

"STRIFE BETWEEN SENIORS"

GRAND LONG COMPLETE NEW-TERM  
CLIFF HOUSE SCHOOL STORY

# THE SCHOOLGIRL

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Incorporating  
"SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN"



## ALL TO SAVE A JUNIOR

THE SCHOOL CAPTAIN  
BREAKS BOUNDS

A dramatic incident in this week's  
grand long complete Cliff House School  
story

# FIRST OF A NEW SERIES of Long Complete Cliff House School Stories, Featuring Babs & Co. and Stella Stone



## STRIFE Between Seniors

### A Promise to the Captain

"BARBARA REDFERN—one for you!"

"Oh, goody!"

"And two for you, Mabs."

"Topping!"

"Two for you, Jimmy, and—wonders will never cease!—a letter for our one and only Bessie Bunterkins! Roll up, roll up, you cripples! Post's in!"

Clara Trevlyn, the tomboyish games captain of the Fourth Form, it was who raised that stentorian cry in Big Hall at Cliff House School, where happy, brown-faced schoolgirls, streaming out of classroom and gymnasium after the first morning of the new term, were converging on all sides towards the letter-rack in Big Hall.

An eager interest always was mani-

**N**EW term at Cliff House—and scarcely has it started than Barbara Redfern & Co. find themselves called upon to intervene on behalf of Stella Stone, their adored Head Girl, whose last term at school is threatened by the malice of a rival.

fested in the mail, but perhaps the interest was never so great as at the beginning of term, when girls who had spent down to their last farthing on glorious holiday jaunts were "hard up" and in happy expectation of remittances. "I sus-say!" squeaked Bessie Bunter. "Oh crumbs! Dud-did you sus-say there was one for me, Clara?" "I did, my fattikins, and here it is!"

Clara cried jovially, handing to the duffer of the Fourth an envelope. "A big, fat, bulky one, too—probably contains several one thousand pound postal orders from your titled relative, Lord Dishwater de Bunter. Hallo, Marjorie, here's one for you—with an Egyptian postmark, too! I've got news from my brother Jack in Nigeria," she went on excitedly. "Hallo, Phyllis! No, old girl, nothing for you. But let me get out of the way."

And Clara got out of the way, removing her personal post from the rack. Full that rack had been two minutes before. Now, with the exception of one solitary letter under the "F" section, it was empty.

There was a tearing of flaps, a rustling of sheets. More than one face beamed happily as they extracted rustling postal orders; more than one eye lighted up as they read news from long-absent friends, or tidings from home.

One or two faces lengthened when it was discovered that the expected remittance was not enclosed, and among those faces was Bessie Bunter's.

"Nun-no remittance!" she announced dolefully. "That is, I should have received a cheque by this post, you know. My titled relation, Lord Dishwater, promised to send me ten pounds as soon as—"

"As soon as he pawned his coronet!" Clara chuckled.

"Oh, really, Clara! As soon as he returned to the House of Lords," Bessie said indignantly. "I sus-say," she added eagerly, "who's the other letter for?"

"Brenda Fallace."  
"Oh, really, Clara, have another look! Sure it isn't for me?" Bessie asked anxiously. "It—it may have been wrongly addressed, you know."

But Clara chuckled. There could be no mistake about the address on that letter. Very neat was the handwriting

—almost copperplate, indeed—and it bore on its front the postmark of Courtfield, the nearest big town to Cliff House School.

Bessie was hungry. Bessie was also disappointed. Worse than either of those two conditions, however, was the fact that Bessie was completely "broke" except for a doubtful threepenny bit, which nobody had ever yet been persuaded to change for copper currency.

Bessie wanted food, but to have food one must have money.

Brenda Fallace's letter was still in the rack, unclaimed and untouched. Somebody ought to tell Brenda about that. There might be a remittance in it. People who wrote as beautifully as the person who had addressed that envelope, usually sent remittances, Bessie thought vaguely.

So, having tried every other source without success, Bessie decided to try to find Brenda. If she told Brenda that a letter was waiting for her,

By  
**HILDA RICHARDS**

Brenda, out of very gratefulness, should be prepared to lend her half-a-crown.

Had Bessie stopped to think, she might have reflected that it was not a very great hope. For Brenda Fallace, crou of Lydia Crossendale & Co., was not one of the most open-handed girls in the Fourth Form, nor was she the most generously disposed.

Brenda, indeed, was one of those girls who never came forward. She was good at games—a fact which made Babs & Co. tolerate her, though they found her trying at times.

Plain, taciturn, inclined to be obstinate and very slow thinking, Brenda Wallace never showed the slightest disposition to make friends.

She had but one heroine in the whole world, and that was Stella Stone, for whom Brenda would gladly have laid down her life. Next to Stella, perhaps her only friend was Lydia Crossendale, who used her shamelessly for her own ends.

But Brenda usually had money. Stella's uncle, Donald Leverick, who was also Brenda's guardian, saw to that.

At that moment Brenda was in Stella Stone's study, and, to judge by the look on her face, Brenda was not having a happy time.

Stella sat at her desk, Brenda in a chair opposite her. The sweet face of the school captain, framed in its masses of dark brown hair, was very concerned, very tender. She looked at Brenda again.

"Brenda, you do want to please me, don't you?"

"Oh, Stella, you know I'd do anything to please you," Brenda said.

"Then won't you do this for me?" Stella asked. "You know, Brenda, that I want to see you get on. I'm not asking you to part with your friends, but I really don't think that Lydia's influence is for the best. My Uncle Donald has been talking to me seriously about you during the holidays. He was not satisfied with your last report, and your conduct sheet appalled him."

Brenda shifted sulkily.

"Brenda," Stella went on seriously, "I'm not going to disguise facts. Uncle Donald said that if you earned black marks this term, he would take you away from Cliff House for good at the end of it. I don't want to see that happen, my dear. This may be my own last term at the school, and when I'm gone you will have no one to turn to. I do want you, Brenda, to try to turn over a new leaf. Please do refrain from getting into scrapes and trouble! Forgive me if I say it, but you haven't the faculty for thinking out the things you do before you do them. Brenda, my dear, won't you promise?"

Such a note of entreaty, of yearning, there was in that last simple sentence. Even stolid Brenda, so usually unresponsive to all signs of human emotion, was touched by it.

She stood up, her chin squared. A flash came into her eyes, lighting up the greeny-blue pupils. She seemed to stiffen.

"All right, Stella, as you ask it!"

"You promise?" Stella said.

"I'll do my best," Brenda returned cautiously.

And, abruptly turning, she went out, while Stella, standing up, stared after her wistfully. For a moment she stood looking at the door, a very tender expression on her beautiful face. Then she sat down again.

Would Brenda do it? Would she reform?

Stella hoped so. Brenda usually meant what she said. Not Brenda to give her such a promise, and then go back upon it. And Stella really and truly did love the girl, for all her stubborn ways.

Still— And, with a sigh, she sat down again. She picked up the letter she had received that morning. For the tenth time she read it. It was from Sir Absalom Whittier, the famous naturalist and veterinary surgeon. It read:

"Providing that you gain your veterinary diploma before you leave Cliff House at the end of the term, I shall have great pleasure in offering you

the post which you seek—that of assistant manageress in my establishment. I am bound to tell you, however, that there are other applicants in the files, and I cannot, of course, possibly accept a girl who has not the necessary qualifications—"

Stella smiled faintly. She looked at the pile of books and papers and notes on the desk before her.

It was true what she had told Brenda. This was her last term at Cliff House School. She wanted it to be a good term, a happy term.

But—there was this diploma. Stella saw a hard fight ahead of her if she were to combine her term captain's duties with the now terrific period of swotting that she must embark upon.

In one short month the examination for the veterinary diploma would take place—the most difficult test that a girl could undergo.

Her chief concern was Brenda. If only Brenda would keep her promise and relieve her of the responsibility of keeping too close an eye upon her!

But she need have had no fear on that score. Not Brenda's intention to fail the girl whom she so completely idolised. Very fierce was Brenda's frown as she went off down the corridor, knitting her brows.

She did not see the fat figure rolling towards her until that figure, with blink and a jump, short-sightedly cannoned into her. She turned.

"Oh, really, Leila— Oh crumbs! It's Brenda!" Bessie Bunter breathlessly spluttered, clutching at her arm. "I say, Brenda, old thing, I'm looking for you!"

"I'm broke!" Brenda said at once.

"Oh, really!" Bessie looked hurt. "As if I'd dud-dream of asking you for money! But, I say, you know, there's a letter for you in the rack! It looks as if it might contain a remittance!"

"For me?"

"Yes."

Brenda stared. Not very often did Brenda receive letters; outside Cliff House she had no friends. The only

person who ever wrote to her was her guardian, Donald Leverick, and his letters were so few and infrequent that a year's delivery could be counted on the fingers of one hand. Quite an event it was, therefore, for Brenda to get a letter. She looked excited now.

"Oh, good!"

"But, I say!" howled Bessie. "Here, I say, you know, wait for me! Dash it all, I told you!"

But Brenda was not waiting. She was hurrying off. Down the stairs she went, reaching Big Hall almost breathless with haste.

In the Hall several juniors were still reading, others talking. As Brenda moved towards the letter-rack another girl entered the door.

A rather angular girl, she was, who wore pince-nez, whose thin lips were set in a firm line. Her superior height, her air of authority, proclaimed at once that she was a girl of some importance at Cliff House, and she was.

For this was Sarah Harrigan, one of the senior prefects, and, incidentally, one of the most unpopular girls in the school.

Quickly her eyes sought the letter-rack, as quickly fastened upon Brenda, advancing towards her. She hurried her steps.

"Oh, my letter!" she said casually. "Just a fraction of a second before Brenda, she reached the rack. One hand she stretched forward, plucking out the letter which reposed there. Barbara Redfern, talking to Clara and Marjorie Hazeldene, saw the action, and looked thunderstruck. Brenda, who had advanced near enough to read her own name on the flap as Sarah pulled it out, glared. She took a step forward.

"Here, I say, that's my letter!" she cried indignantly.

"Your letter?"

Sarah gazed at her coldly.

"I saw the address."

"Yes, rather!" Barbara chimed in warmly. "That was her letter, Sarah. It was the only one in the rack. Look at it."

But Sarah did not look at it. More



**HASTENING** along the path, Brenda did not see the rope until it was too late. Then, as she went sprawling, Sarah emerged from her concealment. Her ruse to trap Brenda had succeeded!

## 4 "Strife Between Seniors"

trap-like than ever did her lips become. She deliberately put the letter in her pocket. Then she turned on her heel.

"Oh crumbs! I sus-say, you know, I—" Bessie Bunter spluttered.

"Sarah!" cried Brenda furiously. The chums blinked. The cool cheek of it took their breath away. Everybody knew that that letter was for Brenda.

Brenda was a big girl, with a strength that was not given to many girls of her age. She took one step forward. The grip she took on Sarah's arm made the prefect wince.

"Give me that letter!" she cried. "Brenda, how dare you!" "Give me that letter!" Brenda repeated thickly.

"I haven't got your letter." "If you don't give it to me—"

Brenda half-threatened. There was a look on her face that alarmed Babs, who took a step forward.

"Brenda, you idiot!" "What might have happened then there is no telling. Brenda's right arm was drawn back, as if she intended striking the prefect. At the same moment, however, a new figure stepped on to the scene. It was Stella Stone herself. Her voice broke in sharply.

"Brenda! Sarah! What are you doing?"

As if she had been shot, Brenda wheeled. The hand that clutched Sarah's arm dropped to her side. Sarah, a flush running into her face, fell back. "She's got my letter!" Brenda cried. "I haven't!"

"But she has," Babs said indignantly. "We all saw her take it!"

"It's a lie!" Sarah retorted furiously. "I tell you—"

"Thank you, Sarah, do not shout," Stella said disapprovingly. "I have not remarked before that Barbara is in the habit of telling lies. Have you got Brenda's letter?"

"No." "Then perhaps," Stella said, "as there seems to be doubt about it, you will show the letter you took from the rack to Brenda, just to satisfy her?"

Babs & Co, glanced at each other. Clara tossed her head.

From Sarah's lips came a hiss. For one electric moment it seemed that she was going to defy the head girl. Then reluctantly her hand plunged into her pocket and came out again, the letter in it.

Stella's face hardened.

"So it is Brenda's!" she said contemptuously. "You did steal it, Sarah!"

"I—I must have been mistaken!" Sarah faltered. "I tell you—"

"Thanks!" Stella's lips curled with contempt. "Don't trouble to explain. Explanations are not necessary, I think. Brenda, here is your letter," she said. "I am sorry that this should have happened. Sarah, I should like to have a word with you," she added grimly.

And while Sarah, crimson with wrath and humiliation, stood glaring at her, Stella, with a cool nod of the head, swept on her heel.

Why? For, obviously, that had been Sarah's motive. As one, they looked towards Brenda, inviting explanation. Brenda, however, seemed impervious to their glances.

She stood near the letter-rack, the letter open, and she was reading it with a frown upon her wrinkled brow, Bessie Bunter hovering anxiously near. She looked up suddenly, thrusting the letter into her pocket.

Bessie smirked. "Oh, Brenda! I sus-say, Brenda, I told you the letter was in the rack, didn't I? Was there a remittance in it?"

"No," Brenda said shortly, and turned on her heel and quitted the hall.

"Not," Jemima said, "what one might call communicative—what?"

But to be communicative was not Brenda's way. All the same, that letter seemed to have worried her a little. She was looking distinctly perturbed as she wended her way back to Stella's study, there to meet a flaming-faced Sarah Harrigan, who was just emerging from that apartment. She glared at Brenda, paused, as if to say something, and then, tightening her lips, walked on.

Letter in hand, Brenda knocked at Stella's door.

Stella, just settling down to work, sighed.

"Yes? Come in! Oh, hallo, Brenda! What's the matter?"

Brenda shook her head.

"Stella, you did say I was to come to you if ever I was in a difficulty?"

"Why, yes," Stella eyed her askance. "What is it?"

"This," Brenda said, and produced the letter.

Stella gazed at her wonderingly. She looked at her work—such piles of it all ready waiting to be embarked upon! She took the letter, however.

It was from Mrs. Briggs, of Court-field. Stella read it through and started. Her lips compressed a little.

"So this is why Sarah was so anxious to obtain possession of it?"

"Yes," Brenda said.

