

ALL THESE FINE STORIES INSIDE:

"THE PAGODA of PERIL" : "THE PRISONER of RED TOWER" : "MORCOVE in Unknown AFRICA" : "HER HARUM-SCARUM HIGHNESS"

# THE SCHOOLGIRL

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EVERY **2<sup>D</sup>**  
SATURDAY

Incorporating  
'SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN'



**ESCAPE THEY MUST—**

FOR THERE WAS A  
FORTUNE AT STAKE!

See this week's dramatic long complete  
Cliff House holiday story, inside



# The PRISONER of RED TOWER

A Romantic Complete Holiday Adventure Story,  
Featuring Barbara Redfern & Co.,

## Strangers Not Wanted

"GOODNESS, and what's the matter now?" sighed Barbara Redfern.

"Another spot of bother with the blessed old engine!" said Mabel Lynn, in tones of exasperation. "My hat! This is the giddy limit!" exclaimed Clara Trevlyn in her most fed-up voice.

Besides Babs and Mabs and Clara, there were five other schoolgirls in the motor-coach which had just come to a spluttering halt at the side of the moorland road.

They formed the small but merry party of Fourth Formers from Cliff House, that famous girls' school in Kent, who had been enjoying an exciting and adventurous holiday in Cornwall during the summer vacation.

But none of those eight girls was looking merry now. Far from it. All were glum and weary, and eight pairs of eyes watched anxiously as the driver of the coach climbed down from his little cabin to make an inspection of the engine. He delivered his verdict three minutes later.

"Conked out completely!" he said, with a hopeless shrug. "Sorry, young ladies, but I reckon it means a break-down van to tow us to the nearest garage."

"Oh dear! And the nearest garage is how far away?" asked gentle Marjorie Hazeldene.

The driver frowned as his gaze swept down the narrow road which would like a long ribbon across the desolate moor.

"Maybe half a mile, maybe half a dozen!" he replied gloomily.

"Gee, I'll say that's just too bad!" groaned Leila Carroll, the Eton-cropped junior from America.

## By

HILDA RICHARDS

Illustrations by T. Laidler

"C'est terrible!" put in little Marcelle Biquet, with a sad shake of her dark head.

"Cheerful, and I don't think!" observed Jemima Carstairs, removing her monocle to give it a careful but quite unnecessary polish with a silk hanky.

And from Bessie Bunter, the plumpest member of that party, came a feeble, bleating wail:

"Oh, I sus-say! Oh kik-crums! Oh gig-goodness! But what about tea? I'm nearly dud-dying from starvation now, you know, and if I don't have sus-something to eat in the next ten minutes I shall die—really I shall!"

"Poor old Bessie! What flowers would you like?" asked Clara solemnly.

"Eh?" Bessie revived to blink indignantly through her thick round spectacles, entirely missing the point of the Tomboy's remark. "I d-don't want flowers, you silly. I want some f-food—"

But Bessie's pathetic appeal fell on deaf ears. Babs & Co., although feeling peckish themselves, were far more concerned about the unfortunate mishap which had overtaken them.

It was no fun to be stranded with a broken-down motor-coach at a spot which must surely be about the most desolate on all Exmoor, on the borders of Devon and Somerset.

All around them stretched an undulating vista of bleak countryside, looking even more dreary in the grey light of the waning afternoon. Low black clouds saddled overhead, ob-

scuring in swirling mist the tips of a range of hills in the distance.

"Well, and what shall we do, girls?" asked Babs, the blue-eyed leader of the party. "Goodness knows if we shall ever reach Holly Hall to-night, and mums and daddy will be awfully worried!"

The Cliff House chums were due at Holly Hall, Babs' home in Hampshire, that evening. But everything had seemed to go wrong since starting out from Pellabay Castle, where they had been staying in Cornwall, that morning.

The coach, not one of the super-luxury variety, had early exhibited a disinclination to function smoothly. Twice already there had been delays for minor defects in the engine. Now had come this disaster.

The driver came up to the girls.

"Reckon I'll start walking," he said. "Can't patch it up, anyhow. Don't remember passing a garage for miles back, so I'll keep on down this road. There'll be one on the main road, although that must be some five or six miles from here."

Babs looked distressed.

"So sorry, driver," she said apologetically. "I'm afraid that's our fault for insisting on taking the by-roads."

But the man smiled cheerily.

"Don't you worry about me, miss. I'll be back as soon as I can with the break-down gang. You girls had better make yourselves comfy in the coach, if you don't mind me saying so. The weather don't look too good to me, and you don't want to get yourselves lost on the moors."

And with that warning he was off, taking big strides down the road. Babs & Co. watching him go, saw him disappear round a bend.

"Well, I'm not going to sit in a

**A**MID the desolate wastes of romantic Exmoor stood Red Tower, the house that was destined to become the scene of a thrilling drama in which the holiday-making Cliff House chums played a part that was as exciting as it was daring . . .

stuff coach for hours!" snorted Tomboy Clara. "Who's coming for a tramp?" Babs' gaze went up to the stormy sky dubiously.

"The driver was right. It doesn't look too good—" she began, but Clara interrupted her impatiently.

"We've got our macs, haven't we?" she demanded. "And anyway, it'll pass the time if we go for a walk."

Clara was a girl of action. They might have to wait a couple of hours for the driver's return, and the thought of doing nothing during that time was not likely to suit the energetic Tomboy.

Babs' pretty face broke into a smile. "Perhaps you're right, old thing," she said. "Who else is coming?"

Everybody was agreeable with the exception of Bessie. Bessie would have preferred to slack in the coach, rather than exercise her plump little legs in a tramp over the moors. But she quickly changed her mind when she saw she would be left behind by herself. So, five minutes later, having donned macs over their frocks and costumes, the eight chums strode out across the moor.

Overhead the clouds scudded lower; the light became greyer and a chill wind began to blow, bringing with it a hint of rain. More and more desolate became the scene, but Babs & Co. tramped on, enjoying the exercise after being cooped up in the coach for so many hours.

The moor rose gradually towards the distant hills, lost now in mist and rain. Still Babs & Co. pressed on, chattering gaily among themselves, talking of their adventures at Pellabay Castle, discussing prospects for the coming term at Cliff House.

A premature darkness was falling over the wild countryside. A drizzle of rain was driving into their faces. Babs suddenly halted.

"We don't want to go too far," she said. "Better turn back now. Goodness, what a day—and to think of the glorious weather we've been having lately—"

And then Babs broke off with a startled gasp. She had swung round, expecting to see the thin ribbon of road in the distance, with the abandoned coach standing there to act as a landmark on the return journey. But Babs could see neither road nor coach. In fact, she could see nothing—nothing but an expanse of swirling grey mist which completely hid everything!

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Clara in dismay. "Look at the fog!"

With disconcerting suddenness that moorland mist had descended, obscuring the whole surrounding countryside. It drifted about them, driven by the wind. It drenched them in a matter of moments, making them shiver in its cold, wet embrace.

Marjorie's anxious voice came through the gloom:

"Oh, Babs! Do you think we'll be able to find our way back to the road?"

Babs smiled with an optimism she was far from feeling.

"Of course, Marjorie dear," she replied lightly. "We followed a definite track most of the way, and once we find that—"

But when they came to look for that path they could not strike it. Half an hour lengthened into an hour—but with no success. And still the mist hemmed

them in, while the daylight waned perceptibly.

Babs was becoming desperately anxious. She had heard of people being stranded for hours in a moorland mist such as this. If the mist did not lift, if they did not find their way back to the abandoned coach— Babs shuddered. A night spent in this wild, exposed spot was not a pleasant prospect.

They stumbled on over the rough, uneven ground, with not the faintest idea if they were going in the right direction. Bessie was groaning and grumbling dimly; the others were tired and depressed, silent, and losing heart with every passing minute.

It was blunt Tomboy Clara, however, who broke the gloomy silence and pronounced the dread fear which was in all their minds:

"Well, girls, we're lost. Completely and absolutely lost!"

There was no getting away from it. Lost they were—lost somewhere on bleak and mist-shrouded Exmoor, with night fast approaching!

"Fraid you're right, Clara," admitted Babs wretchedly. "Our only hope is that the mist will lift soon. If it doesn't—"

"A jolly night under the stars for little us—only it won't be so jolly, and we shan't see the stars!" finished Jemima, with an attempt at cheerfulness.

Babs smiled faintly.

"Anyway, we'd better wander about and try to find some sort of shelter," she said practically. "I've got a packet of chocolate here—that'll be something to

eat. You've got one, too, haven't you, Leila—"

She broke off with a little start.

"What was that?"

"I didn't hear anything—" Mabs began.

"Listen!"

They stood tense, ears alert, listening. Through the mist came a sound—the mournful howling of some creature, startling and nerve-tingling in that world of silent desolation.

"Oh dud-dear!" A terrified wail came from Bessie Bunter. "Lions—tut-tigers!"

No one laughed. Every girl was crouched motionless. Again that sound came eerily through the fog—but nearer and more insistent now. Babs' eyes suddenly gleamed.

"A dog!" she breathed. "The baying of a dog!"

Again the howling rose—and yodded again. Eerie and ghostly it sounded—enough to send a faint shiver coursing down the bravest spine.

They heard the soft padding of feet. The next moment a form seemed to leap at them from out of the gloom; a black shape was frisking round their legs. A large dog it was—jet black, and with greenish-blue, luminous eyes; a beautiful Labrador retriever.

"Here, here, old boy!" called Babs coaxingly. "Where have you come from, eh? Surely you're not lost like we are!"

A large pink tongue came out to lick Babs' hand. The dog squatted on its haunches, and sat looking up at her



**WHILE** her chums pressed eagerly round, Babs slowly read out the dramatic message—the message that was to lead them into such strange adventures: "I am a prisoner in Red Tower. Please help."



with eyes which gleamed with intelligence.

The girls crowded round him, stroking his damp coat on which the moisture had collected in little rivulets, patting his finely shaggy head.

"Home, boy!" cried Clara. "Lead us to your mistress! Home, old chap!"

But, the dog remained sitting there, his thick tail sweeping the ground, still looking up at the chums with eyes in which there seemed to be mute appeal.

"You lovely old doggie!" exclaimed Babs, running her hand round his thick, furry neck. "But won't you lead us home? Home, boy—" Her fingers had closed round his collar, and she felt them touch something soft. "Why, what's this—"

She bent to look closer, and then Babs, to her surprise, saw a white object thrust through the tab of his collar. She plucked it out, saw that it was a rolled-up piece of paper. Wonderingly Babs smoothed it out, then gasped.

"There's some writing on it!" "Writing?" echoed Mabs. "What's it say, Babs? Read it out—"

But Babs was already doing that; and her blue eyes opened wide in amazement as she repeated aloud the message written on that piece of paper: "I am a prisoner in Red Tower. Please help."

"It must be a hoax—somebody's idea of a joke!"

That was Mabel Lynn's suggestion; but Barbara Redfern, still holding that strange message, shook her head worriedly.

"I don't know what to think," she confessed, and looked down at the dog.

It was leaping about excitedly, running backwards and forwards, as though urging the chums to follow him.

Was that SOS a hoax? as golden-haired Mabs suggested—or was it a genuine call for help?

The idea was fantastic. Could it be possible that some strange drama was being enacted out on these wild moors, under the cloak of the all-enveloping mist; that someone was really in danger, in deadly peril?

Again Babs looked down at the dog. He was becoming frantic, barking continuously.

"Come on, girls!" Babs said, with sudden decision. "I vote we look into this, and joke or no joke, at least the dog may lead us to a house where we can get shelter for the night, and be able to phone through to home."

"Hear, hear!" supported Clara eagerly. "And if someone really is in danger—well, they can count on us for help. Lead on, doggie—home, boy!"

Away bounded the dog, with Babs & Co. following at a run. Sometimes he was lost to sight in the mist, but always he came back to lead them on, barking and jumping, as if urging them to hurry.

How far they went they could not tell, but suddenly there was an excited cry from Babs.

"Look—ahead of us! A light!"

For a minute or two the mist drifted clear in the wind, and, following Babs' pointing finger, the chums saw ahead of them in the distance an oblong patch of pale yellow light, set in what seemed to be a huge black shadow that towered up into the sky.

"A house!" exclaimed Clara eagerly. "Red Tower!" announced Babs, a thrilled note coming into her voice.

"The jolly old mansion of mystery, heigh-ho!" murmured Jemima.

A massive gateway had loomed up in

front of the girls, and Babs had seen the name of the house engraved in the concrete of one of the imposing pillars.

The big iron gate was just sufficiently ajar for the dog to squeeze through. Curiously enough he had now stopped barking; there was something almost furtive about his movements as he padded up the drive beyond.

"Come on!" breathed Babs. "I don't know who we're going to find living in this house, but say nothing about that message. Remember we want shelter for the night. If only we can get inside, then we'll look round unobtrusively, and see if there's any funny business going on."

The chums nodded. The gate creaked as Leila pushed it open. Then they were following the dog down a long drive, on both sides of which trees, looking like huge ghostly sentinels, rustled mournfully in the breath of the wind.

That solitary light still shone out into the night from a window that was on ground level. For a moment, as they neared it, Babs saw the silhouette of a shadowy figure, but it vanished as dramatically as it had appeared.

"Oh dud-dear, I dud-don't like this!" stammered Bessie fearfully. "I've got the kik-creeps—"

"Chump!" hissed Clara. "Be a bold, brave Bunter, Bessie!"

They found the big front door. Babs located the massive knocker, shaped to represent a hideous-looking gargoyle. She raised it.

Bang, bang! For a minute the chums waited. They fancied they heard voices from inside the house. Then dead silence. No one came to answer the door.

Bang, bang, bang! Babs knocked again—louder. The echoes were thunderous in the stillness of the early night. But now footsteps were heard from within. The door opened. A tall woman, with a haughty-looking face, glared out at them with hostile suspicion.

"Who are you? What do you want?" she demanded curtly.

Babs gulped, a little taken aback by that rude reception.

"My—my friends and I have lost our way in the mist," she replied. "We've thought that perhaps you would be good enough to let us come in and dry our clothes, and also to use your phone if you have one. We're awfully sorry to disturb you—"

Babs was interrupted by the woman's cold, harsh voice:

"You can't come in here. We don't want strangers at Red Tower. If you've lost your way, that's your own look-out. Go away."

And slam went the door.



The Empty Room

"POLITE, I must say!" remarked Clara Trevellyn, with characteristic bluntness, not troubling to lower her voice.

"And strange!" added Barbara Redfern emphatically.

There was a thoughtful frown on her pretty oval face as she turned slowly away from the door.

"Strange" is the word," put in Clara indignantly. "It struck me she was frightened of us. Looks as if there's something in that message for help, after all."

Babs did not reply, and while she was

not in the habit of jumping to conclusions like the impetuous Tambo, she was certainly thinking of that message now—of those other queer incidents. The furtive figure at the window, the woman's hostility, the behaviour of the dog.

The dog! Ah, where was it? Babs looked round. The retriever had been with them on the doorstep, but there was no sign of it now.

Before Babs could say anything, however, a surprising thing happened—surprising, that is, after what had already occurred.

