"You had better find her!" the secretary decided, with a worried frown. "Poor Kai Tal is only stunned, I think, but we'd better have a doctor."

She spoke in Chinese to the others, and at last they dragged the injured Chinaman away from the idol. Then between them they carried him to the nearest bed-room.

The hall was clear. Charles, looking right and left, saw no one. If he wanted to follow Catherine and Kwanyin into the secret corridor, he could do so.

He groped over the panel. He pushed and pulled—in vain. Charles was baffled. He could not open the panel.

Then Miss Smith returned to the hall: a Chinaman mounted guard by the fallen idol, and Charles knew that his chance had gone.

He could not enter the secret panel while that Chinaman stood there. And—more alarming thought, even—Catherine and the others could not return. He could do nothing at all to help in the search for Mollie.

All he could do was to distract attention from the secret panel through which Catherine had disappeared. So Charles, with heavy heart and growing anxiety, walked away aimlessly down the corridor.

To keep up the appearance of hunting for Mollie, he called her name.

"Mollie—Mollie—where are you?"

He did not expect a reply. He was quite sure that his cousin was in the corridor behind the secret panel. So when a reply came he had the shock of his life.

It was a muffled reply, and yet recognizable.

"Charles—help—"

The voice died away.

Charles turned left in a frenzy of

excitement. The voice, muffled and indistinct, had been at least clear enough to give direction.

It had come from the wall on his left. Charles rapped on the panels; he searched, he pulled aside the tapestries. But he found no entrance, or sign of one.

His rapping and the commotion he caused had been heard, and from the hall came the sound of voices. The sound became nearer and clearer. It was obvious that some of the Chinamen were coming to investigate.

Charles dithered for a moment, uncertain what to do. Then he hurried through some bead curtains behind him into a small room. There, pressed against the wall, he waited.

The two Chinamen stopped in the corridor, and he heard one call out loudly in Chinese. There came, after a pause, a muffled reply.

Charles crept cautiously to the bead curtains. He was a mass of nerves by this time, tense with excitement.

As he drew near to the curtains he expected to feel a hand shoot out and snatch his shoulder. But the Chinamen were a yard or so from where he stood. They were close to the panelling of the corridor, listening.

Charles cautiously edged forward; and then, very guardedly, looked out.

What he saw was so exciting that he almost gave away his presence by a shout of joy.

The Chinamen were looking through the wall. They had swung aside a piece of tapestry in a heavy wooden frame. It was obviously a door.

Charles drew back, shaking with excitement.

If he could remain hidden, he could return to that spot when the Chinamen had gone. He could move aside the frame—

With those thoughts in his mind, he dodged to safety. It was a matter of time only before he could reach Mollie. But to Charles every moment seemed an hour, for Mollie was in danger. And perhaps not only Mollie, but Catherine, too.

### In the Tunnel

**L**ISTEN—"  
Catherine and Kwanyin had crept down the dark corridor in which they found themselves, without knowing where it might lead, or if they would fall into a trap.

They kept close together and were on the alert. Catherine's heart-beats seemed to shake her whole body. Her senses had never before been so keen, her ears so ready to hear the faintest noise.

They had gone only a short distance, when a strange clinking sound came to them.

Catherine remembered the time when she had had a brief glimpse of men at work.

"What is going on here?" she whispered to Kwanyin. "Hear that sound?"

"Men go dig," said Kwanyin.

"Why are they digging?"

"Makee tunnel."

"Why?"

"Plenty gold, me tinkee—"

Catherine's eyes gleamed with excitement.

"Gold—riches?" she said. "But why must they dig for riches? You don't mean there is buried treasure—"

Kwanyin did not answer that. She did not quite understand what Catherine meant, for she could not follow English unless it were spoken slowly and the simplest words were used.

But what Kwanyin had told her gave



THE shadow, thrown upon the wall, was a slow-moving shadow—the shadow of Kai Tal.

Catherine a thrill of excitement and stirred conjectures in her mind. If there were some treasure buried under the house, then she began to understand why Kai Tal should take such desperate measures against anyone who interfered with his plans.

Something very strange and mysterious was going on in this house—and it was something connected with treasure! That was the idea that began to shape itself in Catherine's mind.

"Does my uncle know of this treasure?" she whispered.

"Yes," answered Kwanyin. "But—but—uncle—he is not here—"

"I know. He has gone away," said Catherine. "But he must know that this is going on. My goodness! We are certainly prying into his secrets," she mused.

She felt a tug at her arm, and a shudder of fear ran through her. But it was only Kwanyin, trying to attract her attention.

"No speakee—lookee," said the little Chinese girl.

Kwanyin had found a small peephole.

Hardly breathing for excitement, Catherine pressed her eye to it and looked down. It was a dimly lit scene with shadowy figures that presented itself.

She saw a tunnel half excavated. She saw, too, men at work with picks and shovels, and various tools and gear, barrows and trucks.

One of the men was shining a powerful torch on to the wall of the tunnel, and Catherine followed its rays. They were focused on to a bright yellowish patch.

"Gold," breathed Catherine. But it was not ordinary gold. It was shaped. It seemed to her to be shaped like a hand, yet it was as large as a man's head.

It was the largest solid block of gold she had ever seen in her life, and she

knew that it must be worth a fortune in itself.

The torch rays were swung from the spot, and Catherine followed them.