"Apparently," Stella said, gazing at the letter again. "A Cliff House girl saved the life of Mrs. Briggs' daughter while they were on holiday. The girl, whoever she was, disappeared immediately after the rescue. Mrs. Briggs advertised for her, saying that she would be suitably rewarded. And, apparently," Stella said, "you saw the whole thing, Brenda."

Brenda nodded.

"Yes; I was standing on the cliffs. I couldn't do a thing, of course—I was too far away. The Cliff House girl, whoever she was, was in a boat. I must say it was jolly plucky the way she dived in after the girl and got her to the shore. I saw the whole thing—a girl with light-coloured hair, it was."

"Yes?" Stella said.

"Then"—Brenda shrugged—"as soon as the Cliff House girl had brought the other girl in, she jumped in her boat again and rowed out to sea. The next thing that happened was that Mrs. Briggs advertised for the name of the rescuer, promising her a hundred pounds reward. She also asked in the advert that anyone who had seen the rescue should come forward."

"Well"—Brenda shook her head—"I wrote to her, but I didn't go to see her. That is why she has written this letter to me, asking me to go as soon as possible."

"But," Stella said, and her frown was very deep, "apparently Sarah

Harrigan went to see her. Sarah claimed the reward, saying that she was the girl. Sarah was staying at the same place. How do you know it wasn't her, Brenda?"

"Because," Brenda said contemptuously. "I had been talking to Sarah only two minutes before it all happened. Sarah couldn't even have got down to the beach in that time, never mind being a quarter of a mile out at sea in a rowing-boat. Apart from which," Brenda added calmly, "I saw Sarah not more than five minutes after the rescue, running along the front, and she wasn't even wet."

Stella bit her lip. She gazed at the letter again—or one particular paragraph.

That paragraph read:

"Sarah Harrigan, of your school, has claimed the reward, but my daughter does not recognise her as being the girl who saved her, and very naturally we would like to make sure of her identity before we hand over the reward."

"As you were the only witness to this happening, we have decided to make the award on your word. Will you, therefore, come as soon as you can?"

"You are going?" Stella asked.

Brenda made a disinterested move. "Oh, I suppose so—when I've time," she replied. "I wasn't really going to bother at all, but after the way Sarah treated me—"

"Brenda," Stella said quietly, "I want you to go! This mustn't be allowed to happen. Supposing Sarah did claim that money, and then the real heroine came forward? A nice disgrace for the school that would be! No, Brenda, it's your duty to go. What is more, you must go as soon as possible."

She sat down at her desk, scribbled out a pass, and handed it to her charge.

"There's the necessary pass," she said. "That allows you to absent yourself from the school this evening between half-past five and half-past seven. Please go—to please me!"

Brenda smiled. Worship was in her eyes. With a little fuss, she took the pass and put it in her pocket. She went out, leaving Stella to her interrupted studies.

She was passing Sarah's study when the door came open and its owner appeared.

Sarah's eyes were glinting feverishly.

"Brenda, here! I say, wait a minute!" she cried. "I want you!"

But Brenda was not waiting. She wanted no more scenes with Sarah. She took to her heels.

Sarah gazed after her in fury, for a moment quite plainly toying with the idea of pursuit. But pursuit, after the humiliation Stella had already inflicted upon her, might bring upon her head further repercussions, and, tightening her thin lips, Sarah went back.

She scowled sourly at the desk at which she had been sitting. That desk, like Stella's table, was littered.

Not with notes or books, but with letters, envelopes, numerous bills, and debts which Sarah had collected during her last term at Cliff House, and in which her creditors were rather threateningly pressing for payment.

Once again Sarah glanced at the notes of the amounts. Twenty-two pounds! The worst of it was, those



## Sarah's Secret!

"AND that," Clara Trevlyn opined grimly, as Sarah furiously strode off in Stella's wake, "is the stuff to give 'em! I hope Stella gives her a jolly good wiggling!" "But why," Babs asked, "should Sarah want to steal Brenda's letter?"

were not the only bills. She was expecting others.

And, apart from five shillings, she had not a penny in the world!

Rather desperate was the look on Sarah's face as savagely she swept those papers into a drawer. Where to get that money—how to get it?

She had been hoping against hope for a cheque from her father, but her father had very bitterly reminded her that, with his own business in none too flourishing a condition, he could not allow her a single extra penny piece.

She saw the dreadful danger looming ahead of her. Sooner or later her creditors, fed-up with writing to her, would write to Primmy. And then—

Sarah's face was pale. No, no! She must get the money somehow. She must! If it hadn't been for this girl, Brenda Fallace, it would have been as good as hers now. Yes, and more than that, she would be left with a comfortable balance to indulge the extravagances that the new term must bring with it.

Why must that fool have seen the rescue and written to Mrs. Briggs at Herne Bay?

For Sarah, of course, had no more to do with that rescue than Brenda herself. Sarah was no heroine. It is doubtful, even if she had been in the position of the girl in the boat, whether she would have risked a ducking to save the other.

There had, however, been no risk in claiming that reward. For Sarah knew very well the identity of the girl to whom it should have gone—Sarah's own cousin, Betty Lang, who, as it happened, had been stopping with Sarah at the hotel in Herne Bay, and who had been wearing Sarah's own Cliff House clothes when she had saved Molly Briggs.

Betty actually was not supposed to be at Herne Bay. She was not supposed to be in England at all. For Betty attended a convent school in Brittany. She was supposed to have been at the convent school when she had effected that rescue. Not Betty to endanger herself by coming forward to claim that reward! The less Betty heard about it, the better. So, from that point of view, there had been no danger for Sarah. As Sarah saw it, it was a hundred pounds going begging!

And now the Briggs' had written to Brenda. Sarah had recognised Mrs. Briggs' handwriting. What was in that letter? What had they said to her?

But never mind. A flash came into her eyes. The battle wasn't lost yet. Brenda, she knew, had not actually seen the Briggs.

A rather grim smile came to her face as she remembered that for the second period of afternoon lessons she was taking the Fourth Form. That duty devolved upon her and Stella until Miss Charmant's return. Miss Charmant at the moment being in Egypt where she was spending a protracted holiday.



Tyrant of the School

THE dinner-bell went, and Sarah Harrigan, with the rest of the prefects, trailed off into the prefects' room to partake of the midday meal. She caught a look from



EMERGING from the wood, Brenda came suddenly face to face with Stella. "Where have you been?" the Head Girl demanded. "Do you know that Sarah has reported you to me—for being out after hours?"

Stella as she entered—a rather contemptuous look it was, and scowled blackly in response.

The meal finished, Stella rose first. With sweeping grace she crossed the floor and went out, leaving Sarah still sulkily toying with her sweet.

But Stella did not go to her own study, where her work called. Stella, apart from her studies, was still worried about Brenda. She made her way to the Fourth Form corridor and tapped at the door of Study No. 4.

Babs and Mabs were there, gathering their books together in preparation for the afternoon session. Bessie, as usual, was at the tuckshop, valiantly but unavailingly trying to persuade Aunty Jones, the good dame who owned that establishment, to let her have two ounces of bulls-eyes "on tick."

The two looked up at Stella's entry. A flush of pleasure rushed into Babs' cheeks.

"Oh, Stella—"  
"Barbara, and you, Mabel—"  
Rather seriously Stella came into the room. "I want to talk to you for a few minutes," she said, "about Brenda."

"Oh!" said Babs.  
"I know she's not a friend of yours—"

Babs turned pink.

"Oh, Stella—"

"I know," Stella smiled. "Don't explain, Barbara. But—"

And she paused. "It's rather difficult," she said, "to say what I've come to say to you, I suppose. But I might as well tell the story from start to finish. You know, perhaps, that this might be my last term at Cliff House?"

"Oh, Stella!" Both girls gasped dismayedly at once.

The captain smiled fondly.

"It's a fact! I'm glad in a way—at least, I shall be glad if what I've set my mind on comes off."

And then, while they listened, she told them about the veterinary diploma, the work she must crowd in, how pleased

she would be to get her position, but how worried she was about Brenda.

"I feel," she added, "that if I can only get someone to keep an eye upon Brenda, that I shall be much happier. She's a good girl really, but—well, Barbara, you know just as much about her as I can tell you. Barbara and you, Mabel, have done me a great many favours in the past. I hate to ask you another, but the truth is, I'm worried. It will be serious for Brenda if she has earned black marks at the end of the term. You're more in contact with her than I am. I wonder"—and Stella turned—"Barbara, would you—and Mabs—keep an eye on her for me?"

Of course they would! Stella was the heroine of every nice girl in the Lower School. Whatever Stella asked became immediate law.

But Babs and Mabs glanced at each other when she had gone, realising full well that they had not taken on the happiest of tasks. One thing it was to promise Stella, but entirely another thing to manage a girl of Brenda's obstinacy.

"Still," Babs said, "she's given her promise to Stella. That should make it easier. Anyway, we're not going to let old Stella down."

Perhaps the rumour of Stella's future got around, for the Fourth was unusually docile when Stella took them at lessons. The first period of afternoon lessons was really remarkable for the magnificent behaviour of the Form.

Afternoon break, and all the talk was of Stella; how beastly to be losing her, etc. How everyone hoped that she would get her diploma and come through with flying colours. A happy period that first.

But how different the second!

Sarah Harrigan took that, and it was apparent from the moment she set foot in the class-room that Sarah was looking for trouble.

"Jemima, twenty lines for playing with your egress! Bessie Bunter, fifty lines for eating sweets in class! Clara

Trvlyn, twenty lines for shuffling your feet! Barbara Redfern—"

"Yes, Sarah?"

"Take twenty lines for not having my chalks out. Brenda Fallace!"

Brenda looked up sulkily.

"Well?" she asked.

"That's not the way to speak to me," Sarah said tersely. "Take twenty lines for insolence, and another twenty for reading under the desk."

"But I wasn't reading!" objected Brenda.

"Take another twenty for answering me back!"

"But I tell—"

"Another word, and I shall send you to the headmistress!"

"Brenda!" Babs, next to her, whispered.

"But I wasn't—"

"Oh, goodness, never mind!" Babs plucked her arm. "Can't you see, chump, she's just making a set at you? She wants to rile you. Let her get on with it."

"Now," said Sarah, "get out your trigonometry books."

Really, that was unfair. Trigonometry was not Sarah's subject, in any case. It was Miss Bullivant's, but Sarah obviously selected it because it was the most hated lesson in the Form, and really because she knew that Brenda was the veriest duffer at it—as bad as Bessie Bunter.

The Form glowered.

"Now, Brenda," Sarah said spitefully, "I'm going to see how much you know. And for every wrong answer you get ten lines. Stand up!"

Brenda stood up. She started. Sarah fired questions—really they were outrageous questions. Even Diana Royston-Clarke, who had the reputation of being the best mathematician in the Form, looked rather overwhelmed at some of them. Brenda's collection of lines piled up.

"That will do," Sarah snapped, when Brenda, richer by another hundred lines, and flushed with humiliation, sat down. "Your lack of knowledge is deplorable—most deplorable," she added. "What you require, Brenda Fallace, is a little extra tuition," she added meaningly. "And I shall be pleased to give it to you. Come to my study for half an hour's maths immediately after tea."

Brenda's eyes gleamed.

"Look here—"

"And don't glare! Sit down!" Sarah rapped.

But Brenda remained on her feet. Her face was red with wrath. The old stubborn look was on her face. She drew a deep breath.

"I tell you—"

"Brenda," Babs hissed, "for goodness sake sit down!"

"One more word, Brenda, and I shall take you to Miss Primrose," Sarah said. "And remember—half-past five. If you don't turn up, I shall report you at once for black marks."

Brenda gritted her teeth. Plucked by the anxious Babs, she sat down. The lesson was resumed in an atmosphere of angry tension. Sarah was on the war-path with a vengeance. It seemed as if all her dislike of the Fourth Form crystallised that afternoon into spiteful hate.

Hardly a girl but was not richer by lines when the bell that signalled the end of lessons went. Hardly a girl who was not on the point of throwing something at the prefect. Brenda, however, was almost exploding.

"The beast!" she grated between her teeth. "She's jolly well got her knife into me. Go to her study, will I? I'll see her in Timbuctoo first!"

"Now, Brenda—" Babs paused.

"Eh? Who the dickens asked you to put your oar in?"

"Brenda," Babs said quietly, "please—please listen! Don't you realise, cuckoo, that Sarah would like you to disobey? Don't you see that she's just got it in for you? Oh, yes, we know! She's taking it out of you because of that letter, but, unfair as it is, she's got authority on her side. Brenda, you must go to her study."

"I'll see her blowed first," Brenda said.

"But she'll report you."

"I don't care!"

And she flounced away.

"My hat, nice job we've taken on," Mabs said. "Still, never mind. Give her time to simmer down. By half-past five she'll probably think better of it."

But would she? Babs, who knew Brenda, was not so sure. In rather anxious silence Babs and Mabs and Bessie had tea in Study No. 4. At twenty past five Babs rose.

"Come on!" she said.

"Where?"

"Brenda. We've got to see that she obeys Sarah. It's rotten and it's unfair, but Sarah's got the authority, and we're not letting that goose bang her head against a brick wall."

"They went to Study No. 3. Brenda was not there. They went to the Common-room. She was not there. Finally they found her mooning under the elms in the drive. She faced them as they came up.

"Brenda!"

"Oh, go away!" Brenda snapped.

"What about Sarah?"

"Hang Sarah!" Brenda's eyes blazed at the sound of the name.

Babs looked at Mabs. Mabs nodded. Together they stepped forward; together, gently but firmly, caught each of them one of Brenda's arms. Brenda glared.

"Brenda," Babs said, "don't struggle. I know you're strong, but you can't get away from both of us. You've got to listen to reason. Don't you see that you're giving Sarah the very opportunity she wants of hitting back at you?"

"I tell you I don't care," Brenda fumed.

"No?" Babs shrugged. "But someone else does," she reminded her quietly. "Stella! Brenda, you did promise Stella, didn't you, that you wouldn't earn black marks?"

Brenda started at that. She looked quickly at Babs; from her to Mabs.

"What do you know?"

"We know," Babs replied, "everything, old top. Stella has told us. We, like her, don't want to see you making a mess of things. So please be sensible," she added, and tugged at her arm. "Stiff upper lip, Brenda!"