There was a sound behind them; a patch of light shone out into the darkness, and, turning, they saw that the door had opened once more.

Framed in the doorway was another woman—a woman of middle age, whose pleasant face was wreathed in a warm, welcoming smile.

"Please don't go!" she called. "Did I hear you girls say you were lost on the moor? Then you must come in. I assure you that you are most welcome."

And, still smiling, she held the door open wider.

Babs & Co. blinked in bewilderment. "Well, if—if it won't be any trouble to you, we'd like to," said Babs hesitantly, thinking of the reception given to them by the other woman.

"My dears, it is no trouble at all. You are perfectly welcome to stay here for the night if you wish. I expect the mist will have cleared by the morning. But I'm afraid there is no telephone here, and the nearest one is four miles away. We are very isolated here, you know."

Babs & Co. trooped into a big, panelled hall, where they were at once struck by its gloominess. Very bleak and cheerless it was, with bare polished boards, little furniture, and that of an early period, hard and upright and uncomfortable. It seemed to be a place of weirdly shaped shadows that danced fantastically in the dim light of fluttering candles which burned in two candelabras standing on the brick mantelpiece of the big open fireplace.

Wide, uncarpeted stairs ran up from the centre of the hall and gave on to a square gallery, almost lost in darkness, which ran round three sides of the house, and off which opened numerous doors.

So this was Red Tower—the house in which, if that mysterious message were to be believed, someone was being held captive. Babs felt a queer little shiver run down the length of her spine.

The very atmosphere of this old house breathed mystery. It looked a sinister place in which sinister things might happen.

All of them felt awed—yet uneasy. Bessie and Marjorie and Marcelle, in particular, were looking about them very apprehensively.

"Well, here's a rummy go!" whispered Clara in Babs' ear. "One woman turns us away, and now another welcomes us with open arms! What do you make of it—"

"Shush!" cautioned Babs, for the kindly faced woman had closed the door and was coming towards them.

"My dears, take off your macs—gracious, you're saturated! I'll get them dried in the kitchen. Now come into the library. There's a cosy fire. My name, by the way, is Mrs. Forster." She led the way into a spacious book-lined room, in the large open grate of which burned a wood fire. Like the hall, it was illuminated by candles, and even the glowing fire failed to dispel the depressing atmosphere.

Babs & Co. stiffened as they saw the three people who were already in the





**BEWILDERED** cries came from the girls as they crowded into the cellar. Of Patricia, whose voice they had heard only a moment ago, there was now no sign. The prisoner had vanished!

library—two men and the woman they had first met. The latter's face was cold and expressionless now, but her eyes burned with a fury which the chums could not help but notice.

"This is my sister, Mrs. Parrish," introduced Mrs. Forster, disapproval showing momentarily in her features. "And this is Mr. Parrish, her husband," indicating one of the men. He was of medium height, with pale blue watery eyes, set in a long face which narrowed at the chin, giving him a cadaverous appearance.

"Who are these girls, Ruth?" he demanded brusquely of Mrs. Forster. "I think Ada was right in not allowing them to come in—"

Mrs. Forster eyed him frigidly. "And I think Ada was very rude," she retorted. "Please remember that, at the moment, at least, this is my house, and that you are only here as guests yourselves." Then deliberately she turned away, ignoring him. "And this, my dears," she added, waving to the other man, "is Mr. Silas Fright, the family solicitor."

Bessie, at hearing that name, blinked apprehensively and edged closer to Babs. The solicitor smiled thinly. The glow of the leaping fire lit up the hollowness of his high cheek bones. He murmured a perfunctory greeting, then relapsed into silence.

"Mr. Fright, like my sister and brother-in-law, is staying here to-night," explained Mrs. Forster. "You see, at six o'clock to-morrow morning he is due to read my late father's will!"

The Cliff House chums stared. A will to be read at six o'clock in the morning. Surely that was unusual, to say the least of it. But not then did Mrs. Forster give any further explanations. She invited the girls to be seated, while Babs introduced her chums and herself.

A wistful, pathetic expression had now come into Mrs. Forster's eyes as she regarded the chums.

"It is so nice to have children in this lonely old house," she said softly. "It reminds me of—of poor Patricia—"

The voice faltered; her lips quivered. At once Mrs. Parrish stepped forward.

"You will do yourself no good thinking about Patricia. I do not want to appear unsympathetic, Ruth"—yet how unsympathetic her voice sounded! thought Babs—"but your daughter has disappeared. Where she is we don't know. We've all done everything we can to trace her, but without success. It is just another tragedy connected with this—this ill-fated house."

She put particular emphasis on the words, and her eyes glittered as she glanced from one to the other of the listening girls. Babs got the impression that she was trying to frighten them.

Mrs. Forster hardly heeded her sister's words, however. Her glance had gone to a large cabinet photograph which stood on the massive mahogany table in the centre of the room.

"This is Patricia," she said. "My daughter disappeared soon after the death of her grandfather. If only I knew what had happened to her. Not a word—not a sign of the child—"

Again she broke off, the tears coming to her eyes.

Babs and Clara, who were sitting near the table, rose to have a closer look at the photograph. It portrayed the head and shoulders of a pretty girl of about their own age, and across the bottom of it was written:

"To darling mums, from Pat."

Then Babs, as she studied that handwriting, gave a violent start. The colour flooded excitedly into her cheeks.

For the writing was the same as that on the message which had been brought to them by the dog.

"My hat!" Clara had seen the similarity, too. "Babs, it's the same—"

For some reason which at that moment was not quite clear even to Babs herself, she tugged a warning at the Tomboy's arm.

"Shush, Clara! Don't say it!" she whispered quickly. "Yes, it's the same handwriting. There's something fishy going on in this house—and we've got to find out what it is!"

The Tomboy nodded. The two chums went back to their chairs. They were conscious of Mr. and Mrs. Parrish regarding them suspiciously. A silence

fell over the room—a heavy, oppressive silence during which Bessie Bunter wriggled uncomfortably in her chair, the while she glanced about her nervously.

Even Babs was becoming affected. Already this house of sinister gloom was getting on her nerves.

If only there were more light! The iron candelabra, suspended from the low, ornate ceiling, although it burned twelve candles, was quite inadequate to illuminate that vast room.

The unpleasant Mrs. Parrish and her husband, standing by the big fireplace, constantly exchanged furtive glances. Mr. Fright, the solicitor, stood near them, saying not a word, a thoughtful expression on his sallow features, a strange gleam in his eyes.

Babs felt she simply must say something.

"I—I'm awfully sorry to hear about your daughter, Mrs. Forster." Her voice sounded unreal, breaking that deathly silence. "I hope she'll soon be found. But why should she have disappeared? Have you no idea where she—"

The words died away in Babs' throat. Everybody stiffened. Bessie screamed. For a low, whining sound came from somewhere in the house; it swelled louder, died away, came again, ending this time in an excited bark.

"It's the dog!" exclaimed Mabs, half-rising from her chair. "The retriever that brought us here."

Babs, biting her lip, looked quickly across at Mrs. Parrish. She saw the woman's face go pale; saw her throw an alarmed glance at her husband, who was visibly agitated. He gave a frantic nod.

Next moment the woman was striding hurriedly across the room, had vanished through the doorway. Her footsteps were heard outside in the hall, running now.

Mrs. Forster, too, had risen to her feet; she was flushed with excitement.

"Retriever, did you say? Then it must be Ruff—Patricia's dog. He's been missing for three days, ever since Patricia disappeared. Oh, where can he be? Why is he whining? Perhaps the dog knows where she is; he may be able to lead us to her."

Babs was thrilling. Half-formed suspicions had become certainties now. The missing Patricia, who had sent that message by the dog, was indeed a prisoner—a captive in her own home. And the dog knew where she was hidden.

But where had Mrs. Parrish gone? Where she and her husband at the bottom of Patricia's disappearance? Was the woman even now making a desperate attempt to prevent the girl from being found?

Babs, in her excitement, seized Mrs. Forster by the arm.

"We must find the dog!" she exclaimed. "Oh, hurry!"

There was a rush for the door. In the excitement nobody noticed that Mr. Parrish was the only one to remain in the library. Quickly he moved beside the fireplace, jabbed his finger on a certain spot, and at once a section of the panelling slid open. Two seconds later Mr. Parrish had vanished, and the panelling had moved back into position.

Outside in the hall Babs & Co. were following in the wake of Mrs. Forster. The barking of the dog could still be heard coming from somewhere ahead of them. Under the gallery they rushed, to find themselves in complete darkness.

"Wait!" cried Mrs. Forster. "I'll bring a candle. Be careful, for this passage leads to the cellars!"

From a shelf in an alcove of the wall he picked up a candle and a box of matches; with trembling fingers lit the wick.

At a distance along the passage Babs & Co. saw a flight of stairs leading downwards—and it was from the direction of those stairs that the barking was coming.

"The dog's down in the cellars!" exclaimed Babs.

She rushed on, followed closely by Clara and Jimima. Suddenly all was darkness again. Mrs. Forster, running in her excitement, had forgotten to shield the candle with her hand; it went out.

There was a frightened squeal from Beattie Bunter. Mrs. Forster fumbled feverishly for the matches again; then a thin ray of light shone out by the stairs.

"Follow me, my merry old Spartans!" said Jimima, who was holding a small torch. "I took this out of my mac; thought we might want it—what?"

"Good old Jimmy!" said Babs; and the three children went clattering down the stairs, well ahead of the others who were still groping about in the darkness.

Mingled with the barking of the dog was another sound now—a furious scratching, as though the Labrador were trying to force his way somewhere with his paws.

The cellars were reached along a stone-flagged passage. The chums saw a row of iron-studded doors. In the confines of that passage the barking was deafening.

"There he is!" shouted Clara. Then, twenty yards or so ahead, almost beyond the radius of the small torch, a figure appeared. They heard a scuffling; a woman's voice. The scratching stopped, and the barking changed to a growling.

"Up it, you brute!" It was the harsh voice of Mrs. Parrish. "Give the game away, would you?"

There was a thud; a whimper from the dog, followed by the sound of something being dragged along the floor.

Swiftly Babs and Clara and Jimima raced on. But too late. The passage turned a corner. The chums reached it—but of Mrs. Parrish and the dog there were no signs.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" gasped Clara

in wide-eyed amazement. "Where—where's she gone? And the dog—"

But Babs, retracing her steps swiftly, paused outside one of the doors.

"Never mind them for the moment," she said. "The dog was scratching at this door. Patricia's in here—"

As if to prove her right, a voice called from the other side of the heavy door. "Help—help!" Feebly the words came. "Let me out of here!"

"Is that Patricia?" shouted back Babs quickly.

"Yes. Who are you?"

"We're friends. We were lost on the moor, when the dog brought our message—"

"Thank goodness for that!" A quiver of excitement came into the voice; but Babs guessed that Patricia Forster must be at the end of her tether, so weak and exhausted did she sound. "Please hurry and get me out of here! I'll go mad if I stay here any longer!"

"Keep your pecker up!" Babs said. "We'll have you out of here in a few moments."

She seized the iron ring handle and turned it; but the door would not open; it was locked, and there was no key.

"We'll have to get the key!" shouted Clara.

"Then hurry—for goodness' sake, hurry!" came Patricia's voice again. "I've been kidnapped by my own aunt and uncle. They want to prevent me being present at the reading of my uncle's will. What's the time now? Don't say you've come too late—"

The chums eyed one another in amazement.

"My goodness!" Clara panted. "D'you hear that, Babs?"

The Form captain nodded. "I guessed as much," she muttered tensely. "Well, it's up to us now to get Patricia out. Now, I wonder where the key is!"

Jimima swung round, as footsteps echoed along the passage.

"Hallo! Here come the others!" she said.

Mrs. Forster came rushing up with the other Cliff House girls. Then Babs blinked; for with them was Mrs. Parrish!

"Have you found Patricia?" asked Mrs. Forster eagerly. "Oh, you have! I heard her voice—"

"Yes; she's a captive in this cellar!" Babs replied, and glanced at Mrs. Parrish, expecting that woman to crumple up now that she knew exposure was inevitable. "Have you a key, Mrs. Forster?"

Babs received another shock then; for it was Mrs. Parrish who stepped forward, a strange, mocking smile lurking on her thin lips.

"Don't worry! I have the key," she said calmly. "I heard the dog scratching at that door. You saw me, didn't you?" She was quite unruffled, showing no signs of fear.

"I went back by another passage to fetch the key. And you say Patricia is in here? Then we must open the door—"

A sudden uneasiness swept over Babs. Why was Mrs. Parrish acting like this? Why was she so willing for the cellar to be opened—when she, of all people, should not want Patricia to be found?

"Please give me that key!" Babs demanded firmly.

"Certainly."

Babs thrust the key into the lock, turned it, and flung open the door. Jimima went in first, shining her torch. Babs and the others crowded in after her.

And then Jimima gasped. For the cellar was empty. Of a prisoner there was not a single trace!



In Peril on the Moor

**B**ARBARA REDFERN'S blue eyes suddenly blazed.

There had been trickery here—and she did not need to be told who was at the foot of it.

Round she swung to face Mrs. Parrish.

"You've done this!" she cried accusingly. "You've taken Patricia and hidden her somewhere else!"

Mrs. Parrish's face expressed horror and indignation.

"Oh!" she gasped sharply, with a toss of her head. "Girl! How dare you! Really, this is outrageous! Ruth, are you going to allow me to—to be insulted in this fashion by an utter stranger?"

Mrs. Forster, all those joyful hopes dashed to the ground, peered about her uncertainly and rather helplessly.

"But—but—I heard Patricia's voice." Then she looked reprovingly at Babs. "Barbara, what has been happening down here? How can you make such a terrible accusation against my sister? You can't mean it—"

"But we do mean it!" broke in Clara bluntly, and there was an emphatic nod from Jimima Carstairs. "We heard Patricia, Mrs. Forster—we spoke to her. And she said she had been kidnapped by her own aunt and uncle."

"Stop! Stop!" Mrs. Parrish's voice now quivered with anger. "I will not listen to another word. The accusation is too ridiculous to be taken seriously. Ruth, surely you can see how absurd it is. As if Albert and I would kidnap our own niece—"

"Stop! Stop!" Mrs. Parrish's voice now quivered with anger. "I will not listen to another word. The accusation is too ridiculous to be taken seriously. Ruth, surely you can see how absurd it is. As if Albert and I would kidnap our own niece—"

"Steadily Babs regarded the woman. "It's true, all the same!" she retorted. "Where is Mr. Parrish now?" she added, with a glance round. "He's not here. And how do you account for your own movements? You were down here before any of us, Mrs. Parrish."

Again that woman tossed her head. "I feel almost inclined to refuse to answer your absurd question, but—well, I came down here to stop the dog barking. I saw him scratching at this door, and then, as I have already said, went upstairs again to fetch the key. But I certainly heard no one in this cellar. You must have been dreaming, Ruth, if you thought you heard Patricia's voice. I have no doubt these girls put the idea in your mind. They are deceiving you—playing a cruel trick."

Hot words of protest trembled on Babs' lips, but before she could voice them there was a groan from Mrs. Forster. She suddenly tumbled, and would have collapsed to the ground had not Mr. Frigate, the solicitor, sprung forward and caught her.