She saw three Chinamen walk towards the spot. The two who walked on either side were young men, powerfully built. The one in the centre was older and frail.

He was old, but he walked with an air of immense dignity, as though he were someone of importance.

At first glance Catherine took him to be the leader. She had never seen him before, but she supposed that these people did not all come into public view. Kwanyin's hand was upon hers, and suddenly it tightened.

"Oh," cried the little Chinese girl, and then babbled softly to herself in her own tongue. "My father—my poor father!" she wailed in English. "Where they take him?"

"Your father?" gasped Catherine, her voice rising for a moment above a whisper.

"Yes, yes! Illustrious father, of Kwanyin—oh, they take him. They duel men—makee illustrious father tellee secrets—"

Catherine gripped the little Chinese girl's arm.

"Shush—shush, Kwanyin! If they hear you, you, too, will be taken," she said gently. "And we must help your father—"

"Oh, please, please to save him!" Kwanyin cried.

She knew that she could rely upon Catherine to help her. Catherine seemed to give out a radiance of strength and competence. Kwanyin felt safe in her presence.

"Katieen save illustrious father of Kwanyin," she said in soft appeal. "No lettee bad people makee chuel hurts."

Catherine was deeply touched. This appeal put a load of responsibility on to her. Yet what could she do to help? How could she rescue Kwanyin's father for her? And she

dared not promise what she could not fulfil.

"I'll do what I can, Kwanyin," she vowed earnestly. "I'll find my uncle, and—"

"Yes, yes! Findee uncle!" said Kwanyin in eager, thrilled tones.

"Shush—shush!" Catherine warned her, as one of the men in the tunnel gave a slight start and stared about him suspiciously.

Kwanyin understood the need for silence, but she was excited. Her father was near—near, and yet, because of his bonds and her need for secrecy, still far from being reunited with her.

She could at least see him, however, and know that he was alive.

Catherine hardly breathed as she watched the small group. She saw the venerable father of Kwanyin draw up between his guards.

A small Chinaman halted in front of him and pointed to the wall where Catherine had seen the gold.

Kwanyin's father shook his head. He was denying something, refusing to answer some questions. Catherine watched intently. She could see that his refusal angered the men.

Suddenly, without warning, one of them struck at the old man.

From Kwanyin came a strangled cry. She called out in Chinese as another savage blow was given. Her father recoiled back, trying to guard his head with manacled hands.

"You shall not hurt my father—you shall not!" she cried, in anger. "First it is I who shall be hit."

The men looked up. There was shouting and excitement.

"Oh, my goodness! Run, Kwanyin, or they'll get you!" cried Catherine.

The sight of that attack on the old man had sickened her; she wanted to help him as passionately as Kwanyin did; she wanted to intervene. But Kwanyin must be taken to safety first.

"No, goe—stayee helpee!" panted Kwanyin.

Confusion reigned for a moment in the tunnel below.

A new figure had arrived, Kwanyin's father had found a protector.

"You mean brutes! Leave him alone—"

It was an angry, girlish cry, and Catherine, as she heard it, gave almost a yell of joy.

"Mollie!"

The missing Mollie had suddenly appeared, rushing, heedless of consequences, to the rescue of the aged Chinaman.

Kwanyin was tugging at a catch somewhere in the wall, and now Catherine saw an open space. There was room enough for her to climb through.

"Kwanyin—stay—I'll go!" she said.

She pushed the little Chinese girl back and sprang through the opening to go to Mollie's rescue.

For the Chinamen had now caught hold of her cousin.

There were steps leading down from the hole in the wall to the tunnel, and Catherine hurried down them.

"Mollie—Mollie—" she called.

"Cath—I'm here!" called Mollie. "This is Kwanyin's father! They're being cruel to him; they want me to tell her so that she'll come back—"

"A shrill cry in Chinese came from Kwanyin.

"I am back!" she cried in Chinese. "Do not touch my father. I will come down. You shall take me prisoner instead—"

Catherine saw Kwanyin's father being hurried back through the tunnel, while Mollie struggled with a Chinaman who stood between her and the prisoner.

"Mollie—here I am—it's hopeless!" she cried urgently.

Mollie could not hope to rescue Kwanyin's father from three Chinamen. Instead, she would be more likely to be held captive herself.

"Catherine, he's got my arms!" said Mollie.

Catherine saw that the Chinaman had

a pigtail, as had other workers. She snatched at it and pulled.

With a wild yell, he staggered back, and Mollie moved sideways, wriggling from his grasp.

Then above the confusion came a voice that neither of them expected to hear—Charles.

"Catherine—Mollie—this way!" he called.

Charles had succeeded in moving the tapestry, and his head appeared in the wall at right angles to the one through which Catherine and Kwanyin had peered.

But there was no ladder leading to that spot—no way up! A ladder rested against one wall, and to move it into position would not take a moment. But how could it be done when there were several Chinamen there to prevent it?

Catherine's mind worked at lightning speed. She saw that the tunnel was illuminated by only one light. If it could be turned off there would be almost complete darkness.

Under cover of the darkness the ladder could easily be raised. Perhaps, even, Kwanyin's father—could be rescued.

Catherine snatched up a spade that lay on the ground. Swinging it, she dealt the lamp a violent blow. With a terrific report, the lamp burst. The tunnel was plunged in darkness.

"Mollie, keep by me!" panted Catherine, and stretched out a hand to her cousin.

A hand gripped hers. It was the hand of a Chinaman.

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