Brenda scowled. But, all the same, she allowed herself to be led forward. With Mabs and Babs watchfully hovering at her side, she tramped modify into the school and up the Sixth Form corridor. Straight to Sarah Harrigan's study they went. Babs knocked on the door.

Sarah opened it.

"Oh, so you've come," she said to Brenda. "Well, come in. Barbara and you, Mabel, you can go. Now, Brenda," she added, and following that seething girl into the study, turned and faced her. "Sit down," she smiled, with a surprisingly cordial change of front.

"Look here—" Brenda said.

"Sit down," Sarah murmured, and most amazing was the change which had overcome her. To Brenda's stupefaction,

she was actually smiling. "Sit down," she repeated. "Here, have a sweet."

Brenda blinked.

"I say, what's the game? I thought you wanted me."

Sarah laughed.

"So I do," she replied. "But that's not to say we need go on being bad friends, is it? I can have my little jokes as you have yours. Sit down," she invited again.

But Brenda did not sit down. She glowered suspiciously. She was not deceived.

"Thanks, I'll stand up," she replied. "Let's get on with it if we must."

"Well," Brenda said contemptuously, "talk!"

"About that letter. Have you still got it?"

"I have!"

"Brenda," said Sarah, and now the cordiality had died from her face. There was a threat in it—a lowering look which actually made Brenda feel more comfortable, for this was the Sarah she had come prepared for. "Brenda, I made it hot for you in class this afternoon, didn't I?"

Brenda glared.

"I gave you—let me see—about a hundred and twenty lines, didn't I? Not bad for an afternoon," she mocked. "To-morrow I shall be taking you again, and the next day, and the day after that. You don't want to keep on getting lines, do you, Brenda, and perhaps a few gatings and reports thrown in?"

Brenda's face grew sharp.

"But," Sarah went on, "there's no need to you, know. As a matter of fact, Brenda, I've decided to cancel the lines I gave you this afternoon. To-morrow and the next day, and the next—well, while I'm in charge of the class I promise you I won't ask you a single question, and you can do just whatever you like—within reason, of course," she added hastily.

Brenda blinked.

"You see," Sarah smiled silkily, "what a good time you can have if only you'll do as I say. And it's easy enough, Brenda—dead easy! Now, listen—and here a hiss came into her voice—"I don't want to make your life a misery to you, and I shan't if you'll do as I say. And that"—her eyes narrowed—"first give me that letter you got from the Briggs' at break."

Brenda stiffened.

"And secondly," Sarah continued, "give your solemn word of honour that you'll have nothing to do with the Briggs' at all. Not much to ask, is it?"

But apparently Brenda thought otherwise. Her eyes flashed, her lips curled. She was thinking in that moment of Stella,—perhaps, to Sarah's discredit, drawing a clumsy mental comparison between the two. The sneer that came to her face caused Sarah to scowl a little.

"And is that all?"

"That's all."

"Well," said Brenda, "you can jolly well go and eat coke!" And contemptuously she turned.

Sarah's face turned livid. Terrific the fury which boiled up in her now. She had been so sure of either frightening Brenda into submission, or cowering her. She hadn't dreamt of failure. The contempt of that gesture; the fact that the most stupid girl in the Fourth could treat her like that!

Sarah quivered.

"Brenda!" she choked.

And, with a rush, she was across the

study. Brenda wheeled, and then, as she saw that look upon the prefect's face, defensively one arm came up. In trepidation, she backed away.

Alas! for Brenda. She did not see the bookcase behind her—did not realize that she had cannoned right into it until the rickety structure swayed and crashed. A shower of books came hurtling down upon her. Sarah almost screamed.

"You fool! You fool! Now look what you've done! Take five hundred lines! Five hundred—do you hear? Add them to the rest! And come back!"

In the next study Stella, working away, heard that crash—heard Sarah's screeching voice. She rose to her feet.

Very quietly she stepped into the corridor, very quietly opened the door of Sarah's room. Sarah, her face red and vindictive, was confronting the no less angry Brenda. Brenda's eyes were blazing.

"I tell you I won't do them!" Sarah bit out. "And I tell you you will!" Sarah bit out. "Look at the havoc you've—"

And then suddenly she looked up. She saw Stella, stern-faced and very grim, standing there. "Well, here you are!" she cried. "Here's your lovely Stella!"

"What is this?" Stella asked.

"I've given her five hundred lines for upsetting my bookcase!"

"She went for me!" Brenda blazed.

"Oh, please—please!" Stella cried. "Now, one at a time!" And she listened to both their stories. "I see!" she said quietly. "I am sorry, Brenda, that you should have thought fit to be impudent to Sarah. All the same, it sounds to me as though you were provoked."

"I tell you it's lies!" Sarah cried.

"Thank you! Perhaps," Stella replied tartly, "I am the best judge of that! In any case, Sarah, you are exceeding your authority. You know as well as I do that the maximum number of lines you can give one girl in a day is a hundred. Brenda, you will do twenty-five lines! Sarah, if you wish to take this matter further, we will go to the headmistress!"

But Sarah, very naturally, did not wish to take the matter further. She glared belligerent hate at the captain.

"And if," Stella said to Brenda, "you are going to see Mrs. Briggs, you had better cut off now, Brenda."

Sarah started.

"If what?"

"I was speaking to Brenda!" Stella said coldly.

"But"—Sarah stood quivering—"how can she go to Mrs. Briggs? She hasn't got a pass!"

"Your mistake!" Stella retorted. "I gave her one at break. Well, Sarah, have you anything to say about that?"

But Sarah hadn't. She was standing, dumbfounded, stricken, for once bereft of speech. Brenda was going—was going now—to rob her of that chance of getting the Briggs' reward! Stella, the six feet, had already fixed it with her! Stella—

The prefect choked as Stella, with one last glance towards her, pushed Brenda out of the study and closed the door.

"Yes."

"Oh!" Clara held her head on one side. "Well, some girls have all the luck!" she said. "Who gave you the pass?"

"Oh, what on earth does it matter to you?" Brenda said irritably. "Stella gave it to me."

And she picked up the gloves for which she had come into the Fourth Form Common-room.

Quite a few girls gazed at her enviously. Passes on the second day of term were hard to come by. Lydia Crossendale had tried, and failed. Elsie Effingham had tried, and had also failed.

Even Barbara Redfern, who had received a remittance by the afternoon's post, and was burning to spend it, had tried for herself and her chums; but passes, apparently, were at a premium. She gazed curiously at Brenda now.

"Going far?" she asked.

"Oh, leave me alone!" Brenda said irritably, and turned to the door.

Babs sighed. Brenda was not communicative. It was not in her nature to give confidences, however harmless those confidences might be. Similarly it was not her way to probe into other people's business, however intriguing that business might be. Brenda had not the slightest interest in anybody's affairs but her own, and at times precious little interest in those, it seemed. She turned towards the door.

It opened before she reached it. Sarah Harrigan stood there.

"Oh!" she said, and her eyes narrowed. "Going out?" she asked.

"You know I am!"

"Do I?" Sarah smiled savagely. "That's just what I don't know," she said. "I gave you lines in class this afternoon, Brenda! Where are they?"

Brenda stiffened.

"I haven't done them."

"Why not?"

"Because," Brenda returned, "you gave me no time to have them in by."

There was a murmur. In giving that answer Brenda voiced a sentiment shared by the whole Form.

"And so," Sarah snarled, "without having done those lines, you're going out! Well, we'll see about that! My orders are that you do your lines first, and until you have done them," she added, stretching forward a hand, "I'll keep your pass!"

Brenda drew back at that. Among the girls there was a murmur. Babs' face lightened a little. Clara's jaw squared. Instinctively they stepped nearer.

"You hear, Brenda?" Sarah rapped fearlessly. "Yes, I hear!" Brenda replied fearlessly. "But I'm not handing over that pass! Stella gave it to me!"

There was a stiffening of attitudes now. Every eye was fixed on the domineering prefect.

It had ceased to be a private quarrel between Sarah and Brenda. The rights of a Fourth Former were a Form matter, and, in defending their rights, the Form could always be trusted to stick together. They looked to Babs for a lead, and Babs, as usual, did not fail them. She said distinctly:

"If Stella gave Brenda that pass, then nobody except Stella has the right to cancel it!"

"You dare to talk to me?" Sarah rapped.

"And since," Babs went on, as if the interruption had not occurred, "it is apparent that Brenda will not get justice from you, I am going to fetch Stella!"

"Wait—"

But Babs did not wait. There was a



TENSELY Babs and Brenda faced each other. "You're not going to break bounds!" Babs whispered. Fiercely came the other's reply: "I am!"



### The Trap in the Wood

"HALLO! Hallo!" Clara Trevlyn cried. "Whoa, there, Brenda! Whither going?"

"Out!" returned Brenda

Fallace.

"Got a pass?"

little cheer as she walked out. In two minutes she was back again with Stella, Stella looking decidedly angry this time. Sarah stiffened as she came in.

"Sarah, for the last time," Stella said, "will you please cease to interfere. I gave that pass to Brenda. None but myself can take it away. You are exceeding your authority altogether."

"There was a titter. Good old Stella! "These girls have their rights," Stella went on bitingly. "When they are granted a privilege, that privilege is to be respected. Brenda, you will go now! Sarah, since you appear to have nothing else to do, will you prepare the blackboard exercises for the Third Form?"

Sarah stood crimson with humiliation, her eyes flashing hate. Brenda, with a scowl, brushed past her and went out. For a moment perfect and captain stood face to face, eyeing each other. Sarah, apparently on the verge of mutiny, Stella self-possessed and very dignified.

For one long moment they stared at each other. Then Sarah's eyes fell before the steady gaze of her senior. Without another word she disappeared.

**B**UT SARAH did not go to the Third Form classroom, despite the order she had been given.

Sarah was fuming. In a terrific paddy was the prefect of the Sixth, but for the moment, even greater than her set-back at Stella's hands, was the terrifying thought of Brenda—Brenda going to Courtfield to tell the Briggs' what she knew and by doing that, ruining irrevocably her, Sarah's, chances of claiming the hundred pounds reward. At all and any cost, Brenda must be stopped. She would stop her!

So, instead of going off to obey orders, Sarah hurried off to the cycle-sheds. There was no bus service to-day, and she guessed that Brenda, who did not possess a cycle, would take the short cut through the woods. Already she had thought of her scheme and made up her mind.

Sarah's eyes feverishly glittered. There was a look of fierce determination upon her thin features. She wheeled the machine outside, snatched up a length of thin rope that hung behind the door and, wheeling her machine out into the road, mounted it and took the road that skirted the woods on the Pegg side.

Six or seven minutes hard riding brought her to the outer edge of the wood near the old woodman's hut. There hurriedly she flung herself from her cycle, hiding it in the undergrowth.

Now—

Anxiously she gazed along the path. Brenda was not yet in sight. The path was narrow here, flanked by two rows of tall trees whose spreading branches made the light very dim and gloomy beneath them. In a trice Sarah had stretched the rope across it, fastening it securely to the boles of two of the trees. Then, a little breathless, she plunged into the undergrowth and waited.

Would Brenda come this way?

In less than two minutes that question was answered. There were footsteps farther along the path. Sarah's breath hissed sharply from her lips as Brenda, without any great haste, came into view. She was walking slowly because it was hot and, as usual, looking vacantly ahead. She did not see the rope stretched in front of her, did not realise until—

"Oh!" gasped Brenda.

And, catching her foot against the rope, she went sprawling.

That was Sarah's cue. Like a panther

she leapt from her hiding-place. Almost before Brenda had touched the ground, she was on her, had caught her round the shoulders, was lunging her forcibly and fiercely towards the woodman's hut.

Brenda, too late, turned. She caught just one glimpse of Sarah as that girl, panting heavily, shut the door on her, slipped the heavy bolt on the outside and, taking to her heels, reached her hidden machine and pedalled off as fast as her legs would carry her.

In a quarter of an hour she had reached Courtfield. In twenty minutes was knocking on the door of the Briggs' house. But her visit availed her nothing. Mrs. Briggs kindly but firmly told Sarah that she would do nothing about the reward until she had seen Brenda Fallace.

Sarah, hiding her true feelings, left after a few minutes.

Brenda! Brenda! How she loathed that girl! Once Brenda gave her version of the rescue—

Sarah fumed all the way back to Cliff House. Well, she hadn't given up hope yet. She'd find a way—she'd find a way!

What quarter of an hour before call-over she reached Cliff House, stowed her bicycle away in the shed and went into the school. It was the prep interval then, everyone busy at work in classroom or study.

Nobody saw her come in and, slipping along to her own room, she made a hasty toilet and then went down to Big Hall to collect the Fourth Form register. Call-over sounded; the girls tramped in. Sarah scowled over the faces of the Fourth.

"Now quiet, pay attention," she ordered, "while I call the register." And she proceeded to call out the names, looking up sharply at each name, to scan the face of the replier.

In the Fourth Form ranks, however, an undercurrent of excitement was manifest. Babs & Co. had just discovered one absentee. Brenda Fallace!

"Oh, my hat, this means trouble!" Babs breathed. "But wait, I'll answer."

"Carstairs, Cartwright, Charmant, Crossendale, Eflingham"—the list droned on. Babs stiffened.

"Brenda Fallace!" Sarah snapped.

"Adsum!" Babs answered, assuming Brenda's voice.

"Brenda Fallace, I said," Sarah returned with a glare. "I saw you, Barbara Redfern. Take twenty lines for answering another girl's name. Where is Brenda?"

But Brenda, obviously, was not there. Babs crimsoned with confusion. Inwardly, she groaned.

"Please, Sarah, Brenda went out with a pass," Janet Jordan volunteered.

"The pass," Sarah bitterly replied, "was only available until half-past seven. It is now eight—"

And, with a vicious flick of her wrist, she scored a mark against Brenda's name.

The register was called. Miss Primrose's orders for the morrow were read, and Sarah, book under her arm, went off to find Stella, to whom, as acting mistress in Miss Charmant's place, she must now report Brenda's absence. Stella looked worried.

"You're sure she hasn't returned?"

"Well, she wasn't at call-over," Sarah said, making no attempt to hide her satisfaction.

"You have no idea what has happened to her?"

"Why should I have any idea?" Sarah asked scornfully. "You gave her the pass, didn't you? If anybody's got any idea it should be yours!"

"Thanks!" Stella said, freezing. "All

right. You may leave the matter with me."

Sarah grinned. She went out. She knew, of course, where Brenda was, but she wasn't afraid.