"She's fainted," he said briefly—"overcome by these shocks. We must get her upstairs."

Mr. Parrish appeared at that moment carrying a lantern, the fetching of which he gave as an excuse for being so late upon the scene. He looked very anxious when he saw Mrs. Forster, and at once assisted the solicitor to get her upstairs.

Babs was the last one to leave the cellar. She glanced round it quickly but keenly. The walls, floor, and ceiling were built of stone. There was not the slightest trace of how Patricia had disappeared.

Upstairs in the library, while Mrs. Forster was being put to bed, the eight

Cliff House chums discussed the mystery.

"And you actually spoke to Patricia?" asked Mabs wonderingly. "Yes," Babs nodded. "And I can see what's happened. Mr. Parrish—it couldn't have been his wife, because she wouldn't have had time—managed to get down into that cellar by some other entrance and removed Patricia to a different hiding-place. But where?"

"And why?" asked Marjorie. "Because the Parrishes don't want her to be present at the reading of the will," Babs explained. "I don't know the whys and wherefores of it all, but I do know that we've got to find Patricia before six o'clock. Perhaps there's a fortune depending on it—and the Parrishes are trying to get it for themselves."

From what little they knew of the facts, Babs' theory seemed a likely one. At that moment the door opened, ending any further conversation between the chums. Mrs. Parrish strode in, a satisfied smile on her face.

"Mrs. Forster has recovered, and desires me to give you a message," she said. "You are to leave this house. She wishes never to see you again."

"What!" It was a startled chorus from the chums.

"And," snapped Mrs. Parrish unpleasantly, "you will go at once! Your mags have been dried, and are ready for you in the hall."

Babs & Co. didn't need to be told that the woman was lying. Ordered to go! But that message had not come from Mrs. Forster. Rather was it Mrs. Parrish's method of getting rid of these girls who were interfering with her schemes, and she was taking advantage of her sister's collapse as a means of giving authority to the order.

Babs looked at the woman contemptuously.

"I'm sorry, but I don't believe you," she said. "Please may I speak to Mrs. Forster?"

"Certainly not! She is very unwell, and I refuse to allow you to disturb her."

Babs had expected that. For a moment she was tempted to stand out against the woman, to refuse to leave Red Tower.

Mrs. Parrish saw her hesitation. "Will you go," she hissed, "or must I have you thrown out?"

"My hat! Look here—" exclaimed Clara indignantly. "But Babs suddenly nodded. A thoughtful gleam had come into her eyes."

"Very well," she said icily. "I'm still quite certain that Mrs. Forster has not given this order; but we'll go, all the same."

Without another word, hardly able to hide her satisfaction, the woman crossed the room and held open the door. Some of the chums were eyeing their leader in astonishment. They had hardly expected Babs to submit so tamely.

Outside in the hall they found their noses piled on a Jacobean table. Watched in silence by Mrs. Parrish, who was now joined by her husband, they donned them. Babs gave a quick glance at the man, her eyes keen; then she nodded grimly to herself.

He crossed over to the door and flung it open. The mist, still thick outside, swirled into the hall, carried by the cold, damp wind.

Without speaking, the chums filed out. The door closed behind them. Immediately Clara grabbed hold of Babs' arm.

"Well, you prize chump!" she ex-

claimed wrathfully. "Why the dickens did you walk out so tamely? We could easily have refused to go. What about Patricia?"

But Babs did not reply then. She walked on down the dark drive until the house was but a shadow in the gloom. Then she paused, the other girls about her. She faced Clara.

"Now old hot-head, I'll tell you why I left so tamely," she said, a trace of excitement in her voice. "I don't

"My hat—yes! Then what do we do now?" asked Clara eagerly.

"I suggest," said Babs keenly, "that we find some place of concealment near the house. There must be some out-buildings here. Then we'll have shelter, and somewhere to keep watch. Come on; let's look round! Oh, blow this mist!"

She gave a shudder as she glanced round.

The thick mist still hung about them.



**DIMLY** the chums saw a figure moving stealthily towards Red Tower. "Mrs. Parrish!" Babs whispered tensely, and instantly the same thought came to each of the girls: Had she been visiting Patricia's new hiding-place?

think that Patricia is in the house any longer."

"Eh?" Clara blinked. "How do you make that out?"

Babs smiled faintly. "Observation, my dear Watson." And then she became very serious. "Did you notice anything about Mr. Parrish? No; well, I did. When he came into the cellar he had mud on his boots."

The Tomboy stared. "Well, so have I," she retorted. Babs sighed.

"Can't you see," she said patiently, "what I'm getting at? When we first went into the house his boots were clean. It must have been he who moved Patricia from the cellar. There was no one else to do it at that time. Then, after Patricia had vanished, he appeared, and"—Babs said impressively—"and the sides of his boots were covered with wet mud. Which proves that he must have been outside. Which suggests to me that if he were the one who took Patricia, then he must have taken her outside somewhere."

The chums stared at her admiringly. "Oddsbodkins!" exclaimed Jimima, with pretended awe. "The girl's a detective. But methinks you're right, old Spartan."

getting into their noses and throats, making their eyes smart. It was eerily dark. Phantom shapes seemed to writhe and twist about them in the breath of the wind. Somewhere an owl hooted, making Bessie jump.

Gropingly the chums struck away from the drive, crossing what they took to be a lawn, to judge by the moist springiness underfoot. Suddenly, ahead of them, the mist seemed to become blacker. Clara, blundering on, gave a yelp as she was brought up against something hard and unyielding.

"What the——" she began. "I say, Jimmy! Where's your torch?"

A thin beam of light, cutting through the darkness, answered her question. It shone weakly on a huge black pile—a wooden structure of tarred boards.

Babs inspected it closely. "Must be the stables," she opined. "Well, this'll make a shelter, if nothing else. Wish the mist would lift, though. Pile in, kids!"

They needed no second bidding. Babs, taking Jimima's torch, led the way, and shone it about her. Something scuttled across the floor.

"Oh, goodness! A rat!" timid Marjorie Hazeldene gasped, clutching tightly at Clara's arm.



The Tomboy laughed with a reassurance she did not feel.

"They won't hurt you," she said. "Look! Let's make ourselves comfortable on that straw over there."

It was a good suggestion. They acted upon it. With weary sighs they sank down on the soft straw. Bessie, with a bar of chocolate wheedled from Clara, munched contentedly, momentarily forgetting her fears.

For perhaps half an hour they sat discussing the night's adventure. One and all they were determined to find Patricia, but the mist threatened to balk their efforts.

Then Babs, walking across to the dilapidated door, gave a shout:

"My hat! The mist is beginning to clear! I can just see Red Tower. And the moon's peeping through."

There was a rush to join her. The mist had certainly lifted, was being dispersed by the freshening wind, the pale moon, filtering through, bathed the turret roof of Red Tower, now visible, with a grey glow.

"This is better," said Babs eagerly. "Now we'll be able to watch the house!"

She paused, drew quickly back into the stable.

"Say, what's the matter——" began Leila.

Babs raised a finger to her lips to enjoin silence. They all looked out. A figure had come into sight. Unaware of the eight pairs of eyes that watched, it was moving in the direction of the house.

"Mrs. Parrish!" whispered Babs. "Now where's she been——what's she now doing? I wonder——"

Her brain was busy. The woman, carrying a small attache case, had now vanished from sight at the rear of the house.

"I wonder if she's been to Patricia's new hiding-place—perhaps taken her some food?" Babs murmured, more to herself than the others.

"My goodness, that's likely!" said Mabs excitedly, only to add despondently: "Oh, we're just too late. If we'd been earlier we could have followed her——"

"Who says we're too late?" Babs' voice thrilled. "The ground is wet and muddy. We may be able to follow her footprints. Come on! And get ready with your torch, Jimema."

Making sure the coast was clear, they ventured out from the stable, and went over to the path they judged Mrs. Parrish had taken. Jimema shone her torch to the ground.

"Look!" exclaimed Marjorie, pointing.

"Fuf-footprints!" stuttered Bessie excitedly.

Clearly defined in the mud were the small imprints of a woman's shoe. Eagerly the chums followed them up. For some distance they went. Then a shadowy bulk loomed up in front of them.

Babs & Co. found themselves at the back of a small cottage. It was in complete darkness. All the windows visible were boarded up. The place seemed to be half in ruins.

But the footprints led straight towards it—ended at a stout door.

The chums crowded round it, faces eager, pulses thrilling.

Would they find Patricia Forster captive in this cottage?

Behind them Red Tower reared its massive shape into the night sky.

In front of them, some distance away, but just faintly visible, more figures were to be seen. A group of them—eight figures that were drawing farther and farther away. Soon they had vanished, swallowed up in the gloom.

The man and woman who crouched by the bushes straightened up. Their faces were masks of rage.

"Those interfering kids——" hissed Mr. Parrish, and choked.

"And they're following my tracks!" snarled his wife. "They'll find the cottage, and Patricia!"

"We've got to stop them before they spoil everything!" Mr. Parrish decided abruptly. "She mustn't be found—at least, not until we've got the money. Don't forget, Ada, that there is fifty thousand quid at stake!"

"I'm not likely to forget it!" the woman retorted. "Come, we're wasting time! We'll stop those kids—at all costs!"

And they crept after the unsuspecting chums.

"SMASH THE door down!"

"We'll never do it, Clara," objected Babs. "Even if the cottage is tumbling to bits, that door is made of solid oak."

"Then break open the windows. Those boards are half-rotten. We'll soon have them down!"

And Clara Trevlyn, to prove the truth of her words, ran to one of the boarded-up windows, and with her bare hands began to tug at the strips of wood.

Her chums, convinced that it was in here they would discover the missing Patricia, had decided that they must batter their way in.

The doors at front and back were, of course, locked. As Clara said, the obvious way in was by the windows. The boards which barred them were rotten and crumbling; it would not take much effort to remove them.

Clara, Babs, Mabs, and Bessie attacked one of the windows. Jimema, Leila, Marjorie, and Marcelle got busy on another.

Regardless of ugly nails and splinters, they all wrenched feverishly at the boards. One by one they split and came away. The windows became revealed—one containing not an atom of glass in its framework, the other with panes that were broken and jagged.

Clara seized the lower sash and flung it up. Jimema, at the next window, was already climbing through.

"Can you hear anything?" called Babs.

"Not a sound!"

Clara was through now. Babs followed, then Mabs and Bessie. A damp, musty smell assailed their nostrils. They could not see in the darkness, but sensed they were in a small room. On the other side of one of the walls they plainly heard movements—their chums moving about in the adjoining room.

Clara was groping her way forward. "Jimmy!" she called. "Come through into this room with your torch——"

The Tomboy's words broke off in a painful yelp. She felt as if she were plunging down into a pit, but realised a second later, that a floor-board was rot and rotten, had collapsed beneath her, and

A door opened; a ray of light shone into the room, with Jimema's figure behind it. Clara, dusty and bruised, scrambled to her feet.

"Let's shout!" said Babs, and set the example: "Patricia! Patricia, are you here?"

They all listened. A tomb-like silence, broken only by the sound of their own breathing.

Hearts fell; hopes sank. Had they made a mistake, after all——

Thud! Thud!

"What's that?" gasped Mabs, looking startled.

"It's coming from above us!" cried Clara excitedly.

"Then it's from the roof—or a loft!" Jimema ran out into the passage and along it, shining her torch.

"Come on, you cripples! I've found a ladder!"

Its topmost rungs disappeared into an aperture in the ceiling. Jimema was first up the ladder into the loft. She swung her torch about—saw a bound figure writhing on the straw-littered floor—then ducked swiftly, uttering a horrified cry, as something fluttered into the ray of light. There was a whirring of wings. Babs, below Jimema, saw a dark shape, felt something cold and clammy strike her face.

A bat!

Then, one by one the girls were swarming into the loft—all except Leila, who, at Babs' suggestion, raced back to keep watch at one of the windows.

In the loft, Babs & Co. were bending over that figure.

"It's Patricia!" exclaimed Babs joyfully. "Oh, thank goodness we've found her!"

She was bound hand and foot. There was a gag round her mouth. In the light of the torch she looked very pale, but her eyes smiled gratefully at her rescuers.

Babs whipped away the gag. Jimema and Clara were struggling with the rope bonds.

"Thank you," whispered Patricia weakly and struggled to rise to her feet, only to sink back with a gasp of agony as she was seized with violent cramp.

"You'll be all right in a minute," smiled Babs. "Then we'll take you back to your mother at Red Tower——"

"Say, Babs! Quickly!" came Leila's voice from below in the passage. "Those Parrish guys are coming! I've seen them!"

"My hat!" Babs groaned in despair. "They're going to beat us on the post! Let me think!"

But it was Mabs who was seized with a brain-wave. Glancing round the loft, she had seen a hat and coat lying on the floor. She rushed across and picked them up.

"Are these yours, Patricia?"

"Yes; but——"

"Then I've an idea!" Mabs said eagerly. "I'll put them on and run out of the cottage—your aunt and uncle will think it's you. I'll lead them on a false trail, while you others get Patricia back to the house!"

"Marvellous, Mabs!"

It was the work of a few seconds for the golden-haired one to don the hat and coat. Then, helter-skelter, she was tumbling down the ladder.

"Wait for the others, Leila!" she panted, rushing past the astonished American junior.

Mabs reached one of the windows and climbed through it. In the dim radiance of the moon she saw the figures of Mr. and Mrs. Parrish approaching the cottage at a run.

Just for two seconds Mabs stood there by the window in view of the scheming pair, but careful to avert her face.

The man shouted:

"Look! There she is! Patricia——"

Mabs smiled grimly to herself, and then she was running like a hare away from the cottage out on to the open moor. She heard footsteps behind her——

THE PALE MOON, breaking clearer through the clouds and the drifting mist, bathed two figures that stood crouched beside a big clump of bushes.

the man and woman were giving chase, as she had hoped they would.

On rushed Mabs. A patch of mist swirled ahead of her. She plunged into it. The footsteps still thudded behind her, and throwing a glance over her shoulder, she could see no sign of her pursuers.

"Dished and diddled them!" chuckled Mabs breathlessly. "They'll look round for me—and during that time Babs and the others can get Patricia to safety."  
She slowed down to a trot. Mustn't lose her bearings—

Mabs suddenly stumbled. One foot seemed to sink beneath her. The ground squelched with a horrible sucking sound. She tried to draw back, but already her other foot was being dragged down.

She struggled frantically, only to find herself sinking deeper and deeper. The thick, oozy mud was closing over her ankles now. Lower she sank, felt an icy coldness creeping slowly up her legs.

The terrible truth came to Mabs. She was trapped in a bog—caught in the grip of black oozy mud from which there was no escape—which would slowly drag her down and down into its deadly depths



### Underground

"ARE you all right, Patricia?" Anxiously Barbara Redfern asked that question.

"Yes—yes, I think so." But Patricia Forster's reply was faint, and she leaned heavily on the arms of Babs and Clara Treelyn, who supported her one on either side.

Rescued and rescuers had left the old ruined cottage. They had seen Mr. and Mrs. Parrish rush away in pursuit of Mabel Lynn, and knew that for a time at least the coast was clear.