Nobody had seen her go out. Nobody had seen her come back. If Brenda were aware of the identity of her attacker, then all she had to do was to deny it. And just to make it appear that she had done extremely busy all the evening, she dug out the play upon which she had been working last term and strewed the sheets over her desk.

In the next room she heard Stella pacing the floor. Worried, Stella was—about her work, and about Brenda. She heard her go out presently, and call down the corridor. It was Pansy Carter, of the Third Form, who answered the call. Sarah heard Stella say quite distinctly:

"Find Barbara Redfern, and send her to me."

Sarah grinned.

In a few minutes Barbara came. By applying her ear to the wall Sarah heard everything that went on. Barbara, of course, was being questioned as to Brenda's movements. But Babs, for one, could not help.

"Sarah will report her," Stella said. "Sarah's looking for an opportunity to get even with her, and once she is reported, that will mean the first black mark."

Sarah's eyes gleamed. She pricked up her ears.

"Shall I phone the Briggs?" Babs asked.

"No good. I've thought of that. They're not in the phone book, so can't be connected. Never mind. But please say nothing, Barbara. I should hate this to come to Miss Primrose's ears. I'll walk down the gates and see her as soon as she comes in."

Quite distracted, Stella sounded. Sarah Harrigan chuckled slyly. So Stella was very, very anxious, for some reason, that Brenda should not get black marks, was she? That was worth remembering, Sarah thought.

Stella, greatly troubled, left her study and walked down to the gates.

Piper, the porter, was just coming out of his lodge to look up. He paused as he saw Stella lounging there, anxiously looking up and down the road.

"Which it's time to look up, Miss Stella."

"I know, but wait a few minutes," Stella begged him. "One of the girls is absent. Nothing for you to worry about, of course. I'll attend to her as soon as she comes in. I'll stop a few moments."

"Yes, miss."

And Piper, with a shrug—for Stella's authority, of course, deprived him of all responsibility in the matter—returned to his lodge.

Where was Brenda?

Stella bit her lip. She couldn't believe that Brenda had wilfully stopped out. Brenda might be obstinate, foolish, forgetful, but Brenda had given her a promise, and Stella knew that she would respect that promise. But why on earth, if she had been detained, had she not phoned her? Why—

A rustling in the bushes of Friardale Woods, on the other side of the road, caused her to look up sharply. And then she gave a cry.

"Brenda!"

Brenda it was—a Brenda very furious, very dusty, with hands red and raw, resulting from her repeated onslaughts upon the door of the hut, which for the last two hours had been her prison. Stella stared at her.

"Brenda, where have you been? You



know that you have been reported to me?"

Brenda glared.

"Who reported me?"

"Why, Sarah!"

"Yes, she would. That is why she did it," Brenda retorted hotly. "Well, I'm jolly well going to report Sarah now. Because she added violently, "it was her fault that I am late!"

And she went on furiously to relate what had happened in the woods.

Stella looked startled.

"Brenda, you're sure?"

"Of course I'm sure!" Brenda exclaimed. "Look at me! I tell you I saw her—saw her plainly. Stella, you don't think I'd tell fibs, do you?"

Stella's lips compressed. Her eyes gleamed. What a cowardly trick to have played! But why had she played it? Brenda, who never looked farther than her nose, thought that Sarah's motive was one of pure revenge, but Stella, thinking of the purpose for which she had given Brenda that pass, of Sarah's efforts to prevent Brenda's going, had another idea.

She sighed worriedly. In addition to the unpleasantness of the affair, there was the alarming thought that all this upset was hindering her "svotting."

She dismissed Brenda there and then. Straight to Sarah's study she went. Sarah was in the act of making out the report of Brenda's absence.

"Thank you, but I'll take charge of that," Stella said icily. "Brenda is in, Sarah."

Sarah braced herself. Her eyes did not flicker as she met the steely, accusing glance of the school captain.

"Oh," she said, "and what reason did she give for being late?"

"You should know."

"I?"

"Yes, you! And Stella's anger flamed out. "That was a despicable trick to play. Sarah—a despicable trick! I thought even you would have had more decency."

The blood rushed up to Sarah's cheeks. She made a motion with her hands as if to stay the other's tirade.

"Wait a minute!" she cried. "Wait a minute! What's this? You may be captain of the school, Stella Stone, but that doesn't allow you to come and insult me. About what should I have had more decency?"

"You didn't, of course," Stella asked bitingly, "shut Brenda up in the woodman's hut in Friarade Woods?"

"I did not. Has Brenda told you that?"

"She has."

"And you believe her?" Sarah asked bluntly.

"I do."

"Oh!" Sarah showed her teeth. Her quick ears had detected a step in the passage. "Right! Then let me tell you this, Stella Stone. You've been pretty free with your accusations. Now let me tell you a few things. I haven't been out of this school since tea. I've been working there—and she waved a hand towards her work. "You're making this up. You know jolly well it's my duty to report Brenda to the Head, and because she's your uncle's ward you don't want me to report her. But if," Sarah cried passionately, seeing the shadow which had loomed up in the doorway, "it had been any other girl, you would report her like a shot. You accuse me of having a down on Brenda. Right! I accuse you of showing Brenda favouritism."

"Bless my soul, what is this?" exclaimed a voice. "Favouritism—Stella!" And Miss Primrose, her face a little grim, stepped into the room, gaz-

ing first at one and then at the other.

"Sarah, what was that I heard you say?"

Stella fell back.

"I said," Sarah exclaimed distinctly, "that Stella is showing Brenda Fallace favouritism. Brenda was absent from call-over to-night. Stella did not want to report her. Brenda and Stella between them"—and here Sarah's face assumed an expression of righteous indignation—"have made up a story that I attacked Brenda in the woods and shut her in a hut."

"What?" Miss Primrose's gaze fastened upon Stella. "Stella, is this true?"

Stella paused. She flashed a look of bitter contempt at her rival. Nobody heard the subdued cough at the door, nobody saw for the moment the face which peered in—the face of Barbara Redfern of the Fourth Form, who had brought to Sarah the lines which that prefect had inflicted upon her in class during the afternoon. Stella gulped.

"It is true!" she said.

"But—my goodness gracious! Stella, you must have some foundation for such an accusation?"

"I have," Stella said—"Brenda's word!"

"The word," Sarah scornfully put in, "of a girl who is already a well-known fibber. Miss Primrose, I am sorry! I do not wish to complain, but I really feel that this has gone far enough. For some reason Stella is shielding Brenda—yes, and not only shielding Brenda, but humiliating her subordinates in so doing. This evening Brenda came into this room. She insulted me. She upset my bookcase. I gave her lines—"

Miss Primrose set her lips.

"Yes?"

"Stella interfered," Sarah went on. "Stella immediately reduced the lines I had given her. Apart from that, Stella granted her a pass-out—a pass to a girl who was in disgrace. I attempted to intervene when Brenda was going out. Again Stella interfered, insisting that Brenda was right in not doing her lines first. The position," Sarah added, "is becoming intolerable, Miss Primrose. More than once to-day I have thought of coming to you and offering my resignation."

She stopped. Stella stood very upright, but pale of face. Miss Primrose looked dazed.

"Stella, what do you say about this?"

Stella returned a steady gaze. Babs outside, aching to interfere, clenched her hands.

"I can only say that Sarah has distorted the facts," the head girl replied.

"I see," Miss Primrose's lips compressed a little. She shook her head. Sarah triumphantly grinned at her rival. "I think," she added, "we had better thrash this out before it goes any further. I cannot and will not tolerate this warring spirit among my prefects. Sarah, will you go along to my study, please? Stella, will you accompany her?"

She nodded to them both. Then she went towards the door.



Sarah the Schemer

"ROTTER!" "Sarah's a cat!" "Something ought to be done about it!"

Thus Babs, Mabs, and Clara five minutes later.

They stood at the corner of the passage which led to Miss Primrose's study. They had been standing there, indeed, ever since Babs had warned Mabs and Clara that Stella, in for a wiggling, had been summoned to Miss Primrose's study.

Then at last the door had opened. Stella, white as a sheet, her eyes burning, but her pretty head held proudly erect, had emerged. Easy to see that Stella had got the worst of things.

Without a word, almost without noticing them, she passed the chums. A minute later out had come Sarah—Sarah, a smug, victorious smile upon her face, her whole expression indicating satisfaction.

She had not passed the chums. She had turned the other way, striding off down the corridor that led out into the gymnasium.

"It's Sarah's crow," Clara Trevlyn said savagely.

Obvious, that. But what could they do about it? Silly of Babs to worry herself, of course, but she had a feeling that she had failed Stella. Stella, out of her solicitude for Brenda, had tried to save her from earning that black mark. Brenda quite patently was booked for the black mark, and Stella in consequence humiliated. Somehow, Babs told herself, they should have prevented it all happening. One of them ought to have gone with Brenda. One of them—

Her thoughts were interrupted by the arrival at the moment of Brenda herself. She reached Babs & Co., glancing at them quickly.

"Hallo!" she said. "Have you seen Stella?"

"Looking for her?" Clara asked.

"Lydia said that she was on the carpet. Lydia said," Brenda continued, "that she and Sarah were summoned to Primmy's room."

"And you know why?"

"No!"

"Well," Babs said, "because of you." And she went on to explain. At least, she explained what she knew. Brenda's heavy face became dark.

"And Stella got the wiggling?" she asked. "Stella—through sticking up for me! Why didn't Primmy call me?" she asked wildly. "Why didn't she ask me for an explanation? It's not fair."

And she turned furiously, to vanish along the corridor.

Babs sighed.

"Now what's she going to do?" she asked.

But even Brenda didn't know that. One thought—and one only—occupied her mind. Stella was in Miss Primrose's bad books; Stella had courted the headmistress's displeasure through sticking up for her against Sarah.

She found herself brooding upon Sarah, hatred and enmity working fiercely within her. If only she could have it out with Sarah!

The idea very rapidly became an obsession. It was obsessing her when, with the rest of the Form, she went up to bed; it tormented her when she was in bed, and at last she could stand it no longer. Suddenly, without having even thought about it, she threw her sheets aside and tiptoed out of the dormitory.

She clenched her hands as she tramped off down the darkened corridor; it was half an hour after lights-out then, but Sarah, she knew, would not yet have gone to bed.

Sarah had not; neither, for that matter, had Stella. Stella had her last duties to perform before retiring for the night, and at the same moment as Brenda, in the Fourth Form dormitory, was climbing out of bed, Stella was in

the act of entering Sarah Harrigan's study. That girl, flying at the pile of bills in front of her, scooped them all hurriedly under her blotting pad as Stella's knock sounded upon the door.

"Come in!" she snapped.

Stella, tense and tight-lipped, went in. Sarah sneered at sight of her.

"Well?"

"Sarah," Stella said slowly, "I have just been down to the Third Form classroom. I thought I asked you to prepare the Third Form blackboard lesson."

"I've been busy on other things," Sarah said.

"You know they are not done?"

"Of course I know it!" Sarah snapped. "What do you expect me to do about it? Rob myself of sleep and go and do them now? I've been busy on more important work."

Stella's lips compressed.

"I understand," she said. "Your more important work being making trouble for Brenda. I suppose that is what you were doing when you should have been carrying out my orders. Well, never mind. I'm much too tired for at other row with you, Sarah. I'll do them myself."

She went out, leaving Sarah scowling. Actually, Stella would have been within her rights to report Sarah for that, but Stella was tired of friction. The job had to be done, and, since it was her responsibility to see it done, the easier way of doing it was to execute the task herself.

Rather ruefully she swept off to the Third Form classroom. Once her back was turned, Sarah dragged out her bills again. Savagely she eyed them; desperate grew the look on her face. She must have money—she must!

Without ceremony the door opened. Brenda Fallace, her face inflamed, entered. Sarah jumped to her feet.

"Brenda!"

"I want to talk to you," said Brenda thickly.

"You know you have no right to be out of bed."

"Never mind what rights I've got," Brenda muttered. She stepped farther into the study, the intense expression upon her face causing even Sarah's heart to quail. "I want to know what you mean by getting Stella in disgrace."

Sarah paused. Like a bolt from the blue, the idea shot into her mind. She looked at Brenda keenly.

"Disgrace?" she said. "I don't understand."

"You jolly well——"

"Wait a minute!" Sarah's lips pursed. "Now, now! Please, Brenda," she said, "don't raise your voice. If it were found out that you had come here, you know there would be another black mark for you."

Brenda's eyes blazed.

"And a lot you'd worry about that, wouldn't you?" she cried.

"I should! It's because," Sarah stated calmly. "I have been worrying about it that all this has happened. Oh, don't look so stupid, Brenda! Try to reason things out. I know you think it was I who trapped you in the wood this afternoon, but I assure you that you were making a mistake. You think now that it was I who got Stella into trouble, because Stella was sticking up for you."

Brenda glared.

"Well, wasn't it?"

"On the contrary," Sarah said smoothly. How easy it was to handle this stupid girl! "On the contrary," she added, "if I had done my duty I should have reported you without any reference to Stella. I didn't want to report you. I was worried, if you must know, about Stella."

Brenda's smile was utterly disbelieving.

"You!" she scoffed.

"Yes, I," answered Sarah calmly. "Because, you see, I'd discovered that Stella was planning to break bounds to-night. She was going to see someone in Friardale, a friend of hers—Greta Marsh. It was because I was pleading with Stella not to go to see Greta that we had the flare-up in the study, and Miss Primrose came along. Well, I'm sorry!" Sarah shrugged. "I tried to stop Stella doing the foolish thing, but Stella has done it."

Brenda stared, her anger changing to alarm now. Was Sarah speaking the truth? Had Stella done this thing? In half an hour the headmistress would be on her rounds. Stella's absence would be discovered. Or was Sarah lying?

Any other girl but Brenda would have treated that story with the contempt it deserved, but Brenda was incapable of quick thinking. Perhaps she did not believe the good motive Sarah imputed to herself; but the thought that Stella might be breaking bounds and, therefore, courting trouble filled her with alarm and banished at once all her own red-hot anger.

Still, there was one way to prove that, and one way only. If Stella was in the school, Stella most certainly would be in her own room now. One searching look she gave Sarah, and then, without a word, stepped into the next room. Stella was not there.

Stella was out! Stella must be warned!

Brenda set her lips. Well, who could do that? Only one girl; that girl—herself. It mattered nothing to Brenda that she might get caught herself; Stella only counted.

Back to the Fourth Form dormitory Brenda went, her face white in the gloom. Stella—Oh, great goodness! If Stella knew the peril in which she stood! But she must be brought back! She must—

She groped for her clothes. A voice spoke from Barbara Redfern's bed:

"Brenda, is that you?"

Brenda, grimly dressing, did not reply.

"Brenda, you idiot, you're never going out!"

"Mind your own business!" Brenda snapped.

"But——"

Brenda did not reply. She dressed feverishly. Then, carrying her hat and shoes, she tiptoed towards the door.

She paused as Babs, leaping out of bed, confronted her.

"Brenda, you idiot, you're never going to break bounds! Where are you going?"

"Get out of my way!" Brenda said thickly, and savagely pushed.

Babs, taken unawares by that, went reeling backwards. In a moment Brenda was out of the room. Babs rushed to the door.

"Brenda!" she whispered.

The soft sound of Brenda's footsteps on the carpet of the corridor was her only answer.

Babs clenched her hands. What was the idiot up to now? Hadn't she had a big enough lesson already? Sarah Harrigan could not have gone to bed yet—the risk the chump was running! She was not asking for black marks—she was asking for expulsion!

Babs thought of Stella, of the promise she had given. Her lips compressed in the darkness. Her face set. She darted back into the dormitory.

"Mabs!" she whispered.

"Hallo!" Mabs answered sleepily. "Get up, quick! Wake Clara! Brenda's gone out!"

Mabs sat up with a jerk.

"Brenda? Why—what——"

"She's gone out!" Babs repeated breathlessly. "She's breaking bounds! But she's not going far! Wake Clara up. We're going after her!"

WHILE STELLA, having finished her task in the Third Form classroom, was returning to her study, Babs, Mabs, and Clara were creeping down the stairs. Stella, tired out—how her head was throbbing!—was visualising with gratefulness the prospect of a night's sleep, when the door of Sarah Harrigan's room opened and out popped Sarah herself.

"Stella," she breathed.

Stella stopped.

"Stella, I—I want to—to say I'm sorry—about what's happened," Sarah said hypocritically. "I've been thinking things over. I realise I rather put you in the wrong. But, of course, Brenda was mistaken about me attacking her. All the same, I'd like to make it up to you if I can."

"Thanks!" Stella said curtly.

"And—and——" Sarah shook her head. "I don't want to worry you, but I think you ought to know. Brenda's gone out!"

Stella jumped.

"You mean—breaking bounds?"

"Yes."

"But where," Stella exclaimed bewilderedly, "could the girl have gone?"

"Well, I—I don't know. But I did find this under the window," Sarah said, and produced a clipping, cut out of the "Courtfield Times," which advertised a dance at the Fishermen's Hall, in Pegg—the very opposite direction to that in which she had sent the unsuspecting Brenda.

Stella gave her a sharp glance. Sarah spoke convincingly, but she did not trust Sarah. All the same, her heart was thumping. Could this be true? Just to make sure, she went up to the Fourth Form dormitory.

There, groping her way towards Brenda's bed in the darkness, she realised the truth. Her blood seemed to run cold. Brenda had gone out!

Oh, the fool—the fool! This was courting expulsion!

Stella could almost have wept then. What a hopeless task the reformation of this girl was! Would she never realise her danger?

Brenda, for her own sake, must be brought back, and brought back at once! Who was to bring her back? And instantly the answer came. Only one girl—only one—herself!

If she were caught——

But Stella set her lips. She did not mean to be caught. Brenda, foolish child, was all that mattered now. Brenda did not know that Primmy was in Pegg. She did. Stella, flying back to her study, put on her coat and let herself out.

Her heart was thudding as she dropped over the window-sill in the lobby, her cheeks dyed with shame. She felt once again like a naughty junior. She—captain of the school—breaking bounds!

From the shadows of Big Hall, Sarah, concealed behind a suit of armour, watched her. She smiled cynically, as the captain dropped over the sill.

"And that," she muttered to herself, "settles your number, Stella Stone!



**BRENDA** was at her last gasp; and with a sudden spurt Babs and Clara were upon her. Somehow they were determined to make her return to Cliff House.

I think at last I've got the hold I want over both you and your stupid Brenda!"



**Out of Bounds**

Primmy's, too," Babs said. "Now tell us, you chump!"  
But Brenda refused to say. Knowledge that Stella was out of bounds silenced her lips. Fire, water and boiling oil would not have dragged Stella's secret from Brenda.

"Well, are you coming quietly?" Clara asked.  
"No, I'm not!"  
"Right-ho! Then it's force," Clara said calmly. "Drag her off, girls, I'll bring up the rear and give her a prod in the back every time she tries to break away. Now—one, two, three and off march we! Go!"

So Brenda, struggling, was forced to return. But inwardly she was fuming, Stella! Stella! Where was Stella? What was happening to her idol now? If she could only tell these fools the risk her idol was running—

Stella, meantime, had reached the Fishermen's Dance Hall. The dance was in progress, but it was sparsely attended. Anxious inquiries elicited the fact that Brenda was not there and had not been there.

Stella bit her lip. She had certainly not passed Brenda on the way down. The half-suspicion which had been in her mind ever since she left Cliff House was beginning to crystallise now. Had she, in her anxiety about Brenda, fallen into a trap of Sarah's? She hurried back.

Still no sign of Brenda on the road back. With heart thumping, she climbed through the open lobby window and dropped with a sigh of relief into the school. She tried to close the window. As she did so, a chuckle came out of the darkness.

Stella stopped as if petrified.  
"Who's that?" she called sharply.  
"Only," a mocking voice answered her, "little me, Stella! Oh, my good-

ness, what a story to tell the Head to-morrow! Did you find your dear Brenda? She returned with Babs & Co., ten minutes ago!"

Stella clenched her teeth, but her face was white in the darkness.  
"What are you going to do?"  
"Well, I may and I may not report it," Sarah said tauntingly. She grinned in the darkness. "If I do, it's a dead cert you'll lose your captaincy, at least, isn't it? But I'm not heartless. I don't want to inflict unnecessary suffering. It all depends," she added mysteriously, "upon your angel child, Brenda. We'll talk about it in the morning, shall we?"  
And with another chuckle she strode off.

**EIGHT O'CLOCK** the following morning, and sulky-faced Brenda confronted Sarah Harrigan in the latter's study. Sarah was smiling.

"You sent for me?" Brenda asked.  
"I did," Sarah nodded brightly. "I want to talk about Stella. You didn't find her last night?"

Brenda winced.  
"Because, you know, I saw you go out," Sarah reminded her. "I haven't reported that yet—and don't intend to if you are sensible. There's something else I want to tell you, though—something much more important. You're rather fond of Stella, aren't you, Brenda?"

Brenda's lips closed.  
"You wouldn't like, for instance, to see her lose her captaincy?"

Brenda's eyes glowed their fury.  
"What are you getting at?"  
"Just this," Sarah replied easily, "it is in your power, Brenda, to save Stella. Stella, as you know, broke bounds last night. I caught her. I haven't reported her yet, but I shall do so if you

**T**HERE she is!"  
"Brenda! Brenda!"  
"My hat! She's running away! Catch her girls!"

Babs, Mabs, and Clara broke into a run.

Brenda it was—a solitary figure on the road that led to Friar-dale.

But Brenda had seen them. Brenda was running. Babs, Clara, and Mabs, determined that their quarry should not escape them, broke into a sprint after her. Their footsteps echoed hollowly in the still air, and Brenda, with one desperate look back, sprinted harder.

But Brenda was slow, Brenda was heavy; moreover, Clara and her chums were in the pink of fitness. It was Clara who, with a final spurt, caught her up and grabbed her round the wrist.

"Hang you, let me go!" Brenda spluttered furiously.

"Cooee!" called Clara. "My hat, don't wriggle, you idiot! That was my shin! Babs—"

"Look here—" howled Brenda.

"We're looking, but we can't see much!" Clara chuckled. "Grab her, Mabs! Grab her, Babs! Now, Brenda, are you coming quietly, or have we got to drag you back?"

"Let me go!"

"To-morrow," Clara promised. "What were you breaking bounds for, anyway?"

"That's my business!"

"Is it? You'll probably find it's

don't agree to the one thing I'm going to ask you."

Brenda stared.

"And that?"

"It's very simple." Sarah smiled slyly. "Simply that you go to Briggs' and tell them that I was the girl who saved their daughter at Herne Bay. Not much to ask, is it?"

Brenda paused. She saw that Sarah had all the winning cards in her hand. Sarah could ruin Stella. Sarah was in a position to do as she said.

"Well," Sarah asked, "you agree?"

"She does not," a voice cut in, and Brenda and Sarah both wheeled to see Stella, very tense and very pale-faced, standing in the doorway. "Sarah, what a loathsome cat you are," she cried, and her lips curled with bitter contempt.

"Brenda," she added, "go and get your hat and coat. We're going to Mrs. Briggs right now. And when we get there," she added, her eyes never leaving Sarah's face, "you're going to tell her the absolute truth. I'll be there to see that you do it."

Sarah's eyes blazed.

"And I'll be here when you come back to see you humbled in the dust! Stella, don't be mad! Do you realise what it means?"

"Perfectly!" Stella snapped with contempt.

"You may be expelled."

"Better," Stella retorted bitterly, "to be expelled than to be a party to any dishonesty of yours, Sarah Harrigan! Brenda, please go. I'll meet you in the hall in two minutes."

**B**ITTER was the fury which filled Sarah; dismayed and hopeless the emotion which must have swayed Stella. For Stella had no doubt that Sarah would keep her threat, and keep it Sarah did the moment she and Brenda had disappeared through the gates. But Stella did not quail. Her duty was clear.

Straight to Mrs. Briggs she and Brenda went. There Brenda was forced at last to tell the truth. Uneasily and in silence the two returned to Cliff House just before assembly.

There was a notice on Stella's desk that Miss Primrose would like to see her, but there was no time before assembly to obey it. Stella winced. Her face whitened. Must the blow fall in front of the whole school?

It did!

Very stiff, very stern, was Miss Primrose that morning, and Stella, knowing the inevitable, was very tight-lipped and pale-faced. The denouement came immediately after orders for the day had been read out.

There was a pause, a tenseness, as Miss Primrose looked directly at Stella, from her to the gloating Sarah Harrigan, whose mean eyes were glowing with spiteful malice.

"Stella," Miss Primrose said sadly. "I am sorry that this matter should have been left till now. Yet, perhaps, as you are head girl of the school, it is fitting that it should be thrashed out in public. You are probably aware," Miss Primrose added, "that Sarah Harrigan reported you this morning for having broken bounds last night?"

A gasp sounded through the school. Eyes stared in bewildered incredulity. Babs stiffened. Brenda's face darkened with fury.

"Stella, is this true?" Miss Primrose asked.

Stella drew herself up. She heaved a deep breath.

"It is true!" she answered.

"You had reasons, I presume. I should like to hear them, Stella!"

Now there was a death-like silence. Almost hunted was the glance which Stella threw round. What could she say? To tell a lie was unthinkable. To tell the truth meant implicating Brenda, and implicating Brenda would probably mean expulsion for Brenda.

"Stella, I am waiting!" Miss Primrose said ominously.

And then, before Stella could reply, there was an interruption. It came from Barbara Redfern.

"Please, Miss Primrose—"

"Barbara, silence, please!"

"Yes, Miss Primrose! But I wanted to say," Babs said desperately, "that Stella was out of bounds because we were out of bounds!"

"What?"

Every eye was upon Babs.

"And Stella," Babs went on boldly, "was out of bounds because she went after us."

She cast a sideways look at Mabs and Clara as she said that. She received in reply grim nods of approval. In a sense, what Babs said was true. Stella had gone after Brenda. Brenda had been one of themselves.

"And who," Miss Primrose asked, "were your companions, Barbara?"

"Well, I was one," Clara put in.

"And I was the other," Mabs said.

"And I—" began Brenda, only to be silenced by a sharp kick on the ankle from Clara.

"I see!" The headmistress' face cleared. "Sarah, you did not tell me this!"

"I—I—" Sarah stammered.

"You were acting," Miss Primrose asked, "what you thought in accordance with your duty, Stella?"

"Yes, Miss Primrose," Stella replied truthfully.

"I see!" Her face grew less grim. A sigh of relief went up from the school. There was almost a cheer.

"Thank you, Barbara, for so pluckily coming forward!" Miss Primrose said. "Your punishment for breaking bounds will be much lighter in consequence. Stella, I am sorry that you should have thought of rushing after these misguided girls without informing me; but I suppose duty is duty, and we do not always think of everything on the spur of the moment. Sarah—and here her lips compressed—"please make sure of your facts before reporting next time! The school may now dismiss!"

And the school, aching to let rip the cheer that was welling in its throat, gladly dismissed, while Stella, pale and shaken, flashed a tremulously grateful glance at Babs as she and her chums went out. Sarah, on the other side of the dais, was speechless with fury. Her eyes were blazing.

She had shot her bolt. She had hoped to see Stella humiliated, cast out. Stella, instead, was a greater heroine than ever in the school's eyes. Thanks to Babs & Co., Stella had beaten her—or, rather, Babs had beaten her. She had lost the hundred pounds for which she had been so cunningly scheming. For all her pains, she had received what was tantamount to a reprimand from the Head.

Her eyes flashed hate; her face expressed her venom. Her lips, forming the words which they did not utter, spelled the hatred that sprang from her spiteful and cunning nature.

"You wait!"

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

## THE RIVALS

"**Y**ES—you!" Sarah stormed. "Oh, don't look so innocent. Who persuaded Primmy to send me out with those awful little brats of the Fourth? And who," she blazed, "sent me a faked telephone message? I know! You wanted to get your own back!"

Stella was on her feet now, face flushed.

"Will you," she asked quietly, "get out of this room?"

"And if I don't?" Sarah sneered.

"Then," Stella flared in sudden fury, "I shall put you out!"

Sarah gave a short and bitter laugh.

"Right!" she said. "Then I'll get out, but not before—"

And she made a dive for Stella's precious papers. But in a moment Stella had intervened. Her face pale with anger, she caught the prefect by the shoulder, whirled her round, and almost in the same moment opened the door and pushed her into the corridor, and—

Straight into the arms of Miss Primrose!