Now they were on their way back to Red Tower—and Babs & Co. felt that pleasant glow inside them that comes with the pride of achievement as they anticipate the delight with which Mrs. Forster would welcome the return of her missing daughter.

"Barbara, what is the time, please?" In sudden agitation Patricia stopped and turned to Babs with worried gaze. "Not quite two o'clock," Babs returned. "You're thinking about the reading of the will, I suppose. Plenty of time for that, Patricia."

The girl heaved a sigh of relief. "Thanks only to you and your friends," she said gratefully. "You must be wondering what it's all about—why my aunt and uncle should have kidnapped me and made me a prisoner. I don't really know all the facts myself, but I can make a good guess. It's all to do with grandfather's money, of course—he must have left quite a fortune when he died."

And then Patricia told them the story as they walked slowly on in the direction of Red Tower.

Benjamin had always said he would father, had insisted on Patricia and her mother going to live with him at Red Tower on the death of her father. Patricia's mother had always been his favourite daughter, in spite of Mrs. Parrish's efforts to ingratiate herself into his good graces.

Benjamin had always said he would make Patricia his heir—*a fact which had not pleased Ada Parrish. Indeed, she and her husband had deliberately conspired to disgrace Patricia in Benjamin's eyes—and succeeded. More*

than that, they had caused an estrangement between mother and daughter.

Patricia had run away from home, had gone to live with a friend, hoping she would never return until both her grandfather and mother said they believed her innocent of the things of which she had been accused.

Then grandfather Buckley had died. Mrs. Forster, grief-stricken, and finding the loneliness and gloom of Red Tower too much for her frayed nerves, had asked Patricia to return home. She had done so—only to find herself made a prisoner by Mr. and Mrs. Parrish, who were staying at the house, and hidden in one of the disused cellars.

Exactly why they had kidnapped her Patricia could not be certain, but it was fairly certain that they had somehow managed to learn the contents of the will, and no doubt stood to benefit considerably if their niece were missing at the time it was due to be read.

"Perhaps," said Babs shrewdly, "your grandfather has left you his money on the condition that you are living in Red Tower."

"That's what I've been thinking," agreed Patricia thoughtfully. "Barbara do you think I'll be safe now? There's still more than three hours to go before the will is read, and—*and* aunt and uncle have already proved just how unscrupulous they can be. They'll stop at nothing to get the money. It's not that I want it for myself, but I'm thinking of mums—"

Babs squeezed her arm reassuringly. "Don't you worry, Patricia. Trust us to look after you. We're taking you home right now, and we're not going to let you out of our sight until six o'clock."

"Another not!" supported Clara warmly.

But still Patricia did not seem to be reassured.

"I—*I* was wondering if it wouldn't be better for me to remain hidden until the last moment," she said hesitantly. "Then aunt and uncle, if they discover how your friend led them on a wild-goose chase, won't have the chance of attempting any more of their trickery."

"Well, it's a good idea, I must say," Babs had to admit. "But where can you hide, Patricia?"

A trace of excitement showed in that girl's now.

"In the old tunnel! It's the very place, and now that granddad has died nobody but me knows about it. It leads underground from the stables right into Red Tower."

Everybody agreed that the move was a good one, so now Patricia, instead of making for the drive, made a detour through a dark wood and picked up the track which Babs & Co. had followed to the cottage.

The mist had not lifted completely yet. It hung about in big, drifting patches, obscuring the view of the moon which, when they could see it, was sailing through fleecy clouds.

Curiously enough, although it was so late, none of the Cliff House chums felt tired. The adventures of that exciting night had driven all thoughts of sleep from their minds. It didn't just seem possible that these things could have happened.

But a few hours before they had been bowling along by coach, en route for Holly Hall, in Hampshire. Babs felt rather worried when she thought of her mother and father, who must be wondering what had happened to delay their young guests.

Babs wished she could get in touch with them; that would be her very first

task after Patricia was safely home once more, and the really Mr. and Mrs. Parrish had been exposed and their villainous game outwitted.

"The stables—here we are!" It was Patricia's voice, and Babs' reflections were cut short.

Patricia led the way into the very one which Babs & Co. had occupied less than an hour previously. That same rat which the chums had disturbed earlier in its nightly scavenging once more scuttled into its bolt-hole, squeaking its protest, and bringing another squeal of fright from Bessie and Marjorie.

At the back of the stable there was a row of stalls. Patricia crossed over to the centre one, tugged hard on it, after releasing a cunningly-concealed catch, and round swung the stall on hidden hinges, revealing beyond a dark cavity, from which steep steps led downwards.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" gasped Clara. "Who'd have thought there was a secret tunnel there?"

"Follow me!" whispered Patricia.

Babs threw her a quick glance. Patricia's voice had sounded very shaky, and she seemed to stagger a little as she negotiated the first few steps. Her face was looking deathly pale and haggard, although her eyes shone with an unnatural brightness.

"Keep close to her, Jimmy!" breathed Babs in the monocled one's ear as Jimmie Carstairs made to follow with the torch. "I believe the poor kid's about all in!"

One by one the chums passed into the entrance of the secret tunnel. Leila was the last—and Leila, quite unknowingly, made an unfortunate slip, which was soon to cause them all hours of tortuous anxiety, which left the way open for a pair of schemers to make their last desperate bid for old Ben Buckley's fortune!

Leila, like Babs, was quick-witted and shrewd; but the American junior had not the thoroughness for detail of her leader. She fully intended to close the entrance to the tunnel, actually thought she had closed it. But in her excitement Leila failed to observe that the stall did not click shut on its hidden catch. She went on down the steps, confident that she had done the right thing, and certainly not noticing that already the stall had swung open again.

The girls reached the bottom of the steps and the tunnel stretched before them, vanishing into dark depths beyond the radius of Jimmie's small torch.

It was low and narrow. They had to stoop slightly, and could walk only in pairs. This secret passage had been hewn out of the solid rock. The surface was moist, and, in places, dripping with water.

Babs took hold of Patricia's arm. "You go first with the torch, Jimmy," she said, her voice ringing in hollow echoes down the tunnel. "We'll follow immediately behind—"

That was as far as she got. For suddenly Patricia swayed, one trembling hand pressed to her feverish forehead.

"Barbara, I—I feel all dizzy!" she said weakly. "I believe I'm going to—"

Next moment she had fainted. Her legs gave way under her, and she would have dropped to the stone floor had not Babs flung an arm hastily about her waist.

The ordeal of the last few days, the nightmare experience of being a prisoner in that loft, the frantic worry, and then the excitement of being rescued by Babs & Co., had proved too much for Patricia Forster.

Meanwhile, behind the chums, back in the stable, two figures stood in open-eyed amazement as they stared at the opening behind the stall. They were the Parrishes, and triumph gleamed in their eyes!

FROM a distance the two schemers had seen the last of the Cliff House girls entering the stable. Thus they did not know for certain if Patricia Forster were with them.

They had soon abandoned their pursuit of Mabel Lynn, who was even then fighting a battle for life in the ooze of an Exmoor bog.

It was Mr. Parrish who had seen through the ruse. A difference in height and build, the way in which Mabel ran—details not at first noticed—had eventually told the man the truth.

Little knowing of the fate that had overtaken Mabel after losing her in the mist, they had returned foot-foot to the cottage, only to find it empty.

Frantically alarmed, fearing exposure and the loss of the fortune of which they were scheming to rob their young niece, husband and wife were retracing their steps to Red Tower when they had spotted the girls whose arrival that night threatened to put paid to their plans.

Now the man stood at the entrance to the tunnel, glaring down the steps. His wife was just behind him.

"They've gone down here!" he hissed. "We'll have to follow, to make certain if Patricia is with them or not. If she is—"

His cunning little eyes blazed wickedly.

Ada Parrish nodded, her face cruel and vindictive in its expression.

"If she is, she'll stay down here—she and those other meddling brats!" the woman said harshly. "But, Albert, can this be the same tunnel as the one which opens out into the hall at Red Tower?"

"Of course it is!" replied Albert Parrish brusquely. "I discovered it a year ago. I thought your father was the only one who knew of it. How Patricia discovered it, I don't know."

He shone his torch down the steps and descended them. His wife followed. But only half-way down both of them stopped. Instantly Albert Parrish switched off his torch. To his ears had come the sound of voices, plainly heard in the narrow confines of that tunnel. Some distance ahead of him, too, he saw a glow of light.

"Patricia! She's fainted!" a girlish voice said clearly.

Man and woman exchanged glances. "She's down here all right," breathed Ada Parrish. "What are you going to do, Albert?"

"I'll show you what I'm going to do!"

The man's eyes gleamed malevolently. Gropingly, silently, he descended the remainder of the stairs.

PATRICIA FORSTER lay on the floor of the tunnel, her back against the wall, her head supported in Barbara Redfern's arm. She was still unconscious.

She seemed hardly to be breathing. Her eyes were tight shut. Her face was waxen.

"Goodness, isn't she ever coming round?" muttered Clara Trevlyn, in dismay.

"Soak my hanky in that trickle of water coming through the rock," Babs said.

Clara obeyed while Marjorie Hazel-

dene continued to rub and massage Patricia's hands. The Tomboy came back with the damp handkerchief, which Babs applied to the patient's burning forehead.

The other girls—Jemima, Leila, Bessie, and Marcelle—stood grouped around anxiously, all eyes on Patricia, seeing nothing of the furtive figure which, soft-footed, descended those steps some dozen yards away.

The figure was that of Albert Parrish. He reached the bottom step, advanced another yard, then pressed his foot on the floor close by the rock wall. There was a scraping sound.

Babs, hearing it, looked round swiftly.

"What was that—"  
Then she saw. With horrified eyes she saw a section of the wall swing round, closing towards the opposite wall. And through the narrowing gap she glimpsed a pair of brightly gleaming eyes, heard a soft, mocking laugh.

"Stop him!" Babs cried. "It's Parrish! He's trapping us in the tunnel!"

Jemima and Clara leapt forward. But already that rock door, fixed on hinges, had closed shut.

TEN MINUTES later Albert Parrish and his scheming wife stood in the hall at Red Tower.

"Now to close this end of the tunnel, Ada," the man said viciously.

Mrs. Parrish laid a restraining hand on her husband's arm.

"Albert, dare we do it?" she asked hesitantly.

The man jerked the arm away roughly.

"Don't you start getting squeamish!" he snapped. "Those confounded kids won't come to any harm. We'll release them as soon as everything is O.K.—and we've got the money!"

Mrs. Parrish shook herself irritably. Only for those few moments did her conscience smite her.

"You're right, Albert! I'm being a fool. We've staked everything on getting the money, and we're not letting those kids stop us!"

Her husband nodded shortly. "I'll go down alone," he said. "You stay here and see that no one comes in."

He crossed to a large cupboard standing by one of the walls. He opened it and stepped inside. A touch, and one panel at the back of the cupboard swung back, revealing an opening in the wall. The man vanished from sight.

That opening in the wall was the other end of the tunnel. Here, too, there were steps leading downward. Here, too, as at the other end, there was a double entrance.

Patricia Forster had been wrong in saying she and her late grandfather were the only persons to know of the existence of this tunnel. It was known to the Parrishes, who had learned about it from an old tome in the library of Red Tower, a mansion whose history went back hundreds of years.

He reached the stone door, after descending the steps from the cupboard in the hall. It was open now, but, with a grin chuckle, Albert Parrish pressed the secret catch which operated the mechanism.

The big slab of rock swung shut. Now the tunnel was sealed at both ends; Babs & Co. and Patricia Forster were trapped!

"That settles them!" said Albert Parrish between his teeth. "And there they stay until the will has been read!"



## The Hour Strikes

"SHE'S coming round!"

"Thank goodness!" Patricia Forster's eyes flickered open, shut again, opened once more, to rest dazedly on the circle of girls who were grouped about her anxiously.

"Patricia!" said Babs softly. "Why, Barbara, what—what has happened?" asked Patricia weakly. "You fainted, you know. How are you feeling now?"

Patricia smiled wanly. She was quickly recovering, and a little colour had flooded back into her cheeks.

"Much better now, thank you. Oh, wasn't it silly of me to collapse like that!"

"Silly be blown!" snorted Tomboy Clara. "After what you've suffered I think you've been marvellous."

"I'll say!" agreed Leila. Patricia smiled again, and, helped by Babs and Clara, got to her feet.

It was then that Babs rather hesitantly told her of the latest development.

"Patricia," she said, "I'm afraid I've a shock for you." And she told her of the trick the Parrishes had played upon them.

Patricia eyed the barrier of rock in alarm.

"So we're trapped again, after all!" she said bitterly.

"Well, we are at this end," Babs admitted. "But didn't you say the tunnel led out into Red Tower at the other end?"

"Yes, but how long ago did Parrish do this?"

"Oh, about fifteen minutes ago!"

"Then we'll be too late!" Patricia groaned. "Don't you see, there's another of these doors at the other end. If Parrish had closed one he'll close the other!"

"My hat!" exclaimed Clara, in dismay. "But we're not beaten yet. He might have been delayed, or—anything. The door might not be closed yet. Let's rush there and see!"

With Jemima leading with the torch, they all started down the tunnel at a run.

"What's the time?" panted Patricia.

"Nearly three o'clock," supplied Babs. "Three hours yet before the will is read!"

The tunnel was long and tortuous. The uneven floor caused many a stumble; at times they narrowly missed striking their heads against jagged pieces of rock which hung low from the roof.

For perhaps three or four minutes they pelted on, even a very perspiring Bessie Bunter keeping up with them. Perhaps it was fear that drove her on; she certainly had no wish to be left behind by herself in that dark tunnel.

"Look! We're too late!" It was Patricia's voice, bitter with disappointment.

Ahead of them the tunnel came to an end. A solid slab of rock confronted them, barring their way. What Patricia had feared had very obviously happened. Albert Parrish had sealed both ends of the tunnel, and they were all trapped like rats in a cage.

Patricia looked about her desperately. "Oh, what can we do?" she cried. "We've got to get out somehow—"

But there was no way out. They all realised that, Patricia most of all. Solid rock hemmed them in both ends of



the tunnel. With nothing short of dynamite or pneumatic drills could they force their way out.

Then came another disaster. For the past few minutes Jemima's torch had been flickering. Now the beam of light was becoming perceptibly weaker.

Jemima sighed. "Our little guiding star is failing us, methinks," she said sadly. "Fellow damsels, in distress, the battery is running out."

There was a chorus of groans from the girls as, with only a dim orange glow left, Jemima switched the light out, leaving them in Stygian darkness.

"Now what?" came Clara's voice. Babs, still holding Patricia's arm, bit her lip. Patricia gave a choked sob. "We're beaten! Oh, we're beaten! We'll never be able to do it now. Three more hours to six o'clock—but it might just as well be three days!"

Babs said nothing. For once in her life she felt utterly helpless. There seemed no way now of outwitting Patricia's enemies.

"Anybody got any matches?" asked Clara gruffly.

"Yes, I believe I have." It was Marjorie Hazeldene who replied.

A sound of scraping, then a splutter. A tiny flame shone in the darkness. It showed them all huddled together, faces strained and drawn. Then the hatch went out. A blacker darkness than before.

Bessie's wailing voice was heard. "I sus-ay, Babs! Where are you?"

Babs blundered forward. There came a loud yell from her as her foot caught against something standing on the floor.

"Help! Help! Something's got my foot. Marjorie! Bib-buck up and light another mum-match! Oh dudder! Perhaps it's a sus-snake! It is a sus-snake! I'm being bub-bitten!"

There were startled cries. Marjorie was fumbling for the matches. She struck one. Then a joyful shout from Babs.

"Look! A lantern! Bessie, don't be silly. Of course it isn't a snake!"

She stooped, and from the floor picked up an old storm lantern. There was a faint gurgle from the oil container.

"And there's oil in it!" Babs went on excitedly. "We'll be able to have a light after all. Marjorie, your matches, quickly!"

The lantern was lighted. Babs held it up. And then came another shout, this time from Leila.

"Say, girls, another find!"

From a drift of dust by the wall she pulled at what had at first glance seemed like an ordinary piece of wood. But it was heavy—very heavy. For the object was a pick-axe!

Babs' blue eyes gleamed with sudden hope, only to fade the next moment.

"I'm afraid that's not much use, Leila," she said. "We can never hack our way through this solid rock. It will—"

She stopped suddenly.

"Listen! What's that?"

In the deathly silence that followed, a faint hum rose and fell. Now they distinguished it as the very faint murmur of voices, seeming to come from the very rock itself.

Patricia tensed.

"It's coming from this side!" she breathed, turning to the right-hand wall. "But—but how can we hear it through this thickness—"

Excitedly Babs clutched at her arm.

"Patricia, perhaps it's not as thick as you thought it was. It can't be, when we can hear voices. Then—then that means—"

"That we can jolly well have a stab

at hacking our way through with this pick-axe!" Clara finished, in a thrilled voice. "Give it to me, Leila. I'll start!"

She grabbed the pick-axe—raised it above her head and brought it crashing against the wall.

The chums were striking their first blow towards freedom!

WHILE AT that very moment, a weary, bedraggled figure staggered up the steps of Red Tower, oozing mud at every step.

It was Mabel Lynn—Mabs, miraculously saved from a terrible fate by the courage and sagacity of Ruff, the retriever.

He pranced proudly at her feet now, and Mabs smiled very tenderly as she gazed down at him.

"Dear old doggie!" she murmured, stroking his muddy head. "You saved my life."

And she repressed a shudder as she thought how near she had been to death. Just in time had Ruff come bounding up to the bog in answer to her screams for help.

In his strong teeth he had grabbed her coat, pulled and pulled until, with a sucking squelch, she was free. Then he had led her back to Red Tower.

To Mabs' surprise, it was Mrs. Forster who opened the door. The woman held up her hands in horror as she saw that mud-covered figure on the doorstep.

"My dear child!" she cried. "Whatever has happened? Come in quickly. And wherever are your friends? Why did they leave so abruptly? I came downstairs from my bed-room to find you all gone."

Mabs blinked bewilderedly.

So, as they had suspected, Mrs. Forster had not given orders for her and her chums to be thrown out.

But Mrs. Forster did not give Mabs time to reply. With motherly concern

she rushed her to the bath-room, and laid out clean clothes for her.

How Mabs revelled in that bath! But all the time her mind was a whirl of chaotic thoughts. Where were Babs & Co. and Patricia? Why had they not returned to Red Tower? They should have been there by now.

"Perhaps old Babs has some reason of her own for not producing Patricia yet," she mused, as she dressed. "Perhaps I'd better say nothing. But if they haven't arrived by six—" That thought brought in its wake many startling and disturbing possibilities. Mabs glanced at her wristlet watch. Four o'clock!

Two hours yet. Then the will was due to be read. And if Patricia weren't there—

Slowly Mabs wended her way downstairs. Already the others were assembled in the library. In the grate a fire was roaring.

Mrs. Forster gave her a smile and handed her a cup of steaming chocolate.

"Sit down, my dear, in front of the fire, and drink this."

But the hand with which she held the cup was trembling, her lips were twitching. Only Mrs. Forster herself knew of the gnawing ache in her heart. For Mrs. Forster's mind was still occupied with a terrible anxiety as to the fate of her missing daughter.

Mabs gratefully took the chocolate and sipped it. She glanced across to Mr. and Mrs. Parrish. Those two had been startled by the arrival of Mabs. Then, seeing that she was alone, they had smiled to themselves.

The other occupant of the room, Mr. Silas Fright, sat at the massive table in the centre of the library, silent as usual, poring over his papers.

The minutes ticked on. No one spoke now. But through the silence of that room was suddenly heard a faint sound. Tap! Tap! Tap!



JEMIMA'S torch flashed upon a figure that lay, bound and gagged, in a dim corner of the loft. Patricia was found! And then came Leila's voice from below: "Quick! Those Parrish guys are coming!"

"That noise again!" Mrs. Forster started up in her chair. "What can it be?"

Tap! Tap! Tap!

It seemed to be coming from the panelled wall by the fireplace. Mabs felt an uneasy thrill shoot through her. Albert Parrish and his wife sat tense in their chairs, glancing nervously at each other.

Mabs looked at her watch.

Half past four.

And still that mysterious sound—

Tap! Tap! Tap!

Almost continuous, becoming louder. Tap! Tap! Tap! Mingling with the slow tick, tock of the big grandfather clock over in one corner of the vast library.

"I can't stand it!" cried Mrs. Parrish suddenly. "I can't sit here and listen to that. Let us go into another room—"

But Mr. Fright, the solicitor, shook his head.

"The will must be read in this room!" he said in his thin voice.

Again, Mabs, feeling as if she would scream herself, looked at her watch.

Five o'clock.

Tap! Tap!

The tapping was insistent, growing louder, coming nearer.

**BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!**

The last three strokes of six o'clock chimed out from the big grandfather clock in the library of Red Tower.

Silas Fright rose to his feet.

"By the directions of my late client, Benjamin Buckley," he began ponderously. "I have gathered you all here in the library of his residence to hear the reading of his last will and testament. It was his express instruction that this will should be read on the stroke of six o'clock, that being the hour at which he died, exactly one month ago."

He paused, clearing his throat, and glanced round the table. At Mrs. Parrish, tense, drawn-faced, the knuckles showing white as she gripped the arms of her chair. At Mr. Parrish, the light of greed and avarice in his pale, watery eyes. At Mrs. Forster, a figure of tragedy, seeming hardly to hear his words.

And lastly at Mabs who, unlike the others, sat in a chair by the fire.

"Here, then," continued the solicitor, with a business-like cough, "is the will—"

His voice was drowned in a thunderous crashing from the wall beside the fireplace. The panelling seemed to shiver.

A scream from Mrs. Parrish. Her husband's face had turned a sickly yellow, and probable realisation of what was happening dawned upon him.

He leaped to his feet.

"Read that will!" he shouted.

The solicitor glared at him frigidly. His own hands were trembling, but he had had his instructions. At the stroke of six the will was to be read.

He glanced down at the paper and began to read:

"This is the last will and testament of me, Benjamin Joseph Buckley—"

Crash!

The panelling split. Something like a huge tooth protruded through the wood. Voices were heard coming from the other side of the wall.

Crash!

Now a section of the panelling splintered from top to bottom. Part of it flew outwards and clattered to the floor. In the opening a dust-begrimed face appeared, followed by another and

another. Figures swarmed into the room.

"Babs!" shrieked Mabs joyfully.

"Patricia, my darling!" almost moaned Mrs. Forster, and rushed forward with outstretched arms.

"Mother!" cried Patricia excitedly. "Are we too late? Has the will been read—"

"Don't let them get away!" It was a shout from Babs.

Mr. and Mrs. Parrish, their faces pale with fear now, knowing that their plans had failed and that they would be exposed for the schemers they were, had leapt to their feet and were making a rush for the door.

But Babs headed them off. In leaping strides she reached the door, turned the key in the lock and pocketed it. Mr. Silas Fright, the solicitor, very startled and bewildered by the dramatic turn of events during the last few minutes, went up to Patricia, who was still in her mother's arms.

"Patricia, this is—is most extraordinary! I am glad you have arrived—but only just in time, for I was on the point of reading your grandfather's will, and had you not been present when I finished, then I fear you would not have benefited under it. Where have you been, my child—"

"I've been a prisoner, Mr. Fright—a captive in the hands of my own aunt and uncle here!" said Patricia, casting a contemptuous glance at that rascally pair. "And I still would be, had it not been for Barbara and her friends who rescued me."

The solicitor nodded.

"I think I understand," he said slowly. "Indeed, to be quite frank, I suspected something of this sort had happened. And you, too, and your poor, worried mother will also understand when I read this will."

And then it was that everybody there learned the contents of old Benjamin Buckley's will—and, as the solicitor had said, it became only too clear why Patricia had been so cruelly treated by her rascally aunt and uncle.

For Ben Buckley had bequeathed all his fortune to Patricia Forster, on the condition that she was possessed of her own free will at the reading of the will, and continued to live in happiness with her mother at Red Tower. Failing this, the money was to go to his other daughter, Mrs. Ada Parrish.

But there was no fortune for Ada Parrish now.

TWO HOURS later there was an animated gathering in the large, oak-beamed dining-room at Red Tower.

Breakfast had been served—a regular banquet to celebrate Patricia Forster's good fortune and her reunion with her mother.

Two persons who had played prominent parts in the night's excitement were not there. They, needless to say, were Mr. and Mrs. Parrish.

Patricia's aunt and uncle had left the house as soon as the will had been read. With Patricia's return to Red Tower they benefited not one single penny. Their departure caused no regrets.

Mr. Silas Fright was another absentee when that sumptuous breakfast commenced, but the solicitor appeared just as Bessie was getting really busy.

"I've telephoned your mother, Miss Redfern," he said, smiling at Babs. "Naturally, she was very worried by your non-arrival, but I explained that you and your friends were safe and would be home late during the day."

"Oh, thank you," dimpled Babs prettily.

"While I was at Hall Farm, from where I telephoned," continued the solicitor, "I also located the driver of your coach. Apparently he returned to the spot where you were stranded yesterday evening, couldn't find you, and went back with the vehicle to the garage, where he stayed the night. If there'd been no word from you this morning, he was going to report the matter to the police—but, fortunately, I was in time to save him the trouble. He says the coach is all right now, and he will be here to pick you up in an hour's time."

At half past nine the coach arrived. Babs & Co. stood in the big hall of Red Tower, ready to take their leave of Mrs. Forster and her daughter.

"Good-bye, all of you," said Patricia, with a little break in her voice. "You don't know how grateful mother and I are for what you have done for us. You have brought us happiness—and good fortune."

Handshakes all round, and then Babs & Co. were climbing into the coach. Mrs. Forster and Patricia stood in the wide doorway, smiling and waving.

The coach moved off down the drive; final frantic waves—and Babs & Co. were on their way to Holly Hall.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

NEW term at Cliff House—and scarcely has it started than Barbara Redfern and Co. find themselves called upon to intervene on behalf of Stella Stone, the Schools adored Head Girl, whose last term is threatened by the scheming of her deadly rival—Sarah Harrigan.

Next week's powerful, long complete story, is the first of a brilliant new series of new-term tales, written by Hilda Richards. It is entitled:—



By

HILDA

RICHARDS

**STRIFE**  
*Between Seniors*

# The Cousins Find a Clue . . . Exciting Chapters of this Dramatic Thrill-and-Mystery Serial



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, who suspects that her father is a prisoner somewhere in the house. He is the victim of the villainy of a crafty Chinaman, KAI TAL—who is carrying out some mysterious scheme.

The cousins are suspicious, not only of Kai Tal, but of Uncle Gerald himself, who has been behaving in rather a strange way.

Later they discover a secret tunnel under the house in which Chinamen are digging. Kwanyin's father is also there—a prisoner. In an attempt to rescue him, Catherine puts on the only lamp, but in the darkness a Chinaman seizes her hand.

(Now read on.)

## The Voice

AS the Chinaman's hand gripped hers in the darkness a shudder of terror ran through Catherine Sterndale.

For if the Chinaman held on to her, then she could not reach the ladder which lay against the wall of the tunnel. And upon that ladder everything depended.

Catherine, Mollie, and the little Chinese girl would be trapped. They could be taken along the tunnel and made prisoners, just as Kwanyin's father was.

It was a terrifying thought, and the darkness doubled Catherine's alarm.

But she was not a girl whose heart failed her in a crisis. She had to free herself; she had to find that ladder—and fear would not help.

With a savage tug she tried to free her wrist, but the Chinaman's hand gripped tightly.

"Who am?" he asked softly.

"Nice Uncle Gerald," said Catherine. "And if you do not let me go I'll tell him."

Catherine wriggled furiously then, and so quickly did she swing round that

the Chinaman's arm was bent backwards; his grip slackened.

Catherine tore her hand free and ducked low and crawled sideways.

Above showed the dim light where her Cousin Charles leaned through, calling down to them. But he could not climb to their assistance, for there was no ladder, or means down. It would have been madness to try so risky a climb in the darkness.

But Catherine, having memorised the spot where the ladder was before smashing the light, went to it now quite easily.

The ladder moved against her, and she gave a soft whisper.

"Mollie!"

"Yes, Cath—quick!"

Catherine dimly saw a Chinaman just to her left; setting her teeth, she swung the ladder round.

It crashed into him, and he slipped from the edge into the workings of the tunnel a few feet below.

He gave a wild yell as he crashed down; but the earth was soft, and Catherine had no fears for his safety; at worst he was only shaken and bruised.

Mollie, ahead, rushed the ladder to the wall and lifted it. But never had a ladder seemed so heavy, or so difficult to manage. And at any moment the Chinese might realise what they were doing.

Charles, for a moment, had disappeared from the gap in the wall above—the gap where the piece of tapestry had been moved aside. But he had gone to fetch help, in the form of a framed mirror that hung on a wall.

Returning, he flashed the mirror, reflecting into the tunnel one of the corridor lights.

As its shaft went along Catherine saw, in surprise, that the tunnel was deserted. The Chinaman had gone! There was no one there but Mollie and herself.

"Molly, where are the others? And where's Kwanyin?" she exclaimed.

Mollie called up to Charles.

"Flash the light everywhere! Kwanyin's missing!" she said in alarm.

Charles swept the walls and the workings with the light, but there was no sign of Kwanyin; even the Chinaman who had been knocked into the workings had disappeared.

"That's why the rascal held me," said Catherine in dismay; "not to keep me prisoner, but to keep me from rescuing Kwanyin. After all our hope, they've got her."

"And her father," nodded Mollie.

Little Kwanyin, whom they had come to regard as their friend, was at the mercy of her enemies, but Catherine and Mollie were quite helpless.

"If uncle were here," said Catherine, frowning, "he could set her free—and her father, too. But, my goodness, how they have duped him!"

Their Uncle Gerald had told them definitely that Kwanyin's father was not held prisoner in or near this strange house of his—in fact, he was quite sure that the Chinaman was in an English prison.

"My goodness! What a shock for uncle when he comes back and finds out the truth!" mused Mollie. "I've a feeling we ought to find Miss Smith and tell her, Cath."