This is an extract from one of the many dramatic incidents in next Saturday's brilliant long complete Cliff House School story, which features Barbara Redfern & Co. and Stella Stone, and is entitled:



COMPLETE

NEXT

WEEK

BY

HILDA

RICHARDS

The Dramatic Climax of this Powerful Jungle Serial

## MORCOVE

By MARJORIE STANTON

## IN UNKNOWN AFRICA



## Drums of Doom!

ONLY a moment of tragic silence followed those ominous words which Old Kwamba had voiced.

Then Mr. Willoughby spoke briefly and to the point.

"Make for the native village at once! And that means you girls and boys as well, I'm sorry to say!"

"No help for it!" muttered Mr. Minden, who shared with Mr. Willoughby the present terrible responsibility. "Even if we left you here at the camp—"

"You'd never get us to stay here, so that's that!" Betty struck in. A calm smile evidenced her courage. "Oh, it's all right! We understand!"

In the fitful light from the camp-fire she turned to Polly and the others with an inquiring look—one that said: "Don't we?"

And for answer there were agreeing nods, all expressing a courage as great as her own.

They all knew. To go to the native village might mean only going to meet such a fate as was even now, perhaps, befalling the rest of the expedition, who had been so suddenly made captive by the native tribe.

"Come on, then!"

And they set off, so that quickly the camp became as deserted as they had found it to be on their return from such strange adventures.

The two men hastened along together, with Old Kwamba close at hand, in case he should need to be drawn into the grave conversation which was going on between them in subdued tones.

As for the juniors, they all took good care to follow with brisk steps over the night-bound African bush.

Progress could be helped by keeping in double file. It was, accordingly, in so many pairs that these few girls and boys fell into talk during the hurried making for the Kwamba village. Another bit of forced marching, and

perhaps it was to prove the last march of all!

The thought came to Betty that they were stepping along as quickly as this to the tapping of distant drums—that monotonous drubbing which was part of the sinister commotion coming to them in the darkness from the native village.

Drums of doom! As if to remind this mere remnant of the Morcove expedition that every step, hasty though it was, meant another step taken, only to meet—the end of everything!

A remnant of the adventurous band, that was all they were, scurrying along with some desperately cherished hope that it was not yet too late to save their friends from the Kwambas' revenge.

Their trusty black guide and interpreter had given his sorrowful hint as to what was most likely happening to the rest of the party. And he, himself a Kwamba, was one to know full well the barbaric customs and rituals of the tribe. But still that hope lived on: "Hurry, and perhaps, after all, something may be done!"

Suddenly the night was brightened ahead of them by a fiery glow.

They had come more than the first half of the urgent journey only by the light of brilliant stars, the native village being hidden from them by a line of rocky hummocks which rose out of the plain as a reef rises out of the sea.

Now, however, they had begun to work round the outermost mound—one that would have seemed a great hill anywhere in the Homeland; but here it and its fellows were all so dwarfed by the towering Kwamba mountains.

Reddish glow was from a big fire burning in the centre of the native village.

And by that lurid light they saw, for the very first time, the dwelling-place of that mysterious tribe with whom there had been such strange, and yet—until to-night—such friendly dealings.

Never until this moment had Betty

and the rest even glimpsed the native village.

The Kwambas had visited the whites in their camp, but not once had any of the whites come this way.

There had been the happy expectation of paying a ceremonial visit one day, when all the friendliness would have become even greater because of wonderful things accomplished by the expedition, to the benefit of the black chief and his following.

But Fate, it seemed, had willed it otherwise. To this—only to this had it come in the end! A mere remnant of the expedition, rushing on in the night to seek the rest!

The din was now so great that they would have had to shout to one another to make themselves understood. But their suspense was too great for much conversation. The two men and Old Kwamba ran faster, faster, and eagerly enough did the few juniors keep up with them.

Hundreds of the blacks could be seen now, like a great crowd round a huge bonfire. Not one seemed to have become aware of the party's approach, even though it was being made across open, level ground.

All eyes, no doubt, were looking towards the large space, in the centre of which the fire blazed, and where, no doubt, the chief himself squatted with his picked stalwarts.

That finger-tapping of the native drums still went on, as a weird accompaniment to the continued chanting.

And some of the savages were leaping up and down wildly as they shouted and sang, so that Betty and her companions saw, against the fiery glow, a constant bobbing about of heads and shoulders.

Faster than ever they ran, until there were only another hundred yards to go to reach the fringe of the savage crowd. Then Mr. Willoughby drew his revolver and fired a shot into the air.

Bang!

Instantly the beating of drums ceased and the barbaric uproar died down. A

# CASTAWAYS ON A DESERT ISLAND . . . VIVID NEW MORCOVE SERIAL

SEE NEXT SATURDAY'S

VIVID NEW MORCOVE SERIAL

started silence had fallen upon the wide wild scene.

For a moment or so the would-be rescuers seemed to be rushing towards hundreds of people who were transfixed by surprise.

Then the blacks shook off the spell which that calling-attention shot had placed upon them.

There was violent commotion, due to much turning about to look this way. The ring was broken, the breach widening so quickly that at once the great fire of brushwood could be seen, and some squatting figures close by it.

More, there was a sudden glimpse of those who to-night had been taken away from the camp as captives.

There they were, ranked on that fire-lit plot of ground around which the tribe was gathered. But were their numbers still intact?

The smoke blew downwards, dimming the scene, baffling eyes that were so anxiously seeking dear and familiar faces.

But the rescuers were already darting through that gap in the crowd. On either side of them were startled blacks who gave them the wildest looks.

A raging hatred was in every pair of bloodshot eyes; deadly enmity now, when it was but a few hours ago that these very people had been full of a childlike affection for their visitors from afar!

The shouting and the yelling started afresh, along with the hollow drubbing of those small drums. A dozen blacks there were, at least—Betty somehow took them in with her all-noticing glance—standing together to keep up a rapid beating with their finger-tips.

A movement of the night air caused the smoke to billow away once more, leaving the firelight to draw bright gleams from many a flourished spear.

But these were frightful details, to be noticed only vaguely during an eager looking towards the lined-up captives.

All there still, were they? Not one of them yet come to harm?

Betty may have been no quicker than her companions in finding the answer to that frantic question; but she was the first to gasp out:

"They are! Oh, they're all here!"

"Yes!"

And at last the chiefs' main anxiety was set at rest. They paused, panting for breath after so much fast running.

Bang! went Mr. Willoughby's revolver again, fired into the air. He meant the shot as a demand for complete silence, and silence there was once more. But this time it came more slowly.

The encircling mob, after it had stopped shouting, was still murmurous. A drum or two went on for a few seconds longer.

Then, when these last sounds had died away, the silence was indeed complete.

## Morcove Keeps Its Word

THE Kwamba chief rose suddenly from his reed mat.

His doing so caused all who had appeared upon the scene to turn their eyes upon him. But his angry uprising, challenging though it was, could not claim the attention of every one of them for more than a moment.

Back went the yearning gaze of Betty and the other juniors to the grouped captives, so that only Mr. Willoughby, Mr. Minden, and Old

Kwamba were paying attention to the chief, as he burst into speech.

And the captives—how their eyes spoke back to those who were regarding them, with feelings that must not be voiced, at a distance of only a few yards!

From one loved face to another Betty was glancing, as were Polly and Jack and the rest who had just turned up like this—faces that showed signs of terrible strain. And little wonder, either!

The two women, much as they must have longed to speak to fellow-captives, could have been able to say nothing that held out any real hope.

A sudden check upon the black chief's gibberish was caused by Mr. Willoughby's loudly asking Morcove's own Old Kwamba:

"What does he say?"

"Him say, sah, him going to treat all of us folks jess de same as de others!" came from Old Kwamba's thick lips.

"We hab to be punished—"

"Have we? Why? I'd like to know, for a start. Ask him that, Kwamba!"

The question was put, and then the swarthy chief, as he stood towering almost between the one group of whites and the other, resumed his furious jabbering.

He knew Mr. Willoughby to be the leader of the expedition, and he addressed every word to him, although it was for Old Kwamba to translate, as he did at last.

"Him say, sah, we'in a lot of no-gooders, telling heap-big lies about de Ankh, and de Golden Grotto, and everything, sah! Dis chief, him say we only do heap-big mischief. We kill de witch-doctor, him say, and we smash de Stone Man—all bad, bad for de tribe."

The juniors saw Mr. Willoughby clench his fists with fury. And then he controlled his exasperation.

"It's no use," he said. "This is not the man to be angry with, but that lying, heartless scoundrel—that Dupont fellow! Is he anywhere about?"

A calm voice answered—that of Mr. Willoughby's wife, where she stood with the rest of the captives.

"Dupont went away to a hut over there," she said, with a directing nod.

"Madame Dupont is with him. Mrs. Cardew and I implored them both to get the girls and boys spared, but they said 'Impossible!'"

"Fiends, the pair of them!" Mr. Minden gritted. "But I'll go across to that hut—eh? Oh, all right!" he added in the same breath, but in a very changed tone; for Jack and Dave were moving to go with him.

But it was no more than a first step that each had taken when a menacing shout went up, and blacks who were within striking distance made as if to use gleaming spears and heavy knobkerries.

Wisely, Mr. Minden paused, and the two lads also stood still. The mood of this multitude being what it was, to have taken one step more would have been fatal.

"Very well, Minden. Wait, then," Pam Willoughby's father said steadily, "and perhaps, before this business is finished, the black chief himself will be sending for the pair. If that does happen, then the Duponts will be very sorry they kept out of our way!"

He turned to Old Kwamba, whose eagerness to be of help in this terrible crisis was almost pathetic.

"Kwamba, tell the chief this! It is a lie that we have caused the witch-

doctor's death. It is another lie that we have caused that image in the Valley of the Giant to be smashed. Tell this Kwamba chief that if he will go with me, I will take him even now to the Golden Grotto!"

"Yessah!"

"Tell him, Kwamba, that the great things we promised to do for him and his tribe, we are ready to do now, to-night! The Golden Grotto is found; it can be the tribe's—we want not an ounce of the gold. But the white man who has been here in the village, telling all those lies against us—he wants the grotto, and wants it only for himself. Do your best, Kwamba, my man, for one what you say now the lives of us all depend!"

"Good old Kwamba!"

That was Polly, as the faithful fellow of whom they were so fond began to put into the native language what Mr. Willoughby had said.

At first the native chief listened only sullenly. It seemed as if at any instant he might cut short the interpreter by an outburst as angry as before. His thick lips had a sulky fold.

But of a sudden a great change came about. Morcove & Co. saw the Kwamba chief start violently and look at their own leader in a joyful manner. A splendid set of teeth was revealed by a smile which seemed to go from ear to ear.

Nor was the chief the only native to be seized with such sudden joy. His picked supporters and all others who were within sound of Old Kwamba's voice became similarly delighted.

Another moment, and the interpreted speech was being cut short by a chorus of jubilant cries:

"Ankh! Ankh!"

Once again, the girls and boys heard that word being shouted along with so much else that was mere gibberish to them:

"Ankh! Ankh!"

The chief himself suddenly capered like a child, and that set his picked followers jiggling about. The entire tribe began to sing and dance.

A wild scene once more. But this time—what a different note in all the barbaric shouting and yelling and chanting!

And if the tribe itself was suddenly as changed as all this, in its thoughts and feelings, so, of course, were the juniors and their grown-ups.

The oldest amongst them could never have known such sudden marvellous relief.

As for Betty & Co. and the boys, they simply went wild with delight. Their rejoicing shouts, such as were usually associated with the playing fields of two famous schools after a victorious game, mingled strangely with the unearthly cries of the Kwamba folk.

Whether it was the shrill "Hurrah!" of Naomer, or the beamed "Bai Jove!" of Paula Creel, or Pam's serene "Yes, well!" or the "Rah, rah!" of Grangemore—it all meant the same thing. Every syllable voiced by the juniors was an expression of the triumphant thought:

"We've won! We've won!"

As, indeed, they had!

Only for a few moments, however, could they give themselves over to the boundless joy of being all together again, free as air. Then Betty and several others realised that a fresh sensation was occurring.

The Duponts had vanished!

The leader of the Morcove expedition, with Mr. Minden and a couple of the

lads, had hurried to that hut to which the Frenchman and his wife were known to have withdrawn some time previously.

The Kwamba chief was very angry now with the Duponts, and it was partly with an idea of having to protect them from such anger that the two white men and Jack and Dave had gone to the hut.

"And that hut they had found to be deserted."

"Gone—yep!" Jack disgustedly exclaimed, as he and Jack came striding back to rejoin the other juniors. "Gone whilst the going was good—that's about it!"

"On the run, are they?" Betty chuckled. "Then they'd better keep on running until they're miles away from here!"

"I can't imagine them wanting to hang about," Polly grimly smiled. "If they were listeners up to a minute or two ago, then they must know well enough that the Kwamba country is not going to be exactly a healthy one for them after this!"

"Wather not, bai Jove! The wetches!"

"Bekas, every blessed obsticackle that we have been up against has been caused by those rotters!" shrielled the dusky Morcovian. "Eet has been nothing but lying tales about us—"

"From first to last!" Betty caught up Naomer, with a scornful frown for the vanished couple. "Dupont began his game of lying at home at Southville, when we first got to know Old Kwamba at the circus. And the Frenchman ended to-night by coming here to this Kwamba village to turn the chief against us by a lot more lies!"

"And the worst of it was, bai Jove," sighed Paula, "we couldn't contradict this rubbishy story when the chief turned up with a whole crowd of his men at our camp! Gweat drawback not knowing the lingo, bai Jove!"

"So all we could do," said another of those who had been taken away from the camp, "was to go quietly, as it were. Talk about having the wind up! But can you wonder?"

"Bai Jove, I for one must confess, geals, I fealt wather concerned—yes, wather!"

"Only concerned?" chuckled Polly. "But, there, same to tease you, Paula darling! Our Paula," cried the madcap, conferring a hearty slap on the beloved duffer's shoulders—"a credit to Morcove, after all! And won't I feature you in the whole story of our adventures when I write it for the school mag?"

There was just time for a laugh from all, and then the mothers of Pam and Judy came stepping to join the joyous chatters.

"Back to camp now, all of us," was Mrs. Willoughby's smiled order, "and to sleep at once!"

"What ze diggings! No supper?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sweetle!" Naomer further protested. "Bekas, I zink we ought to celebrate!"

"You shall celebrate, right enough, but not to-night," Pam's mother made satisfactory response. "To-morrow night, our last in camp at Kwamba—"

"What?"

"Yes. Well, we must bear in mind how our time is running out. A day to get everything properly settled with the tribe about the future of the grotto; another night so that we can all get well rested before trekking back to M'Geya; and then—"

"Backs again!" Polly playfully growled, giving a hitch to shoulders to be heavy laden.

"Not at all!" laughed Mrs. Cardew. "We shall have native porters to carry

every scrap of stuff for us this time. No more desertions, leaving us in a fix. The Kwamba chief has already promised us as many men as we like to ask for!"

"Bai Jove, gweat welief that weally is!" beamed Paula. "And, geals—geals, when I think of the Union Jack Hotel at M'Geya—"

"It wasn't so bad!" Bunny Trevor sparkled. "In fact, I wish we were there now!"

her feet about in the air. "I warn you all! The girl who has nightmare to-night, and wakes me up with her yells about elephants being after her, or the Duponts chasing her—she'll know about it!"

And subsequent talk was to the effect that something was to be said for civilisation after all.

Not that the Union Jack Hotel was the very last word in modern comfort. Far from it. But, as the best that



IN the glare of the camp-fire the would-be rescuers came suddenly face to face with the captives. And in that same dramatic instant the circle of natives closed in upon them.

"With an air-liner on the landing ground, waiting to take us aboard in the morning!" Betty pictured the happy scene to come. "And so home to Croydon by air! Back to good old Morcove for another term!"

certain enterprising Britishers had been able to achieve so far in this Central African airport, it was a pretty good effort.

The Union Jack might, too, have been the merest corrugated-iron apology for an hotel, and yet Betty & Co. would have been glad enough to be here at last.

Back again, after sharing with Grangemoor and the grown-ups all those strange journeyings through the wild! Back again, after roughing it for several days and nights since they said most hearty good-byes to the Kwamba chief and his tribe!

"This is the room we had the night before we set off on our great march to the Kwamba country, without any certainty of ever finding the grotto!" Betty gaily commented. "And now we're back again, and the grotto has been found—found! All those great things are going to be done with it that Mr. Willoughby and Mr. Minden have talked about to us, and—"

"And there's the landing ground over yonder!" Tess broke in, after pushing aside a sun-blind to gaze from one of the many windows. "No machine due in for Croydon for a few days yet, they say, and that's a pity. Still, I can always do some sketching."

"Ponny, Pam!" offered Madge, for that chum of hers was looking just a little pensive all at once.

### "Half Way Home!"

"BAI JOVE, geals! This is bettah—what?"

"Corjus!"

It was Paula Creel's vast delight to be sinking down into an easy-chair in a big and airy bed-room at the Union Jack Hotel, M'Geya.

The room, both as to its size and plain furnishings, was very like a dormitory; but those members of the Morcove "chummery" to whom it had been allotted for the coming night only liked it all the more for being that.

"Half way home!" sparkled Bunny. "You know, Paula darling, to look at you now, you might be at ease in Study No. 12!"

"As I trust, geals, with a continuance of our recent luck, we all will be soon—yes, wather! Most gwatifying," said, loling, Paula—"most wewfeshing, that wash just then in weally pure spwing water!"

"And these beds to-night!" shouted Polly, flopping back upon one, to kick

"I feel it's such a pity that Old Kwamba isn't going back to Cröydon with us, after all!"

"Ah, yes! Good Old Kwamba!" Betty exclaimed.

And there were murmurs from others, full of affection for that simple, honest black fellow—once the elephant-keeper to Samways' Travelling Circus—who had served the expedition so faithfully and so well.

Old Kwamba, in fact, was having to make his way back to his native country once more, after being in charge of all those Kwamba porters who had been with the expedition during its return march to M'Geya.

As there were to be big developments in connection with the Golden Grotto, all vitally associated with the Kwamba tribe, it had been felt that the presence of an interpreter at the native village was going to be very necessary.

"Such a splendid chap!" Betty spoke on. "He had only to be asked if he would stay on out here in Africa for a bit, to help things go smoothly, and there was that shiny black face of his all smiles. I can see it now."

"Oh, and he will yet have that cottage to live in at home at Swanlake!" Pam said, brightening up. "That promise of dad's still holds good."

"Tell you what girls!" cried Polly, bounding off the bed to her feet. "Let's all club together—and rope in the boys as well—to make a present to Old Kwamba to-morrow morning when he leaves us?"

"That's it!" the chorus was going up, when a sudden hailing cry reached the room through various open windows.

"Morcove! Hi, Morcove!"

"Bother brothers!" stamped the madcap, recognising Jack's lusty voice.

But did she mean it? Of-course she didn't, although she was careful to demand, in a mock-snappish tone, as soon as she was head out of the window:

"What is it now?"

"Have you girls heard?"

"We've just heard some hoodlum bellowing, so that we thought a bull-buffalo had got into the hotel garden!"

"Then you girls haven't heard!" Jack retorted, from where he stood below the line of windows with his four chums.

"Wireless message just been picked up at the station. O.K. for us to-morrow morning!"

"What?"

"Off at dawn!"

"Oh!" yelled Morcove, from one window and another.

"There's a special air-liner on the way now to pick us up!" Jack rattled on. "A whacker of a liner, boys!"—meaning the girls. "And, say, who do you think her pilot is?"

"Well?"

"Jack Somerfield!"

MR. SOMERFIELD—the airman brother of Morcove's adored headmistress! Jack Somerfield, who was so popular with all of them—as gallant a man as ever handled a fighting plane during the Great War; and he was actually on the way now to pick them up!

"Or are you leg-pulling?" Polly frowned down upon her brother. "If you are—"

"As true as I stand here—isn't it, chaps?"

"If it isn't!" Polly still threatened, shaking a small fist. "Oh, Betty—all of you—just fancy! If only it is!"

"I can quite believe it!" Betty blithely answered. "Just the sort of

thing Mr. Somerfield would do—like the sport he is! Come on down, girls, anyhow, and find out more!"

So away they trooped, all of them, and even as they reached the open air a tell-tale sound came down to them from the brassy sky.

"Why, there he is!" guessed the girls.

"Hurrah! Hurrah!"

And a minute later:

"What a huge machine! Marvel-

lous!"

To see her coming in so beautifully at the finish of something like a thousand-mile run from her last stopping-place—it made the juniors look forward all the more to their voyaging home by air.

A trip with some special thrills in it! That might be taken for granted.

But who amongst them all could ever have imagined even the strange form that some of those thrills were to take? "To-morrow!" the chums were saying.

And to-morrow is ever an open question.

Ended were all the thrilling adventures of Morcove in unknown Africa. And so, perhaps, far stranger adventures were due to begin to-morrow, when at dawn the happy cry would be:

"All aboard—for home!"

THE END.

"MORCOVE MAROONED!" by Marjorie Stanton, is the title of the great new desert island serial which begins in the SCHOOLGIRL next Saturday. Order your SCHOOLGIRL right away and don't fail to tell all your chums about the fine features now appearing in THE SCHOOLGIRL.

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## THE PAGODA OF PERIL

### FOR NEW READERS.

CATHERINE SFERNDALE 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, Kwanyin is brought before Uncle Gerald—who is attired in Chinese robes and enthroned like a mandarin—and asked to forsake her friendship with the cousins. The latter hear what is going on, however, and, determined to find out the meaning of it all, rush into the room.

(Now read on.)

### The Threat

"WHERE is Kwanyin?"

Catherine stumbled into the room, recovered her balance, and then looked about her. There was no sign of the little Chinese girl.

No one answered her. The Black Room was in silence, and it was as though Catherine had interrupted some secret, scared some enemy.

But Catherine had heard a cry from Kwanyin, and she had heard her Uncle Gerald's voice raised in anger.

She looked towards him now, puzzled by his silence. Uncle Gerald sat upon a gilt throne. He was dressed in a red silk garment, richly embroidered in gold; golden serpents chased each other across it, and flaming jewels lit the edges.

Only the rays from the shaded lantern lit the scene. The light was eerie, for it shone through a translucent dragon in a black and otherwise opaque shade.

Kai Tal, who had been knocked over as Catherine burst open the door, had staggered to his feet, and now stood motionless.

"Uncle," said Catherine, turning to

Uncle Gerald, "I heard Kwanyin. I am sure she is near here somewhere. Where is she?"

Uncle Gerald folded his arms. "Kwanyin is not here, Catherine," he said. "And I would like to know why you have thrust yourself upon us in this manner?"

"I came because I heard Kwanyin cry out, and I heard your voice in anger, uncle!" said Catherine, quite sharply. "Your ears deceived you," he retorted. "She is not here. Nor should you be here! You were asked to attend the ceremony of apology on the next floor!"

Catherine stood her ground. Only yesterday she would have obeyed, and felt rather ashamed of herself. But now strange fears and doubts filled her.

She did not trust her uncle now; she did not believe him so readily as before.

Her uncle had denied that Kwanyin was in the room, but Catherine did not believe him.

"Uncle, Kwanyin is here somewhere," she said.

Her cousins Mollie and Charles entered the room and stood beside her.

"Easy, Cath!" warned Charles anxiously. "You had better leave this to me."

Charles always imagined that he could handle delicate situations like this better than anybody else.

"Uncle," he said, stepping forward solemnly into the middle of the room. "I think I can explain matters to you fully. In fact, I think it would help us all very much if we talked things over."

Catherine gave him a warning nudge. He was saying too much. She could see that her uncle's eyes had a hard gleam, and that the evil Kai Tal was making strange signs to another Chinaman.

"Uncle, Charles is getting muddled," she put in quickly. "The fact is, we are very worried indeed about Kwanyin, and would like to speak to her."

Uncle Gerald inclined his head. "I shall be pleased for you to do so," he said.

Catherine did not know that Kwanyin

was all this time behind the black velvet curtain, tightly held by a Chinaman, prevented from making a sound.

But she did realize that this was a difficult situation.

They were in danger of offending their uncle. And if they did that, he might order them from the house.

What, then, of Kwanyin? The little Chinese girl would be left to the cruelty of Kai Tal! At the mere thought of it Catherine's hands clenched in anger.

But though she yearned to take action now—to search for Kwanyin, to demand to see her—Catherine's common sense won. She drew back.

"Very well, uncle," she said. "If we can see Kwanyin later—"

"Most certainly!" said Uncle Gerald. He seemed very relieved.

Kai Tal, turning to the door, opened it wide, and, with a bland smile, turned to the cousins, slithering one long finger-nailed hand in the palm of the other as he bowed.

"Estimable cousins perhaps hear sound from another room," he suggested. "Very unworthy Kai Tal who should not speak of his own humble beliefs, yet dares to say he also heard the voice of Kwanyin. It seemed to be in an upper room. But the ears of Kai Tal, being but ordinary ears of a common person, could be mistaken."

Catherine's cheeks burned at these smooth, hypocritical words. She had never yearned so much in her life to take anyone by the shoulders and shake them as much as she did then.

But she controlled herself and walked past him, unaware that behind that curtain little Kwanyin struggled fruitfully.

Charles and Mollie followed. Kai Tal closed the door after them, turned to Uncle Gerald, and spoke rapidly in Chinese.

"I think they are already suspicious. We would do well to be very careful."

"If they suspect, they must on no account leave this house!" was the terse reply. "Bring Kwanyin!"

The black curtains were swung aside,

and Kwanyin was dragged into the open by her captor.

The little Chinese girl's almond eyes expressed her terror, and yet, when she was spun round and released, she drew up in courageous and dignified manner. "You lie!" she said to Uncle Gerald in Chinese. "They will learn that you lie, and then—"

"Silence! If we are angry with you, it is your father who will suffer!" A trembling seized Kwanyin as though she suffered from chill; her tiny hands clasped in pleading, and her courage and pride seemed drained from her.

"No, no!" she whispered. "Oh, no! My father must not suffer! Oh, please, no! Illustrious father of Kwanyin very ill and aged. He cannot suffer as well as I. If there is punishment, it must be mine."

Uncle Gerald turned to the Chinaman who had been holding Kwanyin.

"Go to the dungeon, and give my order that the father of Kwanyin is to be beaten because his daughter is obstinate."

The Chinaman stood to attention, and bowed his head.

Kwanyin, hardly able to believe her eyes, watched him turn. He went without a murmur. The order would be passed on. And her own father, whom she revered and loved, who was her whole world, would be made to suffer!

"With hands clasped, she looked up pleadingly to Uncle Gerald.

"Stop him!" she begged. "Oh, please—"

"If you will do as we say—"

"Yes—"

"Come back!" ordered Uncle Gerald. The Chinaman impassively returned, and Kwanyin covered her face with her hands. She had promised. She had saved her father from cruel punishment. But the price must be paid. She must turn against the English girl who had befriended her.

For that was what Uncle Gerald wanted, as she knew.

"Well, Kwanyin," he said quietly, "you have come to your senses. You will obey?"

"Yes."

"Then remember that it was not your father you saw in the tunnel."

Kwanyin gulped. She must lie!

"You wish me to say that it was not illustrious father in tunnel?"

"I wish you to make that clear in a more subtle and Chinese manner. I want you to point out another and obviously different Chinaman as your father—"

Kwanyin clenched her hands.

"I—I—" she faltered.

She hesitated even now, and Uncle Gerald looked at the Chinaman beside him as though to dispatch him as before to the dungeon.

"No, no! I will do it!" cried Kwanyin.

"Uncle Gerald indicated the curtain behind him.

Kai Tal swept it aside, and a small iron ladder was revealed. At a sign from him Kwanyin realised that she was to mount it.

Very carefully she climbed up, and Kai Tal followed her. At the head of the ladder she paused. Right and left ran a narrow corridor. The wall of it was also the wall of the room in which the cousins awaited the ceremony of apology to the broken idol.

"Understand?" said Kai Tal, with a leer at Kwanyin. "The wise Kwanyin will speak as she is commanded—or else—much kindness."

From his deep sleeve he produced a dog-whip.

Kwanyin shivered with dread. Would the cruel Kai Tal dare to use that to her

aged father? It was a horror no white girl would have believed. But Kwanyin understood her own countrymen.

"I will obey," she said huskily. "I will obey."

"Then wait—and a door will open and the obedient Kwanyin shall enter the Repentance Chamber."

Kwanyin, trembling, waited. She hoped and prayed that there might be a way out; that even now she need not betray the trust of the English girls.