"And the sooner the better. Uncle's got to know that Kwanyin's father is here, and he'll have to be told about all this digging."

Catherine paid no heed to Charles' call to come up the ladder. She had intended to explore this mysterious tunnel under her uncle's house before this, and now was her opportunity.

"Show the light, Charles," she said. "Flash it over—"

By  
ELIZABETH  
CHESTER

Illustrations by Baker



The light suddenly vanished.

Charles gave a muffled cry, and then the gap where his head showed vanished—and he, of course, with it.

"They've got him!" said Mollie in alarm.

The tunnel was again in total darkness, and the two cousins drew close together, prepared for an attack of some kind. Their plans to explore the tunnel had evidently been overheard by their enemy, and easily enough frustrated.

They waited for the next move; for in the darkness climbing the rickety ladder was too dangerous an exploit. Moreover, when they reached the top they would find the panel fixed against them.

"My goodness! What next?" asked Mollie.

A Chinese voice replied. "Adventurous and honourable misses," said the soft voice, "if for a short space of time the aforesaid young ladies who are of great charm, yet prying as the wily serpent, will no more inquire into that which does not concern them, they shall go free."

Catherine drew a breath. Her impulse was to say "No." But her wisdom was greater than her curiosity, or her recklessness.

"Very well," she said. "But—" "Yes? There is something to say? The young English miss shall have hearing."

Catherine was about to say that she did not give a promise to keep all this secret from Uncle Gerald, but very wisely she kept silent; for, after all, there was no sense in putting the idea into the enemy's mind. He would certainly compel them if he could, to promise to keep all this secret.

Whereas now they were at liberty to speak.

"Let us go now," said Catherine. "And we will not explore here again without our uncle's permission."

"Good, good!" said Mollie, under her breath.

For a moment Catherine waited in doubt for a reply. She wondered if she had tricked the man or not. But his answer made her eyes glint in triumph.

"That is well. Follow the light." A light suddenly shone in the darkness. It lit up a panel in another wall at right angles, and the cousins went towards it. It was where they themselves had entered; but the panel which had been open, was now closed.

As the torch lit it up, however, it slid aside.

Catherine led the way through, and they found themselves in the corridor with the idol. Almost immediately the panel at the end of it opened, and together they walked through into the main hall.

An impressive Chinaman stood there with folded arms.

With a swift movement he operated the small bracket which closed the panel. Click! It was shut.

The cousins were once again in the hall of Pagoda Place. Everything was quiet and normal. The Chinaman on doorman's duty stood impassive as though their coming through the secret passage was a mere nothing.

"My goodness! I believe it was a dream!" said Mollie, with a shaky laugh.

At the same moment Charles came up the corridor, looking greatly excited and very agitated.

"When he saw his cousins his relief was obvious, and he heaved a heavy sigh.

"My word, I didn't expect to see you again!" he gasped. "You duffers, you

perfect idiots! Fancy taking that risk! And Kwanyin—where is she?"

Catherine shrugged.

"Gone! But she'll soon come back, because I'm going to get hold of uncle somehow. I'm going to ask Miss Smith to send an urgent message—"

But Mollie took her arm. She was looking through the glass beside the hall door.

"No need—no need, Catherine. Look!" she said. "Here's uncle himself coming up the drive."

## The Idol's Demand

"UNCLE GERALD!" exclaimed Catherine, in delight.

All at once the horrors and the alarms seemed to fade from her mind; for the presence of her uncle always gave her confidence. Kai Tal, the most evil of them all, seemed to be a master-mind, almost a king. But even he bowed his head to Uncle Gerald.

Catherine herself rushed to open the door, reaching the knob a yard before the Chinese servant.

"Hallo, Catherine!" said Uncle Gerald, drawing up as Catherine suddenly rushed out. "Anything wrong? I've just returned for— for some papers I left behind," he added, after a momentary hesitation.

"We're glad you came, anyway, uncle," said Catherine.

Uncle Gerald walked into the hall, and gave his hat to the Chinese servant.

As he did so Catherine noticed that there was some kind of red mud on his hands. She noticed it with great surprise. For she had seen that red mud only in one place—the tunnel under Pagoda Place, where their recent alarming adventure had taken place.

"Funny!" thought Catherine; but the thought was chased from her mind by others as Mollie and Charles together tried to explain what had happened. They were trying to explain tactfully—by not mentioning Kwanyin.

For they realised that they were not supposed to have helped the little Chinese girl to escape.

"But one moment!" said Uncle Gerald sternly. "You say that you explored the secret passage?"

"I did, uncle," said Mollie. "I watched from behind the idol. Why, it's gone!" she added.

"Broken," said Catherine.

And she explained how the idol had fallen on Kai Tal and stunned him, and itself had been smashed in the process. It had obviously been removed since by other Chinamen.

Catherine explained, too, about the tunnel and the digging.

"But what were they digging for?" Uncle Gerald asked keenly.

Catherine pointed to the secret panel. "Let's go through there and see, uncle," she said.

It struck her as being very queer indeed that her uncle hesitated. In fact, he was taking the whole recital in a very odd way.

And once again she glanced at the mud on his hands. From his hands she looked down to his shoes.

He did not notice that look, for he was talking to Charles, and glancing towards the idol on the bracket which, Charles was explaining, moved the secret panel.

Catherine stared at her Uncle Gerald's shoes fixedly.

There was red mud on them. She looked at her own shoes and Mollie's. Each had the same mud stains.

There was no mud like it in the grounds. In fact, the mud was to be found only in the tunnel. Then the mud on her uncle's shoes meant that he, too, had been in the tunnel.

Catherine was startled. For her discovery could only mean that their uncle was deceiving them.

A sudden uneasiness seized Catherine then. It was as though a prop on which she had been leaning suddenly gave way.

All the sense of security that Uncle Gerald's presence had given her now went. For if he were bluffing then and pretending, he might even be in league with Kai Tal.

Catherine determined to find out. "Oh, uncle, another thing!" she burst out, in real excitement.

Her heart was pumping as he turned to her.

"Well?"

She fancied now that she saw a hint of alarm in his keen eyes.

"Kwanyin's father—he's here!" "Nonsense, Catherine! Impossible!" "But he is."

"A Chinaman, perhaps—an old Chinaman. But not Kwanyin's father. How can you be sure?"

"Because—" said Catherine, and bit her lip.

"Answer me Kwanyin said so," was the answer she had been about to give; but she realised in time that she would be giving away the little Chinese girl, and the fact that she was here.

But a second thought told her that her uncle would soon learn that from the servants.

"I know for certain, uncle," she said quietly. "He is here, and the men were being cruel to him—trying to make him tell them something."

Her uncle frowned, and gave her a close, searching look.

"You seem to have heard and seen a good deal," he said quietly, with obvious displeasure. "But I think, too, you have been guessing a good deal. I will look into this myself. But you three had better go into the lounge and turn on the wireless. None of this is your business, you know."

Catherine hesitated, flushing at the rebuke, and then suddenly turned.

"Very well, uncle," she said. "Come on," she added to Charles and Mollie.

Charles and Mollie had not noticed the red mud; they suspected nothing, and followed Catherine, wondering what was the cause of their uncle's change of manner.

No sooner were they in the room, than Catherine drew them close to her.

"Listen!" she said, in a whisper. "I noticed something queer. I noticed that—"

She broke off suddenly, and listened. An odd sound had come from the door. "Well, what did you notice?" asked Charles.

But Catherine suddenly pushed past them, and, on tiptoes, crossed to the door. She crept to it, and then suddenly snatched at the handle and pulled the door wide.

There—just rising to his feet—was Uncle Gerald! He looked confused and discomfited, as though caught in some guilty act.

But Catherine was just as embarrassed as he was.

"Oh, uncle!" she said. "I—I thought it was a Chinese servant. I heard someone creep—"

Uncle Gerald interrupted her.

"I was coming in to tell you," he said, drawing up, "that"—he hesitated, as though uncertain what to say—"that Kwanyin has been seen in the house," he ended.

The cousins were silent under his keen scrutiny.

"I hope none of you will try to help her, or hide her," he went on.

Catherine's uneasiness grew. It naturally went against her instincts to distrust her own uncle, and yet she was quite sure that he had been listening at the door—spying on them.

Before they could decide what to say, Uncle Gerald turned and went from the room, closing the door quietly. They heard his heavy steps departing.

But Catherine moved nearer to the door and listened. She heard a creak of floorboards. Uncle Gerald was returning! He was creeping back to listen at the door!

Anger and humiliation flushed Catherine's cheeks. She tried to believe she was wrong, that she was being stupidly suspicious. But the sounds were unmistakable.

"Cath—what on earth are you doing?" exclaimed Mollie.

Catherine waved her hand, and stepped away from the door. But she gave a backward glance at it as she spoke.

"We must do everything uncle tells us," she said, in a loud voice. "He knows best. If we see Kwanyin, we must take her at once to uncle—"

Mollie's eyes widened, and Charles stared at Catherine in amazement.

Catherine was bluffing, too, gave her cousins a warning look, and then whispered:

"Someone listening—play up—pretend to back me up," she said.

Even then neither Mollie nor Charles guessed who it was who was listening at the door. But they did realise that Catherine spoke wisely. It was better to put the Chinese off the scent.

"Of course, we must do as uncle wants," said Mollie, looking excitedly towards the door.

"Certainly," agreed Charles, "Kwanyin must be handed over, if we find her."

"We owe uncle an apology," said Catherine.

Then she moved back to the door. The footsteps were retreating, as soft creaking from the boards told. Her uncle was satisfied! He had been bluffing, just as he had bluffed them.

When Catherine turned to her cousins, she was almost shaken in their excitement to find out what this was about. Charles took one arm, and Mollie the other.

"Cath, what's the idea?"

"What's the great mystery?"

Catherine, in a whisper, explained: "Uncle has bluffed us—taken us in. He was in the tunnel. He's been there, anyway. And I'm sure he knows Kwanyin's father is here, a prisoner. He's in with the others. What they are doing is at his orders."

Charles and Mollie were so stupefied that they could not answer. They were quite shocked at this revelation.

"Oh, rubbish!" said Charles uneasily. Catherine pointed to the door.

"Who was listening there to what we were saying? Uncle! Why did he sack Kai Tal, and let him come back? Why has he always taken Kai Tal's word about everything—and against Kwanyin's? Because Kai Tal is in his pay. Because Kai Tal is only obeying orders!"

There was silence.

Catherine herself was almost frightened of what she had said, although she could not help believing it to be true.

"But—why did he ask us here, then?" asked Charles, amazed. "He was so keen for us to come!"

He wheeled round suddenly in alarm. Catherine drew near to Mollie, and all

three stared at the door, which had suddenly opened without any preliminary sound.

No one stood there. The corridor seemed deserted.

But a moment later there came a soft, shuffling sound, and there, framed in the doorway, was Kai Tal, arms folded, hands tucked into his voluminous sleeves. His head was bowed, but his cat-like, almond eyes looked up at them, while his face creased in a thin smile.

"Miserable and cringing Kai Tal has exceeded honour to ask noble cousins will grant considerable favour of their presence to request forgiveness of injured god who is much angered."

They saw that under Kai Tal's velvet cap a trace of white bandage showed. The stunning blow from the falling idol must have grazed his scalp; but he was otherwise completely recovered.

The wooden idol, smashed by its own fall, had not been so fortunate. And now it was demanding the apologies of the cousins!

A wooden idol demanding apologies! It seemed to the cousins a wild absurdity. And they stood still. Yet they did not laugh. There was something far too sinister about Kai Tal's manner and this whole house full of strange "magic" for laughter.

"Come on!" said Catherine, the first to speak.

Mollie and Charles followed. All three were pale and anxious.

For now they could no longer feel that they had the protection of Uncle Gerald.

### In the Black Room

**K**WANYIN, a quiver with fear, crept warily amongst the bushes in the garden of Pagoda Place. She was seeking somewhere to hide.

She had escaped from the tunnel in the darkness; but she knew that she could not remain at large for very long.

The Chinamen were too keen and too artful to be eluded.

Even though she might find some place to hide, she would need food. And they would keep a very careful watch on the larder and the kitchen. They would watch the cousins, too. Kwanyin was afraid. Her mind was filled with thoughts of her beloved father, and the memory of the blows she had seen him endure was like a pain.

Even now her father was at the mercy of his enemies. They were cruel to him. They had no pity. They did not respect his age or his infirmity.

"Ah, if they would but take me and set him free!" was Kwanyin's ever-recurring wish.

But she knew that was not possible. If they took her prisoner she would not be able to set her father free. For there was some secret, known only to him. It was that secret they were trying to wring from him.

She did not know the secret. It was her father who mattered to them.

"Oh, my poor father, could I but help you!" sighed Kwanyin as she knelt in concealment.

Her eyes swam with tears. Her hands were tightly clasped.

It was a secure and safe hiding-place. No one passing along the path could have seen her. Already a Chinaman, pacing softly up and down, in crouching attitude, peering this way and that, had passed her.

But Kwanyin's heavy sigh of distress could be heard on the soft air.

The roaming Chinaman pricked up his ears.

Again a sigh ran through Kwanyin, and the Chinaman turned towards the direction of the sound.

He parted the bushes softly, creeping forward, and then nodded in satisfaction as he peered through the rich,



WITH a sudden, swift movement Catherine had the door open. And there, rising to his feet, as if he had been listening to all that had been said, was—Uncle Gerald!

beautiful foliage, and at last sighted Kwanyin.

Very gently and carefully he parted the leaves and pushed forward.

But Kwanyin was like a frightened animal, starting at the slightest sound. She heard the rustle of leaves, soft though it was, and sprang up.

When she saw the Chinaman a shrill scream left her lips before she could stifle it.

But her momentary paralysis went as the man's hand snatched at her shoulder.

She sprang like a frightened deer and leaped away from him through the bushes. She ran as never before, swerving and dodging.

But now, of course, there could be no concealment. Each of the pursuers had heard her scream, and they could hear the pattering steps of the running girl.

Ahead of her another Chinese servant waited.

He ducked low, and drew back.

Kwanyin was two yards from him—

one yard. Then he sprang.

Too late she tried to swerve. One cruel hand was upon her wrist, and in a powerful grasp she was swung round, losing her footing, she dropped to her knees.

"A last, little runaway!" said the servant, in Chinese. "Please to stand, and make no more effort to escape. For it gives much grief to this humble servant to place hands upon one whose birth is so exalted, and whose ancestors have so long been the source of so much admiration."

His soft words were strange when compared to the cruel grip of his long fingers.

"Oh, have mercy, loyal servant!" begged Kwanyin in Chinese, her eyes brimming with tears. And my illustrious father, who is but a helpless prisoner of her strong and resolute captor, will grant great honour and reward."

The Chinaman shook his head.

"The words are pleasing, and the offers place temptation, but, nevertheless, the imprisoned bird does not sing, and the mandarin in chains gives no great gifts. The illustrious father of Kwanyin is as a plucked peacock, or a toothless tiger."

And in his words was a note of contempt.

He scorned the offered bribe, knowing full well that Kwanyin's father was as helpless now as she was.

The other Chinaman reached the spot, breathing hard. Kwanyin pumelled in vain at her captor's hands and arms and knees, until the newcomer took her hand and held it tightly. She was hauled to her feet.

"Where do you take me?" she cried.

"To the great white lord of the Pagoda," was the reply.

And not another word could Kwanyin get from them. She was led into the house through the small hall, and then into the Pagoda itself.

The oddly shaped tower had a room on each floor, accessible by ladder-like staircases, and it was on the second that they halted.

It was the Black Room.

Black draperies hung from every wall. Black curtains shrouded the windows, and the only light came through translucent red dragons, painted on black papered lanterns.

In the dark room those red dragons glowed with light. They were the sole source of illumination. From their eyes light flashed in many facets, winking and dancing in all colours of the

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**M**Y DEAR READERS,—I wonder what you're all doing, now that you're really in the thick of the holidays?

One thing I'm quite certain—you're all having a really scrumptious time, getting as brown as berries, and forgetting that such a place as school even exists!

Claudine, my very-nearly-grown-up niece, is away on a cruise in the Mediterranean, and having a marvelous time. I had a letter from her the other day, in which she told me all her adventures.

Apparently, in one port, Claudine very nearly got left behind. She and a friend had gone ashore to explore, and unfortunately they got lost, when trying to find some ruins which Claudine had been told about.

You can well imagine their dismay when they heard, in the distance, the deep zoom of the steamer's siren! And, to add to their troubles, they couldn't find anyone who could speak English!

However, their absence from the ship had, fortunately, been noticed, and a search party was sent ashore in a boat to find them. And just when Claudine and her companion were giving up all hope of ever finding their way back to the docks, the rescue party turned up! I expect Claudine to have some such adventure!

I must you're eagerly waiting for me to tell you what treats your next SCHOOLGIRL has in store for you. Well, to start with, there's the first of a new series of long, complete new-term Cliff House School stories, which, in response to many requests, features Stella Stone, the school's popular and adorable head girl.

Of course, Babs & Co. are well to the fore in this new series, as well, but it is upon Stella that the limelight shines. The title of this fine story is:

"STRIPE BETWEEN SENIORS,"

By Hilda Richards,

and in it you will read how Babs & Co. staunchly defend Stella in the face of the scheming of her deadly rival, Sarah Harrigan.

This is certainly one of Miss Richards' most brilliant stories, full of dramatic action—a stirring tale of school life that will hold you enthralled whatever you do. Hurry round to the nearest newsagent's and ask him to reserve you a copy of next Saturday's SCHOOLGIRL.

Other good things await you in next week's issue, too. Long instalments of our two grand serials—now approaching their most exciting moments—and another merry complete tale starring that imperial imp, her Harum-scarum Highness, Princess Cherry.

And, of course, Pat's four pages will be as bright as ever—if not brighter!

Don't forget that in the very near future I shall have some exciting news for you regarding a brilliant new Morocco serial.

With best wishes,  
YOUR EDITOR.

rainbow. As the light behind flickered, so did their eyes.

At first Kwanyin could not see the ivory and gold throne between the lanterns. But when her eyes became accustomed to the dim light, she saw that a man in a red silk garment richly ornamented with gold thread sat there with folded arms, his head adorned with the ancient crown of Hu Fiu. She stared closely, and then recoiled.

The wearer of the crown was the white man—Uncle Gerald!

"Yes, it is I, Kwanyin," he said in Chinese. "The time has come for a clear understanding. To-day you shall earn your freedom—"

Kwanyin's heart fluttered with joy, and her eyes brightened like stars.

"Oh, great lord," she said, sinking to her knees, bowing her head, and spreading out her arms in submission. "Gladly would I do great service to earn freedom, but above everything, beyond all jewels and gifts of the gods, I plead that my poor father may be set free."

Uncle Gerald spoke sharply.

"We do not talk of your father, but of you," he said. "You shall have freedom. Never more the fingers of Kai Tal shall twist your wrists. You shall be free."

Kwanyin did not respond in words, but clasped her hands and looked up in appeal.

"For so great a privilege, what is it I must do?" she asked.

Uncle Gerald spoke sternly.

"Prove to my nephew and nieces that you are evil, that you work bad magic, that you deceive. That is all."

Kwanyin blanched. Her hands trembled.

"I cannot. It would be wicked. You are evil—"

"Silence. You will do as I say."

"Even though I suffer, even though I am flung into the dungeon and endure misery," cried Kwanyin proudly, her hands clenched. "I will tell them the truth. They will understand, they will protect. They will help my father. They—"

"Seize her!" cried Uncle Gerald.

At the same moment a gong sounded, and he sprang up.

Kai Tal entered by the door, which he pushed to behind him.

"The much respected nephew and nieces await the ceremony of apology," he said. "Their ears are keen—the words of Kwanyin are spoken loudly and—"

He tried to close the door, but outside Catherine had put her foot in the way. She had heard those last words.

"Kwanyin's here!" she gasped. "I heard uncle's voice in anger—"

"Charge the door," said Charles, gritting his teeth.

Inside the Black Room Uncle Gerald sprang from the throne and seized Kwanyin himself. He twirled her round and sent her towards the curtains.

As her mouth opened to scream, a Chinaman's hand covered it. One arm was behind her back, and she was dragged towards a curtain.

At the same moment the three cousins charged the door.

Kai Tal staggered and fell forward, and Catherine rushed into the room.

Is Uncle Gerald really an impostor? And are Catherine and her cousins at last to learn the truth? On no account miss next Saturday's thrilling chapters of this powerful serial. Order your SCHOOLGIRL in advance—and make sure of your copy.



Trapped in the Cave of Baboons . . . See This Week's Chapters  
of this Vivid Jungle Serial

# MORCOVE 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 Hwale—a Frenchman named DUPONT and his wife.

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. The Duponts arrive on the scene, however, and block up the mouth of the Grotto. In an attempt to find a way out, Betty and Polly find their way into a cavern which is crowded with baboons. Betty's torch, the light of which has so far kept the baboons at bay, goes out!

(Now read on.)

## The Cavern of Terror

**B**ETTY BARTON'S electric torch had failed.

The black darkness seemed to press about her like a solid thing in this strange cavern to which she and Polly had found their way whilst desperately seeking an outlet from the Golden Grotto.

Alone was Betty now.

Polly had gone back by the way they had both come. But there remained that host of hideous creatures whom the last use of the failing torch had revealed to the horrified girls only a few moments since.

The baboons—who seemed to have made this mysterious place their own communal lair—they were crowding the rocky floor of the cavern. And was there any doubt that in the renewed darkness they were becoming dangerously excited?

But the horror of the situation did not cause her to lose her head. She realised that she still had a way of escape. She must squeeze back into the narrow

passage, and so work back, even as Polly had already started to do, to where, in the Golden Grotto itself, they had left Mr. Willoughby and Jack.

After her first withdrawing step or two, Betty had to go sideways through the cleft, and even so her retreat from the baboons' cave was most gradual. She could tell that Polly was working her way back with real facility; but,

By  
**MARJORIE  
STANTON**

Illustrations by L. Shields

then, Polly did not know that the torch had failed.

Poor Betty! She was sufficiently flustered—and no wonder!—to be unable to tackle the awkwardly narrow passage at all quickly. There were nasty moments when she had the nightmare sense of being trapped—stuck fast between the walls of rock.

Then suddenly the torch blinked on again. The jerking it had received during her efforts to squeeze along the passage had apparently caused it to make contact. The battery, after all, was not quite run down. It had only worked loose inside the silver-plated case.

She paused in her struggling, and gave attention to the torch. For a few moments, whilst panting to recover her breath, she was in total darkness again. Then she got the bulb burning once more, and could keep it so.

Shining the weak ray back towards the baboons' cave, she at once beheld one of the terrifying creatures, clambering in pursuit.

The rift in the rocks, just wide

enough as it was to pass her and Polly through, was wide enough for the baboons. And here was one of them, with the agility of his kind, nimbly working towards her! That great face of his had the convulsive look of fury. Teeth were showing as if they were eager to bite. The eyes glared threateningly.

But Betty kept the torch shining straight at the menacing creature, and it daunted him.

"Shoo!" she gasped at him. "Get out! Shish!"

He started to go back. That seemed good enough to Betty. She boldly shuffled towards him, dazzling him with the light as he shuffled backwards. At the same time she shouted to Polly: "Hi! Hurry up with the gun, Polly!"

"Righty-ho!" that chum's cry came wandering through the zigzagging crevice. "Getting it now!"

That meant, as Betty knew, that Polly had already worked back to the main cavern, and was explaining to Jack and Mr. Willoughby how matters stood.

She herself followed up the baboon in his retreat to the outer cavern. As he shambled backwards, he was evidently forcing other of the animals to turn back also.

But Betty had the joyous feeling that the danger was over now.

"If this light can daunt them," she thought, "wait till I get hold of that gun!"

Sooner than she had expected, she found herself at the very exit from the passage. Once again the torch's weak ray, roving all over the outer cavern, showed her baboons in numbers as great as before.

They were frightened, however. To her increased relief, she saw them crowding to escape on the far side, where previously she had detected a way out into the open air.

For a few thrilling moments she stood

witnessing the panicky scramble. Then Polly was at her side, plucking her by the sleeve.

"The gun, Betty! Want it, or shall I—"

"No! Let me!" Betty shouted back. They were having to shout to each other because the baboons were making a general deal of noise. "I shan't fire, Polly. There's no need."

"Hurry up, there!" the madcap dinned at the stampeded creatures. "Pass right down the car, please!"

Betty giggled, and then found it hard to stop giggling. A bit overstrung, in fact. She nudged Polly to "Shut up joking!" But the madcap's own keyed-up state was the very one to keep her tittering half-hysterical flippancies. It was not until the last baboons were swimming away into the open air that Betty came in for a serious remark.

"I've explained everything to Jack and Mr. Willoughby," Polly then imparted. "They've O.K.'d the idea. You and I will get away together—"

"And well do that now! Come on, Polly!" panted Betty, at once setting off across the cavern floor. "Then to get those two rescued."

The torch lasted only a few moments longer, and by its final glimmering both girls saw how the underground stream, the course of which they had followed through the rock passage, flowed, sluggishly the way they were now stepping.

Then the battery gave out altogether; but Betty and Polly felt that this did not matter now. Starlight! There were some of the myriad stars which nightly bejewelled the African sky flashing before their eyes.

"Only, Polly, I wish your brother and Mr. Willoughby could have been left with a light, back where they were forced to stop! We don't know how long we're going to be getting them out of their fix."

"But see!" Betty was excitedly answered, as she and her chum reached that same opening through which the baboons had swarmed away. "Oh, what's to stop us now, Betty? Nothing!"

The cave-mouth gave on to a narrow ledge of rock, but it was a case of merely jumping a few feet from the ledge down to level ground. In joyous mood, they took that jump, for they had expected to find themselves in some very hazardous position. It was amongst the rugged mountains of the Kwamba country that such thrilling experiences had attended the finding of the Golden Grotto. And the two girls had been remembering that, whenever there had been baboons to see by day, the weird creatures had always been trooping about on dizzy ledges.

"We forgot!" Betty laughed. "The Golden Grotto is underground, and we have kept to that underground stream all the while. So we couldn't have come out anywhere exactly high up! Polly darling, we're at the foot of a valley again—that's all!"

"But is it 'the valley'? I don't think so," the madcap fumed, peering around in the starlight. "Dash! If only it were the same one where we all four found our way into the grotto, then—"

"It isn't, though—no!" Betty had to sigh. "And that is delay No. 1. You and I could soon have slipped away all those rocks which the Duponts lumped over the top of the shaft, and then your brother and Mr. Willoughby would have been able to crawl out."

"Where are we, then?" Polly raged. "Is that other valley just round the corner, so to speak? Must be! Can't

be far, hang it! But which way— which? Betty? We don't want to go all wrong!"

"I'm trying to tell—by the stars," that chum murmured, gazing upwards to the night sky. "Just a mo."

Whilst waiting, Polly preferred to continue peering one way and another. The baboons had vanished, but there was not that deathly stillness which the two girls had noticed in the other valley and had thought so eerie.

Queer little noises came to them out of the surrounding darkness. They were mostly sounds suggestive of furtive movements—the prowlings of some wild creatures.

Betty suddenly ended her star-gazing and gave a directional wave of the hand.

"To the left, Polly—this way, I'm sure. If we work round that cliffy bit which we can see just over there the Valley of the Giant will be on our left again."

Polly gave a "You know best!" nod, and they moved off together.

"Now and then, Betty, I seem to have seen a sort of glow like a camp-fire might send up. It's a few miles away."

"I know, dear. Our camp—"

"Oh, you think so? I was wondering—hoping! Then, if the worst comes to the worst, we can work back to the camp, taking that light for our guide."

"Oh, rather! But we'll manage the rescue, I reckon, all on our own."

They stepped along briskly, feeling greatly heartened. Even the cool night air of these Kwamba highlands was having its tonic effect after the anxious time spent up in the caverns. Starlight and this revivifying air of the African wild! But the measure of their relief at being free was the measure of their eagerness to see Jack and Mr. Willoughby above ground again.

Delay—even the unavoidable delay of another hour or two—was bound to mean for man and lad alike a terrible ordeal. They would not say so to each other, but the thought must certainly be in the minds of both, creating fearful suspense. Supposing disaster befell their would-be rescuers?

Suddenly Betty stopped dead, whispering her chum:

"Look out, Polly! See him?"

"See whom—what—where?"

"Away upon our left," Betty whispered again. "A lion!"

### The Deserted Camp

POLLY, at a standstill with her chum, peered her hardest. There had been so much groping about in the utter darkness of the grotto—when the torch was being kept in reserve—now both girls were not finding the night out here at all dark, thanks to the starlight.

Even so, it took Polly a brace of seconds to discern what her chum, evidently more on the alert, had already detected—a full-grown lion padding amongst the rocks and stunted bushes, quite three hundred yard away.

There was first a hissing intake of breath by Polly as she saw the king of beasts, skirmishing towards them both. Then:

"Gosh, Betty, we're for it now! The gun—use it?"

She spoke of the borrowed weapon as a "gun," but it was only a revolver which had been obtained from Mr. Willoughby with the primary idea of using it to frighten away the baboons.

Betty looked critically at the small blue steel firearm which she held. Then

she returned her gaze to the prowling beast. Both girls could see him looping nearer.

His head was held low as he now came straight towards them. To Betty and Polly they seemed to be the last, unhesitating paces he was taking, just as a cat will pace quickly across a lawn before suddenly crouching—to spring.

"I shall fire to try to scare him off," Betty muttered, raising the revolver. "It may do the trick, Polly. If not, I must keep on firing."

"That's it."

They were both realising, although a big-game gun would have been the thing, for shooting to kill, the mere revolver was, after all, better in the circumstances.

Bang!

Betty had fired.

At the same instant she and Polly sidestepped quickly, and then huddled down behind a boulder.

Bang! again.

"Oh, he's not going!" Polly gasped. "Betty, he's—he's crouching! He means to get us! Look at his eyes!"

They were enlarged to the two girls who stared back at him. Like red coals in the darkness were the lion's wild eyes where he crouched, his great mane bristling.