But Kai Tal would be at hand listening. If she failed he would know!

## No Longer in Doubt

IN the Room of Repentance, Catherine Sterndale and her cousins waited with a feeling of awe.

They were alone save for the broken idol.

The floor was bare save for two ornate rugs, but on the walls hung many tapestries, all representing tribulation in some form or other.

There were idols, too, and every face was marred by tears; every expression one of woe.

The cousins could feel the sorrow and sadness of the room.

The door behind them suddenly opened, and a Chinaman appeared.

With head bowed, he crossed to the broken idol. Standing before it,

watched by the silent and interested cousins, he muttered, dropped to his knees, and banged his forehead on the floor. From behind the idol came a rasping sound.

The Chinaman rose, turned, and left the room.

Another Chinaman appeared, and knelt before the idol. But he made greater lamentation, wailing in great distress.

Three more Chinamen entered, and each time there came a loud rapping from behind the idol. It was obviously made somewhere to the rear of a large curtain that spread across the walls—a curtain which was covered with wonderful embroidery.

"Someone behind that curtain," frowned Charles.

"Of course," agreed Catherine.

"Someone making the rappings," whispered Mollie. "It's all a trick, naturally. Although I suppose these simple Chinese are taken in—"

Catherine walked to the curtains. She went to one end and very carefully pulled the curtain back. A shaft of light from the lanterns in the room at once lit up the gap between curtain and wall.

Someone was crouching behind there—someone small.

"My goodness! Kwanyin!" gasped Catherine.

She flung the curtain aside, and the little Chinese girl was revealed. She had been crouching there, obeying instructions. She had tapped the wall to order.

"It is I, yes," she said nervously.

"But why are you doing this?" asked Catherine, in amazement. "Aren't you afraid they'll catch you?"

"No 'fraid," said Kwanyin, shaking her head.

"But Kai Tal? You're still afraid of Kai Tal," said Catherine urgently.

"He's in the room downstairs. He might come up here any minute—"

"Yes, for goodness' sake hide!" cut in Mollie. "There's someone else coming."

Kwanyin listened.

"Perhaps my father. Father of Kwanyin come please soon, me tinke."

The cousins were absolutely amazed.

"He is coming—his free?" asked Catherine, in wonder.

Not knowing what had happened in the Black Room, she was naturally bewildered by this surprising change. Kwanyin, once afraid of Kai Tal, now no longer feared him. Her father, an ill-treated prisoner, was now free. Why?

"I don't understand," confessed Catherine. "Why did they set your father free?"

"Great Uncle Gerald," said Kwanyin.

Catherine was silent. Only a moment ago she had suspected that her uncle was deceiving them; that he was unkind to Kwanyin, and took the part of Kai Tal against her. Now she was hearing something quite different—and from Kwanyin's own lips.

It naturally did not occur to her that the little Chinese girl was deliberately lying. There seemed no reason for that.

"Waitee! Me go hidee!" said Kwanyin suddenly.

As the door opened again she darted back behind the curtains. It was a young Chinaman who entered now, and the cousins recognised him as the silent one who stood at the hall door, but never spoke.

He walked to the broken idol, knelt, and bowed before it.

But he did not speak. The rapping came from behind the wall, and he rose and turned as the others had done.

Kwanyin called out in Chinese, and stepped into view.

The man turned back, and looked her up and down. Kwanyin dropped to her knees.

He regarded her coldly, then stepped forward, and, to the horror of Catherine, placed the sole of his soft slippered shoe upon the little Chinese girl's head.

It was an action of contempt.

"How dare you!" cried Catherine, in anger, and caught his arms.

She dragged him, staggered back on one foot, and swung him round.

The Chinaman regarded her in cold contempt, but did not speak. He dragged his arm from Catherine with a vicious tug, and stalked from the room.

Kwanyin clasped and unclasped her hands.

"Me velly sorry!" she said.

"You? Nothing to do with you!" said Catherine.

Kwanyin's heart was beating quickly now. The time had arrived for her to lie, and she felt quite weak.

"Me—bow head. Illustrious father tied on head."

"Illustrious father?" said Catherine sharply. "What has he to do with it?"

"Tied on head," said Kwanyin.

There could be no misunderstanding of her meaning.

"That man who trod on your head—he's not your father!" said Catherine.

"That's just nonsense!"

Kwanyin nodded her head several times.

"My father—father of Kwanyin!" she said.

Catherine stared at her blankly.

"But you haven't two fathers. You said the old man was your father."

"Me teller lies!" said Kwanyin anxiously.

She knew what a shock it must be for them to hear this.

"Me sorry," she said—"tell lies!"

Catherine looked at Mollie and Charles wonderingly.

"What are we to believe?" she said, in dismay.

They were still staring at Kwanyin when the door behind them opened and Kai Tal entered.

"Kwanyin!" he exclaimed, as though surprised.

Catherine turned to him. She was determined to get this riddle solved.

"Was that Kwanyin's father who went out?" she asked.

Kai Tal's face expressed nothing. Although Catherine watched him closely for the slightest betrayal of feeling, she could not even guess what effect the question had on him.

"The illustrious Kwanyin's father," he said, "resides in an English prison, which he ennobles by his gracious presence, making it even like unto a palace."

Kwanyin stood with head bowed, while Kai Tal poured out his sarcasm. Catherine looked from one to the other.

"It is not true! Kai Tal lies!" said Kwanyin suddenly. "My father he goes from loom—minute go! Me follow!"

She walked swiftly to the door, with head bowed. She was ashamed to meet Catherine's eyes.

Kai Tal allowed her to pass.

"Intelligent child knows own father," he suggested. "Stupid and misinformed Kai Tal has made sad mistake."

He spread his arms across his chest, and allowed Kwanyin to pass. But as soon as she was gone, he stood with his back to the door.

"Please to express sincere apologies to fallen idol!" he said.

Charles drew up indignantly.

"Rot!" he said.

"Certainly not!" said Catherine firmly. "You are to blame for hurting the idol! You hid in it to spy!"

"Also, perhaps, young ladies spy!" said Kai Tal.

"Perhaps—and perhaps with good reason," said Catherine. "In any case, we are not apologizing to a block of wood, even if it is carved!"

Kai Tal spread both hands. They seemed to Catherine like claws. At any moment she expected him to pounce, and she fell back a step.

But Kai Tal did not move. He spoke suddenly in a passionless monotone.

"It is the sincere and earnest wish of this humble person that everything you eat at supper will be as dry dust in your mouth; that all you may drink shall have the flavour of salted water, and parch your throats as the burning sun dries the desert! For you have spoken evil of the great idol! This is the punishment!"

Catherine was impressed. She tried to be unconcerned, but she could not. Even though she did not believe in the idol's power, and certainly not in Kai Tal's ability to work magic, yet she felt a strange uneasiness.

Mollie and Charles, too, were silent. Not a word was spoken by any of them for a whole minute. Then the gong broke the silence heavily.

"It is supper," said Kai Tal, with a grim smile.

Catherine was not going to let him think that she was daunted by his threats.

"Supper! Goodness, I'm hungry! It smells good!" she said.

"Rather!" agreed Mollie, turning and following her as she went down the staircase. "Considerably hungry niece of illustrious uncle eat disgustingly large supper!"

In the hall, in his usual position on guard, stood the Chinaman who never spoke. He stood impassive as ever, with arms folded, as the cousins passed him. "Kwanyin's father!" said Catherine. "Surely he can't be?"

"If he is, then why did she point out the old man in the tunnel to us?" said Charles. "I don't understand Kwanyin. I think, after all, she may be fooling us!"

"Yes; she did tell us that Uncle Gerald wasn't really our uncle, you know," said Mollie.

Catherine remembered that, and gave a nod; but she had almost dismissed it entirely from her mind. It was such a fantastic thought.

"And she admitted then it was lies," Charles pointed out. "Uncle said that it was one of her weaknesses. He said she made up stories like that. She probably made up the yarn that the old man with the beard was her father."

"And perhaps this one isn't, either," nodded Mollie. "Best thing is not to believe anything she says at all. But I'm sorry for her. And I like her, even if she does tell these silly crams."

The man in the hall ignored them, so they walked past him on their way to the dining-room. Catherine did not believe that he was Kwanyin's father, however. He had never shown any interest in her; and while Kwanyin was high born, he was always treated as a menial.

But Catherine could not be sure that Kwanyin had lied about the old man, and she could not be sure, either, that she had spoken the truth.

To the cousins the little Chinese girl was still a mystery. Her mind seemed to work in a strange way.

The servants waiting at table stood in their usual places, and Catherine gave a signal to her cousins that they had better be very guarded in their speech.

Anything they said was quite likely to be carried back to Uncle Gerald, and Catherine did not want that to happen.

A minute or so passed, but there was no sign of food.

"There's no place set for uncle or for Miss Smith," said Catherine. "We're having supper alone."

"If we're having supper!" said Mollie anxiously.

Even as she spoke a servant appeared with a loaded golden tray. He placed it on a side table, and the serving-men very neatly and efficiently passed round the dishes.

"Good!" said Catherine. "I'm quite hungry!"

But the smells that came from the

various dishes were not as delicious or appetising as usual.

Mollie lifted the dish of one to help herself, looked in, and gave a gasp.

"It's sawdust!" she said.

Charles looked in another dish.

"Wood-shavings!"

Mingled with the wood-shavings and the sawdust was delicious food. But it could not be eaten. It could not be separated from the rubbish.

It was a crude Chinese joke. That was all they could think. Their appetites had been whetted for nothing!

"My goodness, what an insult!" said Catherine angrily. "I don't call it funny!"

Charles looked at the serving-men, put his glasses straight, and glared.

"Take this stuff away and bring us proper food!" he said.

The men did not move. They were either defiant or they did not understand.

Catherine pushed back her chair.

"Where are you going?" Mollie and Charles asked together.

But Catherine took her cue from the Chinamen, and made no answer.

She was going to find Uncle Gerald and tell him what had happened; and she suspected that if she let that be known, someone might prevent her carrying out her intention.

But Catherine, after only a few steps down the corridor, stopped short in sheer amazement.

An enormous piece of tapestry had suddenly swung outwards from the wall ahead at right angles. It turned towards her, and she could not see therefore who or what was behind.

But as she waited, crouched against the wall, she saw a servant step through. The tapestry swung to behind him as though it were a door.

Catherine saw that he carried a bowl on a tray, as though he had been serving food, and her surprise increased. She had had no idea that that piece of tapestry was a door.

One more secret of this strange house! Hardly breathing, she watched and

CATHERINE faced her uncle. "Where is Kwanyin?" she asked steadily. Came the stern reply: "Kwanyin is not here." But Catherine knew it was untrue.



waited until the servant had gone down the corridor and turned the corner out of her view.

Then, greatly daring, she crept forward to the tapestry.

Catherine's was not a reckless nature, and she had already learned that it paid to be guarded in this most unusual house.

But her curiosity mastered her caution. She just had to see what was behind the tapestry.

Very cautiously and by degrees, she moved the tapestry frame. Of a sudden there was a clink through which she could see quite clearly.

It was a scene that held her breathless.

At a round, highly polished table sat her Uncle Gerald and Miss Smith. They were eating dinner, as elaborately served as ever!

"While we have sawdust, uncle has real food!" Catherine told herself.

It was unbelievable. How could their own uncle act in such a cruel, cynical way! But there was no doubting her eyes.

As Catherine watched, she saw her uncle turn his head to talk to someone, and she changed her position slightly in order to see who it was.

When she saw, her legs nearly gave way under her.

It was the bearded Chinaman whom Kwanyin had first called "father."

He was crouched on the floor, hands tied behind his back.

"Honourable miss," he said to Miss Smith—"you who are English lady—how is it you can help the wicked villainy of this miserable rogue?"

As he spoke he indicated Uncle Gerald with his head.

Uncle Gerald turned, thumped his fist on the table.

"Yellow dog, silence!" he snarled. "Only by cutting out the tongue can

I be silenced! Soon I shall speak well! I will speak—yes! The young people shall know you are not their uncle, but an impostor; that their real uncle—"

Catherine's eyes were wide as she heard those words, and her heart missed a beat.

It was Kwanyin's accusation again. This man was not her uncle! He was an impostor!

Catherine's feelings in that moment were very mixed. Coupled with her amazement and horror was a feeling of intense relief—relief that the man whom she had grown to mistrust and suspect was not, after all, her own uncle.

Breathlessly she listened to the old Chinaman's words. Was he about to reveal the whereabouts of the real Uncle Gerald?

No. Impatiently the bogus uncle cut across his speech.

"No one will be able to tell them the truth!" he mocked. "So how are they to know, greybeard? Do you think that I should allow you one chance of speaking—one chance of communicating with them?"

And he laughed harshly, so that Catherine's flesh seemed to tingle unpleasantly at the sound.

"I will find a way—even though you bind me and treat me with vile indignities," vowed the old Chinaman fiercely. "They shall be told. They shall hear from these very lips the truth. And they will bring about justice. The dishonour of my ancient house shall be avenged. You and those who help you will walk in the ways of sorrow and humiliation—"

"Silence!" thundered the impostor. "It is nonsense that you speak. The children do not know anything about it. They are not suspicious. They think I am their uncle. And—"

He paused, a sinister expression creeping into his face. "And if they ever let me know that they do suspect—"

"Well?"

"Then Kwanyin shall take the blame for it. But they won't stay here! I'll see to that!" said the impostor uncle.

The mask had fallen from him; he was another man, no longer urbane, but evil, venomous.

Catherine went pale as she realised that she had been duped.

Catherine let the door close gently. She was badly alarmed now. There were so many things to think about—many reasons for real apprehension.

Without pausing to weigh things up, she hurried back to the dining-room. Charles had to be warned.

She brushed through the bead curtains of the dining-room, and then stopped. Mollie was there, but not Charles.

"Charles—where is he?" gasped Catherine.

"Had a message from Uncle Charles! Gone that way!" said Mollie, startled by Catherine's white face. "Why, what's wrong?"

But Catherine, without replying, dashed through the other bead curtains indicated by Mollie.

"Charles! Charles!" she called, in fear. "Stop!"

Will Catherine be in time to prevent Charles walking into the trap which has been so cunningly prepared for him? Dramatic developments crowd next Saturday's vivid chapters of this absorbing thrill-and-mystery serial, so make sure of reading them by ordering your SCHOOLGIRL at once.

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