Betty, whilst she took the best possible aim—for what it might be worth—could see his haunches swaying, ready to spring.

Bang!

A third shot—and this time not from Betty's futile revolver.

A rifle-shot it had been, creating a shattering explosion in the night, whilst not far off a tiny spurt of flame stabbed the darkness.

And the lion, although he made a spring from his crouching-place, did so only in a balked manner. It had been a leap made with no real life in it—only the beginning of death!

Betty and Polly saw him crash heavily, lifelessly, so that he fell short of his intended mark by a couple of yards. Thud to ground he went, right before their eyes, and lay dead—killed outright by that one marvellously true shot.

"Whew!" panted the shaking girls. "But—but—"

Whose shot—whose, at such a timely moment?

That was what they were wanting to wonder aloud, but the words would not come. The one girl felt as unstrung as the other. By now, if there had not been that shot to save them, they themselves—

"Why, look, Polly!"

"Yes—great goodness!"

Running quickly towards them, rifle in hand, was a boyish figure. He was not calling out to them. It would not have been like him to call out! For they knew him instantly. Dave!

"So there are you two girls, anyhow," he began, with characteristic calmness. "But have you got lost? Where are Jack and Mr. Willoughby?"

"Oh, Dave—Dave!" Betty found her tongue again. "You saved our lives!"

"You're telling me," he smiled, devoting a side glance to the stretched-out lion. "Anyway, I've got Judy a skin for her study at Morcove, after all. Had to shoot to kill that time, if I could."

"And didn't you just!" Polly cried. "But, look here, Dave! Betty and I have had to leave my brother and Mr. Willoughby, still shut away—in the Golden Grotto! Yes, the four of us found the grotto just before dark. We went down by a shaft, and—and then the Duponts turned up and served us a coward's trick. They shut us in!"

"Oh, so that was it?" Dave nodded. "Underground. That's why we got no answer when we hailed."

"You say 'we,' Dave?"  
 "There have been six of us, with our Old Kwanba, out trying to find you. It needs some explaining, and there's no time now—"

"That there isn't!" Betty emphatically agreed. "Dave, I don't know if you and the others, whilst searching round, found your way into the Valley of the Giant—"

"We made straight for it from camp. But there was no sign of you four; not a sound. So we had to split up. Judy is with me. Here she comes," Dave added, quite mildly. "I told her to stay still, just over there, until I knew for sure about this lion."

If there had not been this fresh surprise for his listeners, causing them to sprint to meet Judy, they would have seen Dave go to the shot beast and get busy. The meeting between Judy and the Study No. 12 pair was followed by such an eager interchange of explanations, it was not until five minutes later that the girls paid fresh attention to the lad.

Then they discovered that he had covered the dead lion with torn-up grass and "scrub." The girls guessed that his purpose had been to get the skin later on. It would have to be some time after daylight, and so he had had to guard against flies.

"Marvellous shot of his," Betty said under her breath to Dave's sister. He was keeping them waiting just a moment or two longer.

"If he had missed!" Judy said, with a wince at the harrowing recollection.

"But could your brother ever miss anything he aims at, I ask you?" Polly admiringly exploded. "Dave, sorry to tr-r-ouble you, but—"

"I know; you want to get back to the Valley of the Giant so as to be able to uncover the shaft entrance. Shouldn't wonder if we meet the rest who were out searching, for they may have heard those shots just now. If not, we'll fire a signal-shot when we're back in the valley. Single file now, me first. I don't think we'd better shout. They might misunderstand and think we're needing help."

The three girls exchanged happy glances as they prepared to follow him. What a lad for thinking of everything!

They had the luck to meet Mr. Minden and Jimmy Cherrol, with those two Morcovians who had belonged to that search-party, which had included Judy and Dave. With them, also, was Old Kwanba, the expedition's own trusty guide and interpreter.

Then it was only a few minutes more, and the rescue work at the sealed-up entrance to the Golden Grotto was in full swing.

Swiftly—easily, too, there being so many hands for the urgent task—all the slabs of rock and boulders were cast aside.

The Duponts had done their dastardly deed with thoroughness; but very soon the rescuers had the top of the shaft uncovered.

"Hi, Morcove!" they shouted down. "Mr. Willoughby! Jack! Morcove!"

Had there been no immediate response two or three of them would have descended the ancient stone steps which led down to the Golden Grotto. Instantly, however, a boyish voice called up to them—quite playfully.

"Oi! What's the hurry?"  
 They burst out laughing. Just like Jack, to have reacted instantly to his frivolous nature, the moment all danger for him and his co-victim was past. Yet until that moment came, when he

and Mr. Willoughby knew that the stopped-up shaft was being reopened—how acute the suspense must have been.

Up they came, the pair of them, and, under the flashing stars in that vast, nightbound valley, there was a good deal of rapid conversation, concluding with the happy decision:  
 "Back to camp now!"



INTO the firelit camp rushed Betty and Co.—a camp that was strangely quiet, strangely deserted. A second's silence, a frantic glancing round, and then a wild cry from Betty: "Where are the others?"

Happy, all of them, as they set off upon their return trudge; never in all their lives happier than in this triumphant hour. Or so, at least, the juniors were feeling.

For an hour of triumph it was—complete triumph, they were saying amongst themselves. The Duponts had most certainly been finally routed—how could it be otherwise? The Morcove holiday expedition, in quest of the Golden Grotto, had been achieved. This very night, the Golden Grotto had been found at last. Three thousand years after its sealing-up by those roving Egyptians who had been able only to camp a little of its vast wealth, the mystic place, marvel of Nature that it was, had been rediscovered—by explorers who were mostly girls and boys!

No wonder this present return to camp acquired something of the joviality of a picnic-party returning late from an extended ramble. The juniors could afford to be in a "sing as we go" mood. And far and wide could their singing of their own school songs, as well as some of the very "latest," be heard in the African bush.

The way back to camp was not at all fatiguing, being across level ground. Nor were they ever at a loss which way to proceed, even though there was some inevitable zigzagging through the tussocky grass and stunted bushes.

Their own Old Kwanba would soon have set them right, if ever they had been going wrong. But neither Mr. Willoughby nor Mr. Minden ever

needed to consult the trusty black fellow, whose own special delight in the night's great achievement kept him grinning from ear to ear.

"He's thinking how he's going to be on the board of directors—along of me," Jack chuckled, when the return march was nearing its end.

"Do what?" questioned Polly.

"I don't know about you Morcove girls," he rattled on. "We may allot you a few shares in the Golden Grotto Mine! After all, I suppose you have been a bit of help now and then, but—"

"Now and then!" And she threatened to smite him for his cheek. "As a matter of fact," she added, "the Golden Grotto will be made over to the Kwamba tribe. They've waited long enough for what Nature called the 'great share-out,' that time we first got him to talk about his tribe, in the circus ground at home."

"And that seems ages ago now—my word, it does!" laughed Betty. Then she called out gaily to the ex-circus hand, causing him to turn back and walk with her and her chums.

"What are you going to do with your share, Kwamba?" was Betty's blithe inquiry.

"Me, folks? Dat's jess what I'm a-wondering—"

"You ought to put in for King of the Kwambas," Jack advised him. "And buy a plane, so as to be able to drop in on us at home, now and then."

"No, folks. Dis yere Kwamba don't fancy staying out here in de wild, and the came with much broad smiling, and the wagging of an ebony head. "As for de airplane, I'm jess about hoping you folk give him de miss going home."

"Can't be did, Kwamba," chuckled Jack. "Our schools couldn't reopen unless we were there on the day!"

"Den dis yere Kwamba must jess shut his eyes when de machine go up with

him on board with all ob you—yes, folks!"

Kwamba was shutting his eyes as he said it, having vivid recollections of sinking sensations that had attended the setting off from Croydon, weeks ago.

"There's the light from the camp-fire again—plainer now!" Betty suddenly commented. "Hurrah! Last lap!"

"Soon be there," Jack replied. "Strike up the band, boys!" And he began to sing noisily. "See, the conquering heroes come—" "Ugh!"

The last sound was due to the fact that Polly had hastily clapped a hand over his mouth.

"Do that again—" she challenged threateningly, only to break off. There was a new note in her voice as she spoke again. She was staring past Jack—into the scrubby bush which formed black shadows to either side of them.

"What—what's that?"

The others came to a standstill. Dave joined Jack and Polly at the head of the party and stood gazing in the direction Polly had indicated.

"I can't see anything," Jack said lightly, after a short silence. "Your imagination, Polly—wolly. There's nothing—"

"Look! There again! Don't you see?" Polly burst out.

Dave, without speaking, had raised his rifle, aiming it at the spot where a black shape could dimly be seen squirming across the grass.

The others crowded round him, straining their eyes, trying to make out what it was.

Bang! Dave's rifle spoke. He had not aimed at the black shape but immediately above it. The bullet swished madly into the foliage.

Then came a howl of terror, followed by a fierce jabbering. The black shape sprang to life, stood up, and began to run.

"A native!" cried Polly. "One of the Kwambas!" exclaimed Mr. Minden in amazement. "What on earth was he up to?"

Dave was tight-lipped. "Not friendly, sir," he affirmed. "He had a spear—was going to throw it when I fired."

"Better get back to the camp," put in Mr. Willoughby uneasily. "I don't like the look of this."

"Give a shout!" suggested Betty. "It'll serve to scare off any others who may be about."

They shouted. "Morcove! Morcove!"

Then they listened for the reply—but none came.

"If I find that Tubby has fallen asleep on guard," Jack mock-grimly fumed. "I'll have him court-martialled! I'll stop his pay, I will! Not an ounce of gold, either, shall he have from the Grotto. But come on, chaps; make it an all-together shout this time—a real good 'un! Hoi—"

"Morcove!" The united shout was sent forwards to the firelit camping ground. "Mor—COVE!"

Then, as there was still not a sound in reply, sudden anxiety ousted all jollity from minds and hearts alike. The two men felt as concerned as did their companions.

"Can't be all asleep at the camp," Mr. Willoughby gravely voiced the general conviction. "Besides, such shouting as that!"

"Better hurry," was Mr. Minden's uneasy murmur.

They did so, changing after a mere hundred yards of brisker walking to a fast trot. They were halting the camp again and again as they made for it with this sudden anxious haste.

But there had yet to be a response. In vain, after each loud shout, were ears listening so eagerly for an answer. None came.

With only the last two hundred yards to go, men, girls, boys all rushed their fastest, and in one batch they reached the camp, to have their appalling fears instantly confirmed.

"No one here to receive them! No one! They had got back to the camp to find it quite deserted.

Gone were those chums whom Betty and her present companions had been longing to see again, to tell such grand news about the finding of the Grotto. Gone, the wife of Mr. Willoughby; gone, the mother of Dave and Judy; gone, all of them!

And, to add to the strangeness of such a happening, nothing in the state of the camp offered any explanation to those who stood gazing around, seized with amazement and—dread!

## Drums by Night

WHAT did it mean? There was the camp-fire, recently made up, burning on so brightly in the night. Here and there were the tents, showing not the least sign of disorder.

"Amazing!" Betty had found her voice at last, only to voice a word which was coming to the lips of others.

"Can't have been anything to do with enemies. We know of none, now we're in the Kwamba country," the juniors heard Mr. Minden say to Mr. Willoughby.

Both men stepped away together, meaning to make a systematic inspection of the whole camp. The juniors were inclined to keep together as they also started to go over the ground slowly and vigilantly.

To Dave there came a sudden recollection which caused him to pause suddenly, staring towards a certain tent.

"When we left camp, that Dupont woman was sort of in custody. The mater and Mrs. Willoughby had conducted her to that tent, where she was to be kept for a bit. That was being done, so that she should not be able to return to her husband, who had sent her with his threatening message."

"And Madame Dupont is vanished, like the others!" Betty frowned. "I—I suppose they had to take her along with them. But why—why did they have to clear out? Where are they now—where?"

"Dash!" Polly raged. "This, just when we were feeling so terribly whoopee over the Golden Grotto! It's too bad, really! Oh, and I suppose it is that Frenchman's doing—again!"

"Shouldn't wonder!" two or three of her companions were glumly nodding, when Betty suddenly dived aside as if the flickering firelight had shown her something lying upon the much-trodden grass that looked like being a sensational find.

"A paper!" she was exclaiming excitedly, as she made a stooping rush to pick it up. "Here, I say—look! Leaf torn from a notebook!"

They crowded round Betty, at the same time shouting to the two fathers to come and see.

Clumsier, stranger writing they had never seen than this that went to make up just a few pencilled lines. They had all to go closer to the camp-fire before they could make out the message—for a message to them it was.

"KWAMBAS HAVE TURNED AGAINST US," they read; "ALL BEING TAKEN TO VILLAGE."

Then, out of alignment with those scrawled sentences, so that it came as something added when a fresh chance had occurred, they saw this:

"AM WRITING THIS BEHIND MY BACK.—PAULA."

"Paula!" cried Polly. "But—but just fancy!"

"I see how it was," Dave promptly inferred. "Paula was the last in the line, as they were marched off. She was writing it whilst they were formed up for marching. Then she could drop the note with a good chance of its not being seen by any of the natives."

"That's about it," Mr. Willoughby gravely nodded. "My wife, of course, would be closely guarded; Mrs. Cardew the same. Anyhow, now we know where they all are—at the native village."

"As prisoners!" Betty whispered. "All excepting Madame Dupont. She will be there with her husband—the pair of them, free, in high favour with the Kwamba chief."

A heavy pause ensued. By the light of the camp fire one pair of eyes was meeting another, whilst every mind was quickly reaching a similar decision. "Go after them—this 'all."

"Yes," Mr. Willoughby spoke, as leader. "And, one great blessing, we have our Old Kwamba to interpret for us. We'll all go along with him, and demand an expl—"

"But hark!" Of a sudden the night had lost its peaceful silence. From a good distance away in the darkness, and certainly from the direction of the Kwamba village, came a rapid dub-dub-dub! of small drums, and some hollow chanting.

As they paid heed, they realised that it must be a wild chorus kept up by the whole tribe, called together in the night-time.

Mr. Willoughby looked round for Old Kwamba, and then the others were shocked to see that faithful fellow standing very still. His eyes were goggling, as from terror, in his shiny black face.

"Here, Kwamba," the leader voiced, and it was obvious that the good fellow had to pull himself together as he came closer.

"The drums, Kwamba, and all that singing—any idea what it means, at this time of night?"

"I—I— Oh, sah—"

"Well, what?" "Him bery old song ob de Kwambas—yes, folks. Him de song dis yere Kwamba hear all de tribe sing, jess once in de old days."

The dull drubbing of finger-tapped drums, and the weird chanting, seemed to swell louder. A half-burnt brand in the camp fire turned over, and a tongue of flame leapt up. The stronger light enabled those who were looking at Old Kwamba to see how he trembled, whilst the sweat glistened in beads upon his black forehead.

"Massa folks—" he hoarsely whispered. "You nebber see your friends no more!"

So the rest of the party had fallen into the hands of the Kwambas! What will become of them... unless they are rescued? Thrilling developments crowd next Saturday's chapters of this brilliant jungle serial, so on no account miss your copy of THE SCHOOLGIRL. Order it now—and make certain!